

Psalm 119:17-24

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[0 : 00] I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.

These are the words of Jesus that we read in John's Gospel a few moments ago. And Jesus directs those words to us this evening. He directs those words to you.

I came that you may have life and that you may have it to the full. Jesus came that we, his people, might enjoy life to the full or abundant life.

Now that sounds wonderful. Who doesn't want to live life to the full? Who doesn't want to experience abundant life? But what does that mean? It would be great as a slogan.

Churches sometimes carry that name. A church of abundant life. But what does it mean? What does it look like? What does this abundant life to the full look like?

[1 : 06] I want to try and answer that question, or at least partially answer that question, by reference to the section of Psalm 119 that we have read. Now, as I said, even as I was introducing the readings, this is a somewhat maybe unusual approach.

We will often reflect on an Old Testament passage in the light of the fuller revelation of the New Testament. But this evening I want to go in the other direction. I want to reflect on the declaration of Jesus concerning life to the full in the light of the fuller revelation.

Through the lens of what the psalmist declares about life and living. The author, of course, is the same. the author of Psalm 119, the author of the words of Jesus, the one who inspired the words that we are considering is the same God and the same Spirit of God.

Now, the section that we've read there in Psalm 119 is about life. It's about living. This much is clear from the very first verse where we read, Be good to your servant while I live.

The psalmist's concern is about his life. It's about the life that he lives. He wants to live his life in a manner that is pleasing to God. That's his concern.

[2 : 26] And so the prayer that he prays is in that connection. It's with that goal or that end in view. And so the section, the prayer that he prays is about life.

The psalmist is reflecting on life, on living, on living well, on living with God, on living for God, or to use Jesus' language, on living life to the full.

So what is that like? What does that look like? How can you live such a life? Let's draw a picture of this life, life to the full, with the help of the psalmist's prayer.

All of Psalm 119 really is a prayer. It's a prayer in the form of a poem, but it's a prayer. You read it, and the psalmist is directing his words, his petitions, his praise to God.

Now in the psalm, we discover different aspects of life to the full that we can identify and maybe just very briefly explore. And we'll really just run through the psalm with that focus on what does life to the full look like or what does life to the full involve?

[3 : 33] What are some of the different aspects of abundant life or life to the full? The first thing I want to draw out from the very beginning of the psalm is this, that life to the full is life in relationship with God.

Notice there in the very first verse, be good to your servant. The very fact that he's praying to God reveals that this is a man who is in relationship with God.

He is in communication with God. He knows God. He speaks to God. He asks of God. So with that reality alone, we know that there is a pre-existing, a personal relationship with God.

But he makes that explicit in how he identifies himself. Be good to your servant. I belong to you. I am your servant. You're my God and I am your servant. We are connected.

We are in relationship. Be good to your servant. The reality of that relationship that he enjoys is also brought out, perhaps less explicitly, in what he says also concerning his identity in verse 19.

[4 : 36] I am a stranger on earth. I am a stranger on earth. Somehow he recognizes, he acknowledges, that he doesn't belong fully in this world where he lives and breathes and serves.

Why doesn't he belong? Why is there a sense of being a stranger on earth? Well, because he knows that his ultimate citizenship, to use New Testament language, is in heaven. He belongs with God. He belongs living with God, the one with whom he enjoys this relationship. Life to the full starts here, in relationship with God.

And Jesus, of course, came to secure for us this relationship with God that would be impossible without his mediation, without him opening up that way for us, for sinners who are estranged from God to be brought back to him and brought into a relationship with him.

In Jesus, we are brought into God's family, not just servants, but sons and daughters. We know God. We are in a relationship with God.

[5 : 54] We think of the words of Jesus as they're recorded for us in John chapter 17, where he says, Now this is eternal life, that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.

This is eternal life. This is life to the full. This is abundant life. And what is it about? It's about a relationship that they know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent. So life to the full begins there, in a relationship with God. I wonder if we sometimes lose sight of what a remarkable thing it is that as believers, we are in a relationship with God. Let me just tell you a story about an incident that took place on or near the Balmoral estate, I think in the last week or two.

Those of you who were around at the Bands for Lunch heard the story already, but bear with me. So I was just reading in the papers this week about what happened. As I say, I think it was in the last few days.

The Queen was walking in the hills near Balmoral, and she was doing so with one security guard with her.

[7 : 04] So just two people. She was walking. And as she was doing so, she bumped into a group of American visitors, tourists, and they stopped and exchanged some pleasantries.

And one of the things they did, they didn't recognize her. They didn't know who she was. And they asked her, well, do you live nearby? And she answered, so it is said, she said, well, I do have a house nearby.

And then they said, have you ever met the Queen? And the Queen, who I think does have quite a dry sense of humor by all reports, responded, she said, well, I haven't, but he has.

And carried on walking. And apparently the tourists were none the wiser. As to who they had been speaking with. But the question that they posed, you know, gives an idea of just that sense of excitement.

Imagine meeting the Queen. And how much more amazing would it be to know the Queen, to be a friend of the Queen? That would be just amazing. And yet we as God's people, we who are invited to live this life to the full, are invited to do so as those who are related to, who are friends with Almighty God.

[8 : 22] It is an amazing and wonderful privilege that is ours. And life to the full begins there. In the absence of that relationship, we cannot even begin to experience this abundant life or life to the full that Jesus speaks of.

So life to the full is life in relationship with God. But the second thing I want to draw out from this section of the psalm is this, that life to the full is life enjoying the favor of God.

The prayer of the psalmist is there before us in the very first verse, or in verse 17. Be good to your servant while I live. Or show favor to your servant that I might live is another way some choose to translate that.

We need God's favor in order to live and we enjoy God's favor as we live. And life to the full is a life empowered by, facilitated by, the goodness and favor of God that we can enjoy as we live life for Him.

And of course we know that God has most intimately shown His favor to us in the giving of Jesus to be our Savior. So life to the full is life in relationship with God, but life to the full is also a life enjoying and empowered by the favor of God.

[9 : 47] But I think we can note another aspect of life to the full and let me suggest that it is this, life to the full is life lived to the glory of God.

Again, we're still in verse 17, be good to your servant while I live that I may obey your word. The psalmist is reflecting on life and on living.

He's conscious of his need of God's favor, of God's help, but he also makes clear what it is that he desires to do, what it is that informs the purpose of his life.

And it's very simply this, that I may obey your word. That's what I want to do. Above all else, I want to be obedient. I want to be faithful. I want to be steadfast.

I want to obey your word. That is what my life is about. Life to the full is a life lived to the glory of God. Living in obedience to God.

[10:44] Living for God. That's the purpose of our existence. obedience. The idea that obedience would be at the heart of abundant life may seem rather strange to some.

Many would perhaps even mock the idea. How can you say that obedience is equivalent to fullness of life? Surely obedience is being shackled and being restricted, having to obey these commands and decrees and statutes.

That is what would turn us off life rather than lead us into abundant life. But the psalmist is clear that life to the full is a life lived to the glory of God in obedience to God.

Life to the full, we perhaps could put it this way, life to the full is all about full obedience. With obedience comes blessing and indeed enjoyment of life.

Which leads on to another aspect of life to the full that we're drawing from this section. Life to the full is a life lived delighting in God. Let's think about verse 18, what we read there.

[12:02] Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. We all perhaps have agreed that in God's Word we find truth, in God's Word we find instruction, we can depend on what is said in God's Word.

Of course that's all true. But the psalmist here is acknowledging another aspect of it that's delightful to him, that in God's Word he finds those things that are wonderful, that are pleasing, that are thrilling, that are exciting.

And these wonderful things are both God's decrees but also His deeds that are recorded. In the Bible we have recorded the awesome deeds of God.

His dealing with His people through the generations and we discover wonderful deeds that He has performed on our behalf. We could recount them. The psalms often do.

Recount the wonderful deeds of God. And for us, of course, we focus in rightly on the most wonderful deed of all, the giving of His Son Jesus to be our Savior. And so in God's Word there are wonderful things to admire but often we fail to appreciate them.

[13:09] We need spiritual eyes to be opened or we miss out on these wonderful things in your law to use the actual expression there in the psalm.

As I was kind of thinking about this sermon or this psalm over the weekend, I was also watching some of the European Masters golf on TV. Now some of you may have no interest in golf but this particular tournament took place in the Swiss Alps.

And I've got the name here of the resort but it's French so I think I just won't bother trying to pronounce it. You can look it up on Google if you want to know where it was but you can imagine the Swiss Alps.

And I was just, to begin with, when I saw that it was on I wasn't aware that it was on and I was just so struck by the amazing scenery. It's an absolutely spectacular setting for a golf course.

You know, the splendor of the Alps and it's just spectacular to just witness even on a TV screen where you don't get the full impact, no doubt, of the scenery and the drama of it all.

[14:19] It's stunningly beautiful. But imagine walking around that course blindfolded and you would miss so much. You need to open your eyes and soak it in.

And likewise with God's Word with the difference that physical sight is not required. But we do need to have the blindfold removed, the spiritual blindfold removed.

We need our eyes open to see the wonderful things. God's Word is replete with, it's overflowing with wonderful things. But we often don't see them.

And so with the psalmist we ask, open my eyes that I may see. I want to delight. Because that's part of life lived to the full.

It is of course true that those who are unbelievers need to have their eyes opened in a very fundamental way. But we who are believers as the psalmist, he writes as a believer, and yet he, even as a believer, asks of God, open my eyes.

[15 : 19] Open them more widely. Help me to see more clearly. He also, in this vein of life to the full, being a life delighting in God, we have the language at the very end of this section, your statutes are my delight.

The statutes of God are delightful. They're objectively delightful in their content and in their perfection, but they're also experientially delightful in our living the very decrees and the statutes of God.

There is a delight in obedience and the satisfaction that accompanies obedience. So maybe that's another aspect of life to the full that we can draw from this psalm.

Life to the full is life lived delighting in God. Let me suggest another. Life to the full is a life directed by God.

Now, the whole of Psalm 119, including this section, speaks a great deal about being directed by God and especially giving us insight into how God directs us.

[16 : 34] And he directs us, of course, by his word. He has given us his word. And in the many ways in which it's described in the Psalms, his law, his decrees, his statutes, and so on and so forth, his testimony, all these different words to speak of God's word that is given to direct us how we might walk, how we might live.

You also have, in addition to the many, reference to it, even in this section, be good to your servant while I live that I may obey your word. Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. I am a stranger on earth. Do not hide your commands from me. And we could go on. But in addition to all of these, you also have the beautiful language or testimony with which the section closes.

There in verse 24, your statutes are my delight. They are my counselors. We're thinking of being directed by God and how life to the full is a life directed by God.

Well, what more vivid way could the Bible be described as that which gives direction than this personification of God's word in this expression. They are my counselors.

[17 : 45] Your statutes are my counselors. Jerome, who lived in the fourth century, perhaps best known for his Latin translation of the Bible, known as the Vulgate, he rather touchingly paraphrases this expression at the end of this section as your statutes are my delight.

They are my best friends. They are my best friends. That's an interesting way of conceiving of, of God's word as my counselors, as my best friends.

We maybe think sometimes or are tempted to think the opposite, that God's word is a taskmaster, obliging us to do that which we don't want to do or we're reluctant to do.

But the psalmist's experience is not of God's word as a taskmaster, but rather of God's word as a counselor, as in the words of Jerome or the manner in which he paraphrased the idea, my best friends.

Life to the full can only be experienced as we are directed by God's word. Let me suggest a couple of more things. The next one I want to suggest or aspect of life to the full that we can draw from this section is this.

[19 : 04] Life to the full is a life under the protection of God. In this section, the psalmist acknowledges that while he seeks, no doubt imperfectly, but while he seeks genuinely and sincerely to live a life that is pleasing to God, that is faithful to God, he suffers.

Indeed, the implication is that it's because of this life to the full he is suffering, and that seems almost inconsistent. How can it be that if we're living life to the full, we should suffer as a result? That would seem to have been his experience. In verse 22, he asks of God, remove from me scorn and contempt, for I keep your statutes. He's seeing a causal connection.

Why is he being the object of scorn and contempt? Because of the life that he is living in obedience to God. And it's painful for him. And he asks that God would remove that scorn, that contempt. In verse 23, he states very explicitly how there are those ganging up on him. Though rulers sit together and slander me, your servant will meditate on your decrees.

[20 : 14] And so he's suffering. He's being slandered. He's being mocked. He is the object of scorn because of his faithfulness. And he asks God to remove that scorn.

The abundant life that Jesus came to secure for us is not a life where we are spared suffering and opposition, but it is a life in which we are called to persevere in the midst of such suffering and opposition, and a life in which God is with us in the midst of suffering and opposition.

He will hear and answer our cry for help. We don't seek out suffering. That would be a quite perverse thing to do.

But the experience of believers is that in and through suffering, we can often, certainly sometimes, experience most vividly and intimately the help and friendship of God that lies at the heart of life life to the fool.

Life to the fool is a life lived under the protection of God. Let me suggest one final thing. Life to the fool requires focus and fidelity.

[21 : 31] Now, let's just think a little bit about what the psalmist says in verse 21. We're jumping kind of in no particular order in terms of the order of the actual section, but look at verse 21 with me.

You rebuke the arrogant who are accursed, those who stray from your commands. And I'm thinking especially of that expression, those who stray from your commands. Now, it's clear in the context of the psalm that the psalmist here is not speaking about himself.

He's speaking about others. He's speaking about others who he describes as arrogant. But then he describes them also as those who stray from your commands.

Now, that's interesting because if he's describing them as those who stray from your commands, it must be the case that they are familiar with God's commands. You can't stray from commands that you don't know anything about.

So he's not speaking here about pagans. He's not speaking about people who know nothing of God's word. He's speaking about those who are familiar with God's word but who have made the mistake of straying from his commands.

[22 : 33] Now, it would seem that at this point, the psalmist, that is not his experience. But clearly, it is an experience that can be the experience of God's people.

We can stray from God's commands. And when we do stray from his commands, then what will come with that is a loss of the enjoyment and of the experience of living life to the full of that life that Jesus came to grant to us.

Now, when we are guilty of straying, we don't lose our God-given status as sons and daughters of God, but we can lose our enjoyment of that status, of that relationship.

We can lose the experience of living life to the full. And so, hence, life to the full requires focus and fidelity.

We are prone to stray. Even the language of straying suggests something that's often imperceptible. Maybe not some dramatic moral fault, although it could be, but just simply straying in our affections, straying in our discipline, straying in our obedience, straying in our service.

[23 : 51] Others don't even notice. Maybe we don't even notice ourselves, but little by little, we stray from God and from his commands. And when we lose that focus, when we lose that fidelity, then a consequence will be that we don't enjoy, we don't experience that life to the full as Jesus intends for us.

But we come back to where we began and the words of Jesus, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full. That is why Jesus came.

That is why he came, to live for you and to die for you, that you might have life and have it to the full. And as we reflected on the psalm or this section of the psalm, we perhaps have been able to draw out some aspect of what that life to the full involves and look like.

Well, may God help us to live life in such a manner. Let's pray. Heavenly Father, we do thank you that your purposes for us are good, that you love us and because you love us, your desire for us is that we might live lives that are full and abundant and useful and purposeful.

And we thank you for that. We thank you for your instruction in the Bible as to how we can live such a life. And help us to reflect on your word, help us to make it our own, help us to respond to it, help us to examine ourselves and see where we are perhaps falling short, what we are ignoring or putting to one side and help us to live that life.

[25 : 34] Open our eyes that we might see these wonderful things in your law. And we pray in Jesus' name. Amen.