

GATEWAY CHURCH NORTHUMBERLAND

23.3.14

Having life to the full – Joss Bray

Recap

Over the last few weeks we have been looking at the reasons Jesus said he had come to the earth. The last two weeks we discussed how Jesus fulfilled the Law and the Prophets.

We saw that because of what Jesus did for us on the cross we are under the grace of God – not the Law of Moses. We have been set free from having to do things to earn God's approval or love – and now we *want* to do good things because he *first* loved us.

We also saw that the Old Testament is full of hundreds of prophecies regarding Jesus being the Messiah – the Saviour of the world - that he fulfilled. And there are also some that are still to be fulfilled when he comes again.

Today

We are going to look at having life to the full:

JN 10:7 Therefore Jesus said again, "I tell you the truth, I am the gate for the sheep. ⁸ All who ever came before me were thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. ⁹ I am the gate; whoever enters through me will be saved. He will come in and go out, and find pasture. ¹⁰ The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.

So what does this mean for us – his sheep? What does it make us think about? What would it look like for us if we had life to the full?

Does it mean we will be busy all the time with a huge range of interests and activities?

Will we be happy all the time?

Will life be problem free?

Will we have everything we want, when we want it?

Does it mean church life must expand so that it takes all our time and we can't fit anyone or anything else in?

Will we all be missionaries in Africa – or even Blyth?

Will we all end up doing the same things in the same way?

No – I don't think any of these represent what Jesus had in mind at all. The world may try to tell us that some of these things are living life to the full – but not Jesus.

Back to basics - Start with Jesus

As always, we need to try to get back to what the bible actually says about fullness and what that means.

So this is what Paul said about Jesus:

COL 1:15 He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. ¹⁶ For by him all things were created: things in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or powers or rulers or authorities; all things were created by him and for him. ¹⁷ He is before all things, and in him all things hold together. ¹⁸ And he is the head of the body, the church; he is the beginning and the firstborn from among the dead, so that in everything he might have the supremacy. ¹⁹ For God was pleased to have all his fullness dwell in him, ²⁰ and through him to reconcile to himself all things, whether things on earth or things in heaven, by making peace through his blood, shed on the cross.

So the fullness of God was seen in Jesus and he lived life in that fullness. Everything that God was – his nature and characteristics, was represented in him. Everything that God did through the ages was done by him. Everything in the universe holds together through Jesus and is reconciled to God through him. How amazing is that!

And we see that the church itself is all about Jesus and he is the head – of the whole church - which is his body.

So we see that “fullness” is a massive concept which we can hardly scratch the surface of when we look at Jesus.

What about us?

Well it gets even more exciting -

COL 2:9 For in Christ all the fullness of the Deity lives in bodily form, ¹⁰ and you have been given fullness in Christ,

So there is something of that same fullness Jesus has that is in us! Having life to the full must be to do with being filled with the same thing as Jesus.

What's that then?

EPH 5:15 Be very careful, then, how you live--not as unwise but as wise, ¹⁶ making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. ¹⁷ Therefore do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord's will is. ¹⁸ Do not get drunk on wine, which leads to debauchery. Instead, be filled with the Spirit.

Note that there is a choice – live life like the world with one sort of spirit or be filled with the Holy Spirit. Having life to the full means being filled with God's spirit rather than the spirit of the age. That is the wisdom that comes from God.

How does that show itself in practical ways in our lives?

GAL 5:22 But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, ²³ gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law. ²⁴ Those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the sinful nature with its passions and desires. ²⁵ Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit.

Our lives should have these characteristics developing in them – as we become more Christ like and keep in step.

And our thinking will also be transformed –

EPH 3: 17 And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, ¹⁸ may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, ¹⁹ and to know this love that surpasses knowledge--that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God.

Note – that's not half measures or just enough measures – it is a full measure – there is no stinginess in God. He is extravagant in his giving and there is no end to his resources. He doesn't run out of Holy Spirit or anything else. He doesn't have less love or blessing for us because he loves and blesses someone else.

He wants to give us more as well – the gifts of the Spirit –

¹CO 12:4 There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit. ⁵ There are different kinds of service, but the same Lord. ⁶ There are different kinds of working, but the same God works all of them in all men.

This is important

We are not all called to be the same, do the same things or live in the same place or look the same. We are not supposed to compare ourselves with others – however amazing their Christian lives seem to be.

It is easy to do this and feel inadequate or downhearted – this happens to me. I read extraordinary accounts of missionaries, martyrs, evangelists, sacrificial giving of lives and money and security, great faith – and many others that we can think of. I am tempted to think – they have done so much better than me and are much more dedicated and sold out for God.

Have you ever had that conversation with God?

I spoke to God about it this morning – he said this:

“I don't compare you to other people – so why do you? I couldn't love you any more and I couldn't love you any less”

Remember that Jesus said as much to Peter when he got a bit insecure –

JN 21:20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") ²¹ When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" ^{JN 21:22} Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me."

What a great reassurance for all of us! When we are tempted to "go compare", God says – don't – because I don't! You follow me – that is the important thing.

We are not all called to do the same things by any means. We have different gifts, personalities, abilities, experience and circumstances. If we were all just preachers then where would that get us – or if we were all just administrators – we wouldn't get very far. The church would look very lopsided! Diversity builds the church.

And that is why God has put us together in the church –

EPH 4:11 It was he who gave some to be apostles, some to be prophets, some to be evangelists, and some to be pastors and teachers, ¹² to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up ¹³ until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.

The church as the body of Christ is filled with the same fullness as he himself. We are not meant to be all the same but we are meant to be together so that the fullness of life in Jesus is seen in the church as well as our lives.

We can all be filled with the spirit - and the fullness of Christ starts to become more evident in us – how more so will the church demonstrate that fullness when we are together as his body. The church is Jesus to the world.

EPH 1:22 ...God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, ²³ which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

Having life to the full is not just individual – it is corporate – literally "as a body". Let's not get distracted or downhearted by any comparisons with others – let's instead take hold of what Jesus said and live life to the full.