

# The Word of Life!

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“It is the spirit that gives life; the flesh is useless. The words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life.” (John 6:36)

John 6<sup>60-69</sup> / Psalm 1

We find Jesus and His disciples at perhaps one of the lowest points of His life and His ministry. He has just watched perhaps a hundred followers walk out on Him. So He turns to the twelve – the core group who’ve been with Him from the beginning and He says to them – “Are you going too?”

Have you been there? Have you watched as someone or some group; people who once supported you or whom you thought were your friends, suddenly do something that completely betrayed that relationship? Have you felt the pang of betrayal, of misunderstanding, of deep and bitter disappointment as a relationship you thought was strong fell apart in almost a split second? Jesus knows what that’s like. His closest followers, ones who’ve even been on the road for Him and who’ve done some amazing things through his power suddenly turn tail and leave without so much as a ‘Thanks for the good times!’ Jesus has been there and we see His humanity at this time as He turns and He says to His core 12 – “Are you going too?”

I find Peter’s answer quite staggering. “Where would we go Jesus? Yours are the only words that bring life to us!!” (Dawson translation) **Life!** You bring us **life** Jesus. Your words are the words of **life** Jesus. Why would we go anywhere else?

Make no mistake. Jesus is concerned for you and I. He’s concerned that we might live – truly live! He wants us to be truly alive! Not just to survive, nor to merely taste life but to experience what He calls ‘life in all its fullness,’ a life that is more than mere existence.

We can, of course, be content with existence. A man called Richard Needham once characterised the seven ages of man as: spills, drills, thrills, bills, ills, pills and wills! And maybe that does describe something of our life but I can tell you this – it’s not the life Jesus was talking about. Jesus has a life for you and I that goes beyond survival; beyond indulgence; beyond mere satisfaction. If we are content with these things says Jesus – **we will never know life in all its fullness.** This is the life Peter was talking about.

It always amazes me that a group of reasonably well off men would simply drop everything and follow this man. Why would you do that? Why would you give up a successful business, a successful career, a simple family life and a reputation for being level headed and successful to follow a carpenter from a small town with a bad reputation? Why would you do that?

Well, you might do it because you were hoping for something better but you'd never stick with it unless you discovered something worth sacrifices all these things for. And, says Peter, 'That's what we've found! We've found life!'

According to the Bible we are the people of that life. We're the ones who have access to this life and through whom it can flow to every other human being on the planet. **We are the 'people of life.'** Why are we the people of this life? Because we follow the Lord of Life – we follow the one who not only created life but who continues to **define and to give life – life, as the Bible says – in all its fullness.** If you want a comprehensive definition of the work of Jesus this is it; **He was and is the 'life-giver.'** If you want life, says the Bible, come to Jesus. If you want life to work, submit yours to Jesus. If you want the key to your life, come to Jesus. So I want to ask this question of us at the beginning of the year – **do we want this abundant, full, ever increasing, joy giving, sin defeating life?** Is this what we want for ourselves? Is this what we want this year? If we do we will have to remind ourselves of two things.

The first is that this life is exclusive. It's not this life and the life I'm living at present. Jesus doesn't say to Matthew, "Stay collecting tax and I'll give you an abundant life as well." No! He says "Follow Me and I'll make you a collector of lives and not just of tax!" He doesn't say to the fishing brothers, "Stay out there boys and keep fishing and I'll give you this abundant life!" No He says "Follow Me! And I will make you fishers of men!" Yes you'll catch a few more fish in your life but that's not where the abundant, overflowing, full life I'm offering comes from. You can't hold on to that life and know the life I'm offering.

And aren't we so prone to trying to deal with God along these lines. Aren't we always seeking to stick with what we've got but have some of **that** as well? Yes God, I want your abundant life – if I can only stay at home to have it!! Leave em alone Lord but let me have what you're offering too! Know this today. God wants you to hold out your hands so He can fill them up with a life that overflows but He can't do it if you're holding on to a whole lot of other stuff!! And yes it might be good stuff but that doesn't matter because what God has for us is worth far more than all the stuff you could ever accumulate in your whole life. Give it back to God. Take up the life Jesus offers you this year and see what God can make of it!

Jesus says quite simply,

**<sup>32</sup>Remember Lot's wife. <sup>33</sup>Those who try to make their life secure will lose it, but those who lose their life will keep it. (Luke 17)**

Furthermore, if we want this life God will call us to give the illegitimate ways we try to find life. In this matter we are all alcoholics and we are all drug addicts and we are all smokers and we are all prostitutes. We all cling to things which we think give us life but which in fact are the very things which rob us of the full and abundant life God has for us. Jesus says if you want My Life then you will **have to let go of the lies you are living at present.** And let's not forget that He says this to everyone. To the woman caught in adultery He says – go away now and don't live like that –choose a better way. To the Pharisee He says stop being a hypocrite. To the Teachers of the Law He says let go of your legalism and focus on the compassion of God and to the disciples he says stop relying on yourselves and believe in Me. **What is it that God is calling you to let go of today?**

So are we prepared to face up to the lies we are living this year? On the one hand Jesus says empty your hands of all the stuff in your life. But now He says to us, be prepared to accept my judgement on your life. Be prepared to accept that you're on a wrong path. Lay down your life before God so it can be judged.

There's a right and a wrong aspect to judgement in life. The wrong one is when we stand in judgement over another in order to condemn them – in order to dismiss them or to belittle them. Jesus says quite definitively 'Judge not that ye be judged.' But there's another aspect to judgement which none of us can do without and which we Christians are, unfortunately often impervious to. And this aspect is the aspect of **assessment in order that we might improve**. God leaves no person unassessed. He will give us the most honest and helpful assessment we could ever have – but are we prepared to accept it. I find New Zealanders particularly immune to this kind of judgement and yet Jesus says 'The spiritual person judges **all things** spiritually.' Nothing is to be held back from the judgement of God. Are we prepared to have our lives assessed, to come under the judgement of God because it is from this that abundant life flows.

As for me, I want what God has got this year. I want to receive all that God has for me and I want to hear God's judgement of me so that I might live this abundant life.

Finally and ultimately we find life in His Word, His living Word to us. Let me be clear here, I am not talking about just the recorded words of Christ or, indeed, the whole of the Bible even though this is where we must always start if we are to hear God's Word to us. Rather I am talking about His **living Word**, His specific instruction, His clear indication, His whispered directive to us, to our specific situation. God speaks not just to provide general instruction and broad direction but to give us **specific guidance for specific situations**. This specific instruction begins here, in the Bible, the Word of God. It is here that we find the very best context within which to hear God's living voice to us and it is here that we become open to His spirit and His life.

Jesus says that true life – 'life in all its abundance' flows not from pleasing the flesh and deferring to it but in hearing God's living Word to us and obeying it. The flesh cannot bring the sort of life we were made for. Rather it is the spirit that brings the kind of life which is both most fulfilling and most lasting.

We make two equally devastating mistakes in regard to hearing God's Word as Christians. The first is that we give God virtually no opportunity to **speak His word into our lives**. We deliberately live life in the weedy patch surrounding ourselves with all sorts of distractions and activities until there is simply no room for God to speak into our lives.

The second is that when God does speak we do not obey, we simply don't do what He asks us to.

Let me ask you – when was the last time God really spoke clearly and decisively into your life? If he hasn't for a while then you can be sure of one or two things. Either we just have not devoted some real time to listen to Him we didn't do what He said last time He spoke!

25 years ago I worked with a man who told me this story. He said that at High School he'd only ever gotten one A+ for an exam and it happened this way. The school was one that prepared its pupils for external exams by running internal exams modelled strictly on the external exams they were to sit. These came in the middle of the year so that those who didn't do so well had ample warning of their impending fate. This particular year for English the teacher had been ramming into the class how important it was to read the questions well and to answer only what was asked and not to deviate from the desired result. And furthermore he emphasised how important it was to read the exam instructions. The external exam consisted of 4 essays to be written over a period of 3 hours all on the prescribed texts for the year. The teacher assured them they could all do well and that there would be no trick questions if only they would read the paper well.

When the pupils arrived in the exam room they sat down and were directed again to read the instructions and to work **in silence** from the time the exam started. And so they read these instructions:

1. This exam must be completed by the candidate in the exam room and within the time period allotted to it and no correspondence of any sort is permitted while the exam is in progress. All papers submitted must have the identification sections fully completed.
2. Candidates may exit the exam within the first 20 minutes but are thereafter required to stay for the entire exam period. They may, with permission, leave the exam rooms to go to the toilet during the exam period but must be accompanied by an exam supervisor.
3. Hand in all materials used including notepaper clearly marked with your exam number.
4. Complete 4 of the 10 questions offered. This exam will last only TWO hours so you need to organise your time accordingly. (Room divided neatly into three types – lawyers, warriors and panickers. Lawyers immediately began thinking of an appeal strategy based on the false expectations they'd been fed prior to the exam, the warriors were bent on revenge and many of them walked out in protest without reading further and the panickers read no further and began a feverish attempt to finish the exam on time.)
5. Complete also the 25 question multiple choice section B. (This only made all three focus on their strategy more)
6. Prior to starting the exam fill in the identification panel on the back page, sign it and this will exempt you from any further work on the exam. You may leave the exam at any time following the completion of this instruction.

Simon was the only pupil to leave both relaxed and confident. Many others worked very hard, completed some amazing papers and left worried and upset. Only Simon read the instructions and knew an incredible inner peace and for that paper he received an A+.

God has an A+ life for us but are we prepared to lay down our stuff, to allow God to judge our life and to take up His free offer of an A+ exam pass. **Are we prepared to hear God's Word?**