

NATIONAL COMMUNITY CHURCH
August 19, 2018
WTL Part 3 – The Way The Truth And The Life
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There are two ways to live life. One is with a mindset of scarcity where we recognize that there are limited numbers of hours in the day and we feel like there's a limit on time and resource and opportunity, and so we rush around because we don't have enough time and we hoard because we want to make sure we have our fair share and we clamor for position and opportunity and role and we look at others with jealousy and suspicion because we're afraid if we don't take full advantage of the opportunity or we missed the moment, we won't get our fair share out of life. The other is a mindset of abundance. It's a recognition that even though there are a finite number of hours in the day, that we serve a God who has given us all the time, we need to accomplish all of the purposes he's ordained for us. It's recognizing that we're not owners of anything but merely stewards of the resources that God has given to us and that it is more important that we focus on our character and if we focus on our character, then God will make sure that we step into the calling that he has for us.

My daughter is only three years old, but already she oscillates between these two mindsets. On her best days she will gather the toys that she doesn't play with anymore and suggest that we give them to some younger kids that might enjoy them. A couple of weeks ago, she helped me go through all of her baby clothes to sort them and to package some of them to send to a maternity ward in Uganda that one of our recent A18 teams just built. Other days, she operates with a mindset of scarcity, especially when it comes to popcorn, she loves popcorn and we were sitting with some friends watching a movie and there was a community bowl of popcorn and then she had her own little personal bowl of popcorn. There was a recognition that the large bowl was getting very low and we needed to take it back into the kitchen to refill it. All my daughter heard was we were taking the large community bowl away despite the fact that she had her own personal bowl, despite the fact that that big bowl was going to be refilled. She grabbed onto the bowl and began stuffing her face with as much popcorn as she could consume, I've never seen the child eat that much before in my life; and even though in the room over there was plenty of hot, fresh, good popcorn she was holding onto that bowl as tightly as she could, grabbing at specs and scraps and kernels in the bottom of the bowl because she couldn't understand that something better was on the other side of it.

Now, we can laugh at her childlike expression of it, but how many of us are often tempted to approach life in the same way. When it looks like we might lose something or miss out or not have enough we grab onto things and hold onto them so tightly and we fail to understand that abundance is on the other side. But what if we live with a mindset of abundance? How would that change the way we approach our calendar, the way we approach our relationships, the way we approach our work? Would we sleep better and worry less and encourage more and enjoy more? Would we find that we live with more freedom and more joy and more peace and more fulfillment and more contentment?

We're coming to the end of a series this weekend, the way the truth and the life which focuses on this. One of the most famous statements that Jesus made is he went to the cross; I am the way, the truth and the life. In two weekends ago, Dr. Foth talked about how Jesus was the way he shows us the way, he is the way. And he talked about how the Gospel can be explained within the idea of place. That Jesus said, I'm going to leave my place and I'm going to come to your place to take your place and then we'll go back to my place. His idea that the way isn't so much about where we're going or what we're doing, but who we're following. And then last weekend, Pastor Joshua talked about the idea that Jesus is the truth and that like Phillip in our culture today, we want truth, but we want it on our terms. And we've got to understand that in this ever changing world of confusion and uncertainty and relativity that Jesus is the truth that is unchanging and unwavering and we can anchor our lives into. But the truth that he offers is less about rules to live by and a calling to live for.

Today we're going to talk about life. Jesus is the way, the truth and the life. From the very beginning of time in history, life springs onto the pages of the human existence when God said, let there be light. The first four words at the beginning of our story, he is putting into motion life. Light is the primary driver of the process of photosynthesis. The mechanism by which life is supported, plants and animals, God breathed into Adam into his nostrils the breath of life. Other gods of the ancient times were concerned with far more pedestrian ideas; with rivalry and power and using human beings to get their own wants and desires. The God of the Bible stands uniquely and alone; is one who intersects the human story but not because of power or rivalry, to bring life to his creation. In Deuteronomy 30:19 God set before his people a choice. He said,

19 "Today I have given you the choice between life and death, between blessings and curses. Now I call on heaven and earth to witness the choice you make. Oh, that you would choose life, so that you and your descendants might live!"

God offers his people a choice between scarcity and abundance, between life and death, between blessings and curses, and it all hinges on the story we choose to embrace, the story that we choose to follow. In the scripture, particularly in the Old Testament we see a number of threads and when we pull on those threads, we realize that they weave their way through the entire story of scripture and we're going to talk about each of those threads, particularly as they relate to the life that God offers, but just as we frame it before jumping into them, they come in three categories.

The first thread is the story of shame to salvation.

A second thread is a story of bondage to liberation.

And a third story is that of exile to restoration.

Let's unpack each of those for a moment. The first is the story of shame to salvation, or you might say from guilt to innocence, from sin to holiness. It's this cycle of sacrifice and purity that we see in the Old Testament. Let me explain it this way. So in the garden, Adam and Eve step across the one guard rail that God gave to them and when they discovered how they had fallen they ran into hiding, embarrassed by their shame and their nakedness, and yet while they were

hiding, God comes into the garden, pursuing them, looking for them. And God takes an animal and sacrifices it to cover their nakedness so they could emerge back into the presence of God and live life, no longer walking in shame. In the Old Testament, we see this legal system that is established by God that follows this pattern where people can atone for their sin, they can deal with their shame through a system of sacrifices. Their lives were tainted by sin, but the sacrifices would remove the shame and remove the guilt and allow them a life with God. It's a story that moves people from a tainted life to a pure life, from a guilty life to a forgiven life, from an accused life to an acquainted life. It's the story of shame to salvation.

We see another story-line throughout the Old Testament that's bondage to liberation. And we see this story primarily in the next book over in the book of Exodus, and the people of God find themselves enslaved in a foreign land. They don't belong to themselves. Their life is not their own. What their life produces is not their own and they are in captivity in an oppressive world, and yet God raises up a deliverer named Moses and Moses leads the people out of captivity into the promised land. It's a story of bondage to liberation. It's a story of life in captivity to life in freedom, and we see that story weave its way through the pages of scripture.

A third story-line, we encounter is exile to restoration. In 586 BC the people of God find themselves conquered by the Babylonian empire and they're scattered across the four corners of the Babylonian empire, separated from their land, from their culture, from their temple, and from one another. And the prophets pointed to a day when they would be restored, that though they were living in exile that God had promised to restore them to their land and their people and their culture and their temple. Seventy years later, the exile ends and they're restored back to their land. It's a story of exile to restoration, a life of isolation to a life of connection.

Shamed to salvation, bondage to liberation, exile to restoration. Now, I think in the church, we've often focused on that first story of shame to salvation. And sometimes when we talk about our faith or we're sharing with somebody else what we believe, we often explain it this way. You have a sin problem, but Jesus came to deal with your sin problem and if you will accept the wonderful gift of salvation that he gives to you, you'll live with him forever, but if you reject it, you'll burn in hell forever. Oh, I don't know that might not sound like good news to everybody. Now, the good news of Jesus is definitely about sacrifice and purity. It's absolutely about shame to salvation. It's about shame to significance. It's about guilt to forgiveness, but it's also about bondage to liberation. It's about exile to restoration.

Let me talk a little bit about how we see this in the life of Jesus because in the New Testament, Jesus shows up on the scene and he becomes the fulfillment, he becomes the completion of these stories. When Jesus said, I am the way, the truth and the life; those words would have been very recognizable to his audience. As Dr Foth mentioned a couple of weeks ago, the first five books of what we know is the Old Testament, the Torah, the sacred writings of the Jewish people was referred to as the way the truth and the life. When Jesus first audience heard him proclaim that he was the way, the truth, and the life, it wasn't new language, it wasn't a new concept. It was something that rang very familiar to them. They understood Jesus to be saying, I am the Torah, I am the way, I am the truth. I am the life. It's no longer follow Torah, it is follow me. And his life continues to pull on those same three threads of the Old Testament. His life completes the story of shame to salvation. In II Corinthians 5:21 we read,

21” God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God.”

That pretty much sums up this shame to salvation story-line. That Jesus who was sinless and perfect stood in our place, paid a debt that we couldn't pay; said give me all of your sin and I will trade that for all of my righteousness and bring you from shame to salvation.

We read in Colossians 2:13

13” You were dead because of your sins and because your sinful nature was not yet cut away. God made you fully alive with Christ, for he forgave all our sins.”

14 “He canceled the record of the charges against us and took it away by nailing it to the cross.”

It's this legal exchange that completes that sacrifice to purity cycle that we see in the Old Testament. Our sin was paid for so that we could be made alive in Christ.

Second story-line from bondage to liberation. In Luke 4:18 & 19 Jesus stands up publicly for the first time and announces his mission, announces his purpose, and he says,

18-19 “The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he's anointed me to preach the good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners, and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor’.”

Jesus is saying, I have a mission of liberation. I said this a few weeks ago when we were finishing up the neighboring series, but it's so fascinating to me that the first time Jesus stood up publicly to declare this is who I am and this is what I'm about. He didn't mention anything about dealing with the sin problem or going to a cross or rising from the grave. He said, I have come to bring freedom to bring liberation, to take those who are oppressed and bring them into the life they were created and designed to live.

In Isaiah 53:5 and I Peter 2:24, we read by his wounds, we are healed. Jesus came to free us from unhealthy habits and unhealthy cycles and patterns that we can't break to bring us freedom. Whatever trial or tragedy or trauma, has weakened you, whatever hurt, habit or hang-up has you in prison, Jesus came that you might find freedom and live a life that is free.

The third story-line, exile to restoration. In Matthew 8, we find this really interesting story where Jesus heals a leper and after he heals the leper, he tells him, don't tell anyone, but go show yourself to the priest and offer the gift Moses commanded as a testimony to them. He heals the leper and then says, go see the priest. This is an interesting thing for Jesus to do because Jesus didn't seem to have much like for the priest. In fact, he told his followers not to be like the priest and yet here he is telling this man he has just healed to go see the priest. So why would he do that? Well, I think it's because the priest was the only one in the community that could declare the leper legally clean, spiritually clean and relationally clean and give him the authority to move back into society. The priest was the one that had the ability to let the man have access once

again to his neighbors and his family and his friends. The priest was the only one that was able to restore him to relationship and Jesus was not just concerned about healing the man physically, not just concerned about restoring him physically, but also concerned about restoring him relationally. And we see this all through the life and the ministry and the teachings and the actions of Jesus. Whether it's the story of the prodigal son or his encounter with Zacchaeus or his conversation with the woman at the well or the moment with the woman caught in adultery. Jesus is seeking to restore people to relationship with one another. Jesus came to restore relationship between us and God and us with one another.

Maybe you're in a place where you can't experience life to the fullest because there is a cloud of shame and guilt that is pressing down on your life. The good news for you today is that Jesus has taken your place and paid for that and offers you life that moves from shame to salvation. Maybe you're here today and you can't live life to the fullest because there's a cycle that you can't interrupt or there's an addiction that you can't break; there are unhealthy patterns. Or maybe you feel trapped by shame, but it's not shame because of something you did, but by something that someone else did to you and the good news for you today is that Jesus offers a life of freedom. Or maybe you're having trouble living life to the fullest because you feel isolated and lonely and there are broken relationships, and the good news for you today is that Jesus has adopted you into his family and offers you life in relationship with him. He's the way. He's the truth. He is the life.

Now a lot of times when we talk about the life as it relates to Jesus, we use this phrase, eternal life. That little adjective eternal in front of life shows up in the New Testament a few dozen times, in fact, a couple dozen times in the Gospels and a couple dozen times in the rest of the New Testament. I mean perhaps the most famous verse in the whole Bible,

John 3:16, for God loved the world so much that he gave his only son, that whoever believes in him would have eternal life.

That word eternal I think trips us up sometimes we tend to think about it in terms of something in the future, something that happens after death, we associate it with heaven. And while that's certainly a dimension of eternal life, the original language carries with it the idea that it's eternal not just in duration but in quality. That eternal life is not just a future destination, but a current reality that Jesus has come to give us eternal life and that eternal life is meant to be experienced here and now.

A couple of weeks ago, Dr Foth referenced the 'I Am' statements in the book of John. And I think those 'I Am' statements give us an indication of the kind of eternal life, the kind of abundant life, the kind of shame to salvation, bondage to liberation and exile to restoration life that Jesus offers. And when he put those on the screen a couple of weeks ago, I noticed that five of them were directly related to life. I knew I was going to be preaching this message and so it just struck me that five of the seven 'I Am' statements had something to do with giving life or being life. I'm the bread of life, I'm the light of the world, I'm the way, the truth and the life, I'm the resurrection and the life and I am the vine. There were two others that didn't on the surface seem to have anything to do with life; I am the gate, I'm the good shepherd. But I thought it would be interesting to read those and to look at those and dive into them and see what they looked like.

And so just, just watch this for a minute. So in John 10 verse nine is where we read, I am the gate, he says, I'm the gate and through me sheep can find green pastures. And then two verses later in John 10:11 he says, I'm the Good Shepherd, the Good Shepherd lays down his life for the sheep. Sandwiched right between I am the gate and I am the Good Shepherd is John 10:0 which says, the thief comes only to steal, kill and destroy. I have come that they might have life and have it to the full. I don't think it's any coincidence that all seven of these 'I Am' statements have to do with life, they're related to life. Jesus is saying, I am the life and this is the life that I'll offer you. Jesus didn't come to deprive you, or to hold back from you, but to give you the bread of life. Jesus didn't come to bring dullness to your life, but to bring your life into full color because he is the light of the world. Jesus didn't come just to make bad people good, but to raise dead people back to life because he is the resurrection and the life. Jesus didn't come just to tell us where to go and what to do and what to believe. He said, no, I am the way, I am the truth, I am the life, follow me, experience the life in me. He didn't ask us to produce just based on our own abilities or merit, he said, I am the vine and you are the branches and my life in your life produces new life. He doesn't say, I've come to restrict you and to confine you, but I am the gate and through me you find the abundant life that you long for that I don't push you and I don't control you and I'm not here to destroy you, but I am the Good Shepherd who lays down my life for the sheep; life.

I think a lot of times we associate Jesus with religion and then we associate religion with that mindset of scarcity that it's about the things we have to stop doing or the burdens that we have to now carry. It's about the have to's and the don't do's, it feels constricting and suffocating. It's like we're holding on to that bowl of scraps and just hoping that there's something at the bottom that will fill us, but that's not Jesus. Jesus is life.

One of my favorite verses is Romans 5:8. It says,

8 God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us.

While we were still sinners, Christ died for us. When we were at our worst, he was at his best; before we were ever looking for him he was pursuing us and before we were living for him, he gave his life for ours.

If you've never experienced that kind of life that Jesus offers, I want to invite you to take that step today. In just a few moments we're going to celebrate communion together and if you want to take that step, I just invite you to consider doing it then. Now, if you're new to faith, new to church, what we're about to do might seem a little bit odd, but it's something that the church has done for 2000 years to commemorate and celebrate a moment in the life of Jesus. Before Jesus went to the cross, he shared a meal with his disciples and he took bread and after he broke it and gave thanks, he said, this is my body broken for you, do this in remembrance of me. And then he took the cup and he passed the cup around and he says, this is the cup of the new covenant in my blood is often as you drink it, do it in remembrance of me. And none of that made a whole lot of sense to those disciples till three days later when a brutally beaten and crucified, Jesus emerged from a tomb. And for 2000 years the church has celebrated, remembered, replayed that moment. It's a recognition of, an expression of gratitude for the life that Jesus has given to us.

So in just a moment, our hospitality team will come. We'll pass out the elements. If you could just hold onto those and then your campus pastor will come back and lead you in taking those together. As we take that communion, can we just use that moment to reflect, to give gratitude for the life Jesus gave for us, the life that he has called us in to, the new life he's given to us.

Let's pray together. Father, we thank you that you have intersected the story of human history, not to bring death, not to bring pain, not to use humanity for your own purposes, but that you intersect to bring life and we thank you that you wrapped yourself in the skin of your own creation and subjected yourself to the care of your own creation that you personally showed up in our story to give us life. God, I pray today for those that are walking in shame, that they would understand the life on the other side of salvation. God for those today that are walking in bondage, in captivity, they feel imprisoned God, that you would offer them the life that is found in the freedom and you. God, for those that feel exiled, they're lonely, they're isolated, I pray that they would know the nearness of your presence, that they would know you as God, their father, and they would know that they have been adopted into your family. God, I pray as we take these elements in just a moment that we would be reminded of the life that you have given to us, and we would live it to the fullest in you. In Jesus' name, Amen.