

Greetings in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ! In this edition I'll be exploring what "life" is.

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John 10

7 Then said Jesus unto them again, Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheepfold.

8 All that ever came before me who testified not of me are thieves and robbers; but the sheep did not hear them.

9 I am the door; by me if any man enter in, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture.

10 The thief cometh not but for to steal, and to kill, and to destroy; I am come that they might have life and that they might have it more abundantly.

11 I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for his sheep.

It may seem a silly question to ask, but what is life?

For the last couple hundred years scientists and doctors have been working on this question from the naturalistic perspective - measuring heart beats, brain waves, energy consumption, and even consciousness. Thus far they have little more than they started with – a lot of questions and not many answers.

Jesus spoke of a more “abundant” life that he came to bring. What exactly does *that* mean?

Sure, we are living even today. People are born, grow up into adulthood, many have children, and eventually everyone must face death. In a world without Jesus that is where the story ends, and it is a most miserable idea because it gives no hope for anything except perhaps to leave a legacy for others. Jesus wanted us to have more than that.

Not just *more*, but something *better*.

I see two major things that the Gospel does for us. The first is that it makes life both tolerable and purposeful. We know what life without the Gospel is like – we see it in the lives of people all around us. Wars, evil-speaking, hatred, depravity, deceit, malevolence, etc., these are the effects of a life without the Gospel of Christ. We see these things in the news every single day. With the Gospel these things are done away.

The second thing I see the Gospel doing for us is to make life possible in an altogether different sense – one that does away with the limitations we face day-to-day. The sting of death is taken away and the burden of pain is removed. Perfection becomes the minimum standard of existence.

Jacob wrote about this altered form of being in these term:

2 Nephi 6

24 **Oh, how great the goodness of our God, who prepareth a way for our escape from the grasp of this awful monster,**

25 **Yea, that monster, death and hell, which I call the death of the body and also the death of the spirit.**

26 And because of the way of deliverance of our God, the Holy One of Israel, this death of which I have spoken, which is the temporal, shall deliver up its dead, which death is the grave.

27 And this death of which I have spoken, which is the spiritual death, shall deliver up its dead, which spiritual death is hell;

28 Wherefore, death and hell must deliver up their dead, and hell must deliver up its captive spirits.

29 And the grave must deliver up its captive bodies, and the bodies and the spirits of men will be restored, one to the other;

30 And it is by the power of the resurrection of the Holy One of Israel.

31 Oh, how great the plan of our God! For on the other hand, the paradise of God must deliver up the spirits of the righteous, and the grave deliver up the bodies of the righteous;

32 **And the spirit and the body is restored to itself again, and all men become incorruptible and immortal; and they are living souls, having a perfect knowledge like unto us in the flesh.**

33 **Save it be that our knowledge shall be perfect.**

34 Wherefore, we shall have a perfect knowledge of all our guilt, and our uncleanness, and our nakedness;

35 And the righteous shall have a perfect knowledge of their enjoyment and their righteousness, being clothed with purity, yea, even with the robe of righteousness.

36 And it shall come to pass that when all men shall have passed from this first death unto life, insomuch as they have become immortal, they must appear before the judgment seat of the Holy One of Israel;

37 And then cometh the judgment; and then must they be judged according to the holy judgment of God.

38 And assuredly, as the Lord liveth--for the Lord God hath spoken it, and it is his eternal word, which cannot pass away--that they who are righteous shall be righteous still, and they who are filthy shall be filthy still.

The resurrection is not just the solution offered in the Gospel by Christ, it is the embodiment of the Gospel itself. Jesus said as much himself:

John 11

25 Jesus said unto her, I am the resurrection and the life; he that believeth in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live;

26 And whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die. Believest thou this?

Eternal life without Jesus would be misery, and for those who refuse to believe him that is their choice. The resurrection is for **all** men, not just those who are faithful followers of Jesus. What those wicked ones have to look forward to is a kind of living death – one in which they have an eternal spirit and body, but a torment that is equally undying. In that respect it seems like the

choice should be an easy one – eternal life with the enjoyment of all things God has in store for us, or eternal torment, or in other words, eternal death. But the choice is still there even if the right choice should be the obvious one.

What is interesting to me is the idea of **growing** spiritually. In our physical bodies we start as babies and grow up, which means that our bodies fill out and we become adults. Spiritually it is not all that different in concept. We **start** as weak and with such a small understanding, then we **grow** in understanding and in strength. The **growing up process** may be similar between our physical and spiritual selves, but they are not necessarily in synchronization with one another.

Someone who is 35 or 70 years old may have just started their **spiritual** growth from near infancy, while someone in their 20's may be very spiritually mature. Or vice versa. We have to receive nourishment in our physical bodies to grow and be healthy, and so it is in our spiritual lives that we must nourish it with spiritual food so that it might grow and be healthy.

Jesus famously required something very important of Peter:

John 21

15 So when they had dined, Jesus saith to Simon Peter, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me more than these? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my lambs.**

16 He saith to him again the second time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? He saith unto him, Yea, Lord, thou knowest that I love thee. He saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.**

17 He saith unto him the third time, Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me? Peter was grieved because he said unto him the third time, Lovest thou me? And he said unto him, Lord, thou knowest all things; thou knowest that I love thee. Jesus saith unto him, **Feed my sheep.**

It might seem that Jesus used the terms lambs and sheep interchangeably, but I'm not so sure that is the case.

Lambs are generally regarded as the newborns of the flock, and while lambs are sheep, Jesus – in my mind – seems to infer in the other two references as younger and older sheep. You may be thinking, “sure, that seems obvious,” but I believe there is more to the story.

One of Peter's issues seemed to be with the Gentiles. He was comfortable among the Jews, but less so among the Gentiles. This led to the vision he was given:

Acts 10

11 And saw heaven opened and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners and let down to the earth,

12 Wherein were all manner of four-footed beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

13 And there came a voice to him: Rise, Peter; kill and eat.

14 But Peter said, Not so, Lord; for I have never eaten anything that is common or unclean.

15 And the voice spake unto him again the second time: What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

16 This was done **thrice**; and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

Is it entirely surprising that Jesus told Peter three times to feed the lambs and sheep, and then he receives this vision three times, in which he finally realizes that he must also go to the Gentiles?

Acts 10

34 Then Peter opened his mouth and said, Of a truth, I perceive that God is **no respecter of persons**;

35 **But in every nation** he that feareth him and worketh righteousness is accepted with him.

Peter seemingly had to be reminded ***again*** about this by Paul:

Galatians 2

11 But when Peter was come to Antioch, **I withstood him to the face because he was to be blamed.**

12 For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles; but when they were come, **he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.**

13 **And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him, insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.**

14 But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of the Gentiles and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews?

15 We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles,

16 Knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ and not by the works of the law; for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.

Peter was admonished to provide spiritual nourishment to the newborns of the faith, as well as to those who were adults in understanding the faith. Or in other words, Jesus has a plan for all of us and he knows that we must start somewhere to get somewhere, and regardless of where we stand there is room for growth. That is a need that has to be met, and we – like Peter – need to be prepared and willing to give the right answer to people regardless of where they are in their spiritual life without fear.

What kind of spiritual food will nourish us and help us to grow? After all, if it was so important for Peter to learn this lesson, what did he then do to fulfill it?

1 Peter 2

1 Wherefore, laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings,

2 As newborn babes, **desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby,**

3 If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious,

4 To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God and precious,

5 Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Peter equates the “sincere milk of the word” as the means to start growth, and then the writer to the Hebrews says this:

Hebrews 5

12 For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be **the first principles of the oracles of God and are become such as have need of milk**, and not of strong meat.

13 **For everyone that useth milk is unskillful in the word of righteousness; for he is a babe.**

14 **But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.**

This seems to compare the milk of the word to the first principles of the communications of God with us. These are repentance, faith, baptisms, etc., as shown in the immediate verses following in Hebrews 6

Hebrews 6

1 Therefore, **not leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection, not laying again the foundation** of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

2 Of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying on of hands, and of the resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

3 And we will go on unto perfection if God permit.

4 For he hath made it impossible for those who were once enlightened, **and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost,**

5 And have tasted the good word of God and the powers of the world to come,

6 If they shall fall away, to be renewed again unto repentance, seeing they crucify unto themselves the Son of God afresh and put him to an open shame.

This again shows that the word of God is food to us, but along with it is the “partakers of the Holy Ghost” element, which shows that when we have tasted the goodness of the word, we can receive the stronger food through the presence of the Holy Ghost. Lehi spoke of this also:

1 Nephi 2

50 And it came to pass that **I did go forth and partake of the fruit thereof**; and I beheld that it was most sweet above all that I ever before tasted.

51 Yea, and I beheld that the fruit thereof was white, to exceed all the whiteness that I had ever seen.

52 And as **I partook of the fruit thereof, it filled my soul with exceeding great joy**;

Nephi then explains what the fruit is, because he had tasted it himself:

1 Nephi 3

63 Knowest thou the meaning of the tree which thy father saw?

64 And I answered him, saying, **Yea, it is the love of God**, which sheddeth itself abroad in the hearts of the children of men; wherefore, it is the most desirable above all things.

65 And he spake unto me, saying, **Yea, and the most joyous to the soul.**

Can a soul be nourished by words alone? The answer to that question is maybe a little more complicated than it might seem considering the scriptures we've just read.

The reason I say that it is more complicated than it seems at first glance is this: the devil is fully aware of all the words that God has spoken – or at least, those that are recorded in the scriptures. He probably has a far better **knowledge** of them than we do. But has he **partaken** of that word? Has it nourished **him**?

The Jews of Jesus' day had a very strong connection with the words of the prophets – they had them memorized as part of their cultural training when growing up, but Peter was commanded to feed the sheep as well as the lambs.

Having the word and partaking of the word are not the same thing. When you partake of something, you are making it a part of you. You take it in and it becomes energy and strength. It circulates through your body and becomes nourishment. By comparison, though, a bag full of potatoes is no good to me if I never eat them, and so it is with the Word of God. The Jews had the word of God, but they didn't let it change them. It couldn't nourish them because it was stuck in their mouths.

What becomes of that nourishment once we receive it?

Firstly, it changes you. You begin to have different desires. The things of this world seem less important, while life becomes a whole new vista to see and participate in, full of wonder and excitement.

Secondly, you do things you've never done before. You talk to people that you feared speaking with before. You become confident in the tasks before you. You encourage others to seek out this life.

Thirdly, you become a different person. Your personality changes. You look out for the welfare of others. You become fervent in the Spirit. You pray as never before. You begin to understand things that were incomprehensible to you before. You grow.

What happens is that you become more Christ-like. His teachings become your teachings, his doctrine becomes your doctrine, and his life becomes your life.

John 15:5 I am the vine; ye are the branches. He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit; for without me ye can do nothing.

It is through stubbornness that we resist the workings of the Spirit of the Lord in us, but then again that is why Jesus said that we must become as a little child:

Matthew 18

2 And Jesus called a little child unto him, and set him in the midst of them, and said, Verily, I say unto you, **Except ye be converted and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.**

3 **Whosoever, therefore, shall humble himself as this little child, the same is greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

4 And whosoever shall receive one such little child in my name receiveth me.

We are spiritual beings at our core – we had a spiritual existence before we were born, and it is certain that our existence in the resurrection will be a spiritual one, but we have to choose what kind of life that is.

In some respects taking in the word of God into our lives, letting it permeate our being and working within us that work of purification, is an act of surrender. But it is also an act of determination. The Lord will not knock down our door to make us obedient – we have to open that door so that he can come in and sup with us.

Revelation 3

20 Behold, **I stand at the door, and knock; if any man hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me.**

21 To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame and am set down with my Father in his throne.

22 He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

To that end we begin to understand that our life is nothing without his life. If we hold our life so preciously as it is that we cannot change it, then he cannot work within us.

Luke 17:33 Whosoever shall seek to save his life shall lose it; and whosoever shall lose his life shall preserve it.

The only life that should matter to us individually is not ours, but his that dwells within us, and by extension we should help to nourish his life in others. This is how we can grow spiritually – to have that abundant life as promised so long ago. The only abundant life is his life, for it is infinite and eternal.

Revelation 21:6 And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

3 Nephi 4:48 I am the light and the life of the world. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end.