



THE LIFE

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Gospel of John
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Do you have a good definition of “life?” If someone asked, “What is life?” what would you say? I know an older man who would answer that question well. I remember watching him one Saturday night as a group of college students listened to him speak. He introduced himself with the following words: “I am 79 years old. I have walked with Jesus Christ for 49 years, and I am one of the original elders of Peninsula Bible Church, serving the Lord’s church at PBC for 40 years as an elder.” I was watching the faces of those students, and every fresh young face was riveted on the old man’s aged face. He had words of life to give a younger generation.

This man has also played a key role in my life in recent years, as an older brother and friend. He has locked arms with me in these last two years of trial, standing side-by-side with me, and he has prayed for me. I love this man. Whenever I am with him, I listen closely to every word, to learn whatever I can from the Lord through this man. What has intrigued me most about him is the way he refers to his own life. When I ask how his life is going, he ruminates for a while on “the life.” He says something like this, “Well, this is the life: there are meetings with younger men and young couples; there are many opportunities. The life keeps on going.” He refers to “the life,” not “my life” or “I,” or “me,” but he constantly talks about “the life.” He has understood the basic principle of the New Testament: it is all about “the life.” My friend Charlie knows the life, the only life, and he bears witness to that only life lived out in him. It is his life, but more than his life. It is THE LIFE. For Charlie, the life of Jesus Christ in him has so completely superordinated “his life,” that now at age 83 he speaks only of THE LIFE that was introduced in Jesus Christ and has become the life for all who believe in him.

All the great men I have known have discovered this greatest of truths. This is the secret of the Christian life. The most famous book written by my first mentor, Major Ian Thomas, was entitled *The Saving Life of Christ*, in which he brilliantly expounds the life. He speaks of the same life Charlie knows: the saving life of Christ residing in the Christian through the Holy Spirit. The most famous book of another mentor of mine, Ray Stedman, is on the same subject, entitled *Authentic Christianity*. Ray writes on page 12 of that book that “True Christianity in certain circles is equated with doctrinal purity, and whenever true teaching is adhered to it is very difficult for those who view life this way to accept the charge that they are not yet living an authentic Christian life. But it must be remembered that true Christianity is more than teaching—it is a LIFE. ‘He who has the Son has life!’” And a much older mentor of mine, a man whom I have always wanted to be like, teaches the same thing in his most important book entitled *The Gospel of John*, in John 10:10, when Jesus said, “I am come that they might have life, and have it more abundantly.” John expounds the definition of life from God’s perspective.

This is the central truth in the Gospel of John, and it is the theme of the whole New Testament. When I studied through the NT one year with some college students, we had a five-word theme for the year’s study: *Jesus Christ Is My Life!* Let’s see how this theme emerges from the Gospel of John.

Overview of John

The book of John is considered by many to be the greatest book of the New Testament. It is certainly the sentimental favorite of many Christians, including me. John stands in a unique position as the most spiritually reflective word on the life of Jesus Christ. It is John who portrayed Jesus as the life who was the light of men. It is John who expounds more fully than any other NT writer on the central

mission of the Holy Spirit in the life of the believer, in the Upper Room Discourse of John 13-17. And it is John who grasps how Jesus is the resurrection and the life, both in the raising of Lazarus, in John 11, and in the manifestation of the resurrected Christ to his disciples, in John 20 and 21. As an older man, probably writing this account in his seventies, eighties or even nineties, sometime during the last decade of the first century AD, John had concluded that the most important aspect of Jesus Christ’s life was exactly that: THE LIFE.

The gospel of John can be broken down into four main sections. The first section, dealing with the introduction of and witness to the life, is found in John 1-5. The second section, describing how the life was lived in Jesus’ day and time, is found in John 6-12. The third section, where Jesus reveals the secret of life through the indwelling Spirit, is found in John 13-17. And the final section, John 18-21, proves that this life is a resurrection life, a life that death could not halt, a life that goes ever ever on, a life that resides in all of us in whom the Spirit lives today. The gospel of John is all about the life.

The Introduction of and Witness to the Life: John 1-5

John’s gospel begins with far more drama than any of the other gospels. His beginning at once reminds the reader of the first words of the Bible, in Genesis chapter 1. As God was the subject of Genesis 1, so God is the subject of John’s prologue, God as the Word, God incarnate in Jesus Christ. John begins with the timeless beginning: *In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was in the beginning with God. All things came into being by Him, and apart from Him nothing came into being that has come into being. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.* (NASB)

This is John’s theme of the book, set forth immediately: Jesus is God, and in him is life itself.

John introduces Jesus Christ as the life principle itself, the only and true author of life. John says this plainly in verse 4, which sets out the theme of “the life” for the rest of the book: “In Him was *life*, and *the life* was the light of men.” The fact that this life was eternal, an eternal flame of light never to be extinguished, is what John tells us next, in v 5, and illustrates in the final chapters of the book, from John 18-21. Truly, Jesus’ life was the light of men, “and the light shines (continuous present tense, up to and including our own day) in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it.” This tells us the life is a thing of mystery and power, far greater than any darkness or power of darkness.

Moving ahead, since this is an overview, chapter 2 is all about foreshadowing. On the third day (NB: the day corresponding to the resurrection), Jesus performs his first miracle of turning the water into wine, in Cana. Given the difference between the water baptism of John the Baptist and the Holy Spirit baptism of Jesus, elucidated by John the Baptist, in John 1:31-34, we already see that one of the key shifts in emphasis in the gospel of John is the graduation from water to the Spirit, which Jesus dramatically portrays in the miracle of turning the water in purification jars (Jewish custom) into new wine (new life in the Spirit). Wine is nearly always a symbol of the Spirit in the NT. This first miracle in Cana foreshadows the greatest news and miracle of Jesus’ life, a greater miracle to come after his resurrection on the third day: the giving of the Spirit. This is the climax toward which John is building in the Upper Room Discourse of John 13-17. Thus, the significance of the water changing into wine is in the foreshadowing of the coming of the Holy Spirit, who will bring the life home to settle down in every believer.

Then in chapters 3-5, Jesus introducing the mysteries of the life to those who are lifeless. In John 3, he explains to Nicodemus that Nicodemus is so devoid of life it is as though he has never been born. He must be born again, into the quality of eternal life Jesus offers. Nicodemus, the man who came in darkness, remains in the dark. He asks Jesus, "How can these things be?" And to a simple question Jesus delivered a simple but eloquent answer, in vv 15-16: **"whoever believes may in Him have eternal life. For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have eternal life."** Then Jesus challenged Nicodemus to come out of the dark of night and come into the light of his life, in John 3:19-21.

In John 4, John moves us into the heavenlies with the unforgettable story of the Woman at the Well. The heart of the story comes in Jesus' offer to her of "living water." This is an offer of the "living water" of the Spirit, since John later defines "living water" as symbolizing the Spirit, in John 7:37-39. And Jesus explains to her that this living water of the Spirit shall become in her "a well of water springing up to eternal life." Thus, the life is once again at the heart of Jesus' message. Whereas with Nicodemus it was highlighted as the new birth in the Spirit, with the Samaritan woman it is the living water of the Spirit which will spring up in her unto eternal life.

Following the Woman at the Well story there is the moving story in John 5 about the sick man at the pool of Bethesda. This is one of the most intriguing stories in the gospels, because of Jesus' timeless question that still rings in our sick ears today: "Do you want to get well?" I believe Jesus puts this question to everyone. This healing, which happened on the Sabbath, causes a tempest in the religious establishment's teapot. To their wranglings, Jesus gives a clear word about who he is, in vv 19-24. He says, in vv 21 and 24: *"For just as the Father raised the dead and gives them life, even so the Son also gives life to whom He wishes... Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears My word, and believes Him who sent Me, has eternal life, and does not come into judgment, but has passed out of death into life."*

This section of the gospel closes with Jesus' clear statement that he has life in himself, in John 5:25-26: *"Truly, truly I say to you, an hour is coming and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and those who hear shall live. For just as the Father has life in Himself, even so He gave to the Son also to have life in Himself."* This weighty truth is then made far weightier at the end of chapter 5 by the solemn, four-fold witness of John the Baptist, the works of Jesus, the Father, and the Scripture, to this central truth: Jesus Christ is THE LIFE.

Over the past year, as my world has been turned upsidedown, I have been thinking a great deal about what is really important. One theme has emerged over and over again throughout this year as I have been praying about God's vision for my life. Whether I remain in the business world as a management consultant or whether I return to the vocational pastorate, no matter what, he has marked out my life for one thing: to be a conduit of his life everywhere he puts me. He put me in the business world to express his life to all who are around me. He has placed me in my family to express his life and love to my wife and children. He has placed me in my community to express his life to other parents in our children's school. My life is no longer about my life, it is all about the life.

The Life as Lived in Jesus' Day and Time: John 6-12

In John 6, John gives us the continually unfolding story about Jesus as the life in his day and time, with Jesus as the bread of life. The entire chapter of seventy-one verses is one tightly-linked tale. The tale begins with a living parable, with the feeding of the 5,000. With this miracle, Jesus was testing the disciples with the question: Where do I get bread for all these people? Or more deeply, where can I find the resources to meet all the crying needs of humanity? The answer lies in the resources of Jesus Christ, the One providing the bread to the 5,000. But he is doing far more than providing bread. He is physically portraying how he is providing himself for the needs of a hungry humanity. Jesus then interprets this dramatic feeding of the 5,000 for the multitude, in vv 33-34: *"For the bread of God is that which comes down out of heaven, and gives life to the world." They said, 'Lord, evermore give us this bread.' Jesus said to them, 'I am the bread of life; he who comes to Me shall not hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never*

thirst." What a fascinating parallel to the Woman at the Well story! In both cases, with the living water of the Spirit and the bread of life in himself, Jesus is the great answer, the only One who is enough for us.

Then in chapter 7, John brilliantly focuses to the crucial point he is making in his gospel. Jesus' brothers tell him to reveal himself in Jerusalem at the coming feast, and make a name for himself, rather than ministering in obscurity in Galilee. But Jesus says his hour had not yet come (he says it twice), that he would not attend the feast just yet. Then in a few verses, Jesus decides to go up to Jerusalem incognito, and reveal himself later at the feast. At this point, we as readers are convinced something special is going on; we just don't know what it is yet. Jesus then speaks to the crowds from the Temple, and yet his message is not gripping them. The tension builds in the scene John is describing until it reaches its shattering climax, in vv 37-39: *"Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, 'If any man is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, "From his innermost being shall flow rivers of living water." ' But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified."* Thus, John by the gripping revelation of this narrative, narrows our vision to the main point of Jesus' ministry: that he offers living water, life itself, through the coming Holy Spirit. John could scarcely be telling us the main theme of his gospel more loudly and clearly than the way it is broadcast in chapter seven.

But these words make the Jews uncomfortable. In chapters 8-10, we see how the darkness of the Pharisees' legalism could not comprehend the life. Chapter 8 begins with the marvelous oral tradition of the adulterous woman and Jesus. This is one of the most striking stories of grace in the face of legalism in the history of the world. But the voices of legalism are not easily drowned out, even by such an arresting story. Chapter 8 tells of Jesus' further disputes with the Pharisees. The dispute begins in earnest when Jesus proclaims himself to be the light of the world, in John 8:12: *"I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness, but shall have the light of life."* But the darkness of religion fails to see or comprehend the light. They tried to seize him, and by the end of the chapter they are trying to stone him.

I have seen this same dynamic in the modern day church. I was at an elder retreat at the last church I served in, and one of the elders was very much a modern day Pharisee. He was controlling the meeting, very literally, and the question on the table was what we wanted people to experience when they came to our church. There was much good discussion. When it was my turn, I said this: "I want them to encounter the living Christ: residing in his people through their spiritual gifts, hearing from him when he speaks through the preaching. I want them to know the heart of the New Covenant: Christ in you, the hope of glory." This man looked at me like I was talking gibberish. He said, "I have no idea what you are talking about." And he was right. The truth of the living Christ is as incomprehensible to the darkness of religion in churches today as it was in Jesus' day. And if you cling to the life in Christ, you may get stoned for it!

In chapter 10, we see Jesus speak a strange parable, in vv 1-5, about the door into the sheepfold and the true shepherd of the sheep, but no one understands what he is saying. Then, Jesus interprets the story for them, in vv 7-18. Jesus simply says, *"Truly, truly, I say to you, I am the door of the sheep... I am the door; if anyone enters through Me, he shall be saved, and shall go in and out, and find pasture. The thief comes only to steal, and kill, and destroy; I came that they might have life, and might have it more abundantly."* Thus, with another story, John is telling us that Jesus came to give life, abundant life.

Then we come to the first of two peaks in Jesus' life and ministry with the story of John 11. This story of death and resurrection life is what proves beyond a doubt that Jesus is indeed the life, the One capable of giving life even to the dead locked away in a tomb for four days. Jesus hears from Mary and Martha that Lazarus is sick, and Jesus strangely replies that this sickness is for the glory of God, that the Son of Man may be glorified by it. This seems odd here, but it helps to throw light on the glory Jesus is talking about later, in John 17:1-5. In both cases, resurrection is what glorifies God more than anything else in the world, manifesting him and his power in the most dramat-

ic way. Although Jesus loved Martha, Mary and Lazarus, he carries two more days before journeying to Bethany to check on his friend. Jesus does this because he knows God is going to resurrect the dead Lazarus by his hand.

On the way to Bethany, Jesus lets the disciples know what God's plan was, in vv 8-15. He tells them plainly, "Lazarus is dead, and I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, so that you may believe; but let us go to him." They arrive in Bethany, and Jesus is met by a distraught Martha, who rebukes him by saying, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Then Jesus responds to her with some of his most famous and empowering words: "*I am the resurrection and the life; he who believes in Me shall live even if he dies, and everyone who lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?*" In many ways, this is the key theme verse of the entire gospel of John. In it is the central claim of the book: Jesus Christ is the resurrection and the life, followed by the central question of the book: Do you believe this? This episode with Lazarus, and this saying of Jesus, lie at the very heart of this gospel.

Martha has the right answer: "Yes, Lord; I have believed that You are the Christ, the Son of God, even He who comes into the world." After saying this, Martha goes to fetch Mary, who then approaches Jesus with the same reproach, but this time accompanied by the weeping and broken heart of this great-hearted woman. She too says, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died." Seeing her weeping, our compassionate Jesus wept too. He then moved on to the tomb, and commanded that the stone be rolled away. Martha, ever the administrator, told him it would stink. But Jesus tried to redirect her to focus not on the mess, but on the glory of God about to be revealed. He then lifted his eyes and thanked God in advance for the resurrection power and life, and then Jesus commanded the dead man, "Lazarus, come forth!" And come forth he did! Many of the Jews who were looking on believed in Jesus based on the miracle of life from death.

But what about the life as it is lived out in our own day? Let me quote from my older friend Charlie, describing the beginning and ending of each day of the life as he experiences it. When Charlie gets up in the morning, he stretches out his arms while he thanks the Lord for the good sleep he has just had, and then he excitedly asks the Lord the following question: "Okay, Lord, what is the adventure for today?" For him, every day of the life is a day of profound and joyous adventure in intimacy with Jesus Christ. He isn't just dragging himself out of bed nursing a number of aches and pains like most men at his station in life. He is entering each day with the thrill of anticipation of the life of Jesus Christ in him, a life he has come to know through long experience to be a pure adventure. Then he goes through that day and discovers the adventure, often in the seemingly mundane. At the end of his day, Charlie climbs into bed and spends several minutes going through his day thanking Jesus Christ for each step of the day as it unfolded: "Thank you Lord for that great breakfast, thanks for the exhilarating walk with you, thank you for the meeting with that young man, thank you...thank you...thank you..." Thus is the beginning and ending of one day in the life. Who would not want to be like this when they are 83? Or 63? or 43? or 23? or 13?

Getting back to the text, John will now let us into the upper room where Jesus and his twelve disciples are meeting in private. In this privy council of the King, we discover the secret of life itself.

The Secret of Life — The Indwelling Spirit: John 13-17

After Jesus foreshadows the Cross by washing the disciples' feet in chapter 13, he moves into the marvelous sermon known as the Upper Room Discourse, stretching from the comforting words of John 14:1-6 to the moving High Priestly Prayer of John 17. Perhaps the most striking feature of this "last will and testament" of Jesus before his death is how tremendously positive and upbeat it all is. Jesus is looking beyond the cross, even beyond the joy of the resurrection, to the greatest joy in the history of the world, the greatest event on God's redemptive calendar before the coming of the new heavens and the new earth: the day of Pentecost, the coming of the Holy Spirit. Moses yearned for this day, in Numbers 11:28-29; Jeremiah hoped for the new covenant in the Spirit, in Jer 31:31-34; Ezekiel had a clear vision of the coming arrival of the Spirit, in Ezek 36:24-28; and Joel

the prophet foresaw the coming day of Pentecost, in Joel 2. Jesus as the greatest Prophet looked ahead to the greatest day in the history of the world: the Spirit bringing the life home to the believer at Pentecost.

Knowing where his life has been pointed, Jesus offers his beleaguered men words of comfort in 14:1: "*Let not your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me.*" He then tells them that he will leave them, but not forget them. Rather, he goes to prepare a place for them in his Father's house, meaning that he goes to the Father to pave the way for the coming of the Spirit to place them in the heavenly temple being constructed by God, a place spoken of by Paul at the end of Eph 2, a place where Jesus Christ is the cornerstone and they are living stones, so that where he is, they may be also. But their inclusion in this great and lasting Temple is through the Spirit, that can only come if Jesus goes. While this was meant to comfort them, they miss Jesus' point, and Thomas told Jesus they did not know the way. Jesus then reminds Thomas that the way is not some road, nor some road map, but a Person. HE is the way. Jesus speaks another key theme verse of the gospel of John, John 14:6: "*I am the way, and the truth, and the life; no one comes to the Father, but through Me.*"

Jesus then introduces the coming Holy Spirit to them, in John 14:16-18 and 26-27, which are all so important that I will simply include them here in their entirety: "*And I will ask the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may be with you forever; the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it does not behold Him or know Him, but you know Him because He abides with you, and will be in you. I will not leave you as orphans; I will come to you...But the Helper, the Holy Spirit, whom the Father will send in My name, He will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance all that I said to you. Peace I leave with you; My peace [in the Spirit] I give to you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be fearful.*" Here is comforting news indeed: the Spirit is coming to be with them, indeed within them, forever. He is the Spirit of truth, Someone they can trust in no matter what. He is a great Helper (literally a Comforter). He will teach them all things, be companion to all their pains. He represents Jesus' own remarkable inner peace. In short, everything they would wish for and will need, the Spirit will be. No wonder Jesus is so excited!

To sharpen their minds and imaginations about the reality of this new dynamic of the Spirit, Jesus paints for them the picture of the vine and the branches, in John 15:1-11. This is the dominant image for the life in the Spirit found in the Bible. Jesus himself is the true vine, and we are the branches. The Father is the vinedresser, and he prunes back the fruitful branches to bear more fruit, and he takes away the branches bearing no fruit (thus those who are not Christians). Jesus' golden principle for life in him is stated in few words: "*Abide in Me, and I in you. As the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, unless it abides in the vine, so neither can you, unless you abide in Me. I am the vine, you are the branches; he who abides in Me, and I in him, he bears much fruit; for apart from Me you can do nothing.*" But where does the Spirit come into this word picture? The Spirit is seen in this metaphor to be the life-giving sap which brings the sustenance and vitality from the root into the branches, allowing the branches to flourish and produce fruit. The branch that receives no sap is the one that bears no fruit. The one without the Spirit is not a Christian, and is thus taken out of the plant. It is the Spirit as the life-giving sap that links the branches to the vine. It is the Spirit who defines the Christian by his indwelling presence and life-giving vitality bespeaking the life of Christ. It is the Spirit who brings into our lives the life of Christ.

What has Jesus done in this Upper Room Discourse? He has given the secret to the life he has been modelling and explaining throughout his ministry. In Ray Stedman's book on the Upper Room Discourse entitled *Secrets of the Spirit*, Ray highlights the following sentence in his preface which serves to identify the theme of these chapters, on p. 8: "He tells them that [boldfaced his] **the primary work of the Spirit will be to take the life of Jesus and release it to these believers.** This is the great and marvelous truth which the Scriptures seek to set before us. When the Spirit came to release Jesus' life within His disciples, they were then able to live by Him, as He lived by means of the Father. This is the fantastic secret which makes possible the fulfillment of the high demands of Christian liv-

ing. A Christian lives by the same principle as Jesus did. As He lived by means of the Father, in dependence and trust in Him, moment by moment, so we are to live by means of the Son, in dependence and trust in Him."

With his final word of this discourse spoken to the disciples, Jesus launches into one of the most moving chapters of the New Testament, John 17, rivalled only by Romans 8. In it, Jesus brings together all the threads woven thus far in the gospel of John: He identifies THE LIFE for us in clear terms throughout the entire prayer, defining the life in terms of deepest relationship with Jesus Christ and the Father through the Spirit. He begins by specifically defining eternal life, in v 3: "*And this is eternal life, that they may know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.*" Here's your definition of "life": the life is a relationship of knowing God and knowing Jesus Christ, an inner knowing made possible only by the indwelling Spirit by whom the Father and the Son make their home inside us. Here is where Jesus defines the life in terms of family: we have life because the entire Trinity is resident in us as an eternal family into which we are eternally placed and kept. Oh how this material grips the soul!

Jesus' prayer expresses our deepest longings as human beings: intimacy with God as a Father through a secured place in an eternal family. And Jesus' prayer expresses God's deepest desires for us as adult children grafted into his family: that the Father will keep us in his great name (as certain a statement on eternal security for the believer as I can find anywhere else in the Bible); that we may have the joy of Jesus Christ made full in ourselves; that we may be in the world but kept from the evil one; that we might be sanctified in truth; that we may all be one, even as Jesus is one with the Father, that we may be one with Jesus and the Father, that with Jesus in us we might be perfected in unity; that we might be with him where he is, that we might behold his great glory; and Jesus ends the great prayer with the final definition of THE LIFE: "*that the love wherewith Thou didst love Me may be in them, and I in them.*" This is it, the life: Christ in them, Christ in us, Christ in you, Christ in me. Jesus has laid bare the secret of the life: the indwelling Holy Spirit, by whom my Christ is in me, by whom Jesus Christ is my life.

The Resurrection Life that Goes Ever, Ever On John 18-21

In John 18, the first 11 verses paint a stirring portrait of who was actually in charge of all the events of that fateful night. Jesus went across the Kidron valley into the Garden of Gethsemane, and waited there to receive Judas and his gang of thugs. When Judas arrived, Jesus asked, "*Whom do you seek?*" and they answered, "Jesus the Nazarene." He said to them, "*I AM.*" This is the final and most gripping self-revelation Jesus made, and it was attended by explosive power: as soon as he spoke these words, the entire cohort of some 600 men were knocked to the ground. Clearly, Jesus was in command of this scene.

But to John, the most striking interaction Jesus had during the entire trial sequence was his interaction with Pilate, in John 18:28-19:22. This makes perfect sense: John has always highlighted the stirring private interviews Jesus had with non-believers who were intrigued by him. We saw this with Nicodemus, the woman at the well, the royal official from Capernaum, the sick man at the pool of Bethesda, etc. John hones in on the interaction between Jesus and Pilate, who was clearly impressed with Jesus. While Pilate was seemingly the man in charge, the life was so compelling to him that he couldn't just dismiss this Jesus. He asked Jesus the question, "What is truth?," an amazing question for a governor to ask a prisoner. Again, the darkness comprehended not the life that was in Jesus Christ, and Pilate

may have been the most baffled of all.

Jesus' death on the cross is told in a very tight narrative, from 19:23-30. The soldiers cast lots for his clothes, Jesus undertook his final task of caring for Mary by entrusting her into John's care, Jesus cried out about his thirst and was given vinegar on a hyssop branch to slake his thirst, and then he cried out, "*It is finished!*" and yielded up his spirit. Thus he died. But since the gospel of John is primarily about the life and not the death of Jesus, the narrative dealing with the actual death is extremely sparse in detail. It is just eight verses. By the end of chapter 19, Jesus is certifiably dead and buried.

But now that the burial is confirmed, John can return to his great theme of the life. In chapters 20-21 John glories in the resurrection life of Jesus, painting three powerful scenes of resurrection life that galvanized his disciples into carrying that life into the entire world in their day. While the first major scene of the resurrection life was with Mary in the garden, the second and third scenes are with the disciples, focusing on two disciples in specific. In John 20:19-29, the narrative focuses on Jesus and Doubting Thomas. In vv 19-23, Jesus makes his first appearance to the disciples on the evening of the first day. The disciples were in the upper room again, with doors locked and bolted against the Jews. It was a time of fear and apprehension, but Jesus arrived and said, "*Peace be with you.*" He then showed them both of his hands and his pierced side. This transported the disciples from fear and apprehension to praise and rejoicing. Then, Jesus breathed on them the breath of God, which was a dramatic action encouraging them to wait for the infilling of the Holy Spirit: "*He breathed on them, and said to them, 'Receive the Holy Spirit.'*" However, Thomas the Doubter was not with the other eleven disciples when Jesus appeared, and he was adamant in his unwillingness to believe that Jesus had risen until he himself saw Jesus' nail-scarred hands and his pierced side. Thomas has to see the resurrection life to believe it. But eight days later, in the same place, the disciples and Thomas were together, and Jesus appeared to them and let Thomas feel his hands and his side. Thomas felt him, and then said, "My Lord and My God!" Then Jesus said in return, "*Because you have seen Me, have you believed? Blessed are they who did not see, and yet believed.*"

After this blessing pronounced on all those who would believe in Jesus without having to see him, John then dedicates the book for all those who might believe in Jesus, in John 20:30-31: "Many other signs therefore Jesus also performed in the presence of the disciples, which are not written in this book; but these have been written that you may believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing you may have life in His name."

The fact that the book goes on to show the reconciliation of Jesus and Peter during the breakfast by the seashore shows the transition of the life from Jesus to the church founded on Peter the rock. This last chapter is the final statement about the life: it goes ever, ever on, passing from Jesus to Peter and the rest of the disciples, to the first century church through the process of apostolic discipleship, and down from one generation to the next through the ages. And in this life, it passed to my old friend Charlie, and down to me. And today from me to you. It is my deepest prayer for my children that this life will pass from me and my wife to them, that they may have life and have it more abundantly. In my prayers over the past year and for the rest of their lives, my prayers for my children will focus on them individually entering into the adventure of the life, the life of Jesus Christ through the Spirit. That is my prayer for everyone who hears this. Amen and amen.

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