

Text: John 10: 1-10

Theme: Series-Living Witnesses: Are you Enjoying Life?

Sermon delivered by Iyabo Agbelusi during Family Service on 21/06/2015 at 10.30am

A story is told about a Professor of archaeology who brought with him a lamp recently unearthed in the Middle East. It was reported to contain a genie, who, when the lamp was rubbed would appear and grant one wish.

A professor of philosophy was particularly intrigued. He grabbed the lamp and rubbed it vigorously. Suddenly a genie appeared and made him an offer. He could choose one of three rewards: wealth, wisdom, or beauty. Without hesitating, the philosophy professor selected wisdom. "Done!" said the genie and disappeared in a cloud of smoke.

All the other faculty members turned toward the professor, who sat surrounded by a halo of light. At length, one of his colleagues whispered, "Say something. What wise insight do you now have?"

The professor, much wiser now, sighs and says, "I should have taken the money."

Our scripture lessons for today contain one of the best-known sayings of Jesus. It is exceedingly well known, but often sadly misunderstood. This saying is the second half of John 10:10 and is best known in its King James translation. Jesus says, **"I have come that they may have life, and have it more abundantly."**

This is the favourite verse of scripture for many modern Christians, for they read it as an endorsement of their extravagant lifestyle. They equate the abundant life to living in the lap of luxury. They listen enthusiastically to the pitch of the TV evangelist living in his multi-million-dollar home who declares, "God wants His people to have nice things!" Certainly, the TV evangelist lives up to his creed. Many of them live opulent lifestyles.

I'm not going to be hypocritical. I like nice things. My guess is that you like nice things. All God's children like nice things. Does that mean, therefore, that we can use this verse from John's gospel to baptize rampant materialism? No, it does not.

In our culture, **we are apt to confuse the "abundant life" that Jesus taught with what is often referred to in our culture as the "good life." The good life consists of things. The accumulation of toys.**

Someone once saw an epitaph on a tomb that read like this: "She died of things."
The next tomb said, "He died providing things for her."

Looking closely at John 10:1-10, one way to sum up the section is to divide it into two parts. In verses 1–6 Jesus is gathering a flock—a people for himself from the Jewish fold. In verses 7–10, he is explaining why he is gathering this flock—that they might have life and have it abundantly (verse 10). That's the summary, but O, so much more is going on.

Our world is full of unhappy and dissatisfied people. For this reason, people everywhere are looking for answers to the emptiness they feel inside. These people will try anything, if it might bring them some sort of satisfaction or happiness. We are so messed up. So, what is the solution? Materialism and wealth? Pleasure and enjoyment? Power and prestige? Religion? Wisdom and understanding? **Everybody has an answer. But I believe the Bible when it says, "There is a way that seems right to a person, but in the end, it produces**

death," Proverbs 14:12 There is a way that appears to be right, but in the end it leads to death.

There is an answer to the eternal question, "How do I find happiness and satisfaction in life?" Jesus stated in the purpose of why he came. He said, "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full". What did Jesus mean when he said that we can have "life to the full"? You deserve an answer to this question.

A good dictionary will define the word "full" as "complete, perfect, being at the highest or greatest degree, the maximum". So, when this word is in reference to one's life, it would mean a life that is complete, not lacking in anything essential. It would imply that one's life was successful, superior, having an abundance of quality and life. The good news is that not only did Jesus come to save us, but he also came to give us an abundant life. This is much like a second blessing: eternal life, plus "life to the full"! I'm convinced the reason why so many Christians are not living life to the full is because they don't know what it is! Many Christians don't really think that such a life is available to them. How sad!

How to identify the "Abundant Life".

The "Abundant life" life means that there is an abundance of something. This, of course, is referring to life itself. They are living it to the fullest. They are not just merely existing, or simply "trying to make a living." That's why Jesus said in Matthew 6:25 that we should not worry about our life, what we will eat or drink, and what we will wear. If we allow ourselves to remain preoccupied with what we consider to be basic necessities, we will not be able to enjoy "abundant life". It is a mistake to allow "the urgent" to control you, because that will cause you to miss out on what is truly important.

As you learn to see what life is all about, you will begin to see all around you, many who are successfully living their own "life to the full" - full of meaning and hope, happiness, satisfaction and a strong faith in God. Their life becomes an adventure worth living.

Let's begin here: The person who has abundant life recognizes Jesus' voice. John writes, "The man who enters by the gate is the shepherd of his sheep. The watchman opens the gate for him, and the sheep listen to his voice. He calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice." The key to abundant life is not the accumulation of many things. The key to abundant life is to recognize the voice of Jesus in your life. It is to know you are walking in the light of his revelation. It is to live as Christ would have you live.

The person who has abundant life also seeks to follow in Christ's steps. The author of I Peter writes: "To this you were called, because Christ suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps."

What does it mean to follow in Christ's steps? The writer tells us, "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth."

That's a pretty high standard. "He committed no sin . . ." What does that mean? So many people have such a narrow definition of sin. Listen to the words of I Peter: "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth. When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly."

We think of sin as some personal transgression. However, it is clear that sin has a relational dimension as well. "When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats."

We show love for Christ by how we treat each other. Not only by how we treat those closest to us, but by how we treat all people, those we like and those we dislike; those of whom we approve and those of whom we do not; the neighbour and the complete stranger.

Do you understand that following in the footsteps of Jesus means living a life for others? It is a paradox. The more selfishly we live our lives, the less satisfaction we feel about our lives. The more we are open to others, the better we feel about ourselves.

The person who lives life abundantly hears Christ's voice and walks in Christ's footsteps, performing acts of love as Christ performed acts of love.

But there is one thing more to say about the abundant life. The person who has abundant life gratefully accepts what Christ has done for him.

A. What abundant life is not.

1. It is not necessarily a life of comfort and ease.

Sometimes we need to "go through the fire" in order for it to melt away the impurities inside us. This is how God refines us. See James 1:2

2. It is not dependent on outside circumstances.

It's not what happens to you that is nearly as important as how you respond to it. Some of the greatest men in our country grew up in poverty and other extreme hardships.

3. It is not glamorous, flashy or outwardly impressive.

The abundant life is much like that small gate and narrow road that Jesus told us about in Matthew 7:13 "Enter through the narrow gate. For wide is the gate and broad is the road that leads to destruction, and many enter through it.

The reason why so few will find it is because it takes more effort to even notice it. It has no flashing lights, no whistles or bells.

4. It is not necessarily obtained quickly.

People can receive eternal life fairly quickly as long as they have a little faith. It's not that way with the abundant life. It may take a few years before a person can experience it, because it is a process that often takes time. Don't allow that to discourage you.

A person who is 100 lbs. over-weight may take longer to reach their ideal weight than someone who is only 10 lbs. over-weight. Nevertheless, they still can achieve their goal, even if it takes longer. In the same way, the process for some people to obtain the abundant life may take longer because some people carry around a little more "spiritual baggage" than others. Some baggage may also be harder to turn loose.

The point is, a few years from now, Lord willing, you are going to be a few years older. Either you will be a few years older and enjoying abundant life, or you will be a few years older and still not have it. The choice is yours.

5. It is not easy to obtain.

This should not be surprising. Almost everything worthwhile tends to be harder to obtain and require more effort to keep it. Good habits are like that.

B. A good description of Abundant living. I will give you about 15 examples

You are living the "Abundant life" when...

1. You clearly understand that failure is an event, not a person; that yesterday ended last night, and today is your brand new day.
2. You have made friends with your past, are focused on the present, and optimistic about your future.
3. You know that success doesn't make you, and failure doesn't break you.
4. You are filled with faith, hope, and love, and live without anger, greed, guilt, envy, or thoughts of revenge.
5. You are mature enough to delay gratification and shift your focus from your rights to your responsibilities.
6. You know that failure to stand for what is morally right is the prelude to being the victim of what is criminally wrong.
7. You are secure in who you are, so you are at peace with God and in fellowship with man.
8. You have made friends of your adversaries, and have gained the love and respect of those who know you best.
9. You understand that others can give you pleasure, but genuine happiness comes from doing things for others.
10. You are pleasant to the grouchy, courteous to the rude, and generous to the needy.
11. You love the unlovable, give hope to the hopeless, friendship to the friendless, and encouragement to the discouraged.
12. You can look back in forgiveness, forward in hope, down in compassion, and up with gratitude.
13. You know that "he who would be the greatest among you must become the servant of all".
14. You recognize, confess, develop, and use your God-given physical, mental, and spiritual abilities to the glory of God and for the benefit of mankind.
15. You stand in front of the Creator of the universe and He says to you, "Well done, good and faithful servant." (p. 313, "Over the Top", by Zig Ziglar, 1997.)

C. You can know how to receive this "Abundant Life".

There is not a magic formula. God graciously gives it to all who seek it. "Ask and it will be given to you, seek and you will find, knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks, receives, he who seeks, finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened," Matthew 7:7-9

"If you...know how to give good gifts to your children, how much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him," Matt. 7:11.

Conclusion: For those of you who realize that you have never experienced or discovered the abundant life, the most important thing you can do right now, is to agree that Jesus really has come so that YOU may enjoy life to the full. If you have already said "yes" to Jesus and have received eternal life, then "abundant life" is yours! However, it is a process, and it will become a life-style as you grow to be more like Christ.

Abundant living is more than simply being a do-gooder. Abundant living is life lived out of gratitude for what Christ has done for us. Abundant living is not something we are able to do on our own. Abundant living is a gift, a gift of grace. Listen again to the words of Peter: "He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; by his wounds you have been healed." Then the writer of the epistle adds these words, "For you were like sheep going astray, but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls."