

Sunday February 12th, 2023

John 10:7-10
"I Am the Gate"

It was back in the old days and my friend was into this new age wisdom and spirituality and stuff. Well, one day he heard of this special guru who knew the meaning of life in the universe, so my friend drove from Brantford to the airport in Toronto and caught a plane to India. When the plane landed in India, he took a train. When the train got to the end of its track he got off and rented a jeep. He drove the jeep to the foothills of the mountains and borrowed a donkey.

He rode the donkey until the donkey could go no further, and then walked up the mountain to the guru's cave. He entered the cave and he told the guru that he had come to find the meaning of life in the universe. The guru said that the meaning of life in the universe was mushrooms.

At first my friend was confused, but the more the he thought about it, the more of his questions were answered by mushrooms. My friend ran out of the cave and down the mountain. At the bottom of the mountain, he got back on to the donkey and rode the donkey to the jeep. He drove the jeep to the train and took the train to the plane. He took the plane to Toronto and drove his car from Toronto to Brantford. My friend told all his friends that the meaning to life in the universe was mushrooms!

But they said no, and he could not answer any of their other questions, so he decided that mushrooms were not the meaning of life in the universe. So, he drove from Brantford to Pearson airport and caught a plane to India. When the plane landed in India, he took a train as far as it would go.

When the train got to the end of its track he got off and rented a jeep and he drove the jeep to the foothills of the mountains and borrowed a donkey. He rode the donkey until the donkey could go no further and then walked up the mountain to the guru's cave. He entered the cave and he told the guru that the meaning to life in the universe was NOT mushrooms. The guru said, "Well then it must be turnips."

How would you fill in the blank: Life is _____?

If I asked my son the answer to this question, he might quote his favourite movie, Forrest Gump and fill in the blank by saying: "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're going to get." F. Scott Peck began his best-selling book, *The Road Less Traveled*, by writing, "Life is difficult."

Others have described our existence by filling in the blank with: a rat race, a bowl of cherries, amino acids, a series of choices, a paycheck, the weekend, a party. Which raises a question. Why is it that we always want to reduce life in size? For many, life is nothing more than the time spent between birth and death.

- The drudgery of existence.
- The boring monotony of the routine.
- The hope of having enough until the end.
- Have these people bought a lie? Has their life been stolen from them?

Sunday February 12th, 2023

So once again, Jesus, drawing from a familiar scene of shepherds on a hillside keeping watch over their sheep, said, "A thief comes only to steal and to kill and to destroy" (John 10:10). The job of the shepherd was to lead, protect, and feed the sheep. But, unfortunately, as in our day, there were thieves and robbers. They sought to take away the livelihood of Jewish shepherds. Today we might refer to them as rustlers.

Likewise, there are many avenues down which we can travel that lead, not to life, but to destruction. While we would never call these pursuits thieves and robbers, they are just that. They, in their diabolical and methodical ways, attempt to destroy our attempts at life. Where do people go to find life, to only end up discovering despair? First off, I can tell you categorically that you won't find life in pleasure.

I've heard people say that if only they could take a cruise, or retire in luxury, or have their fantasies fulfilled: then they would be living. Many people have done these things yet they still remain empty. "The eye is not satisfied by seeing or the ear filled with hearing" (Eccl. 1:8). Try as they may in the pursuit of pleasure, eventually the law of diminishing returns takes hold. It takes a bigger thrill, or a bigger event to bring another high. But it never lasts.

In a classic "Peanuts" comic strip, Charlie Brown goes to Lucy for psychiatric help. He says, "What can you do when you don't fit in? What can you do when life seems to be passing you by?" Lucy leads Charlie away from her booth and says, "Follow me. I want to show you something. See the horizon over there? See how big this world is? See how much room there is for everybody? Have you ever seen any other worlds?" Charlie replies meekly, "No."

She continues, "As far as you know, this is the only world there is...Right?" Even more meekly, Charlie says, "Right." Lucy presses on, "There are no other worlds for you to live in...Right?" Charlie admits, "Right." "You were born to live in this world...Right?" "Right," says Charlie. Lucy then explodes, "Well, live in it then! Five cents, please." While we may disagree with Lucy's counseling technique, we recognize she is on to something. We need to make the most of our lives and really live.

You also won't find life in performance.

Eventually workaholics learn that the satisfaction of one job completed is short lived. A Wimbledon tennis champion thought all his life that winning this major tournament would result in life as has he had never known it. He said following his championship, "The thrill of victory lasts about fifteen minutes." A myth has circulated for years that says success produces life. The truth of Scripture states, "Man is always working, never satisfied" (Eccl. 4:8 GN).

You won't find life in possessions. "The one who loves money is never satisfied with money, and whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with income. This too is futile" (Eccl. 5:10). Have you ever asked yourself, "Why is it that I have more money than I have ever had before, and yet have less contentment?" You won't find life in position. Too often people think that if they receive a certain promotion, or reach a certain status, or live in a certain area: then they would be happy. Interestingly, those people who have reached that position, still have not found the secret of a fulfilling life.

Sunday February 12th, 2023

You won't find life in pursuits. Some people are deluded into thinking that if they stay busy enough and if their pace of life remains at an intense level then they will discover life. Yet all they find is stress, ulcers, and heart attacks. These thieves masquerade as givers of life, but actually they are dispensers of destruction, disease, and death.

A psychiatrist had a patient suffering from severe bout of depression. And the wise doctor's prescription after examination: "Go and entertain yourself by seeing the famous clown Grimaldi performing in the circus in the town today, his antics are bound make you laugh...you sure would find some relief." Instantly the patient broke down much to the astonishment of the doctor. The doctor could barely hear the patient muttering "Doc, I am Grimaldi."

The truth is, that life is not found in pleasure, performance, possessions, position, or pursuits; it is found in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus says time and time again that he is the giver of life, the author of life. Jesus said, "I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25). And later in John's gospel he states, "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

But the most powerful statement he made regarding life was: "A thief comes only to steal, and to kill and to destroy. I have come that they may have life and have it in abundance" (John 10:10). The I in this verse is emphatic, meaning that life is found in no other than him. Life is entered by no other than Jesus himself.

How could this be? For us to understand how this life is entered, we must understand that a special relationship exists between a shepherd and his sheep. For example, Jesus said, "I am the door of the sheep" (John 10:7). Sounds peculiar, doesn't it? It stretches the imagination to think of a person acting as a gate, or a door. But that's just what a shepherd does, particularly one who is devoted to his sheep.

One day George Adam Smith, an Englishman who traveled extensively in the Middle East, came across a sheepfold and said to the shepherd, "That is where they go at night?" "Yes," said the shepherd, "and when they are in there, they are perfectly safe." "But there is no door," said the Englishman. "I am the door," replied the shepherd. Sir George looked at him and asked, "What do you mean by the door?"

The shepherd answered, "When the light has gone out, and all the sheep are inside, I lie in that open space, and no sheep ever goes out but across my body, and no wolf comes in unless he crosses my body; I am the door." When Jesus said he is the door of the sheep, he meant that the fold has only one entrance; life has one source; spiritual nourishment is obtained one way; heaven can be entered through one entrance. And the single means of access to all that is life is Jesus.

Now some people may say, "Wait a minute, don't I already have life? Aren't I breathing? Isn't my heart pumping blood?" I would answer, "Yes, but . . . not the life Jesus is referring to." The life that Jesus gives is infinitely and eternally different than the life one possesses now. Maybe a little lesson in Greek vocabulary would be helpful in discerning what the significance of this life he offers is. As with most of the Greek language, it employed several different words to communicate concepts and thoughts that in English only one word is available.

Such is true with this concept of life. They had six different words to clarify its meaning. But two words for life will bring our study into focus.

A. The first word is bios, in which the English word biology is derived. It refers to the duration of life - one's life span, the time between one's birth date and one's death date; or it refers to the necessities of life - one's food, shelter, and clothing.

B. The second word is zoe, in which the English words zoo and zoology are derived. It refers to life as God has it. The life that belongs to God that becomes ours when we cross the doorway of Jesus and enter into a relationship with God. It is not duration because this life is not limited by time, nor hindered by death. It is not a possession but rather an infilling - God once again breathing his life into us.

When we were born, we were given bios- life, when we are born again, we are given zoe life. Until we cross the doorway of Christ, and enter into a relationship with God through Jesus, we may be physically alive but spiritually we are dead.

Jesus goes on to quantify this life, "and have it in abundance" (John 10:10). Depending on the translation one uses, the word that is translated as abundance may be translated as "fullness" or "overflowing" in other versions of the Bible. But what is meant by this word? "Have it in abundance" means to have a superabundance of a thing. To be a follower of Jesus, to know who he is and what he means, is to have a superabundance of life. There is a new vitality, a new meaning, a new energy, a new purpose, a new significance, a new outlook, a new hope, a new joy, a new life.

Granted this is hard to explain, but consider this scenario for a clarification. You have reserved a subcompact car like a Ford Escort to rent for a vacation. Now I have nothing against a Ford Escort. The Ford Escort gets good gas mileage. It runs fine. It will get you where you need to go. But let's suppose when you go to the car rental place, and you ask for your Ford Escort, the attendant tells you that all the Ford Escorts are in service. "Would you mind an upgrade?"

"Would you mind an upgrade?" you say to yourself. "Come on, get serious," you think. You would love an upgrade. The car rental attendant says, "Well, it looks like the only car we have available is a Lincoln Towncar. Would that be all right?"

Of course, that will be all right. So, you hop into your Lincoln Towncar and drive off in style. Does this car get you to your destination any faster? NO. But you get there in greater comfort and in luxury. You feel better about yourself. You don't mind a few stares and looks from people you pass on the road. When you get out at the motel, you're treated with a little more respect than you have been before when you pulled up in the Ford Escort.

But remember! Getting in through the gate is just the beginning of God's blessings for us. Entering in is not the end of the journey. Many Christians put a lot of stress on being in, that they don't worry about what is next. It's the sheepfold itself. Once we enter the sheepfold, we discover we have community.

Sunday February 12th, 2023

What was God up to when he sent Jesus to this earth? Upgrading life, that's what. Through Jesus Christ he was offering to us life not just good, but better, not just full, but fuller.

Think of Jesus as your friendly travel agent. If you are not already on board, he would like to book you on a flight to glory, heaven as the final destination. While this ticket is free, you must receive it by asking Jesus into your life. And furthermore, while you're on the journey, as you live this life, he wants to offer you an upgrade. This is a gift too, but you must take advantage of it.