For the Life of the World

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[0:00] Now, I'd like us this morning to look back to John's Gospel, Chapter 10, where we were reading earlier together, John's Gospel, Chapter 10.

And probably particularly if I was to focus anything on our thoughts, it would be on the last bit of verse 10, which is really in the middle of this section almost, I have come that they may have life and have it to the full.
And that's going to be our theme for a few moments this morning as we think about the claims of Jesus and our need for Jesus in our lives and what He does.
We hear a lot about life on earth, don't we? It's kind of a well-known phrase that we hear a great deal of. I think there was probably a David Attenborough series a while ago with that title, Life on Earth.
And the interesting thing about life on earth is that in many ways we as human beings are doing our very best to endanger it.
[1:02] The great danger to life on earth, from a kind of human point of view as we look at it, is ourselves. By our attitudes and by our abuses and by our destruction and by the way that greed comes over and endangers so much of this world in which we live.

And yeah, we hear a lot about preservation and keeping life going and thinking about the generations ahead. And the interesting thing about that, the interesting thing about thinking about the generations ahead is that it kind of, within that we forget that because there's generations that each generation dies and I suppose it's a magnanimous thought thinking forward to the generations that are to come when we'll not be there.
But the reality of the life in which, the world in which we're living is a world which is relentlessly full of generations of dying people. I know that sounds very morbid today.
But that's the truth, isn't it? We had a football tournament the other day, a five a side tournament which was run by the churches league that were part of it, it's an 11 a side league.
But this was a five a side tournament and at the end of the tournament, so there was a lot of teams related to churches but there was a couple of pub teams and a couple of business teams to do with business.
[2:30] So there was a real mixture of Christians and people that aren't Christians and kind of tough guys and whatnot. And at the end of it, we had this award ceremony, sadly St Columbus didn't win it, we got to the semi-finals and were knocked out and I missed the golden penalty.

Terrible. Guilt, written all over my face. However, despite it was good for our humility, the team that beat us went on to win it.
But what was interesting was that one of the assistant ministers from Nidry's church, he gave a brief gospel message at the end of it, just in the pitch where everyone was standing and you know, it was always getting kind of tough guys playing football and kind of laughing and joking at this guy talking about Jesus and the resurrection.
But the interesting thing was when he mentioned death, they all kind of laughed. She was, you're a real happy chappy, speaking about the day we're all going to die, all these young strong men.
And that's very often a reaction, isn't it? When someone mentions, you know, you don't laugh here because you know that I talk about it every week, but you know, very often that's our kind of nervous reaction.
[3:36] You know, we laugh it off the whole idea of death and speaking about it. They did say that, I think I've used this illustration before, here last century, nobody or last, another century back, nobody spoke about sex and everyone spoke about death because it was just part of life, it was common to everyone.

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But today everyone speaks about sex and nobody speaks about death because it's the unmentionable thing to speak about death. But yet that's the reality of the world in which we'll have the short existence that we have here is peppered with reminders of our mortality, of the malfunction of the irrational division and illness and natural disaster and pain that make up so much of day to day living which we can choose to ignore of course, but which is real and which is affecting us.
But parallel to that of course is there's amazing goodness. There is a human level amazing goodness in this world that so we can come today and say life is good.
We enjoy it at human level, there's lots that we can enjoy and there's lots of things that make life on a day to day basis for us at least I would think.
Maybe not for some of the people I was mentioning in prayer but for many of us especially in the West, good at an ordinary level. But that deceives us into thinking that life is fine and that we're not actually people who are dying.
[5:13] The goodness that we enjoy which is to thank God for and is remarkable in itself can transform our prognosis either physically as dying people or spiritually.

It's like we would try to use a sticking plaster for what is needed which is heart surgery. It's impossible to do because however good our experiences are, however good our life is, we are getting older and we're struggling and ultimately we're dying.
Life is short and for most people in this world, not for us maybe but for most people in this world it's a huge battle. And even in the luxury that we have here and maybe you look longingly at the luxurious lifestyle of some people, there may also in their lives be deep, deep dissatisfaction.
The dissatisfaction that reminds us of what money can't buy for us. But there's this recognition that for all of us as we look at things biblically, sin deceives us and sin deceives us into thinking that this life is worth living without God.
We've been sold short by a deception of false hope of independence from God that is worth having. It's worth having this independence and this freedom away from God so that I can live a few dying years without Him.
[6:55] It's a powerful deception. So on Easter Sunday we have a great message, a great gospel message and the resurrection of Jesus that is at the absolute core of our Christian faith and belief, the death and resurrection of Jesus.

There's four characteristics very briefly here that I want to share with you from this passage, really characteristics about Jesus that make what I'm saying from His word hugely significant and important for each of us to consider both for ourselves and for the people around us and for maybe the three people that we've been praying for over this last 50 days that we're longing for these three unbelieving friends to come to faith in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior.
The first thing is very, they're all very obvious, they're all very simple. First thing is truth, a characteristic of Jesus' truth. He starts in this chapter or this chapter starts with what Jesus says which is, I tell you the truth.
In the old Bibles it used to be verily, verily I say to you, amen, amen. It was really a saying that people would use when they had something very important, very significant to say and Jesus used it quite a lot.
In other words, he's saying, listen, listen up here. I've got something very important to say. It's like a marker. Stop daydreaming and listen to what I'm saying here.
[8:28] So Jesus is saying that he's got something, a solemn announcement or pronouncement to make and in the context of who Jesus is then, doesn't that make it hugely significant?

If it's Joe Blogs, it says verily, verily I say unto you or if I say verily, verily I say unto you, you might choose not to listen. But when Jesus says it, who says I am the way, the truth and the life, when Jesus says it, when he says I'm God in the flesh, when Jesus says it, then I do believe it's worth listening to.
It's not frivolous in other words. It's not just meaningless. It's important for us to sit up and get our listening concentration on and hear what Jesus is to say. And that objective truth that Jesus is declaring is really important for us.
What we aren't saying as Christians is that we just happen to believe this. It's our interpretation and it's okay, but you can believe whatever you want. Kind of relativism, a relative understanding of truth so that you can believe what you want and I can believe what I want and we'll all be happy and we'll walk down the road together.

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And so much today is like that, isn't it? That truth is relative to so many people. And with society in which we live in, it can make it very difficult to know what the truth is.
[9:47] You know, if you've been listening to the independence debate, yawn, ad nauseam for the last six months, one side will say one thing absolutely truthfully about what independence will do and the other side will then come out and say absolutely, just as clearly and definitively what will happen and it's complete opposite.

It's difficult to find out what the truth is in this independence debate. Or if you've been watching again on the media a lot these days, the Oscar Pistorius trial, they're trying in this trial, as they will in every trial, to find the truth of what happened on that night.
There's only two people who know the truth that what happened, Oscar and God.
Riva knew but she can't speak. And so in our mortal efforts and our incomplete efforts, we're trying to find out or the judge is trying to weigh up and decide what the truth is.
If I get done for speeding and it's 54 miles an hour and a 40 mile an hour zone, I can argue to them blowing the face that I wasn't doing that speed or it didn't seem like 54 to me, I seem to be just about 40, doesn't matter what I think because it's been recorded that that was the speed I was doing.
[11:19] And so there is an objective reality, there's objective truth. Now not all truth is scientifically measurable with data in that way, but it comes with the way of evidence and the character and many other circumstances.

And we come to this place as believers where we have accepted that Jesus speaks the truth and is the truth based on his character, based on evidence, based on historicity and based on our experience of what he has done and transformed our lives.
He wants us to hear. Truly I tell you the truth. He wants us to listen to what he's saying. And the second truth, second characteristic is diversity.
What is he on about here? Well Jesus wants us to hear and listen and understand what he's saying here.
And it's a crucial message. He wants us to get across. Jesus was the teacher par excellence. He was no teacher like him and he wanted people to understand and know what he was saying.
[12:23] And he's getting across all the time to his disciples and those around him. Our need, the need for rescue, both from ourselves and from sin that leads us to death.

He wants us to know that he's the judge. He wants us to know that he's the savior. He wants us to know that he is an outstandingly good message for our lives today.
He wants us to know the incalculably miserable reality of being eternally separated from life and from him.
He wants us to know these things. So what does he do? What do you do when you want people to hear that? How do we tell them? Do we just ram it down their throats?
Do they give them the ABC or the gospel? Do we make sure that we've actually said every important thing that we need to say? Well, what does Jesus do? Jesus uses pictures here.
[13:23] That's what he does. Isn't that great? That Jesus, the Son of God, the Redeemer, he uses pictures that would be relevant to his ordinary everyday listeners so that they would understand with the diversity of the pictures he uses why he was saying what he was saying.

I wonder when you share the gospel, when I share the gospel, we think about our audience. We think about who we're sharing the gospel with and we think hard about the kind of things that would help them to understand about the gospel in pictures.
We're good with pictures. That was a very visual age. Look at pictures. And Jesus used pictures. And one picture is never enough as he tries to describe what he has come to do.
It's diverse. It's mixed. And even within this small section, he uses two different pictures in the same kind of illustration. He says, I am the gate or I'm the door.
But then he also says that's the gate to the sheet pen. But then he also says I am the good shepherd. So he's both the gate and he's the good shepherd because he's using pictures.
[14:42] He says he's the way in to that place of safety and security in him. And he also says I'm the one who will look after you because I'm the good shepherd who loves his sheep and who indeed goes on to lay down his life for his sheep.

Now his listeners would understand that because there was a kind of rural agrarian kind of society and they would just look around them and they would see sheep wandering around and goats and

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sheep pens and shepherds and they knew these things.
They understood them. And so they, oh, I understand that. This is the Son of God but he's giving us this picture. Isn't that great?
Simple people like me. That's great. He doesn't use deep metaphysical, philosophical, academic constructs to get across the message of the gospel.
He uses pictures for these deep unfathomable truths. It's not that the truths are just kind of simple. They're massive truths. But he uses these pictures.
[15:46] I am the bread of life. I am the true vine. I am the light of the world. I am the way, the truth and the life.

He uses these pictures to help us to understand how significant he is.
And he describes sin and Satan here as a thief. That is a brilliant picture of death and the grave and sin and Satan and evil.
It's a thief, malevolent, venomous, destructive, selfish evil. That's what he wants us to know.
He wants us to see. He wants us to make the comparison. And they're clear, aren't they? If you come home to your house and you go in the front door and all the drawers have been tipped out and all the precious things you own have been stolen and things that are worthless to anyone else but precious to you have just been trodden on or trampled or broken.
[17:04] You know and can understand this picture of the thief. And that's exactly what Jesus wants us to understand. And he uses these pictures to show us the danger of our lives without God and without forgiveness and without hope and the greatness of what he comes to offer.

So diversity. The third thing is life. It's a characteristic that comes across here. I have come that they may have life and life to the full.
And if you just follow with me backwards to John chapter 6 verse 51 and this is actually the title of my sermon.
This bread is my flesh. Again another picture. I'm the living bread which I will give for the life of the world. So Jesus gives himself for the life of the world, for those who will put their trust in Him and also maybe if you go back further, I'm making you work a little bit today, John chapter 1 and verse 4.
When it speaks about Jesus being with God in the beginning and before the beginning and saying that Jesus in him was life and that life was the light of men. Now that theme is a hugely significant theme in John's gospel.
[18:28] John uses this whole theme of life more than any of the writers in the New Testament. Thirty-six times he uses this idea of life and relates it to Jesus and what Jesus has come to offer.

And that's a quarter of all the New Testament references to that. And God through Christ is the source of life and light.
Light, there being kind of consciousness and direction and vision and understanding. So at the moment, you see it all goes back to the very beginning, the moment humanity rejected God as their Lord and went their own way and abandoned him as it were, they were cut off from that life support. Because not just that God has life, it's not just that there's God alive. Not just us living but dying. It's not just that. It's not just that God has life. It's that God is life.
He's the source of all life. He's the source of all creation. He's the source of everything that comes up. Even in our experience, the life we have, whether we're believers or not, even though it's a life that is coming to an end, even though physically we're dying, the life we have is graciously been given to us from him.
[19:50] But to be cut off from God, which the Bible says we all are by nature, and to go our own way is to be physically dying and spiritually dead.

Spiritual death just means that we don't love God and serve him and put him first. It might not like you can't see it, but it's there.
The physical bit we understand, the spiritual bit sometimes maybe we don't. But the good news is that that is what Christ has come to offer. I have come to offer life and life to the fool.
What does that mean? Big cars, new house, life to the fool? No, it's much bigger than that. It's much, he's saying, I'm offering life, which is that our physical dying will not keep us from him.
We might die, but we will live again. And spiritually we are born anew and we become alive to God and we are able to love God and serve him and make him Lord.

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[20:56] So the Bible describes it not just as we're a lifestyle choice now and again, you might think about it, but as a moving from darkness to light or from death to life. So it's a massive transformation.

And that is what life to the fool is. He offers us this healing, an ongoing healing process that our lives begin to be turned towards him and living the way he wanted us to live, that he created us to live, to love and serve him and follow him.
And so that even though the Bible says even though we die physically, the sting of death is removed, yet we shall live and we shall live. And as he was resurrected, so we will know that same resurrection death will not hold us.
It will be the great message of the gospel. And that's what we believe. That's why today if you're a Christian, you should be happy and rejoicing.
Even though maybe things are difficult in your life, I'm not saying that you should be kind of insensitive to what you're going through and difficulties arise, but at a deep seated level there's a pleasure and a joy in knowing what we know, in knowing we've moved from one place to another, knowing that we're safe in that sheepfold, that we have a good shepherd who cares for us and loves us, that we are no longer under the tyranny of the thief, but that we know and live in the light of that knowledge as Christians.
[22:24] It's just not a small and significant thing. It's a great, big, important, beautiful thing. And lastly and very briefly, he speaks also and is the characteristic of authority.

And this comes across very strongly in the resurrection, in the whole of the resurrection idea. Verse 17, the reason my father loves me is that I, now no one has ever said this.
No one ever has said this. I lay down my life only to take it up again. No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down and authority to take it up again, this commandment I receive from my father.
It's a remarkable statement. No one has ever said that. No one has ever been able to back that up with action. I lay down my life only to take it up again.
Some people will say, well, you know, people who commit suicide, they've made that choice of when they lay down their life. But they haven't really. What they are doing is they are choosing the means by which they will die.
[23:30] But ultimately death is not theirs to give themselves over to. And of course, they can't take their life up again.

It's completely different. This is not a suicidal last minute claim. This is Jesus with the authority. It's the power behind the Easter message. There's been a lot of talk on Christian blogs and things like that.
Not I read them. I don't have much time for that kind of stuff. But once again, you read them, there's this kind of thing that's kind of conversation going around with everyone saying, all the politicians, everyone wants to talk about the Easter message and Christianity without Christ.
Some politicians have been saying things. I don't know. But there can't be that, you know, there isn't an Easter. There isn't good news. There's been a message without this power of Christ and as the author of life, showing what he has come to do.
It flows from him. Because he came face, what did he do? He came face to face with the thief.
[24:44] That's what he did. He came face to face with the thief. The one who's there to destroy and to kill, death itself, the sentence of death.

God's justice, God's just out working of our rebellion against him. He came to pay that price, to face up to that price himself. I was in Brunsfield, our church plant.
We've got a church plant in the south side of town. It was there last Sunday morning, so the Sunday off. And Jeremy, so I was going to say Jeremy Clarkson. Thank goodness he wasn't preaching.
But for who happens to be a politician? And a very good one, I believe. He was preaching and he told a story of a judge down in the border last century who had a young man who was brought before him for poaching.
And he was found guilty and he had to pay a sum of money and the young man had no money. So the judge took off his hat or wig and left his judgment seat and went to the table where the prosecution was and took his checkbook out and paid the amount of money for the crime because the young man was his son.

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[26:05] So you get the ill, it's a picture, isn't it? It's not a great picture, but it's a picture. He was both judge and he had to declare what was the just sentence for poaching.

But he knew the boy couldn't pay and he loved the boy and so he came out of judgment and paid it himself. And that's a picture, however incomplete of what Jesus has done. We are declared guilty by him because of our rebellion and sin and because we have fallen short of his standard and his glory.
We can't make it up. We can't do it ourselves. We can't avoid the sentence which is death. We're all dying. We know that. Jesus recognized that. But he and his love has come out of the judgment seat and gone to the cross and has provided the answer and the way.
So he says, I'm the gate. That's what he says. I'm the gate. I'm the way into this place of life and security. I'm the way forward. And that's the mystery of his great grace, isn't it?
He experiences on the cross hell and abandonment paying the full price for our sins. Then voluntarily, listen to this, voluntarily at the end of his suffering, laying down his life, which is was necessary, the reality of God dying.
[27:23] In his innocence, taking our guilt. And on the third day, taking up his life again, just as voluntarily, showing that he had immense power greater than the thief, greater than death, greater than the grave, greater than hell itself.

He's stronger. He is life. Do you see why the resurrection matters? Is it insignificant now in our scientific and highly sophisticated and wonderfully caring and loving society?
Is it any less relevant? No. We celebrate our hope because the hope is in the physical and real resurrection of Jesus, which transformed the life of the disciples and has transformed everyone who has put their trust in him ever since.
Because we know our risen Savior and the third day risen and then ascended so that when we put our trust in him, he promises us his spirit, which is life.
And his spirit is in us. It means that even though we die, yet we shall live. That's a great hope. It's an eternal hope. It goes beyond this life.
[28:41] I think the thief has really grasped us with the significance of today, as if today is all that matters. And maybe in the Western world, maybe in the society, which you'll have, I don't know, more so than others.

But I know that a lot of people become Christians when they recognise that this life isn't so great, but there is a life to come.
But we recognise the importance of his truth, of his life, of his authority.
And I ask the question, who are you listening to today? I want to finish with a song. You'll be glad, I'm not going to sing it. You'll be very glad I'm not going to sing it.
But it's a song and a CD that I got this week, and it's from an old, aging rocker. Well, not really a rocker, but Tom Jones. It's interesting, a lot of these old guys, Robert Plants and another one of them, very spiritual lyrics as they get older.
[29:51] And I'm not sure is that because they're more aware of their mortality or are reminded of the kind of vacuosity and emptiness of the life that has almost gone in their lives and that fame and fortune hasn't provided the answer they needed.

But I know that Tom Jones was brought up in a very Christian home. And he doesn't write many songs. He plagiarises mainly from other famous people, but he's got a great voice, so he's allowed to.
But he's written this song and it's a nice song and it's a picture. I just want to finish with this picture. You can't really do it justice when you're reading it. Okay.
Death went out to the sinner's house. Come and go with me. The sinner cried, I ain't ready to go. I ain't got no traveling shoes. Got no traveling shoes.
The sinner cried, I ain't ready to go. I got no traveling shoes. Then death went down to the gambler's house. Come and go with me.
[30:51] Gambler cried out, I'm not ready to go. I ain't got no traveling shoes. Ain't got no traveling shoes. And then death went down to the preacher's house.

Come and go with me. The preacher cried out, Lord, I'm ready to go. I got my traveling shoes. The preacher cried out, Lord, I'm ready to go.
I got my traveling shoes. You got your traveling shoes. You ready to go, Christ, in His resurrection power, offers you eternal life.

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And it's a great gospel and it's a great message. And I hope that we're refreshed and encouraged after a long, hard winter with that great message. Let's bow our heads and pray.
Father God, we thank you for the gospel. We thank you for the infinite grace of Jesus Christ, for the simplicity of your pictures and yet the depth that is unfathomable in what you proclaim.
[31:56] And we ask that you would make us good communicators of that truth, that we would live in such a way that would indicate to our friends and loved ones that people need us to us that our lives have been changed, that it's not just a pastime or a hobby in our lives, it's not just a religious corner that we visit now and again, but that Christ has brought us from darkness to light, from death to life.

And we rejoice in Him and we rejoice in His message, we rejoice that He has come. With all the authority He has and all the truth that He possesses, He's come to offer life, life to the full, life that transforms us here so that even though outwardly we might feel that we are fading way inwardly, we are being renewed and also eternal life, life beyond this life, life beyond the grave, life in heaven with Him.
And we pray and ask that there would be a working in people's conscience today here and throughout our beloved city, throughout our western world and we rejoice and give thanks for the gospel progressing so much in so many different places, even though sometimes we get discouraged here, we read of wonderful outpouring of your spirit in Asia, particularly in China and we pray and ask that you would bless the gospel there, but also hear that as we are in many ways spiritually our darkest hours when it might seem that the thief has got his way, that Lord the destruction and the chaos and the selfishness of his way will be exposed and that life will be embraced through repentance and faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.
The Lord turn us from the sin that so easily destroys us and deceives us and is sweet in the mouth but gravel in our stomach and help us to find our satisfaction in Christ.
For we ask these things in His precious name. Amen.

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