

How to Find Life

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- [0 : 0 0] ...camp for about 12 years, and who, when she wasn't working in the summer, worked heartily with a friend of mine, Michael Poutney.
- So I used to spend many nights back in Montreal wondering what this romantic Thetis island was all about, and who this woman, Thina Ayers, could possibly be, and if she could possibly be as good as they were saying.
- So I had the opportunity to come here and actually spent my first week in Vancouver at Thina's house, and although we'd never met before, I felt like I knew much more about her than she could ever imagine from a stranger.
- So I'm going to give you the opportunity to find out a little bit more about her. So I would like to ask you, Thina... I don't get to go yet. No, this is the old high school interview style.
- But we want to ask you about your first kiss tonight. You did? No. I'd like to know where you were born. Ottawa. And where did you spend your childhood?
- [1 : 0 5] My father was a commander in the Navy, and so Mommy and Daddy were in Ottawa, but actually we were from here, so I spent all of my childhood here in Vancouver. And so where did you go to high school? I went to McGee High School.
- Hooray! Hooray! Hooray! I hope I've made some friends by saying that and not enemies! Hooray! I also went to Pointe-Rae, if that helped anyone.
- It was when it was a junior high, back when the dinosaurs mowed the earth. And you left university, you left high school and went on to university to do which degree?
- I did a BA at UBC in English and international politics. And can you remember your most memorable moment in grade 9?
- Yes! I'll never forget it, actually. I'm just a minute. Let me just get this organized. I need both hands to be able to talk.
- [2 : 0 9] In grade 9, it was just before Pointe-Rae and McGee. When I was in grade 9, Pointe-Rae was still a junior high and McGee was a senior high.
- But I had been president of grade 7 and I had such a whale of a time that I decided that I would stay on. And so I stayed on. And my most memorable moment in grade 9, I don't know why you would have asked that, was I was president of Pointe-Rae High School.
- And I can remember that when they announced that I had won, I got pins and needles so strong in my fingers that I had to just press my fingers open. And now these many years later, when I think of it, I can still remember that feeling of the pins and needles of sheer nervous excitement in my hands that I had won the election, etc.
- Anyway, can I go now? Okay. I don't like to be too far away. Well, I didn't expect that kind of introduction, but it was fun to meet Tama because what she doesn't know is that we had had a phone call from Mike Poutney saying all sorts of marvelous and fantastic things about this gal with an unusual name, Tama O'Rourke.
- And she had to come and meet one with an unusual name at this end, Athena Ayers. And we had heard all sorts of wonderful and fantastic things about her, which all turned out to be true, as you two have discovered.

[3 : 40] So, thank you. Enough of all that baloney. And let's get down to business. I'm going to be speaking tonight about the passage that we just read.

It's Mark 10. It's on page 44 of your Pew Bible. If you'd look it up again, please, because I'd like you at some point just to keep your eye on it. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Okay, are we organized?

Good. When I was about 15 or so, a fairly startling question, unexpectedly, rose to the surface of my mind.

I found myself at that age wondering for the first time, what is life all about? What is it supposed to mean?

[4 : 41] And more importantly, what will it mean for me? Have you ever had those kinds of wonderments? I assume that you have. And although I was just beginning to try to answer what I later discovered was a sort of basic bottom-line question for all human beings, I knew one thing for sure, and that was whatever life was about, I didn't want to miss it.

I wanted to live life to the full. So from then on, to be honest, I was watching and wondering and even seeking to find out what life was all about and how one really lived it to the full.

No matter what your age or stage tonight, whether like me in those teenage years, you are starting to ask this question. Or, as an older person, you've been thinking about this for a long time.

I thought that it would be fascinating for all of us to see how Jesus responds when, quite out of the blue, a young man comes running up to him and asks, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

Let's begin by looking, first of all, carefully at the passage of Scripture to make sure that we understand it. And then I'd like us to ask, how does this apply to my life and circumstances?

[6 : 24] The incident occurs quite near the end of Jesus' ministry. And so word of his miraculous healing, his wonderful, powerful teaching would have spread far and wide.

As Jesus is setting off on his journey, he is interrupted by a person who has come to be known as the rich, young ruler. Now, the parallel passage in Matthew mentions that he is young.

And Luke tells us that he is a ruler, but doesn't say over what. But here in Mark, it just says that he is a man. And a man with a burning question.

In his eagerness, he comes running up to Jesus and then, respectfully kneeling before him, asks, good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?

The contrast is significant. The rich young ruler, his life carefully together, and the penniless prophet from Nazareth, the one who had nowhere to lay his head, whose life was on the brink of being blown apart.

[7 : 44] What would a young Jewish man mean by eternal life? I gather primarily he was asking about some kind of future life.

As we will see, he had clearly attempted to keep all the commandments. And now, just to make absolutely sure that he had covered all of the bases, he was checking to find out if there was something else that would ensure for him life in the world to come.

It seems that he expected to be told that he would have to do something exceptionally meritorious, which would make good anything that was lacking, and would thus be for him a sure-fire guarantee for the future.

Now, the first thing that happens in this encounter is that Jesus makes clear, he comes up and says, good teacher, Jesus makes clear that God alone is the source of all goodness.

Even Jesus' goodness is dependent on his relationship with the Father. Jesus is the source of all goodness. And then, in starting to answer this young man's question, Jesus focuses in on the commandments, suggesting, it seems to me, that eternal life is related to keeping the commandments.

[9 : 15] Now, just in case you think, oh, yuck, rules, who needs this? How can rules, how can commandments have anything to do with life?

Let me remind you that we know from Exodus 20 and from the communion service in our Anglican prayer book that we say Sunday after Sunday, that the commandments are not rules but relationships, loving relationships.

Listen to this. You know this part. It says, And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, with all thy soul, with all thy mind, and with all thy strength. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.

So, we're not talking here about yucky, irrelevant rules. We're talking about loving relationships. And I don't know about you, but my ears start to perk up at the talk of love and relationships.

And as you can see from the way it's mentioned in the prayer book, these commandments basically fall into two categories.

[10 : 24] They're about loving God and about loving people. So, in bringing this up right away, I think Jesus is challenging this man's understanding of eternal life.

It's not about keeping all the rules, doing all the right things. It's not, as someone has said, some kind of, I'm sure you've heard this expression, pie in the sky by and by.

It has to do, not with some kind of future something, but with loving relationships. And it starts right now. So, the answer then, to the burning question about what life is all about, is that it is about, believe it or not, I mean we could make a million dollars if only we could bottle this and sell it.

It's about loving God and loving people, right now and right on into eternity. I must say, when I was the age of the people sitting in this pew, these pews rather, unlike this rich young ruler, I don't know how you are, but I didn't think much about life after death.

That just did not grip my gizzard. What I was interested in, I mean that's true, all I was concerned about was life in all its fullness now.

[11 : 42] Who wanted to wait a hundred years when I had grey hair and was about to die? So, one of the things that really drew me to Jesus was that when I discovered the passage in John 10.10, and if you don't know this, it's worth knowing it.

Jesus says, I have come that you might have life and might have far more life than ever before.

Now that caught my imagination. That was what I was interested in, life with a capital L. Eternal life, according to Jesus, is that which begins when we start to follow him.

It involves loving God and loving people. In verse 19, as Jesus begins to answer the man's question, it's interesting to me that he only mentions the commandments that refer to people.

He says, do not kill, do not commit adultery, do not steal, etc. And he has hardly gotten these commandments out. When the young man absolutely leaps into the conversation with both feet and he says, I've done it all.

[12 : 53] Teacher, he says, all these things I've observed since my youth. I get ten out of ten. I have all the gold stars. Now, I mean, that's a fairly big statement to make.

You know, I can't help feeling that if it was me, I'd sort of, you know, give him the once over and raise my eyebrows a few times. I'd be a bit skeptical. But it's at this point that something very special happens.

Jesus looks at this young man and he sees his eagerness, his earnestness, sees his desire for eternal life, and sees that he has sought to obey the law and to keep the commandments.

And in seeing all of this, he deeply responds to him. Verse 21 says, Jesus, looking at him, loved him.

And when I mentioned to Tama that I was going to talk about the rich young ruler, she smiled and she said, that has one of my very favorite verses. And we both looked at one another and said, Jesus looked at him and loved him.

[14 : 04] But, Jesus' love wasn't some kind of gooey feeling for this man. It wasn't sort of all sorts of gushy words.

It's a love that is committed to the truth. A love that wants only the very best for us. And so, precisely because Jesus loves this young man, he moves in and puts his finger on the central issue in this man's life.

You lack only one thing, Jesus says. The man's heart must have left. Can't you just see his face? Eager.

Yes, what is it? Go, sell what you have, give to the poor, you'll have treasure in heaven, and come, follow me. Jesus is loving this man.

Offering him life. Now what happens is a surprise. It's not what we expected.

[15 : 15] The young man had been so keen, so eager to know life, so ready it seemed to do whatever was necessary.

But, when he hears that one thing, it says his whole face changes. The one thing that Jesus asks reveals the truth about who he is and what really matters to him.

What emerges is that there is a stronger loyalty. A God that he is tightly holding onto.

A God that he is not prepared to give up. Even if it means that he will lose out on that one thing that he was searching for.

The passage, of course, has often been misunderstood. Jesus is not making selling everything you have the prerequisite of following him.

[16 : 20] The point is that in this situation, for this particular person, wealth and possessions apparently were his stumbling block.

The one thing preventing him from following Jesus and thus knowing eternal life. And so, like most 20th century movies, this story does not have a happy ending.

The man turns from Jesus' love and offer of life and goes away sorrowfully.

And we are left asking, how does this passage apply to us? The first thing I would like to suggest is that the rich young ruler is every man.

You and me. Every one of us here tonight. No matter what our age or stage. You and I are people who wonder about life. Ask questions.

[17 : 28] People who want life to count. We want to live it, as they say, to the max. You and I are here because we think that Jesus might have some answers.

And if we are honest, you and I, like the rich young ruler, are hanging on to some things.

From the passage, it appears that these issues are important. So we need to look at this carefully and ask, how does it apply to us?

Now, it's absolutely clear that the question, what must I do to have life, couldn't be more contemporary. Think of the millions of dollars that have been spent by individuals in the Western world trying to answer this question.

People have traveled far and wide. Sought answers in Eastern religions with Eastern gurus. They've tried meditation, exercise, health food, you name it.

[18 : 38] Every kind of therapy imaginable. They've championed countless causes. They've sought self-fulfillment and experimented with their sexuality.

And as we come to the end of the 20th century, the values that were cast aside in the name of freedom have somehow only resulted in bondage and disillusionment and darkness.

The 20th century solutions to life that looked so promising have not delivered. And so now, the question is being asked more desperately, more urgently than ever before.

What must I do to inherit eternal life? I am convinced that the answer centers on Jesus.

That it has to do with following Him and with loving God, as the prayer book says, with all our heart and mind and soul and strength.

[19 : 45] And it has to do with loving people. We can be assured from this passage that in the same way that Jesus saw the longing in the rich young ruler, He sees our longing to have life in all its fullness.

And that He loves us. And so, we too, we're drawn near. And because He knows us and loves us, He offers His gift of life to us.

But as we go to receive it, like the rich young ruler, we discover that there is a problem.

Like the rich young ruler, we're holding on to something else. Now, over the years, I've held on to a whole lot of things.

I'm sure you have too. When I was a teenager, I held on like crazy to boyfriends. The more, the better.

[20 : 56] And to popularity. It was a big thing to be president of the school for me. That was a real value. And then, as the years went on, and I got to go to university, I held on to books.

I loved my university years. And I held on to my education. I realized that it would really take me somewhere. And then also, not as an end in itself.

It wasn't that I wanted money as an end in itself, but I was dying to go to Europe. I really wanted to go to Europe. And every once in a while, I wanted some smashing dress for some big deal that I was going to.

So I wanted money just to do those things that I wanted to do. And I suppose at different times, I've... Vitamin pills. I've held on to my health.

You know, it would just be desperate if you got in a car accident and, you know, couldn't play in the grass hockey game on the weekend, or you couldn't write your final exam, or it would just mess up your life, you know?

[21 : 58] I wanted to be healthy. I would say, to be honest, that the thing I've held on most tightly over the years, too, has been relationships. And these are just some of the pictures that I brought as I was coming.

But in my desk, in my study, and all over my room, are the people that really matter in my life. And over the years, maybe more than anything, I've held on tightly, sometimes too tightly to relationships.

And there's been times in my life, I can't take it off now, but when I was just dying to hold on to marriage, I thought that would be the key to something really special in life.

I have one ring on, you'll have to pretend that that's the ring of marriage. I hung on to that, really longed for that in my life. But now I'm a working woman. And so I hang on to my career, and my briefcase, and all the rest of it.

And here's my car keys. And I mean, they really help. I mean, I'd die without my car. And on here as well is the key to my house.

[23 : 09] My house has been a tremendous blessing to me. Lots of people come and go. I live with my friend Anne, and we really enjoy it. And I'm hanging on to my house, you know?

And the final thing, and my mother knows how very well, is my diary. My gosh, I'm just absolutely helpless without my diary. And it's my time, and organizing my life, and all that kind of thing.

Do you ever look anything like I do? I'd like you, I mean, I'm being honest, you know? I'd like you to think for a minute about the kinds of things that you're holding on to.

Just think for a minute while I put this stuff down. What are you holding on to? Jesus very lovingly and very patiently says to each one of us, I want to give my life to you.

It's what you've been searching for. It will meet your deepest longings. But you lack only one thing. You need to let go of all that stuff that's in your hands, so that you can receive my gift of life.

[24 : 35] Now if you were anything like the rich young ruler, and like me, when Jesus says that, your whole face changes. You say to Jesus, look, come on, be reasonable.

I mean, I want life, but I can't let go of these things. They're too important to me. They represent my security. I can't let go of those things.

I mean, maybe I could let go of one or two. Could I receive your gift of life with one hand? But Jesus keeps looking at us in love.

He understands us. I'm so grateful that he understands the many reasons why I have held so tightly onto those things all my life.

But he doesn't budge. He says again, I love you. And you must let go of those things.

[25 : 37] Because if your hands are already full, you won't be able to hold the life that I want to give you. You must let go of those things.

Because in and of themselves, they won't give life to you. They aren't big enough. They aren't adequate. They won't deliver what you really long for.

If you receive my gift of life, I can give all of these things back to you. And then you will know how to handle them.

And you can have my perspective on them. But first, you lack one thing. You must let go of them.

You must give them to me. Now, if you have really thought about this, if you have really come to the place where you understand this, and you are wrestling with letting go, you will know that it seems like an incredibly costly choice.

[26 : 44] We have to decide whether Jesus is telling the truth, whether he is trustworthy. We have to believe in faith that Jesus really can deliver on his promise to give life to us.

Otherwise, it would be crazy to let go. Now, I've found that this decision has two parts to it. The first part of the decision is when I became a Christian.

When I started following Jesus, that was a once-for-all decision. As much as I understood, and as much as I could at that point, I let go of the things that I was hanging onto.

Because more than anything else, I wanted, as it were, to have both hands free and take hold of Jesus and say, Yes, whatever it means to follow you, I want to take hold.

And I see that you are promising to give me life, and I long for life in all of its fullness. And I understood that following Jesus would mean loving God and loving people.

[27 : 53] And somehow or another, I wanted to take hold of that with both hands. So at one point in my life, I was willing to let go. And perhaps some of you are at that place tonight.

And the decision before you is, Am I going to trust Jesus? Am I going to become his follower? And your follower. The second part of the decision I find to be an ongoing thing.

I frequently discover that I am hanging on tightly to something or someone. or someone. And time after time, I have to let go. And again and again, I have to say, Jesus, please help me. Unless you are first in my life, I won't be able to handle all the good things that you want to give me. So whether it's once for all in that time at becoming a Christian or all the way along the road of following and trusting him, it seems to me that it boils down to this. I'm holding in my hand one dollar, one dollar bill.

Now, it might not look like much to you, but I want to tell you that it's tangible and it's real. It's one dollar. It can buy something. And it belongs to me. And I'm sure that I've got hold of it. And I'm going to hold on to it with all I've got. And then, Jesus comes to me. And lovingly, he offers me a million dollars. My eyes just about pop out of my head.

My little heart starts to beat. I think, wow, what I could do with a million dollars. A million dollars would be the key to life, for heaven's sakes. But the only way I can receive the million dollars is to open up my hands and let go of my dollar bill. Let go and let go of my dollar bill. Are you kidding? It's all I've got. And if I were to let go of it, what would that mean? How can I let go of his dollar bill?

[30 : 22] The rich young ruler, my friends, found the choice too costly. He hung on to his dollar and went away sorrowfully. Jesus is offering each one of us a million dollars. How will you respond? That's the real question. Thank you.

Maybe we should just pray, could we? Lord Jesus, thank you so much that we have come to discover that in you is to be found life in all of its fullness. We pray that you would give us eyes to see that as in the circumstances of our lives. Like the rich young ruler, we cling with all we've got to that dollar bill.

I pray that you would have mercy on each one of us. You know us and you know the things that we're holding on to. And I pray that somehow you would open our eyes that we might see you and realize that what you offer to us is a million dollars. And in understanding that, may we let go of our puny middle dollar bill and embrace the fullness of life that you offer to give us.

And so for this great offer, we give you thanks. In Jesus' name, amen. Would you stand for the creed?

I believe in God, the Father Almighty, creator of heaven and earth. I believe in Jesus Christ, his only Son, our Lord. He was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit, who was born of the Virgin Mary. He suffered under Pontius Pilate, was crucified, died in the Spirit.

[32 : 52] He descended to the dead. On the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is seated at the right hand of the Father. He will come again to judge the living and the dead. I believe in the Holy Spirit, the Holy Catholic Church.

The communion of saints, the forgiveness of sins, the resurrection of the body, and the life everlasting. Can you see that?

The intercessions will be taken out of the Book of Alternative Services, found in your pews, and it's on page 126. It's this green book, it says, the Book of Alternative Services.

Page 126. In peace we pray to you, Lord God, for all people in their daily life and work, for our families, friends, and neighbors, for all those who are alone. For this community, our country, and the world. For all those who are in justice, freedom, and peace. For the just and proper use of your creation. For the victims of hunger, fear, justice, and oppression. For all who are in danger, sorrow, or any kind of trouble. For those who minister to the sick. Amen.

For the peace and unity of the Church of God. For all the community of God. For all the of the Church of God. For all the Church of God. For all the Church of God. For all the bishops and other ministers. For all who serve God and His Church. Amen.

[34 : 52] For our own needs and those of others. You can say the names of friends or people that you know who are suffering or in your love. You can say the name of your heart. You can say the names of people that you know who are suffering or in your love.

Thank you.

Hear us, Lord.

We thank you, Lord, for all the blessings of this life. We pray for all those who have died in the peace of Christ, and for those whose faith is known to you alone.

That they may have a place in your eternal kingdom. Lord, let your loving kindness be upon them. And now to the back of the page, the pamphlet.

[36 : 36] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. give you most humble and hearty thanks for all your goodness and loving kindness to us and to all men.

We bless you for our creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life, but above all for your immeasurable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ, for the means of grace and for the hope of glory.

And give us, we pray, such a sense of all your mercies that our hearts may be unfained with them, and that we show forth your praise, not only with our lips, but in our lives, by giving up ourselves to your service, and by walking with you in holiness and righteousness all our days.

Through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom you and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory forever. through Jesus Christ our Lord, to whom you and the Holy Spirit be all honor and glory forever.

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