

THE ABUNDANT LIFE

"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."
John 10:10.

Christ repeatedly placed great emphasis upon life. No statement that He made is more startling, revealing, or challenging than our text when it is understood. Nothing is more impressive than life. It is what all need and should want. Yet many are perplexed about life today. Many think they know what life is, and believe that they can live without reference to Christ or to His way of life. But they have not mastered the art of living.

From time to time in the course of His ministry our Lord briefly, yet quite comprehensively, expressed His purpose in life. Never more fully did He express His mission than in the words of our text. He came to give men life of a more abundant nature and measure than they had ever known. The expression "more abundantly" means more than is necessary, something that is superadded or extraordinary. This verse teaches us that the Master's desire to bless mankind knew no limits. He wanted men not merely to live, but to have life; not merely have a life, but to have an abundant life. The test is, "Is my life enriching or not enriching the life of the world?" That is an important test for everything from creed to pleasure. We ought to put that test to the whole range of human life and activity.

This extraordinary life is the ideal one. It is unique and distinct in its origin, its motives, its manifestations, and its mission. This life is in a class to itself. In the brief sentence of our text Christ has given us in epitome His mission to this earth. He came, lived, wrought, loved, and died that we might have this life.

I. The Abundant Life Is Peerless.

Life is the most important subject because it is fundamental to all else. To exist is one thing; to live is another. Life is far more than mere existence. An audience like this would have a variety of opinions as to what life is and what life means, and yet all would agree on the love of life, the quest of life, and the hope of life. All cling to life with pathetic tenacity. This love of life is perfectly natural, entirely legitimate, and divinely implanted in man. All of us are alike in our desire for life. Humanly speaking, the greatest deprivation one can suffer is the loss of life. Above other things most people desire to live.

What, then, is life? It is easy to ask the question, but it is by no means easy to answer it. About all we can do is to describe it. Sometimes adverse circumstances and bitter experiences raise the question, "Is life worth living?" But this is only a momentary question, significant of despair. Our usual attitude toward life is that of a tenacious clinging thereto. We are constantly reechoing the cry of the dying Queen, "A million of money for a moment of time." Then in Christ's coming we have the divine estimate of the value of life. He came to bring life. Whatever else He may have accomplished, that was His definite goal. When He revealed the Father, established the church, inspired His hearers, and died on the cross, He was firm in this purpose that we might have life.

He came that all of us might have abundant life, the life which lifts us above the changes and circumstances of this world. The life that Christ gives transforms everything. Paul said, "If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; old things are passed away; behold all things are become new." Some things about life remain the same, such as the problems, the work, and the associates. And yet, everything is different because of the change within. It is the creation of a new life with Christ in the

center, transforming everything. It is life above and beyond time and sense. And it must be remembered always that this life does not emanate from blood, from the will of the flesh, or from the will of man. Neither does it spring from position, education, or culture. It is the result of spiritual regeneration, or a new creation.

II. The Abundant Life Is Possible.

Christ did not come into this world to make money, or to seek pleasure, or to gain power. He came to give the world a life which it did not have. What He possessed in Himself, He came to give to those who would believe on Him. He did not care for pleasure, fame, honor, or wealth, but He gave Himself in loving and sacrificial service.

To all who trust Him, He gives life here and hereafter. He amplifies and dignifies this present life. He gives us a happiness bigger than things and stronger than circumstances. He not only came to give life, but to show men how to get the most out of life. The abundant life begins when the curse of sin is removed. Then, when one is right in his relationships with God and man, he will be right in his thoughts, his motives, his ambitions, his aspiration, and his actions.

Life may not be all we had planned or all that we would like, but it will not be dull and sordid if we are truly following Christ. He lived a full life. The range of His interests was complete, embracing everything that concerned the life of man. The abundant life is not inherent in human nature, acquired by human means, or possible to human strength, but it is found in Christ only. If we are to enjoy it Christ must give it to us. To bring the abundant life within our reach Christ came into this world. In inspiration, in aims, and in results His mission was divinely benevolent and practically efficient. In Him there is all-sufficiency to satisfy the daily needs, and to sustain amid all the temptations and trials of this life. "But my God shall supply all your need according to His riches in glory by Christ Jesus." Christ lived the abundant life, taught it, sacrificed His own life to make it ours, invites us to accept it, pleads with us to receive it and longs for us to enjoy it.

How can one lay hold of the life which Christ offers? The only way is to receive it as a gift. Christ offers Himself to us to be our constant friend and companion. As we fellowship with Him, we are wonderfully blessed by His great presence and power. He illuminates our minds with divine truth. He floods our souls with divine love. He bends our wills until they are brought into conformity with His will. Our lives are so identified with His life that we can say with Paul, "I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me."

Service results from the abundant life. Christ came to serve and the obligation to serve rests upon every Christian. As a rule, the names that shine with undimmed glory on the pages of history, the names to whose memory we have erected imperishable monuments, the names we teach our children to honor and to revere are the names of men and women who distinguished themselves in unstinted and unselfish service for mankind. The clarion call of these crucial times is not for more culture, or more education, or more wealth, however desirable these may be, but rather for more true servants of Christ. To those of you who possess this abundant life, it has brought you opportunities and responsibilities unknown to the rest of our race.

III. The Abundant Life Is Profitable.

Christ goes to the root of individual character, cleanses the soul, rescues from evil, and ennobles all of life. In Christ we have one whom men may trust and love and serve. He stands in the midst of this weary, sinful, hungry world ready to reconstruct man's whole view of things and to help him fulfill his proper destiny as a child of the Father in heaven. He imparts to all who accept Him a power not their own, that works through

them an overwhelming sense of having life abundant. There is an overflow in the life that Christ gives. It is life with a surplus. It has peace and joy and power. It is within reach of every child of God. Christ brings a new purpose into our lives, giving to the common day and the humblest task a new significance.

The dying hour tests, as does no other hour, what Christ has done for man. When all human hands withdraw and are utterly helpless, then Christ is able to strengthen and to bless. An old preacher had reared a good family of fine boys and girls. He had lived a life of simple piety and unquestionable honesty. Death was approaching and the family was called home. One of his sons had been honored with prominent positions. He approached the bedside of his father and said, "Father, there are two things I know. If you will tell me another, these three will settle all the questions of my soul." He said, "What are they, my boy?" The son replied, "I know that you have been an honest man and never deceived me in any matter. Second, I know that you have practiced the teaching of your Saviour as perfectly as it is possible to do on this earth. Now, my question is this, Is this Saviour you have served all you hoped He would be in the dying hour? Has He both in life and in death proved a reality to you?" The father looked up and a smile played over his face as tears of joy trickled down his weatherbeaten cheeks. "My boy," he said serenely, "I know Whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day. Yes! Jesus has been all I could ask for in life, and He means more than I could hope for in death. There is reality, my boy, in the Christian faith. I have lived a happy life. I am dying a triumphant death."

Perhaps some are wondering how to get the most out of life. If so, let me suggest to you that: --

1. You accept Christ as your personal Saviour.

Christ Jesus is not a luxury, but a fundamental and absolute necessity. He is as necessary to the soul as bread is to the body, light is to the eyes, a path is for the feet, and truth is for the mind. He alone can give abundant, full, complete, and wholesome life. Accept Him, receive the abundant life, catch His spirit, keep step with Him as you march through time, let His mind be in you, His motive inspire you, and His presence lead you.

2. You must have the right attitude toward life.

Attitude means so much. He gets most out of life whose attitude is that of appreciation instead of criticism. It is the difference between scanning verses for their meter and listening to poetry for its inspiration and charm. It is the difference between analyzing the chemical properties of pigment and canvas and looking enraptured upon a noble painting. It is the difference between weighing out the lime, fat and sulphur of a human body and enjoying a friend.

For critics one is made to feel the most poignant pity. Their lives are puckered, sour, and unhappy. Where others smell the fragrance of roses, they feel only the sting of thorns. Where the poet sees green pines and a rippled lake, they notice only the mosquitoes and gnats. Where the artists behold God's hand upon the western canvas at sunset-time, they perceive only the dying of another day. God pity them! And God pity us if we belong to their joyless order.

3. You must open your soul to the good things which life has to give.

Many people will not do that. They remain satisfied with a bare margin of life's good things, like a hermit who exists in his dark cave when the fresh and bright world is waiting just outside; like a poor bird that stays in a tiny cage when an open gate welcomes to the joys of liberty.

A man took a trip by boat and during the whole journey lived abstemiously on cheese and crackers. But, at the end of the trip he learned that the ticket he had bought and paid for called for three meals a day at no extra charge. There we are, living on cheese and crackers when our tickets call for fine food. There is the man without God and just to think of the available power which he refuses to appropriate. He is tugging at his bootstraps, when nearby is a Hand from above waiting to lift him up. You cannot get the most out of life until you open your soul to all the good things which life has to give.

4. You must put the most into life.

There are two ways to get money out of a bank. One is to hold up the bank and at the point of a gun make your demands. The other way is to put money into it. The more money you put in the bank the more you can take out of it. Any farmer knows the only way he can have greater and better crops is to plant more seed, fertilize the soil, and cultivate it better. A character in one of William Locke's novels exclaims, "I would like to take life by the throat and choke something out of it." But we know that life cannot be handled like that. One might as well talk about dynamiting a garden to get roses, or hacking a piano with an axe to get harmony, or clubbing a friend to get love. Paul could not have spoken more truly if he had been talking about this very thing when he said, "He that soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap bountifully."

There is one class of people you will never hear whining about whether life is worth living. They are the people who are sacrificially spending their lives in human service. They are too busy serving God and meeting the needs of men to ask the question, "Is life worth living?" Can you imagine our Lord walking in and out of Nazareth and Capernaum and Jerusalem saying, "Is life worth living?" Can you imagine Paul on his missionary journeys saying, "Is life worth living?" Can you imagine William Booth working in the slums of London and saying, "Is life worth living?" It simply did not happen.

Your life will be sour until you reach your grave unless you sweeten life for someone else. If you will sweeten life for others, it will become more worth living for you. The useless life is always unsatisfactory. Listen to these two contrasting appraisals of life. Lord Byron, after years of self-indulgence, near the end of his life wrote these lines:

"My days are in the yellow leaf,
The flower and fruits of life are gone;
The worm, the canker and the grief are mine alone."

How could anyone feel any sense of satisfaction with such a life? It would be very strange if he did. But listen to these words of Adoniram Judson, spoken on his deathbed, and while you listen to them, do not forget that life of his which was buried in suffering among the Burmese people:

"I suppose they think me an old man and imagine it is nothing for one like me to resign a life so full of trials. But I am not old—at least in that sense; you know I am not. No! No man ever left the world with more inviting prospects, with brighter hopes, or warmer feelings."

Listen to Christ Jesus, as He looks out upon spiritually anaemic men and women, subsisting on cheese and crackers, when rich life is inviting them to her banquet-table. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly." Hungry souls, He will lead you into that rich life if you will let Him. He will lead you aright because He knows the way.