

An Abundant Life

There have been and still are preachers who offer a “Prosperity Gospel”. In reality, the only prosperity that may usually be found in their message is their own personal wealth. They live in large palatial homes, drive expensive cars, and jet around in private aircraft. These preachers often quote scripture. This morning we will look at some of their favorite scriptures and seek to learn about the life that God calls us to live.

Some of these preachers love to point to Malachi the 3rd chapter where we find: **“Will a man rob (or *defraud*) God? Yet you are robbing Me! But you say, ‘How have we robbed You?’ In tithes and offerings. You are cursed with a curse, for you are robbing Me, the whole nation of you! Bring the whole tithe into the storehouse, so that there may be food in My house, and test Me now in this,” says the LORD of hosts, “if I will not open for you the windows of heaven and pour out for you a blessing until it overflows. (Malachi 3:8-10 NASB)**

It is certainly true that we cannot out give God. It should never be our motive to give in order to receive. Our giving is part of our worship. We give as a tribute to the God whom we serve. If we read through Exodus chapters 25 through 35, we find that the children of Israel gave so much that Moses had to tell them to stop. God had liberated them from slavery in Egypt and they were building a tabernacle for God. Their gifts were to fund this project. Giving to God has never been about what we receive from Him. His blessings, as we will see later, are spiritual in nature and are not tied to material or earthly wealth.

Another scripture that we may hear about prosperity is found in Luke. Jesus is speaking in what has become known as the Sermon on the Plain and He says: **Give, and it will be given to you. They will pour into your lap a good measure—pressed down, shaken together, and running over. For by your standard of measure it will be measured to you in return.” (Luke 6:38 NASB)**

This seems to be another “give and get” verse. However, this verse is totally lifted out of context. Jesus is telling the crowd not to be quick to condemn and judge others. In the preceding verse, Jesus speaks of the standard of measure we use to pardon others will come back to us in even greater amounts. He continues His caution about our harsh judgements when He speaks of removing a log from our own eye before we attempt to remove a small speck from another’s eye. In reality, this verse has nothing to do with money.

Another scripture that is often mention is found in John the 10th chapter. In this chapter, Jesus is telling His disciples about His mission on earth. He tells His disciples that He is the way to God, He is the shepherd that will lay down His life for His sheep, and He brings abundant life.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly. (John 10:10 NASB)

For whatever reason, many will take this idea that in Jesus, we not only have life but an abundant life and that translates into wealth. This word “abundant” in the Greek is περισσός (*perisson*), meaning “exceedingly, very highly, beyond measure, more, superfluous, a quantity so abundant

as to be considerably more than what one would expect or anticipate.” In short, Jesus promises us a life far better than we could ever imagine.

Paul touches on this in his letter to the church in Corinth as he quotes from Isaiah to describe what God has in store for us. He writes: **“THINGS WHICH EYE HAS NOT SEEN AND EAR HAS NOT HEARD, AND *which* HAVE NOT ENTERED THE HEART OF MAN, ALL THAT GOD HAS PREPARED FOR THOSE WHO LOVE HIM.” (1 Corinthians 2:9 NASB)**

Paul tells us that God is able to deliver to us more than we can imagine. In Ephesians the 3rd chapter beginning in verse 17, we read: **so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.**

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him *be* the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen. (Ephesians 3:17-21 NASB)

In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks of the rewards and grandeur “in heavenly places” multiple times. In this passage, Paul is telling us that we cannot imagine all that has been or will be done for us in Christ Jesus. That is abundance.

The idea that God’s blessings and the abundant life is measured in material goods is foreign to anything found in scripture. In 1st Corinthians the first chapter, Paul points out that God chooses the base things of this world. His intent is that we depend on Him rather than our riches, strength, or intelligence.

For consider your calling, brethren, that there were not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble; but God has chosen the foolish things of the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen the weak things of the world to shame the things which are strong, and the base things of the world and the despised God has chosen, the things that are not, so that He may nullify the things that are, so that no man may boast before God. (1 Corinthians 1:26-29 NASB)

To illustrate this, reflect on the people to whom Jesus went and ministered. The overwhelming majority were poor and remained poor after Jesus touched their life. The few rich or wealthy people who came to Jesus often went away after Jesus suggested that they needed to use their riches to help the poor.

If service to God is a pathway to wealth and a materially abundant life, what happened to Jesus? According to Matthew 8:20, Jesus did not even have a place to lay His head. For Jesus, this abundant life is the eternal life in God’s presence.

Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, “Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority

over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life. This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent. (John 17:1-3 NASB)

In this brief statement, we find that Jesus defines eternal life in a unique manner. His definition makes no mention of length of days, health, prosperity, family, or occupation. As a matter of fact, the only thing it does mention is knowledge of God, which is the key to a truly abundant life.

So, what is the abundant life? The first thing we need to understand is the abundant life is spiritual abundance and not material. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus tells us not to be concerned about what we wear or what we eat. He points to nature and reminds us that we are more important to God than the birds of the air and the grass in the field.

Paul tells the church in Philippi that He had learned to be satisfied regardless of his situation by relying on God.

Not that I speak from want, for I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need. I can do all things through Him who strengthens me. (Philippians 4:11-13 NASB) Paul continues to point out that God supplies our needs (not our wants): **And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus. (Philippians 4:19 NASB)**

The wise man Solomon wrote about the emptiness of wealth in Ecclesiastes the 5th chapter.

He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves abundance *with its* income. This too is vanity. When good things increase, those who consume them increase. So, what is the advantage to their owners except to look on? The sleep of the working man is pleasant, whether he eats little or much; but the full stomach of the rich man does not allow him to sleep.

There is a grievous evil *which* I have seen under the sun: riches being hoarded by their owner to his hurt. When those riches were lost through a bad investment and he had fathered a son, then there was nothing to support him. As he had come naked from his mother's womb, so will he return as he came. (Ecclesiastes 5:10-15 NASB)

Looking to wealth as a sign of the abundant life does not align with the teachings of Jesus. In fact, Jesus taught that we should seek God instead of riches. Looking to wealth for satisfaction in life will leave us empty. The abundant life is not to be defined by or through wealth or material things.

The second thing we need to understand about an abundant life is that it is not defined by how long we live. It is defined by having the eternal life as we mentioned earlier. (Found in John 17:1-3.) We gain that eternal life through our relationship with God as found in Jesus.

And the testimony is this, that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has the life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have the life.

These things I have written to you who believe in the name of the Son of God, so that you may know that you have eternal life. (1 John 5:11-13 NASB)

It is fairly simple to follow. God gives us eternal life in His son. If we are in Jesus, we have that life. If we are not in Jesus, we do not have eternal life. Our relationship with God is limited to being found in Jesus. We are to **believe in the name of the Son of God, so that we may know that we have eternal life.**

The abundant life from God's viewpoint is the eternal life in His presence and has absolutely nothing to do with how we might apply earthly standards like wealth, age, prestige, or power. The abundant life will only be found in our relationship with God.

The final consideration we will address this morning is the fact that the abundant life is one of growth. We must make choices that help us to grow in our relationship with God. In Paul's letter to the church in Rome we read: **And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect. (Romans 12:2 NASB)**

We are called to refuse to live the life that the world tells us to live. We are to be transformed into the life that God calls us to live. It involves a growth or **renewing**. Peter tells us that we are to grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and savior Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:18). Again, it is presented as a process: transforming, renewing, and growing.

We all find ourselves longing for the prosperity we see around us. We want to enjoy the rewards of our labors. This is not contrary to a Christian life. It is, however, incumbent that we understand that we are to become a new creature in Christ and that will help us to understand that the abundant life must be defined by God and not the world. In truth, the abundant life is an abundance of love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. (Fruits of the Spirit Galatians 5:22-23).

To find our abundant life, we must listen to this admonition from Paul found in Colossians the 3rd chapter.

Set your mind on the things above, not on the things that are on earth. For you have died and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ, who is our life, is revealed, then you also will be revealed with Him in glory. (Colossians 3:2-4 NASB)

Are you ready to find and live your abundant life?