

Zoe for Zero - The King of Life for the People of Naught

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Preacher: Bo Wong

- [0 : 00] All right, let's pray before we begin. Father God, it is not common that we have this undivided heart towards the Lord Jesus Christ, towards you.
- We have granted this hour that we might have such a heart to focus on you. To enjoy your presence.
- To marvel at all your doings. Thank you, Father, for we pray in Jesus' name. Amen. The title of the talk is Zoe for Zero, the King of Life for the People of Lot.
- I'm going to pronounce Zoe as Zoe so that we don't confuse it with Zoe. Zoe, one of our Bernard's girls.
- Zoe is the way the Greeks would pronounce. All right. Last week, Rob talked about the King of Love, and so this week I'd like to talk about the King of Life.
- [1 : 16] In chapter 14, Jesus tells his disciples about him leaving and about sending another helper for the disciples.
- And then in chapter 14, Jesus also said that he is the way, the truth, and the life. So in chapter 15, we are going to think about this life, and Jesus explains how the coming of the helper would help the disciples to know him as this life.
- So the original Greek work for life here is Zoe. Zoe means a life of abundance, fruitfulness, and everlasting.
- So the ultimate purpose of God's salvation work is for his own glory through the fruitful life of his own people. And how does a person have a fruitful life?
- So that is what the purpose of John is writing, as he read in John 20, verse 31. So he said, But these are written so that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that by believing, you may have life.
- [2 : 32] There is Zoe in his name. Okay. So the book of John talks a lot about this fruitful life, a supernatural kind of life, Zoe.
- So in his introduction in John 1, 4, he wrote, In him, that Jesus, was life, that is Zoe, and the life, Zoe was the light of man.
- John is saying that this Zoe gives us light, helps us to see who God is, who we are, where we come from, and where we are heading to, so we know how to live.
- So on this topic of life, I think John 12, 25, gives us the clearest understanding. And Jesus said, Whoever loves his life, that's Suhey, I don't pronounce it as psychic, it's a Greek pronunciation, Suhey, whoever loves his life, loses it, and whoever hates his life, Suhey, in this world, will keep it for Zoe.
- All right. So there's a very clear contrast to us that when we have, when we live in this world, we all have this Suhey, or the natural life.
- [3 : 46] But Jesus wants us to have this Zoe, eternal life. So with just this natural life, we are like people who live in the dark.

So we all try to live, make a living, but do not know the purpose of living, and could not see the glory of living. When we believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, we begin to realize that there's much more to life, because Jesus is the Zoe.

Zoe, without believing in him, there's no other way to know what Zoe is. Chapter 15 tells us how this Zoe is developed in us, by abiding in Jesus.

If we live without abiding in Jesus Christ, we can do nothing. Therefore, the meaning of zero in the title of this sermon, Zoe, for zero. Without Christ, we are zero.

And also Paul said in 1 Corinthians 13, 2, And if I have prophetic powers and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith as to remove mountains, but have not love, I am nothing.

[5 : 06] So Paul is talking about this love that will only come with Zoe. So Paul is saying that without Zoe, we not only can do nothing, we are nothing.

Nothing of eternal value, nothing of meaning, nothing of significance. One of the marks of natural life, Suhei, is the need of love and joy.

So most of our resources is to gain love and joy for ourselves. We can think about what we do each day. Why do we do them?

A lot of times you can think that because we want to be loved or to be happy. So we abide ourselves to different activities, projects, missions, philosophies, religions, to try to get some love and joy.

And when we do not get enough love and joy, we would think that our lives are not worth living. In verse 11, Jesus said, These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.

[6 : 15] So in here we see that God has the same aim for us, that is for us to have a joyful life. However, there is no lasting or true joy in our natural life.

True love and joy comes with Zoe. So we cannot have true love and joy without having Zoe. And we cannot have Zoe without also having true love and joy.

So in chapter 14, the Lord Jesus talks about God the Father and God the Holy Spirit. And now we come to the part when he talks about how this triune God, God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit work for God's glory through the fruitful life of God's people.

And this fruitful life flows to us from Jesus, the true vine. So this Zoe is flowing from the true vine. Jesus said, I am the true vine.

True vine brings true life. In the Old Testament, the nation of Israel was often referred to as God's vineyard. However, God found no authentic fruit from any of these wines or any of the vines in the vineyard.

[7 : 28] In Isaiah 5, 3-4 be read, And now, all inhabitants of Jerusalem and men of Judah, judge between me and my vineyard.

What more was there to do for my vineyard that I have not done in it? When I look for it to yield grapes, why did it yield wild grapes?

So, the nation of Israel refused to submit to the word of the wine dresser. It wanted to be independent from God.

And the Old Testament talks a lot about the kings of Israel. So, how the kings relate, related to God, influence how God would relate to the nation.

So, the kings are like the vines in the vineyard. If the wines are not faithful to God, then they won't be producing any fruit.

[8 : 25] So, for example, in 1 Kings 6, 12-13, God told King Solomon, If you will walk in my statutes and obey my rules and keep my commandments and walk in them, then I will establish my work with you, which I spoke to David your father, and I will dwell among the children of Israel and not forsake my people Israel.

So, there are only a handful of kings who almost approach to this true wine or the true king, but none was consistent. None loved God consistently.

None obeyed God consistently. Jesus, being the true wine, is also the true king, fully submitted himself to the wine dresser. So, as just now, Gareth, talk about Jesus as the lamb of God and also the vine, you can imagine that both of the images give us this idea.

The lamb and the vine, they both need somebody to care for them, to depend on the master. Without that, they cannot survive or they cannot grow properly.

So, the image also tells us that Jesus, as the vine or as a sheep, is fully dependent on the father. And that is the picture of the true king that God was looking for or establishing for his people.

[9 : 55] A king that would not seek glory for themselves, but a king seeks glory for God. So, being the branches of this true wine, then we can, therefore, enjoy God's presence and God's cultivation.

That's like Israel would have enjoyed if their kings were obedient. Great wine is a unique fruit plant. It has the potential to produce more fruit than any other plant.

That's why the image of the vine is being used. However, its branches are not used for any other purpose. So, a fruitless branch is therefore cut down and burned.

It can't be used for any other purpose. So, a great wine needs skillful pruning for it to produce good fruit. A true wine shares the same mind as a wine dresser to produce good fruit.

A true wine therefore obeys the wine dresser joyfully. It's not begrudgingly, but joyfully, the true wine and the wine dresser work together. Another characteristic of the true wine is that the true wine is active in growing branches that will produce good fruit.

[11 : 09] So, in verse 16, we read, you did not choose me, but I chose you and appoint you that you should go and bear fruit and that your fruit should abide so that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he might give it to you.

The kings of Israel were busy choosing men and horses to establish their own kingdom, their own glory. The true king takes initiative and actively chooses his people to establish their godly characters for the glory of God.

So, the life of the true wine flows through its branches to produce fruit and this flow also tells us the work of the Holy Spirit. Zoya is cultivated by the wine dresser.

So, in verse 1, he says, I am the true wine and my father is a wine dresser. He tells us that both the wine and the wine dresser work together to ensure the production of fruit in the branches.

Israel of old failed to produce good fruit. The new Israel is not going to repeat the same failure. So, in verse 2, he says, every branch in me that does not bear fruit, he takes away and every branch that does bear fruit, he prunes that it might bear more fruit.

[12 : 33] So, this verse tells us the work of the wine dresser. The wine dresser is determined to harvest good fruit. He's not going to tolerate any branch that produce no fruit or he will also prune those branches that produce fruit.

When I started doing gardening, I thought I should leave the fruit trees alone for them to develop naturally. But after some years, I learned that this is not the case.

If we leave those fruit trees alone, they don't produce good quality or quantity of fruit. So, similarly, God does not stop pruning and cutting until we are perfect like Jesus Christ.

So, verse 2 is a bit more challenging for us to understand. Who are these branches in the vine that do not bear fruit? I think we can apply primarily this word, first of all, it can apply to Judas primarily because Judas is one of the disciples that Jesus chose but he was going to betray Jesus.

Secondary, it can be applied to the nation of Israel who consider themselves as the chosen people of God. It might also be applied to people who say that they are in the vine but produce no fruit.

[13 : 55] However, the emphasis of this verse is not so much about whether a believer could lose his salvation. The emphasis is on the work of the wine dresser. It is saying that the wine dresser means business.

He would not let any fruitless branch remain in the vine as doing so affect the fruitfulness of other branches. So, God's glory is at stake here.

We can think further about these words. Last week in John 14, 15, we have considered the statement, if you love me, you will keep my commandments.

Now we come to John 15, 2, it seems to be saying that you need to be fruitful, otherwise you will be removed from me. How to respond to these seemingly conditional statements in the New Testament?

How we respond to them is dependent on if we read them with the mind of Suhei, the natural life, or the mind of Zoe, the supernatural life.

[15 : 02] So, with just natural life, we will treat statements like this, like the Old Testament laws. We will live in fear, despair, or pride.

Fear, because for not we fear that we may not be able to keep the commandments. Despair, if we have repeated fail, we fail to keep them repeatedly.

Pride, when we think that we can do better than other people. So, that is the natural life, a natural mind, to treat a statement like this.

But if we have Zoe, a supernatural life, a living water, this life will start to flow within us. We will start to believe and obey God's command joyfully.

We start to love actively and sacrificially. We want to serve because there is this living water overflowing from within us. And we can see that in our church. We can see the people who just take the initiative to do things, to talk to people who seem to be sitting by themselves, if we observe.

[16 : 15] and we can see this thing that's very beautiful. It's not because of compassion, there is a duty, but there is a love that is flowing in God's people.

And with this mind, we have more concern for God's glory than our own comfort or status. We want God to prune away all our pride, laziness, and idolatry.

We start to see that our happiness is dependent on God's glory. The more God is glorified, the happier we are. So we will not have problem reading verses like John 15, 2.

We might even want God to cut us away if we are in any way diminishing God's glory. We don't say that, God shouldn't say that, but we should agree with God because we have the mind of God or the life that flows from God.

So when this is always cultivated by God and us, our belief begins to transform from self-centered belief to God-centered belief. If you remember in John 2, the last few verses, there are people who believe in Jesus and it says that Jesus did not trust or put their trust on those people because he knows what was in man or there's a natural life in man.

[17 : 44] What man was thinking with their natural life, the belief that they had was to gain something for themselves purely. However, when this new life comes in, we can see the change in the disciples.

They don't care about their life. They preach even under persecution. And that is a different thing because they see things differently. Also, our love begins to be transformed from self-centered love to God-centered love.

In John chapter 13, we read that Jesus loved them and he loved them till the end. So there's also two different sort of love. Many a time with a natural life, when we love, usually we want something for return.

That's how we love people. But when we have this joy in us, our love is different. we love just simply because there's love in us to love. And so when we see commands like this, love one another, we do not find it surprising.

This is natural. We will do it. Okay. So this joy is manifested by fruitfulness. How do we know we have joy? By the mark of joy.

[19 : 04] joy. So one, we have fruit that abides. We come back to verse 16. It says that you should bear fruit and that your fruit should abide.

So this joy, with the fruit that abide, means that our character, our purpose in the kingdom of God is consistent.

It's not changing all the time. that is because it's natural, part of us. That's how we live. Number two, that we have the difference of wisdom and faith.

Back to 16 again, it says that whatever you ask the Father in my name, he may give it to you. So that is the wisdom and faith that come into this real life, that we know what to ask.

We ask for things that is concerning with God's kingdom and his glory. And so there's this change in our prayer, in how we pray, because we know God's mind.

[20 : 07] Number three is that we will have this fruit that edifies or builds up. So in Galatians 5, 22 to 23, there is the passage that talks about the fruit, what exactly is the fruit.

But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control, against such things, there is no law.

So all this is the virtues or character that in our relationship, how people appreciate how we can build up one another. It's not for our own use, and such.

It is how we relate to people, and that change, how we relate to people when there's such fruit in us. I don't have time to go very deep on this part, but I think we can understand how this difference is, hopefully.

But how does this zoe replace suhai? That is, how does supernatural life replace our natural life? We do not contribute to our own birth, either naturally or supernaturally.

[21 : 14] However, we do contribute to our maturity, because as we contribute, we mature. we take part in our maturity. If we don't, if we sit back, we will never mature.

So we need to do something for maturity. So our supernatural birth starts when we are cleansed by the word of Jesus. That is in verse 3, it says already you are clean because of the word that has spoken to you.

And then we can go to John 5, 24. Truly, truly, I say to you, whoever hears my word and believe him who sends me has eternal life, has this zoe.

He does not come into judgment but has passed from death to life. Okay, so to start with, there has to be this supernatural birth, but after that, then we start mature.

First of all, there's abiding, that's what we are talking about in this chapter. So can a branch not abide in the vine? I mean, the branch is actually attached to the vine.

[22 : 20] You can't walk away, sort of. But talking about us is that we can definitely do that, like I can talk with you, but my mind is not there.

That's quite common. We can be in church, but our heart is somewhere else. So that part of it is not abiding. But how can we abide?

How can we abide in Jesus? Number one is word. Jesus said, abide in my word. So how do we abide in Jesus' word?

We do so by reading, reading the Bible, reading Christian books, thinking, listening, teaching, singing, applying. I think also teaching is quite important.

when I prepare for Bible studies, for sermons, I think the one who benefited the most would be myself because when I need to teach other people, I need to understand it myself.

[23 : 27] If I don't understand, it's hard to teach. But if I don't have the pressure to teach others, I'm too lazy. You just don't think deep enough.

if you get a chance to teach others one to one in the Bible study group, it's actually very good to help us to abide in the word.

And singing, also if you sing songs that is scriptural and help us to understand the scripture, that will help us as well. So in Colossians 3.16, it says, let the word of Christ join you richly, teaching, admonishing, one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thanksgiving in your hearts to God.

So that's abiding in the word, then abiding in his love. Verse 9, Jesus said, as the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Abide in my love.

And verse 13, greater love has no one than this, that someone lay down his life for his friends. How do we abide in Jesus' love?

[24 : 40] That is the thing. Every time in the New Testament, almost every time, when it says that Jesus loved us, he always followed by the fact that he died for us.

Okay. We don't look at the circumstances that we are sick, we lost our job, oh, Jesus doesn't love me. The Bible doesn't say that.

Jesus' love is not conditional, doesn't result in our life being easier or smooth. The love of Jesus is always related to his death for our sin.

Okay, so every time we remember Jesus dying for my sin, then I know that Jesus loved me. And that's enough, and that's more than enough.

And that's how we abide in Jesus' love. Number three is abiding in Christ. Obviously, he already said abide in me. So how do we abide in Christ?

[25 : 41] We just try to think less of ourselves and think more of him. If we try, we keep trying to gain love and joy for ourselves, doing all sorts of things, most of the time we will be disappointed.

But if we keep our minds, on Christ, we will have love and joy as well. We will come with him. So abiding in his word, his love, and abiding in him.

Number two for maturity, for being fruitful, is to have this joyful obedience to his word. In verses 14 to 15, you are my friends, if you do what I command to.

No longer do I call you servants, for the servant does not know what his master is doing, but I have called you friends, for all that I have heard from my father, I have made known to you.

if all we have is suhai, this natural life, we will obey begrudgingly a slave, because this is what we are told to do, we just do it.

[26 : 56] But when Zoe comes to us, we could start to understand Jesus as comrades, as friends, and we start to obey joyfully. So I can use the analogy if you are an employee of a firm, and your boss tells you to do something, you will do it, because otherwise you won't get paid, but even though you may not be happy, you're not happy to do that, but if you are also a shareholder of the company, then you know that whatever you do is going to increase the profit of the company, then when you do it, you have a different motivation, the joy in it.

The glory of God is more than the profit of company, much more, and when we can see that, when we have this joy in us, we will obey, not so much as slaves, but as friends, we know what Jesus is about, and we obey joyfully, and that's how we contribute to our growth, maturity, and this new life.

Lastly, is life going to be easier or harder with joy? If we change from Suhey to joy, would that be easier or difficult?

It is both easier and harder. Harder because we need to deny our natural self, we take up the cross, and follow Christ. Deny our self is always hard.

That's when God is doing the pruning, and we will go through difficulties either from other people or from our own unfulfilled desire.

[28 : 50] However, as we go in and follow the Lord Jesus Christ, it becomes easier because we will find that his yoke is easy and his burden light.

So you need to do that step, and then you will find and we will find that this new life is actually much easier than the old life that we try to live.

That is because his grace is always sufficient for us, helping us to be more fruitful, and the Holy Spirit helps us. I shall end with two stories.

The first story is about Kevin Kevin Carter. I'm not sure whether you have seen this picture before. It was very well known, and Kevin got the prestigious prize for it.

Kevin became famous after he visited Africa and took many pictures of poverty, suffering, and after this picture came out and he got the prize, a lot of people started to attack him online or on paper.

[30 : 05] Why did they attack him? He said that he is heartless. How could he take a picture like this and not caring for the baby who is suffering? So Kevin was very hurt by that.

He actually explained not that he didn't care because he was not allowed to touch those children because they were soldiers with him because of disease. So the government allowed him to take picture and not to touch any of the subjects that he took picture for.

But he said he did chase away that voucher after the shooting. Actually, that child lived for 14 more years and he died of malaria is a boy, not a girl, but they thought it was a girl, so the title was still called The Voucher and The Little Girl.

So Kevin committed suicide four months after this picture was taken at age 33. He left a suicide load in his car.

He said, I'm really, really sorry. The pain of life overrides the joy to the point that joy does not exist.

[31 : 26] Depressed without phone, money for rents, money for child support, money for debts. I'm haunted by the vivid memories of killings and corpses and anger and pain, of starving or wounded children, of trigger-happy madmen, often police, of killer executioners.

I've gone to join Ken if I'm that lucky. Ken was his friend who committed suicide a few months beforehand. Kevin was only 33.

He wanted to make a difference to his life and those who were suffering. But he doesn't have the joy in him to enjoy the suffering. He just couldn't take it.

So he killed himself by inhaling carbon monoxide in the car. The next story is about Michael and Amy Rittering.

Michael and Amy Rittering, they heard about a poor country in West Africa called Burkina Faso. It's a Muslim country. Very poor.

[32 : 41] So they went there as missionaries in 2011 and established churches, ministries. In 2013, Burkina Faso was considered as one of the countries with fastest growing number of Christians.

And in January 2016, Michael Rittering was gunned down by Muslim extremists. He was 45 years then. Since then, many Christians and missionaries were killed.

The last killing happened just two Sundays ago. 14 people in the church including children were gunned down by Muslims. Amy Rittering is still there running orphanage, women's crisis center and medical clinic.

Michael's brother, Jeff, and his family also joined in the ministry. Are these people crazy? They saw sufferings. They suffered themselves.

And the churches there are growing and they didn't despite the killing that happens almost every month. There's a joy offering from within them.

[33 : 57] And this is the fruit of Zoe. Revelation 12, 11. And they have conquered him by the blood of the lamb and by the word of their testimony.

for they love not their suhai even until death. We can do nothing glorious on our own. This lamb of God is also the king of life.

We do not need to hold on to our natural life. We just need to submit to this king and abide in him. From Jesus' supernatural life, we flow to us so that we could joyfully live for God's glory.

Let's pray. Father God, as we think of Christian brothers and sisters who have suffered for your glory, we know that there is this difference in them.

We know that they are more blessed because they have something greater to live for and to die for. Father, may you keep pruning us and make us fruitful for your own glory.

[35 : 30] Thank you, Father, for in Jesus' name we pray. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.