

Salvation

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Date: 01 August 2019

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[0 : 00] By means of introduction to this, I just want to share with you how much we actually pursue a good and a full life.

We all want to have a full life. So much so that back in the 1930s and 40s, Harvard started a study that has been running for 75 years. They were college students at the time.

I imagine there's not going to be much more than 75 years, bearing in mind that life expectancy hasn't changed that much. But they've run a study for 75 years trying to uncover the key to long-term happiness.

We're so invested in this living a full life, living a happy life, living a life that's rich, that we will invest all kinds of efforts in achieving that.

And we think of that fullness in a number of ways. I mean, for example, I want to live a life that will be admired. I want to be thought of as a good person.

[1 : 06] I lend my lawnmower to the neighbors when they ask. I worry about it the whole time, but I still lend it. I want a life that's rich with experiences. Every now and then, Facebook reminds me of things that just make me smile.

You know, the holiday I went on 2, 3, 4, 5, 7 years ago, it lets me know the things that I've done, which reminds me of the things that I still have on my bucket list.

That's what they call it when you get to 50. I also want a life of deep friendships. And that 75-year-long study that I said, their conclusion to a happy life, the number one thing is deep friendships, deep relationships.

I want to know and I want to be known. I want a life marked by personal achievement. And by that I mean I want to make a difference in the world. I want people to remember me for my contribution to their lives.

And I want a long life, too. When I'm gone, I want people to say, he had a good life. And friends, one of the things that our culture sells us in terms of pursuing that life is this.

[2 : 19] A full life means I need freedom. That full life demands freedom. We need to be free to pursue life to the full.

Free to define who we are. Free to make choices for ourselves. Free to eat Chinese food when I want. And when I do, freedom to choose the dumplings and not the chicken feet.

As I was offered in recent times. Freedom to choose who I love. Who I marry. I am so committed to this freedom.

And I think we are as a culture that we will fight to the death for this freedom. And we do it because our lives are that important to us.

Well, today we are going to look at the Gospel of John, as I have already said. And John was a man who met Jesus. He lived alongside Jesus. He learned from Jesus.

[3 : 17] He saw how Jesus lived and died. And lived again. That's a spoiler. Sorry. But he saw how Jesus lived and died. And John's conclusion was that there is life to the full to be had.

And if you read his book, the Gospel of John, you'll also find out that that life, that life, abundant life, life to the full, is a key theme of his. But when it comes to pursuing life to the full, one of the things that John says is, there are a number of wrong ways of pursuing fullness of life.

There are a number of wrong ways, but only one right way. And with John's help, we're going to look at three of the wrong ways that he presents. And the one right way.

Okay, so let's start with the three wrong ways. And I'm going to move a little bit around the Bible, around the Gospel of John at least. So you're still in the same book. The verses will come up on here if you're not very good at navigating the Bible.

But if you are, by all means, you can flick to them. So the three wrong ways. A self-improvement. You've got these on your bulletin. Self-improvement, self-indulgence, and social structures, or political structures if you prefer.

[4 : 28] So first, self-improvement. Very early in John's book, in fact, if you've got one of these Bibles, it's still on that first page, you know, first open page at the bottom here. Chapter 3. Very early in the book about Jesus, John introduces us to a man called Nicodemus.

Nicodemus wanted fullness of life. And he was trying to build that life for himself through self-improvement, the religious branch of self-improvement. He worked hard at his religion. He was perhaps the best, the Dalai Lama of his time, if I dare say. He knew all about God. But he couldn't give you life.

He had even learned and the title Teacher of Israel. So he knew the Bible better than anyone. Before Wikibible, there was Nicodemus. If he had a question, he could answer it. But he didn't know as much as Jesus. And Jesus, when he came to Jesus, Jesus told him the truth. Jesus said in verse 3, John chapter 3, verse 3, Truly, truly, truly, I say to you, unless a person is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God.

[5 : 42] Unless a person is born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God. What does that mean? Well, it means that no amount of effort, no self-help strategy, no action that we can perform can get us what we desire.

They've explained the reality of sin last week. It's universal, he said. It's total. It affects every area of our life, he said. Deep down, we know.

I'm not sure how to cough with these, I'm sorry. We know that brokenness exists within us. We know that we're not perfect, but still we try to fix it ourselves. I used to live like this.

I don't live quite so much like that as I should, I guess. I used to live like this when I was a kid. I used to be the good kid. I used to be the kid with a clean room. I used to be the kid at school who sat in the front two rows of the classroom.

As you know, that's the two rows that no one sits in generally. I used to be the kid with the top button done up. We had uniforms with ties and jackets. And the middle button on my blazer done up. I used to be the kid who always had an answer to the questions, always did his homework, always, always behaved in a polite way.

[7 : 04] I was the good kid. And I thought that that goodness actually was guaranteeing God's favor.

And then my parents' relationship started to fall apart. And suddenly, I was faced with the reality that my goodness, it wasn't such a simple transaction between me and God.

I was good, and then he followed suit. I cleaned my room, as one of the kids said. I get to heaven. It didn't work like that. I was building my life on how I lived.

But no amount of effort, self-help strategy, no action that we can perform can do that. We can't earn it. It has to be given to us, is what John was saying, what Jesus was saying to John.

We can't earn it. It has to be given to us. Now, the second thing that John takes us on a trip to, and it's the very next chapter, so he goes from self-improvement to self-indulgence. In the very next chapter, we meet the Samaritan woman.

[8 : 13] And I'm skimming over these because we have actually been doing a John series on these, so you should be reasonably familiar with them. And if you're not, it's page 888. Please, by all means, either go back to our sermon catalogs online, or at least read the chapter later.

See, the Samaritan woman, she was also trying to build a life for herself. But for her, it was through sexual freedom. She had five husbands, we find out in this story.

We don't find out why she had five husbands, but we do know, from the fact that she draws water in the middle of the day, that her choices had consequences. She was on the outside socially.

She wanted to connect with someone so much. She wanted to belong, to love, and to be loved, more than anything else. And she proved it by sacrificing everything else for this goal.

But five husbands later, she was further away than when she started. The man she was with now wouldn't even marry her. And again, Jesus spoke challenging, truthful words to her.

[9 : 27] Jesus says to her, and this is a paraphrase of John 4, verse 10, which you can see in full on the screen. Jesus said to paraphrase, You are drinking from the wrong well.

You are drinking from the wrong well. And we know, even 2,000 years later, we know this is still the case, and yet people still drink from that well.

I know this song because it's been played on the radio. I don't own it, but I know this song, and it's Beyonce's song, All the Single Ladies. Hands up if you do know it, if you have heard of it.

All the Single Ladies. Beyonce is a bit of a representative kind of person, a woman who really tries to fight for women's rights and women's freedoms.

And she writes this song, All the Single Ladies, at the end of a three-year relationship that ended up breaking up. And the problem was that she broke up, the relationship broke up, and then when she started to date other guys, the other guy, the first guy, got jealous.

[10:32] And so she writes this song as a response. She gets all the single ladies in the room to stand up as part of the singing when she sings it live. And then she says to the girls that when the guy gets jealous, when you exercise your freedom of choice in terms of sexual partners, you tell him this, If you like it, you should have put a ring on it.

If you like it, you should have put a ring on it. Why does she say that? Because she recognizes that in pursuit of sexual freedom, somehow it's a two-edged blade.

It's cutting her even as she's pursuing it. She's finding herself in a situation where people within this kind of realm of sexual freedom won't commit to each other.

And she doesn't like it. So she encourages her fellow women to hold out until the man commits. We idolize absolute freedom.

We see it as the way to have fullness of life. But absolute freedom isolates us. And what Jesus says to the Samaritan woman is, you need to come to the source of life.

[11:44] If you want fullness of life, you need to come to the source. So we've got self-improvement, self-indulgence, and then social structures. The final wrong way that I'm going to share from John's book, there are others, but the final wrong way I want to share it, is a little bit further into the book.

And this is chapter 6, so if you turn over to page 891, if you've got these Bibles. This time a crowd of over 5,000 people was trying to build a life for themselves by choosing the leader who could provide it for them.

This massive crowd had followed Jesus, just to paint the picture. They'd followed Jesus into a remote area, no shops, not even a McDonald's, and it's pretty hard even in Australia to get into a place where you're a long way from McDonald's.

There was nowhere to buy food, and so Jesus fed them all miraculously. They ate until they were full, and there were still leftovers, way more leftovers than they even had to start with.

So they thought, this man will make a good leader. We like what he says, and he can provide what we need. So they planned to make him a leader by force.

[12:50] They choose the one that they thought could provide the circumstances that they needed to thrive in life, and they choose to try and make him king. Isn't that an interesting thing?

We still idolize that concept, us choosing our leader. Democracy, again, our ultimate ideal for leadership. It's something, again, that we would fight for in our culture.

We would fight and die for the preservation of democracy, and it still doesn't work. Even when we choose the right people, we choose the right people for the wrong reasons.

It's all about me exercising my freedom to do it my way, to get what I want, to get the conditions in life that I need, that I desire. But it doesn't work.

Do I need to play the trump card? Or do we go to Boris now? Or do we go to our own culture now, where we're starting to see politicians make decisions that we just couldn't have imagined 10 or 20 years ago?

[13:59] Friends, whether we pursue life independently, through freedom of choice, or through political or social structures, it doesn't work. John presents them as three wrong ways of pursuing life.

But even as he says that, he presents it in the context of the life of Jesus, through whom he has found the one right way to pursue life.

You see, we know that life is an internal thing. We know that life is found in connection. Surprise, surprise. We know that life is affected by leadership structures.

These things are all real things. But John found all of these things in one person. Jesus. And he said, Jesus came to give this fullness of life that we pursue, to give it away.

So who is Jesus? Not who do we think Jesus is, but who is Jesus? Well, John opens up by actually answering that question at the very beginning of chapter one. And so we're back into chapter one

now, and you can stay here for the farewell now.

[15:12] John opens up by saying that Jesus is the word, or the logos in Greek. It's an interesting word, if you'll excuse a pun. It's full of meaning for pretty much everyone, really, in a sense.

Because it represents something that we're actually trying to pursue. So for the Jews, the concept of the word carried thoughts of God's powerful and effective action in creation, rule, judgment, and deliverance.

For the Greeks, logos was a philosophical term. It was a shaping, ordering, and directing principle in life. Something that was at times personified in literature, but never in reality for them.

In the Chinese Bible, as we try and translate this word logos into Chinese. I think I've got this right. Is it Tao? Tao? Yep. Tao is, again, it's a philosophical term, a philosophy, about the proper path in life.

And that's a very, very narrow definition of it. If you're a Taoist, then you'd probably be offended by that, but there is so much to Taoism beyond that. But the concept is kind of similar.

[16:21] It's this philosophy of living life well, richness of life. And so there are these kind of terms and themes that resonate within all kinds of different cultures because we all pursue life.

But none of these terms are actually meant to define Jesus. So as John writes, in the beginning was the word, he's not saying, so this is the one who is the actual person of the Greek term.

They, those terms, are meant to carry, are to tell us that whoever can carry this title must be important. They're not meant to define Jesus so much as he is meant to actually say, John is meant, trying to say that Jesus is the one who all this, you know, this thing that we're searching for and we just can't quite grasp a hold of, he is the one who actually has it.

John's point is that we're all searching for that full life and that Jesus is the answer to that search.

Jesus is meant to show us what life is all about.

If you're looking for answers, then Jesus is the person to come to. If you don't know Jesus, John is saying that Jesus is a big deal and you should find out about him. In fact, John goes on to say, Jesus is more than a big deal.

[17:43] He is actually the ultimate being. Jesus is God himself. Not a minor God like the JWs will try and convince you. He is God.

We read in those words, nothing was made except through him. He made everything that was made. He is God.

So he has more than answers. And then next thing John does is he introduces Jesus as the creator, the creator of everything that has been created. In our first talk in the series, if you remember, we looked at Romans chapter 11, the last few verses, 33 to 36.

And we looked at who God is in relation to us. He is the source. From him and through him and to him are all things. So he doesn't need us.

We need him. The word, God, creator. These are all massive categories. And then John becomes a little bit more specific or relevant to us, starts to land them in the next two categories that he uses.

[18:58] Jesus is described as the source of life and light. The source of life.

Life. That thing that we are trying to get right. That thing that frustrates us. That promises so much and even kind of delivers at times. But that just keeps on letting us down.

Do you know that frustration? Do you feel it at times? Does it keep you awake at night? Maybe I can illustrate with a simple example. We've had quite a few babies born in recent times.

Have you ever watched a baby sleeping? Ever looked at how peaceful they are when they're asleep? And envied them that peace that they have?

Every now and then, as you'll know, as a baby, even while they're asleep, their face can scrunch up. And even at that point, your heart goes out to them.

[20:03] I mean, they're only dreaming. They're perfectly comfortable where they are. They're only dreaming or maybe they've got a bit of wind or something like that. But still, you find yourself, sort of, your heart reaching out to that baby and promising them that you love them, that everything's all right and that you'll do everything to keep it that way for them.

You make massive promises knowing that you just can't keep them. Life isn't that simple. But for Jesus, it is.

Jesus is the source of life. And Jesus breaks this open in two ways. He talks about life in the sense of quantity as we go through John and life in the sense of quality.

So in the sense of quantity, in John 3, 16, while he's talking to Nicodemus, Jesus says, For God so loved the world that he gave his only son that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life.

The man who was trying to live the self-improvement lifestyle was doing it for a reason. He was religious because he wanted a part of heaven. He was angling for eternal life.

[21 : 15] And Jesus claims that he is that source, the source of that life. So quantity, but also quality. In John 10, verse 10, Jesus claims to be the source of abundant life.

He says in verse 10, chapter 10, verse 10, The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

And in John 14, 6, John again describes Jesus as the life. He says, I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me.

Abundant life, full life, everlasting life. And this is not an in the future kind of promise. The force of Jesus' words here are that we find life in him when we believe in him.

Not at some point in the future, but as soon as we believe in him, that life begins. But how does this work? I mean, you could be tempted to say, life doesn't seem any better or any longer as a Christian than it does for people who aren't Christians.

[22 : 30] If anything, this is something that even Jesus said, life gets harder as a Christian. and all the more for knowing that God can sort out any hardship we face if he chooses to.

He could make life dreamy if he chose to. But I think this is part of the problem that John is trying to break us out of with these big terms that he's using.

Our dreams are born of our desires. As Dave said last week, we're all just so busy playing God, exercising our freedom to indulge ourselves, elevating our opinions about what that requires to the status of unquestionable.

Exercising our freedom to indulge ourselves, that's what sin is. we're so busy playing God that we don't know how good it is to be reconnected to God. And even despite being post-enlightenment, we can't see that this world is suffering because of our freedom of choices that we've pursued.

This mess is ours. The darkness in this world is ours. I can get concrete, more external, things like global warming, plastics in our oceans, a Western lifestyle that's sustained by unethical business practices, relationships that are less permanent and seemingly more painful than ever.

[23 : 56] And despite our best efforts, we still struggle to set things right. The modernist dream is ended. We've given up on that. Apart from God, we live in the dark.

And John says, into this darkness has come Jesus. The only light is Jesus.

God himself come to us. The one who reveals the character of the God we ignore. Think about that. Because whether you believe in John or not, this is a huge claim.

Whether you think John is right, surely this Jesus is at least worth a look if someone's going to claim these things about him. So what kind of light is this Jesus? What kind of God is he?

Well, the best way I can sum it up is this. We got into this huge mess ourselves, pursuing life our own way. And the best way I can suggest it is this.

[25 : 01] That Jesus is the ultimate cross-cultural church-planning missionary to a people in an absolute mess of their own making. He's ultimate. And if we just skim through this first 18 verses or skim over the first 15 or so of them, he's ultimate in the sense that he's God himself.

We see that in verses 1 and 2. He's cross-cultural and we can see that in verses 3 and 9 that he came from heaven to earth, creator to creature. He's a church planter.

In verses 10 to 13, he came to gather those who received him to himself. The image John uses here is so intimate as well. It's a family gathering.

He's gathering the children to himself. And he's a missionary and we see this in verses 14 and 15. Jesus is God himself who came and lived among us. The word dwelt or tabernacle, set up his tent, set up his home among us.

He was a carpenter for crying out loud. He could build homes. He is so glorious, says John, in these verses.

[26 : 12] And literally, he is so glorious that it was painful to look at him and yet he chose to become a brother, a son, a neighbor, a friend, a savior.

through Jesus we see God. All the goodness of God. John is saying that if we want to know what it's like to live in the light, if we want to know fullness of life, then we need to know this Jesus.

Jesus is a source of the life that we long for. And this Jesus is the God who gives life away. That thing that we so relentlessly and frustratingly pursue, God gives us.

He's so full of life that he actually can pour it out into us. John says in verse 14 that Jesus is full of grace and truth.

Grace in the sense of its undeserved favor. It's a gift. Truth. Well, I think you know what that is, don't you? I know some of you have been stretching it with your children telling them they get to heaven if they clean their rooms.

[27 : 34] But, you know, we know that's wrong, don't we? We know what truth is. We really want truth but we don't always like it when it starts being spoken to us.

The good life that we strive for within, the rich life that we pursue by any means we see fit, the prosperity of life we try to nurture through political or social systems, the life that eludes us, Jesus is giving it away.

And to explain how, he brings up John the Baptist again, the one who was supposed to witness to Jesus, Psalm from verses 6 to 8 in this first chapter. It's no coincidence because John the Baptist did witness to Jesus and in this chapter as well, just not far forward in verse 29.

And the very first time John the Baptist witnesses to who Jesus is, he explains how grace works. Look at verse 29.

John the Baptist sees Jesus coming toward him and he says this, Behold the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world. Jesus is a lamb.

[28 : 46] It's a metaphor, not literally a lamb. But in Isaiah 53.6, Isaiah prophesies about the coming Savior and he uses this same metaphor.

Isaiah 53.6, All we like sheep have gone astray. We've turned everyone to his own way. Does that sound familiar? 3,000 years ago? Same words apply.

And the Lord has laid on him this Savior to come, the iniquity of us all. Their sin and ours is to time and time again play God and refuse to let God be God as Dave talked about last week.

And through grace, fullness of life comes to us free. And the truth of it, it comes free because we could not achieve it ourselves. So Jesus came to bear the cost.

Jesus, our God, took the punishment we deserve. And he calls us to receive him. To believe. To simply believe.

[29 : 55] Friends, we strive for this fullness of life and we get tasters of it. We do. At times it seems like we get it all. But then something happens that kind of lets us know that we were kidding ourselves.

Nicodemus, he got closer to the good life than any of us ever will. But still, he came to Jesus with questions. Still, he just wasn't sure. And the Samaritan woman, man, she pursued life harder than most of us will.

But still, she came up dry. Still, she thirsted for something more. And the 5,000, well, they saw an opportunity to secure their lives, so they thought.

But still, they were looking at the darkness in the world and trying to preserve themselves from it instead of running toward the light. And then Jesus breaks in.

He shows us that self-improvement, self-indulgence and social structures are not enough. We can't make this life for ourselves. We need him to give it to us. And it begins now as we learn to abide in him, to connect back to him relationally.

[31 : 12] We need to come to Jesus to find true life and freedom and security in him. Let me pray.

Father God, I pray that for those of us here who know this truth, that we will be encouraged, that it will build our confidence in the truth of coming to you, receiving Jesus and believing in him.

And for those of us, Lord, I pray that who don't yet know you as their savior, we pray that you would show yourself to them through the words of the gospel of John.

And at least, Lord, be interested enough to inquire about who this man is, who this God-become man is that John makes such big claims about.

And Lord, as we daily seek to relinquish our God-like control of our own lives, help us to be nourished by being reconnected to you.

[32 : 24] Help us to see life as, the fullness of life as beginning and ending with being in a right relationship with you. Fill us to full with the life that only you can provide, we pray.

In Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.