
The Meaning Of Life

Various Passages

The year was 1863 when Samuel Kragen, leaving his wife and sister-in-law in New York, sailed to California by way of the Isthmus of Panama. "Crossing the Isthmus by rowboat wherever possible and on mules through the jungle, he finally reached the Pacific Coast after three days of hard traveling. From there it was by sailing vessel to San Francisco...." And it was sometime later that his wife joined him by sailing around the Horn.

Samuel had fled Krakow, Austria, family tradition tells us, because of the persecution of the Jews. But like a lot of Jews who had fled tribulation, he also left Judaism, and with it he left the question of personal faith to each of his children. They might be Jewish, but what they believed was their own choice. It appears Samuel may have come to believe the cost of being Jewish was too high. He told his sons they were free to make whatever decision they wanted to regarding their faith.

And this was the way it was with the Kragens. My father was an agnostic until shortly after I was born. Then he accepted the Lord. I have immediate family who are believers, others who are religious Jews, some who have been involved with cults, and, as might be expected, some who believe nothing at all. It should be noted that my grandfather, who lived with us from the time I was nine months old until about the time I was in Jr. High, did come to accept Jesus when he was in his eighties.

The Kragens were a family who came out of the Jewish people, a family whose roots may have gone back to the Levites. But, sadly, it appears most of them decided that life came somewhere other than God. Like many others they have made their own way in a world, instead of seeking where God desired them to go.

And so I grew up in a semi-Jewish culture, in the open city of San Francisco. If this city were a cereal, it would be granola: full of fruits, nuts and flakes. I also grew up in main stream Protestantism, the Presbyterian Church. As a child I didn't understand the difference between the terms Jewish and Catholic, but I knew I was a Christian, having accepted the Lord at five years of age. I knew that Jesus was Jewish, that I was a Jew too and somehow that was cool. But even as a young believer I struggled with the same question that, decades later, still poses a challenge: where does life come from? The battle is not one of lack of knowledge, but of how to live as a believer.

The real issue for me then, through my youth and on into adulthood, is how to put feet to the truths of the Gospel. Being a Messianic believer, I reach out to both Jew and gentile. Being in both business and Ministry, people are always watching me. And being human, what they see isn't always what I wish. The question I have always battled with is how to live out the reality of Christ in my life. And the question which we all must ask ourselves, be we Jews or Gentiles is: where does life come from for us? What is the true motivating force of our lives? Is it God or is it someone or something else?

When I was originally asked to speak to a group of believers outside of my church, I considered a lot of topics. A number were suggested to me by the person who asked me to speak. Of course then I was told I had only about a half an hour. Now, I had deliberated talking a little about Chosen People Ministries, a group for whom I spoke once in a while. I considered talking about the responsibility of the church to the Jew, a favorite topic of mine. But then I felt led by the Lord to speak to this problem which we all face, the reality of our faith in a real world. This is, as Dr. McGee would say, “Where the rubber meets the road.”

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I The Christian Life: In this message we are going to look at one area in which Scripture defines the Christian life. Just what does it mean to live in the real world? Next, we will consider how we can live these truths out in the real world. In other words, how do we live out the reality of Christ in our lives, our jobs, with our family, in our neighborhood, even within the church? What is the real motivating force behind our behaviors? Jesus said we ...

“ ... are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men. You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:13-14).

But what kind of salt and light are we? What is the life of the Christian anyway? Remember what Jesus told us:

“ I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full” (John 10:10).

Now does this mean God came to give us everything we want? NO! There is so much false teaching in the church today regarding God’s desire for our lives. We are led to believe that He wants us to be happy, to be fulfilled, to be materially well off, to be healthy, and if not, to be healed, but this isn’t what the Word teaches.

II The Abundant Life: Abundant life doesn’t come from this life being one in which we can be at ease. Life doesn’t come from the children always behaving, or our wife making us feel we are the world’s greatest husbands, or our bosses, or for that matter our employees being great. This isn’t what it means to have abundant life. On the contrary, we are told to be a Christian means to suffer as our Lord suffered.

“ All men will hate you because of me, but he who stands firm to the end will be saved.” ... “A student is not above his teacher, nor a servant above his master” (Matthew 10:22, 24)

But how is this possible? How can we be promised abundant life and at the same time be promised that we will suffer? And Paul adds to the problem when he tells us that ...

“ ... we also rejoice in our sufferings” (Romans 5:3).

Here we have the promise of abundant life, of suffering, and the call to rejoice in that suffering. Is this what life is all about? Do you think perhaps this has something to do with what is of primary importance in our lives? We were created in the image of God. We were created with deep longings for relationship and impact. And it is how we try to meet these longings that tells where we believe life comes from, what is really important, where our heart is.

“ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:21).

III Where Does Life Come From: The Christian life then is one which is based in having our “treasure” with the Lord. And if we buy into the world’s view that our treasure is in this world, then our lives will not reflect Christ, but become undistinguishable from those of the unbelievers around us.

Consider this. Look at your day-to-day walk and ask yourself “What does this say about where I believe life comes from?” Now, by life I mean that which is the primary motivator for our actions.

Maybe this example will clarify the issue. You’re in the supermarket and see a mother and child coming down the aisle. The child is yelling and screaming, throwing a regular tantrum in the middle of the floor. The mother is in turn screaming back at the child. She slaps the little one hard and continues to yell. At that moment where does this mother believe life comes from? If she is motivated by the child embarrassing her, making her look like a bad mother, then life comes from being perceived as a good mother. If life came from God then her desire would be to please Him and be the mother He wants her to be. Her behavior towards the child would be calculated on what is best for the child, not a result of her concern over how others perceive either of them.

One of the things I’ve done as a counselor is to advise people on how to deal with stressful situations in the job environment. Too often our primary motivation is to win the praise and appreciation of our boss. Now certainly there isn’t anything wrong with wanting to have our boss appreciate us, but this is a poor motivator. We’ve all had bosses we can’t please no matter what we do. Our concern as an employee is to be the best we can be for the Lord and if we are doing our best for Him, then we wouldn’t be overwhelmed by the boss’ rejection.

Now I hope you understand what I mean by life. It is only as we recognize life comes from God and nowhere else that we will be able to accept life for what it is, not what we want it to be. Again, let’s look at the words of Paul.

“ ... through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us. (Romans 5:2-5).

There is only one source of life and that is the life which comes from Christ. As we depend only on Him, we can be truly free to live, to experience life to the fullest. We are free to experience both comfort and suffering, and be able to rejoice in both. We are truly free, as we are shaped by our relationship with God, and not by our circumstances. This is why Paul could truly say

“I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:12-13).

Paul is saying life doesn't come from being well fed, or not going hungry. He doesn't believe life comes from material well-being or the absence of want. No, Paul knows life comes from God and therefore he can be content in any circumstance. And what is the source of the true life? the Lord who gives Paul the strength to do anything.

Do you understand what the Scripture is teaching here? We are seeing true freedom. The freedom to obey God's great commands.

“‘Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.’ This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself.’ All the Law and the Prophets hang on these two commandments.” (Matthew 22:37-40).

IV Life Comes From Pleasing God: We can only love God and others if our concern is pleasing the Father, as we ask ourselves: What would Jesus do? Here then is how we can truly live the abundant life. We can have a life full of the blessings of loving God, by allowing His love to flow to those around us, not fearing the pain we may receive in response.

Jesus is our model of true love, *agapé*. He gave His life for mankind, knowing His sacrifice would be rejected by many. He loved Judas, knowing this disciple would betray him. He didn't strive to protect Himself from the pain of the actions of others. No, he died that they might have life and have it abundantly. And so we are to live our lives for others so they too might know the love of God through us. As we live in the midst of the reality that life comes from God, as we love Him and each other, His light shows through us to others.

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34-35).

As we live only for the Lord, then others may also come to know Him.

V Examples Of Getting Life From God: All this is well and good but what does this mean on a day-to-day basis, to say that life comes from God and nowhere else? Husbands, this means that you must love your wives when they are unlovable.

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Ephesians 5:25).

When you've come home from a hard day, and expect your wife to be considerate of your needs, but she isn't, how do you respond? If at that moment life comes from being treated as you should be, you fly off the handle. Please note: the issue isn't whether or not you're right! Maybe your wife is treating you badly. And it is ok to be hurt and disappointed. But if you fly off the handle, then you're saying that life comes, not from God, but from being treated as you desire.

Paul said to love your wife, to put her needs first. Why? Because she deserves it? No, because of our reverence for Christ. We are called to love because of who Jesus is, not because of who our wives are. We are to love our wives because Christ loved us and died for us.

Doesn't that make it easier to love our wives? We don't love them because they deserve it but because we desire to please God. And He certainly loves us, in spite of, not because of who we are. That's great! We can love them even if we don't like their behavior.

The same principle carries over to dealing with the kids. Paul notes,

“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord” (Ephesians 6:4).

Life doesn't come from your kids making you look good, but from you raising them as God desires you to. This also means that you aren't called to raise Godly kids, but to be a Godly father. The final responsibility for your children's welfare is between them and the Lord. If you do the best before Him that you can, then that is all you can do. However, make sure it is the best, because you are accountable to Him and I suspect that He doesn't buy the nonsense of quality time making up for the lack of quantity time.

This same principle carries over into other areas of our life. We are called to be the best slav... I mean employee we can be in obedience to the Lord.

“Employees, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free. (Ephesians 6:5-8)

And we can only live this way if we live in the truth that life comes from God not from the good, or bad will of our bosses.

Understand that as we realize that as we live to please God not men, then we will truly be free to reach out in love to all we come in contact with, regardless of how they may respond to us.

“Am I now trying to win the approval of men, or of God? Or am I trying to please men? If I were still trying to please men, I would not be a servant of Christ” (Galatians 1:10).

VI Conclusion: Let me close with this example. John, *I've changed his name*, is a true example of what it means to be a husband loving his wife because of a desire to please God. John understands that life doesn't come from having an ideal marriage. Life comes from God. Jane was abused most of her early years. John didn't know this when they married, and it wasn't obvious. But as the days went on Jane's life began to deteriorate. She fell out of touch with reality. When they were out together, she would get in arguments with people and when they would argue back, she knew that they were going to attack her. Of course this wasn't true, but she had learned that verbal violence was always followed by physical violence. And so she considered John a wimp because he didn't protect her.

Soon she moved out and lived on her own. She was very suicidal, and tried to kill herself on a number of occasions. She would be voluntary or involuntary committed. John often waited for the call telling him she was dead. He continued to support her, to be there for her even when she rejected him.

Now don't blame her, for she was in such pain that she believed her life came from ending the pain, and that was why for her death was preferable to life.

Most people would consider this situation intolerable, and John felt that way himself sometimes, but he knew that life came not from circumstantial comfort, but life came from God. John looked to God for strength and comfort. And so, regardless of the circumstances, regardless of how his wife treated him, John continued to *agapé* her because that is what the Lord expected of him. And if he had to live the rest of his life this way, with God's help he could do so.

As long as we walk in the truth that life comes from God and nowhere else, we will be able to rejoice in the midst of circumstances and to grow from them. We will have the abundant life that comes from a relationship with the Eternal God, a relationship that nothing can ever take away. We will truly be free to live life for God, no longer having to meet the expectations of others, or even ourselves. We will be truly able to love others, and no longer need to protect ourselves from the pain of failed relationships. We will meet the greatest longings of our heart, relationship and impact with and through our loving God. Praise the Lord.

“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light” (Matthew 11:28-30).

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(Matthew 5:13-14; John 10:10)

II The Abundant Life:
(Matthew 10:22, 24; Romans 5:3; Matthew 6:21)

III Where Does Life Come From?:
(Romans 5:2-5; Philippians 4:12-13; Matthew 22:37-40)

IV Life Comes From Pleasing God:
(John 13:34-35)

V Examples Of Getting Life From God:
(Ephesians 5:25, 6:4-8; Galatians 1:10)

VI Conclusion:
(Matthew 11:28-30)

Personal Application: As we react to the circumstances of life, let us learn from where we are getting life, God or elsewhere. And if we learn it is elsewhere, let us go to God for a change in perspective..

Prayer for the Week: Lord, let us look to You as the only source of life. Let us be motivated and empowered to share this life with others. In Christ's name, amen.