

ARE YOU STUCK IN A WORLDLY SHEEPFOLD? (If so, you are missing the abundance of life!)

This Sunday is Mother's Day when we all honor our mothers for the many, many things that they have done for us to make our lives so much better than they would have possibly been without them. For the time we were small children on through our adult years, our mothers have loved and nurtured us. Without them, our lives would have been woefully lacking in all the things that help to make life worth the living. And when I was thinking about that, I could not help but remember the words found in John 10:10 about Someone else who is absolutely essential to having a full life—because in that verse, Jesus told us that He came to this earth to minister to us in order that we ***“may have life and have it abundantly.”*** John 10:10 (ESV)¹ Here, Jesus is making a very interesting assertion which implies that many people may be living their lives, but the quality of their life is meager as opposed to being ***“abundant”***. So that's what I would like for you to consider this morning—what is it that Jesus is offering when He speaks of ***“living life abundantly.”*** What does He mean by ***“abundantly”***?

The Greek word that Jesus uses here for ***“abundant”*** is περισσός (perissos). It means ***“over and above, more than is needed, beyond measure.”***² This word is basically an accounting term and generally points to a surplus.³ Now that may help a little to begin to get at what Jesus is saying here, but we still have to ask ourselves what does this overflowing, surplus of life beyond measure entail?

Is Jesus saying that the abundant life is one in which we gain wealth and riches? Well, that can't be the case because the Book of Proverbs seems to put wealth and riches in a negative light if that is all you pursue in life. Proverbs 28:20 tells us: ***“A faithful man will abound with blessings, but whoever hastens to be rich will not go unpunished.”***(ESV) So if it does not mean worldly riches, are we talking about pleasures? The answer is “yes and no.” Yes, we are talking about pleasures, but no, we are not talking about ***worldly*** pleasures. The Psalmist clarifies that in Psalm 16 when he says, ***“You reveal the PATH OF LIFE to me; in Your presence is ABUNDANT joy; in Your right hand are eternal pleasures.”*** Psalm 16:11 (HCSB) So the true abundance of life has something to do with a ***“path of life.”*** With that thought in mind, let's take a look at the overall context in which Jesus made this comment about ***“having life more abundantly.”*** His statement emerges from a confrontation that Jesus had with the Pharisees. In John 9, Jesus had just restored sight to a poor beggar who had been blind from birth. And this beggar's friends were so amazed when they found that he had been healed of his blindness that they presented him to the Pharisees for examination. And when the Pharisees asked the beggar who had healed him, he told them that it was Jesus. Now the Pharisees hated Jesus and they just wouldn't

buy the fact the Jesus had healed this man. And when the beggar insisted that Jesus did exactly that, they became so mad at this beggar that they threw him out of the synagogue—i.e., they excommunicated him. *John 9:34* And the man eventually met Jesus again and came to recognize Him as the Messiah and worshipped Jesus. *John 9:38* And with that background, Jesus turned to the Pharisees and this is what He said:

¹ “Truly, truly, I say to you, he who does not enter the sheepfold by the door but climbs in by another way, that man is a thief and a robber. ² But he who enters by the door is the shepherd of the sheep. ³ To him the gatekeeper opens. The sheep hear his voice, and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out. ⁴ When he has brought out all his own, he goes before them, and the sheep follow him, for they know his voice. ⁵ A stranger they will not follow, but they will flee from him, for they do not know the voice of strangers.” *John 10:1-5 (ESV)*

Now remember what the Psalmist said in Psalm 16 about a “*path of life*”—because Jesus also seems to be alluding to a *pathway* here—it is a *pathway* that goes out of a “*sheepfold*.” So what is that all about—that “*sheepfold*” to which Jesus refers? Well, in 1st century Palestine, a sheepfold usually consisted of a pen with four walls constructed of rock with one opening for the door to the pen. At night, the shepherds would guide their flocks into the pen for protection against thieves and natural predators. And at this opening, or door, the shepherd would typically lie down at night and block the way of anybody who might try to come into the fold to get the sheep. When the sun would come up in the morning, the shepherds would come and call out their flocks from the sheepfold and begin to assemble the sheep for a day in the pastures. But, each flock of sheep would only come to their individual master’s voice. Thieves, of course, weren’t allowed through the door and even if they snuck over the wall, the *faithful* sheep would not follow the thief’s voice, because the sheep simply did not recognize him as their shepherd. So, the only way a thief could come away with any sheep was to somehow deceive them and steal them away.

Now Jesus was telling them this as a kind of parable, but the Pharisees and the people standing around were a little slow on the uptake and did not understand what He was saying. Jesus, then, explained it as follows—and in so doing, He made His comment about the *abundance of life*. *John 10* continues:

⁶ This figure of speech Jesus used with them, but they did not understand what He was saying to them. ⁷ So Jesus again said to them, “Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep. ⁸ All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the door. If anyone enters by Me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. ***I CAME THAT THEY MAY HAVE LIFE AND HAVE IT ABUNDANTLY.*** *John 10:6-10 (ESV)*

Now remember the background information: The Pharisees had kicked the beggar out of the synagogue. In other words, these Pharisees were the false shepherds or the thieves who wanted to prevent the formerly blind beggar from “*seeing*” who Jesus really was. But, Jesus came to him as the “Door”. The “Door” to what? The ***Doorway to life itself***—that full life, that overflowing, unending abundance of life that only Jesus can give. The late pastor and Christian theologian, Warren Wiersbe makes a good point here that we need to understand. He points out that many preachers and teachers tend to think that the “***sheepfold***” that Jesus referred to symbolizes the Kingdom of Heaven “and that those who try to get in by any way other than Christ are destined to fail.” Wiersbe contends that it does not mean that at all—and I agree with him. Now don’t get me wrong, the Bible does teach that faith in Jesus Christ is the only way into Heaven—that is certainly true. But, that is not the point that Jesus is making here in these verses of John 10. So, what then does the “***sheepfold***” symbolize? Jesus gives us a hint to the answer in John 10:16 when He says: ¹⁶ ***“And I have other sheep that are not of this fold. I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. So there will be one flock, one shepherd.”*** John 10:16 (ESV) When Jesus refers to the “***other sheep***”, He is referring to the Gentiles—i.e. He is talking about us. Thus, those in the sheepfold in this parable are the Jewish people—the ***nation of Israel***. Wiersbe explains: ***“Twice [Jesus] said, ‘I am the Door.’ He is the Door of the sheepfold and makes it possible for the sheep to leave the fold (the religion of Judaism) and to enter His flock. The Pharisees threw the beggar out of the synagogue, but Jesus led him out of Judaism and into the flock of God!”*** And, this Scripture indicates that that is not the only thing that Jesus does. Jesus calls those who are receptive to Him and they pass into the door’s opening and leave whatever ***worldly sheepfold*** they have been trapped in. And when they pass through His Door, they then go out into the most wonderful, lush pasture that you could ever imagine. There, they can enjoy His life for them more abundantly. This is basically what David is saying in Psalm 23: ¹ ***The LORD is my Shepherd; I shall not want.*** ² ***He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: He leadeth me beside the still waters.*** ³ ***He restoreth my soul: He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for His name’s sake.”*** Psalm 23:1-3 (KJV) Couple this with what Jesus says here and it’s clear: Those who believe in Jesus Christ and follow Him, as a sheep would its shepherd, they are privileged go out from whatever sheepfold they may find themselves trapped and into a new and infinitely better fold. It is the fold of God where they will find an amazingly abundant pasture of peace and rest beside the calm, clear waters. You see, Jesus is saying that you don’t have to wait until you die to get into this amazing fold—you can experience ***life abundantly*** in the ***here and now*** and enjoy the presence of His peace.⁴ And because of the great abundance of the life that Jesus offers to you, it will continue right on into eternity in the sense of eternal life with God in His Heavenly

Kingdom. You just need to follow the pathway to His Door and move on into His pastures and ultimately into His fold. And for those who think they are unworthy to walk this path due to whatever dark sins they have in their past, this is simply not the case. Why?—because no matter how great your sin may be, God’s grace is always greater. Just as Jesus offers a super-abundance of life to those who submit to Him, He has a super-abundance of grace to bestow on us no matter how sinful our lives may have been. For as the Apostle Paul has said: **“But as people sinned more and more, God’s wonderful grace became more abundant.”** Romans 5:20 (NLT2) And more recently, pastor and theologian, James Montgomery Boice expresses a similar thought when he said: **“The abundant life is one in which we are content in the knowledge that God’s grace is more than sufficient for our needs, that nothing can suppress it, and that God’s favor toward us is unending.”**⁵

And some people get that—they understand that Jesus Christ is the Door that opens the way out of those worldly sheepfolds that stifle any prospects of an abundant life. But, then again—there are other people who just never seem to understand that. So let me conclude by giving you two contrasting examples of individuals: One who understands that, despite her relatively young years, and another person who apparently would not get it if they lived another hundred years. Let’s start with the one who just doesn’t get it—who just can’t see that they are trapped in a sheepfold that robs them of the abundance of life the God wants them to enjoy.

And this guy has been around quite a while. In fact, folks my age might include him as being one of the founding fathers of the hippie generation of the 1960’s and 70’s. It is none other than Graham Nash of *Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young* fame—who just recently turned 78 years old. Not too long ago, Nash published his memoirs, entitled (appropriately enough), *Wild Tales*. Reflecting upon this autobiographical sketch of his life, he said, **“It was only after it came out that I began to really absorb what I had done with my life. What I thought were the happiest parts, in fact, weren’t. I said, ‘Look, how much longer is my life going on? I can just settle and coast through it, or I’ll follow what my heart said I should be doing.’”** You see, Graham Nash has no concept of following that pathway to the only Door that matters—Jesus Christ. Rather, the only path he has elected to pursue is a self-centered one aimed only by the selfish desires of a corrupt heart. And so, back in 2016, Nash started what he thought would be a make-over of his life by divorcing his wife to whom he had been married for 38 years and taking up with a 37 year old girlfriend, Amy Grantham. And did that give him that **“abundance of life”** that he thought he was pursuing? Apparently Nash thought so because he came to the following conclusion—one that proves he is still stuck in the same old degraded sheepfold that he has always inhabited. He states, **“I was coasting through an unsatisfactory relationship [with my former wife],**

and Amy set me on fire.” The problem for Graham Nash is that that fire is going to get a lot hotter in the world to come if he doesn’t find the Door provided by Jesus Christ. Some people never seem to learn that when their worldly pleasures are the sole unending desire of their lives, they can never find true meaning in life. And, they can never find true meaning because, in the end, fleshly pleasures can never satisfy the longings of the heart—only Jesus Christ can do that. And so, they never experience what it means to live **abundantly** in the life Jesus has planned for them.⁶

But, I want you to compare Graham Nash’s degenerate life with the life of someone who has found the Door to those green pastures Jesus offers. One of the most encouraging things that I see today is the rise of young people who know this **abundance of life** and are willing to share the message of its bounty with the world. I don’t know if any of you are *Duck Dynasty* fans, but if you are, then you will be familiar a young lady by the name of Sadie Robinson who is part of that family dynasty. She is a 22 year old Christian writer and speaker who had her third book published just last month entitled, **Live**, which is currently on the New York Times Best Seller list. In a recent interview, Sadie described the premise of her new book by explaining that Jesus wants us to be actively alive right now, not just barely surviving.⁷ She explains: **“When you truly learn to live the life God offers, your whole existence becomes a verb.”**⁸ **“We know this great [Christian] lifestyle but for some reason we say to the people of the world, ‘Oh yeah, I have this but let me join you. We try to prove ourselves to others that we can still be a Christian and do the things of the world. But in fact, what we should be doing is saying ‘I am a Christian, why don’t you come over here and join me?’”**⁹

Wow!—that sounds so much like what Jesus was offering in John 10—**“Why don’t you come on over and join my fold and truly be alive!”** Leave the fold that imprisons you now—maybe it’s the fold of alcoholism or drug abuse, or the fold of pornography, the fold of adultery, the fold of self-centeredness, the fold of dishonesty and fraud, the fold of greed, the fold of hate and anger, the fold of worry and doubt. Whatever worldly, mucky sheepfold that you may be trapped in Jesus offers you an immensely better fold. All He calls you to do is to walk His path through His Door into lush green pastures beside cool, clear still waters and join the fold of God. If you haven’t taken that walk, then you need to start that life today and live abundantly in Christ.

Let us pray.

Forest Hill Baptist Church
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Darvin Satterwhite, Pastor
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Footnotes:

¹ John 10:10 “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” (ESV)

² Joseph Thayer, Thayer's Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament, Database © 2014 WORDsearch.

³ James Montgomery Boice, Boice Expository Commentary - John, Volume 3: Those Who Received Him (John 9-12).

⁴ Warren Wiersbe, Bible Exposition Commentary - Be Alive (John 1-12).

⁵ Boice, Boice Expository Commentary.

⁶ David Browne, “Graham Nash’s Wild Side,” Rolling Stone (9-8-16), p. 16; “Musician Graham Nash Follows His Heart,” PreachingToday.com.

⁷ Maina Mwaura, “God Wants Us to Be Alive, Not Just Live, Sadie Robertson Shares,” *ChristianHeadlines.com* (May 1, 2020).

⁸ <https://www.amazon.com/Live-remain-specified-exciting-fulfilling/dp/1400213061>.

⁹ Jeannie Law, “Sadie Robertson: Christians Should Draw More to Christ, Not Compromise with the World (Interview),” <https://www.christianpost>.