

Introduction: To Love Life

Why is it that in the moments of our greatest outward success we often find ourselves feeling the most empty and unsatisfied with life? You work for years to start a business and when it finally takes off you feel like an imposter. You are filled with self-doubt and the feeling that someone else could have done it better. You graduate from college get a good paying job sit down at your desk and wonder, “If I have arrived why do I still feel so anxious about the future?” Or maybe you are mid-career, you are well respected, accomplished in your field, but feeling trapped. Wanting a change but unable to leave because of all the outward benefits your success has offered you. You have married a lovely husband, three healthy children, but feel depressed and unsatisfied with being a mother and a wife. And then you feel guilty for not feeling happy when you have been given so much. The driving ambitions of life: education, career, family, finances, achievement... the pursuit of happiness has left you anything but happy.

It is a common refrain, an athlete works all of his life to win the championship, to stand on the podium, to achieve greatness only to find that it leaves him feeling empty.

In our passage for this morning the Apostle Peter quotes Psalm 34, which asks, who

“...desires to love life and see good days,” (1 Peter 3:10 ESV)

Who desires to love life? Who wants to not merely be successful but to enjoy the success that they have achieved? Who wants to wake up in the morning joy-filled because of the life that they have been given to live? Who wants good days? Who wants to go to bed at night satisfied with what they have accomplished? Who wants to feel in the very core of their being that their life is a life that is good; a life that is filled with purpose and joy?

The Lord Jesus said to his disciples,

“I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (John 10:10 ESV)

Full abundant life. Good days. Loving and satisfied with what the Lord has given to you each and every day.

That is what the Apostle Peter is seeking to lead us to this morning, the love of life. Abundant life in Jesus Christ. Yet what we will find is that the path to loving life is much different than you might expect. For Peter is no health, wealth, and prosperity preacher. And the Lord Jesus did not come that we might have ease and have it abundantly. Rather in our passage for this morning Peter teaches that the true path to loving life is to give your life away. If you want to love life and see good days, then give your life away.

These are the words that Jesus used to teach this same lesson. He says in Mark 8:35,

“...whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it.” (Mark 8:35 ESV)

You want to save your life, don't you? You want to have abundant life, don't you? Then lose it. Give it away. For those who give their life away will find that in doing so they gain true life.

Point One: To Love Life You Must Give Your Life To The Church (verse 8)

I wonder what you think is the most daunting challenge facing the American Evangelical church in the 21st century. Is it the breakdown of the family? Is it the ever-eroding morality of our culture? Is it secularism? Is it the push to accept unbiblical sexual lifestyles? Is it biblical illiteracy? What do you believe is the biggest challenge? As a pastor I might offer a contender. I believe one of the biggest challenges to the health of the Evangelical church is the rampant and often unchecked spirit of consumerism.

Consumerism tells this story: The reason that you do not love life is because you are lacking goods and experiences. Therefore, through the consumption of goods and services you will achieve satisfaction. Dissatisfied with your kitchen? You need a remodel. Dissatisfied with your car? Trade it in. Dissatisfied with your health? Buy some exercise equipment. Dissatisfied with your knowledge? Buy a book. Dissatisfied with your job? Change careers. Dissatisfied with your church? Find one that meets your needs. Shop, purchase, consume, and be satisfied. The gospel of consumption.

But this is not the narrative of the gospel. This is not the path to abundant life according to God's word. For the Lord Jesus did not shop and purchase and consume. Rather he obeyed and served and gave his life for others. Consumerism says buy your life. Christianity says give your life away.

Look at verse 8. Here Peter explains how we might gain life through giving our life to the body of Christ,

"Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind." (1 Peter 3:8 ESV)

Peter is concluding a section in which he has taught all Christians to submit to the governing authorities, to submit to economic authority, and to submit within familial authorities. Now he says, "All of you..." That is, all Christians are to have a unified and humble spirit toward each other. He expresses this attitude that should mark our relationship with other Christians, as like-mindedness, sympathetic, filled with brotherly love, compassionate, and humility. Each of these qualities are rooted in a willingness to submit personal desires, needs, emotions, and ambitions to the greater good of others. To have sympathy for example, is to rejoice with those who rejoice and to mourn with those who mourn. It is a willingness to enter into the needs and concerns of others. A tender heart means that you have a deep emotional connection to others in the body of Christ in which you long for their wellbeing and fruitfulness.

In Philippians 2 Paul explains the attitude we should have toward one another in the body of Christ with these words,

“Do nothing from selfish ambition or conceit, but in humility count others more significant than yourselves. Let each of you look not only to his own interests, but also to the interests of others. Have this mind among yourselves, which is yours in Christ Jesus,”
(Philippians 2:3–5 ESV)

You see so often we approach the body of Christ with the attitude of, “How is the church meeting my needs?” Do I like the music? Am I being fed by the preaching? Are the children’s programs keeping my kids happy? Am I learning in Sunday School? Are the people friendly enough? Now I am not saying that as a church we need not be excellent in what we do. But rather, if your relationship to the church is primarily about how the church can meet your needs and not primarily about how you can give your life to others than you will never be happy with your church life. It is not those who receive much who love the church but it is those who give much.

To love life, as a Christian, you need to begin to focus your attention away from yourself and begin to focus on those who are worshipping next to you. Do you love them? Have you given yourself to them? Are you unified in mind? Are you rejoicing and weeping with them? Do you even know them well enough to know what they are struggling with or excited about?

Do you want to love life? Do you want to see good days? It will not come through finding a body who will meet your needs, but rather through submitting yourself, giving yourself, giving your life to the body of Christ.

Point Two: To Love Life You Must Give Your Life To Your Enemies (verse 9a)

Now it might seem rather radical to say that if you want to love life than you need to give your life over to the body of Christ. But just want to hear what Peter says next. Look down at verse 9. He says,

“Do not repay evil for evil or reviling for reviling, but on the contrary, bless, for to this you were called,” (1 Peter 3:9 ESV)

To love life, to find fulfillment and satisfaction in this world we must be willing to give our lives to the body of Christ and we must be willing to give our lives to our enemies. Peter says that we are not to repay evil for evil or hurtful words for hurtful words, but rather we are to try and make those who are mean to us happy.

You want a happy life? Then seek to give your enemies a happy life? You want to be encouraged than speak good words about those who speak poorly about you. You want good days? Then give those who ruin your day the best day of their life. The Proverbs put it this way,

“If your enemy is hungry, give him bread to eat, and if he is thirsty, give him water to drink,” (Proverbs 25:21)

And Jesus says,

“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven... For if you love those who love you, what reward do you have? Do not even the tax collectors do the same? And if you greet only your brothers, what more are you doing than others? Do not even the Gentiles do the same?” (Matthew 5:43–47 ESV)

Vengeance and unforgiveness is never the path to a good life. So don't revile those who are mean to you. Don't ignore those who speak ill of you. But bless them. Pray for them. Forgive them and pray for their forgiveness.

There are those of you here today who have wounds that I can't even imagine. You have been hurt in ways that have altered the way you see the world and other human beings. And I don't mean to make light of the pain and anger that you feel. And I may not be able to sympathize with you. But there one who can. For the word of God tells us that in Jesus Christ we have one who can sympathize with our weakness. For he has been tempted in every way that we have. And he has suffered abuse and shame and loss and pain. He was humbled and tortured and killed. And yet even as he hung upon the cross he prayed for his enemies,

“Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34 ESV)

We are never more like Jesus in this world than when we are giving our lives for our enemies. When we are blessing those who seek to curse us. When we pray for those who have mistreated us.

Do you want to be happy? Do you want to see good days? Then take the radical Christ-like step to lay down your life to bless your enemies.

Point Three: You Must Receive Your Life from The Lord (verses 9b-12)

Now happiness does not come automatically when you lay down your life. We are not talking about Karma. If you have been around long enough you know that it doesn't all come out in the wash, as it were. There is not some cosmic law of nature at work. Rather to experience fullness of life in this way, that is through the giving of your own life you must have faith in God alone to bless you.

Look down at our text beginning in verse 9. And see the active role that God must play if we are to find life through the giving of our lives.

... “for to this you were called (laying down your life), that you may obtain a blessing. For “Whoever desires to love life and see good days, let him keep his tongue from evil and his lips from speaking deceit; let him turn away from evil and do good; let him seek peace and pursue it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayer. But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil.” (1 Peter 3:9–12 ESV)

First, we see it is God who has called us to such a life. Blessing and life does not begin in our own work and sacrifice rather it begins in the call of God. It begins in the work of Jesus Christ who loved the Church and died for her. Who loved us even when we were enemies that we might become sons of God. We do not earn the blessing of God. It is given by grace alone.

Second, we see that when we live this way we inherit a blessing. The ESV says, "...obtain a blessing" yet a better translation maybe to inherit a blessing. We do not earn the blessing of life through laying down our own lives but rather as verse 7 says, "...we are heirs of the grace of life." God has caused us to be born again. And through this new birth we have been born into the inheritance of life. To love life we must first receive the life that has been given to us through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Third, we see that it is the Lord's eyes are upon those who give their lives for others. He sees their life with favor. As Jesus teaches in the sermon on the mount, we are to practice our righteousness in secret so that our Father who sees in secret will reward you (Matt 6:4, 6,18). If there is no God of grace than living this way is foolishness.

Fourth, we see that when we seek life by giving our lives away the Lord's ears are open to our prayer. Remember the husband from last week? When he didn't treat his wife with honor? His prayer were hindered. But when we seek to live for the good of the church and for the good of our enemies the Lord loves to answers our prayers.

So when you give your life to the church don't do it with the mind that the people in the church will then bless you and give you life. And don't love your enemies with the idea that all of a sudden they will begin to love you and bless you. We don't give our lives to others with the hope that they will give their lives to us. We don't serve people so that they will in turn serve us. To see good days and to love life you must look to the Lord alone in faith and receive life from him. For apart from him we can do nothing but in him is full and abundant life.

Conclusion

So give your life away. This is the pattern of life that we have committed ourselves to in following Jesus Christ. For the word of God tells us that Jesus poured out his blood for the Church. He gave his life so that we might have life. And the word of God tells us that we were enemies of God but, "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son" (Romans 5:10 ESV)

This is what it means to take up your cross and follow the Lord Jesus Christ. Give up the path of salvation through consumption and hear the call of the Lord Jesus Christ who says,

"If anyone would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for my sake and the gospel's will save it." (Mark 8:34-35 ESV)

It is a radical message, this Christian life. Submission, humility, sacrifice. In a world that says you need to learn to love yourself, you need to focus more on your own needs, it may be a hard sell to quote Jesus when he says, “lose your life.”

If you love *your* life and you hold onto it and protect it you will lose it. I think of it a bit like a new pair of shoes. When I get a new pair of shoes it is always a temptation for me to not wear them, for fear that they might get dirty. They might get banged up and worn out. So I just keep them in my closet. Now, growing up there were times (especially when I was a teenager) when I would grow out of a pair of shoes in a few months. And if I didn't wear my new shoes I would grow out of them before they were even ever used. And the irony of the whole situation was that I would lose my shoes for fear of ruining them.

And some of you are doing that with the life that you have in Christ. You are protecting your life. You are hiding it in the closet. You are more concerned about protecting your life than sharing it. Well it is time to get out those shoes and start wearing them. Will they get muddy? Sure. Will they get worn out? Sure. But that is what they were made for.

Verse 9 says, “to this you were called...” To giving your life to others to the church and even to your enemies. Why? The verse goes on to say, “...that you may obtain a blessing.” (1 Peter 3:9 ESV)

This is how we will see good days and love life... when we give our days and life away.