

The Pie of Life

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[0 : 00] As we turn to God's word, let's pray together for a moment. Father, as we turn to your word, we just long to hear your voice. We pray that you'd speak to each one of us and lead us in your ways.

Today I'd like us to turn back together to the passage which Derek read for us in John chapter 10. We can read again verses 9 and 10. Jesus said, I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. For many of us today, perhaps more than ever, we are conscious of how precious, beautiful and fragile life is.

We are so blessed to have life. It's such a privilege. It's something that we want to hold on to and protect. And I'm sure every one of us would agree that to lose life is horrendous, but to have life is an amazing thing.

In this verse, before us, verse 10, Jesus tells us that he has come for that very reason. He has come so that people might have life.

[1 : 28] That's a remarkable statement, but it raises the question, what exactly does he mean? What does it mean to have life?

That's what I want us to think about together today. Our initial answer to that question might be to say that life is about staying alive.

In other words, it's about survival. And that, of course, is true. Survival is essential and in many ways, that's very much at the forefront of our minds just now.

That's, of course, why medical care and a healthy lifestyle is so important. But at the same time, I think we would all agree that to have life means more than just surviving.

If you imagine that one day in the future, everyone was locked in pods and connected to machines that kept our bodies alive, we would all be surviving, but we wouldn't really have much of a life.

[2 : 35] To have life means more than just being alive. So if it's not just about surviving, what does it mean to have life?

Well, maybe a good way to answer that question is to think of things that ruin life. And I want to suggest four, there's many others, I'm sure.

But we would all, I think, agree that life is ruined by poverty. All around us, we see a world that's in desperate need. And that doesn't just mean in terms of money, there's desperate needs in terms of health care, education, employment, housing.

A couple to that is the stigma and shame that people can feel when they're at that kind of lowest rung of society's ladder.

And as the work of charities like Safe Families emphasised to be in that grip of poverty is a horrible thing. And that's why their work is so important.

[3 : 40] We can all picture in our minds, I'm sure, and maybe for many of us, this is all around us, people who live in desperate poverty.

They might be surviving, but they don't have much of a life. Life is also ruined by captivity that can apply in lots of ways.

Sometimes whole countries can be held captive by oppressive rulers. And that can just as easily be true of individuals. So some people are bound by their circumstances, they have a lack of opportunity to flourish.

Others live under the threat of controlling or abusive individuals. And other people are captive in the grip of addiction.

For anyone who's held captive like that, they might be surviving, but they don't have much of a life. Life's also ruined by isolation.

[4 : 40] Of course, there's times in life when we maybe want to and enjoy being on our own, but for the vast majority of people, for the vast majority of the time to be isolated and lonely is horrible.

We've all probably felt that more over these past few weeks than maybe we've felt in a long time, but we must never forget that for many people, self-isolation is just what every day is like.

To have no friends, no family, to have no one to love and no one to love us in return is a horrible situation to be in. For someone who's isolated like that, they might be surviving, but they don't have much of a life.

So life's ruined by poverty, by captivity, by isolation. It's also ruined by despair. By that, I mean the fact that having life is not just about having physical stuff around us.

We might have all the materials that we need. We might have endless opportunities at our fingertips. We might be surrounded by other people in our lives, either in real life or on social media, and yet still we can feel totally lost.

[5 : 56] Our minds are in despair. We struggle to find meaning in the world. We're burdened by regret, and we don't know who or what to trust.

Physically, we might be surviving. In fact, physically, we might have everything, but if our minds are in despair, then we don't have much of a life.

And the seriousness of all these four things that we're highlighting here is reinforced by the fact that people whose lives are ruined in these ways can often easily come to the tragic conclusion that life is just not worth having.

So to have life is definitely more than just surviving. And to summarise this, I want us to use a wee diagram that you should be able to see on your screens.

You've maybe read the book or seen the film, *The Life of Pi*. Well, here is the Pi of Life, which I hope explains the strange sermon title that we have this week.

[7 : 10] It's got five sections, all of which summarise what we need to have life. So as we've been saying, you need health to survive, but that's just one section of the Pi.

Instead of poverty, we need provision to enjoy. Instead of captivity, we need freedom to thrive. Instead of isolation, we need a community to be part of. And instead of despair, we need truth and meaning to live for.

That's the Pi of life. And to have life is to have all five of these parts. In other words, to have life is not just to survive.

To have life is to thrive. Now, you may very well be thinking, what on earth has any of this got to do with John chapter 10?

[8 : 13] Well, what I hope we'll see is that John 10 tells us that the person who understands this better than anyone is Jesus.

Jesus knows that to have life is much more than just to survive. Jesus knows that we need every section of the Pi. In fact, Jesus' mission, the reason he has come is to give us life in all of these areas.

And he explains that by giving us a very simple picture. He said to them again, truly, truly I say to you, I am the door of the sheep.

All who came before me are thieves and robbers, but the sheep did not listen to them. I am the door. If anyone enters by me, he will be saved and will go in and out and find pasture.

Jesus gives us this beautiful image of sheep and pasture. And then in order to tell us why he has come, he draws a contrast between himself and the thief.

[9 : 24] The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.

That contrast sets before us the two great forces at work across the whole Bible. In fact, they're at work across the whole of history. The thief is ultimately pointing us to sin, to the power of darkness, to the kingdom of evil.

And that thief's goal is to steal, kill and destroy. In contrast to the thief is Jesus. He has come as the light of the world.

He's come as the king of God's kingdom. His goal is to give us life. And these contrasting goals, the goal that the thief has and the goal that Jesus has, are clearly seen in each section of our pie.

And I want us to look at that in turn together. So our first section of the pie is that we need health to survive.

[10:37] In Jesus's image, the thief doesn't just come to steal. He comes to kill and destroy. In other words, at the most basic level, the thief's objective is the non-survival of the sheep.

And that's reminding us that sin has one great aim. Death. When the devil persuaded Adam and Eve to sin, that work of killing and destroying humanity began.

And for every human, the life that we now have is a life that's gradually dying. We see the reality of that all around us. We see it in the weakness and frailty of our own health.

And in the face of that, we do everything that we can to survive. And all around us today, we see people just desperate to make sure that they survive.

And rightly so. But one thing we know is that the day will come when we won't survive. Whether it's through conflict, through disease, through inequality, or through neglect, the thief will find a way to kill and destroy by stealing the health that we need to survive.

[12:03] Now, this issue is so universal that we've kind of become resigned to it. And it seems just inevitable.

But we must never, ever forget that one of the most fundamental truths of the Bible is that humans are not meant to die.

That might sound astonishing, but it is absolutely true. God did not create humans to die. He created them to live.

Death, therefore, is not natural. Death is an intrusion. Death is an enemy. Death is not what God intends for us.

And today's secular culture all around us would think, Thomas, that's nonsense. Death's just part of the big machine that the universe is that we are all part of.

[13:09] But the Bible tells us that that's not true. And in fact, my heart tells me that that is not true as well. Because when someone dies, it absolutely does not feel right.

It feels utterly wrong. And the Bible explains that feeling. Death feels wrong because it is wrong.

And in contrast to that, Jesus has come so that we might have life. In verse nine, he says that anyone who comes to him will be saved.

Now, at a very basic level, that word to be saved, to save, means to have health to survive. In Greek, the word for health and salvation is the same word.

In Gaelic, it's the same word for both concepts, salvation and health. It's reminding us that in a world where no one can survive on their own, Jesus has come to restore us to the health that God always intended us to have.

[14:26] Jesus has come to give us life. The second piece of our pie is that we need provision to enjoy.

Jesus uses a particular word to describe the provision that he has come to give us. That word is pasture.

Now, I think pasture is one of my favorite words. I love the countryside, I love grass, I love the color of grass, I love the feel of grass, I love the smell of grass.

And pasture is just a beautiful word because it conveys the idea of a sheep having a brilliant place to live with everything that they need provided.

As humans, God has given us a pasture. It's called planet earth and it is absolutely amazing. The world around us is stunning, an amazing place to live.

[15:32] And in it, God has provided for all of our needs. It's beautiful, it's majestic, it's a wonderful pasture to be in.

But the thief wants to destroy it. And sin has brought a curse into the world that now causes the creation to groan.

Now there is hostility, brutality and danger in the natural world. And on top of that, we humans, we are wrecking our own pasture. And the environmental damage that we see around us is all part of the fact that sin has wrecked the pasture that God created for us.

And again, it's not just the Bible that tells us that that's wrong. In our hearts, we know that that kind of damage and abuse of the environment is wrong.

The thief wants to destroy our pasture. But Jesus has come so that we might have life. The world around us has been made for us by God.

[16:40] And a key part of Jesus' work as saviour is not just to restore us humans. It's to restore the world as our pasture. And his promise is that there will be our new heavens and our new earth where righteousness dwells.

That means that heaven is not going to be this kind of floaty sort of experience in clouds where we just sort of drift around in vagueness.

The new creation will be a renewed universe, a new heavens and new earth, a perfect pasture provided for you.

And if you want to know what that's going to be like, the best place to get a glimpse of it is to read Genesis 1 and 2 and to read about the Garden of Eden.

That's where we get a glimpse of what God wants our pasture to be like. The only difference is that the new creation will be even better.

[17:46] All the blessings of that pasture, all the provision that God makes is for you to enjoy forever.

The third piece in the pie of life is freedom to thrive. And that freedom that Jesus wants us to have is described in a beautiful phrase in verse 9.

Anyone who enters through Jesus will go in and out. I think that's an amazing description of freedom. The sheep in this pasture are able to go out and come in, explore and return, and they're safe and free to do so.

And again, that's the opposite of the thief. The thief wants to steal our freedom. And one of the most deceiving things about sin is that again and again, it promises freedom only to bring us into captivity.

That's what happened to Adam and Eve. They were promised the freedom of being like God only to fall into a horrible captivity. And the same thing happens to us.

[19:05] On the one hand, our own sinful hearts can trap us. So sin promises us comfort through drinking. It promises us a thrill through sexual sin.

It promises us wealth through gambling, admiration through our status, security through having more stuff, self-worth through attention from others. But all of these things just leave us enslaved by the constant need to go back for more.

And then on the other hand, our freedom and our opportunities can be taken away by the selfish actions of others. And the inequality that we see in the world around us means that so many basic freedoms have been stolen from people.

And again, it's not just the Bible that says that that's wrong. Your heart will say the same thing. Jesus stands in amazing contrast to this.

He has come to give you life. He wants you to go out and to come in and make the most of every opportunity that his pasture gives you.

[20:18] That means Jesus wants you to learn and explore and achieve and discover and make and do and work and have a brilliant time doing it. That's why laughter and music and sport and gardening and hill walking and eating and reading and learning are all the things that Jesus wants you and me to do.

But the amazing thing about the gospel is that Jesus isn't saying, do these things just now while you can.

He's saying in the new creation, you can do these things forever. Jesus wants to give us freedom to thrive.

The fourth part of the pie is a community to be part of. At the heart of this whole image that Jesus is presenting before us is the image of a flock.

It's a great reminder that the life that Jesus wants to give us is not individualistic or solitary. It's life that is part of a community.

[21:30] The thief wants to destroy that. And sin has caused havoc in the relationships between humans throughout the whole of our history.

If you go back to the beginning of the Bible and read the aftermath of Adam and Eve's sin, read Genesis 4, 5 and 6, the great emphasis is that sin has brought a horrible hostility between humans. And we know that that's true. We see it everywhere and we know in our hearts that it's wrong.

Jesus has come to give us life and that life is shared with others as part of a community.

That's why the Christian life should never be a solitary one. That's why when we come to faith in Jesus, we become part of his church, a worldwide community of people who are all brothers and

sisters.

It's a great reminder that the life that Jesus gives is a life of amazing togetherness. Death brings horrible separation.

[22 : 42] And there are so many people just now suffering the agony of separation. The life that Jesus gives is a life of togetherness and that life is stronger even than death.

For the Christian, we're part of an amazing community here on earth, but we can also look forward to the day when we will be together forever, when Jesus takes us home.

He wants us in his community together. And then the last part of the pie is that we need truth and meaning in our lives.

And the final thing that I want to notice from the image is that as well as being together, as well as going in and out and finding pasture, the sheep in Jesus's image also listen.

The sheep hear his voice. You can see that there in verses three, four, and then in contrast in verse eight, the sheep do not listen to those who are thieves.

[24 : 01] And the key point is that the voice of Jesus is a voice that speaks the truth. That's why the sheep follow him. They trust him. What he says is reliable. It gives them direction, truth, and meaning in their lives.

And I suppose if you think about it, I don't think it's actually possible to live life without listening to a voice.

We might choose what voice that's going to be, whether it's ourselves or other people or a leader or an ideology or a religion. We can choose who we want to listen to, but we cannot escape the fact that we are listening to something or someone.

The thief wants you to listen to him, but he does that because he wants to destroy you. He wants to lead you down a path of destruction.

Now, that might be by distracting you. It might be by deceiving you, or it might be by tormenting you to despair. The thief has a thousand ways of leading people the wrong way. Jesus wants the opposite. He wants to tell you the truth.

[25 : 22] He wants to give you hope. He wants to lead you home. And the disciple Peter recognized this beautifully.

After Jesus had been teaching, we read that many of his disciples turned back and no longer walked with him. So Jesus said to the twelve, do you want to go away as well? Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go?

You have the words of eternal life. So looking at the pie of life, we see two things.

We see the work of the thief in the reality of the broken world around us. But we also see the hope of the gospel. We see all that Jesus wants us to have.

And the world that's under the grip of the thief is desperately trying to survive. It's destroying its own pasture. It's imprisoning people and denying them freedom.

[26 : 35] It's hostile and aggressive and cruel. And it's full of lies and emptiness. The life that Jesus wants you to have is alive and healthy.

It's enjoying all the beauty of the pasture. It's thriving in the freedom that God gives. It's part of a community where we love each other and love being together. And it's founded on the unchanging truth of all that God says.

And in the midst of all that's going on in the world just now, John 10 is reminding us that Jesus has come to give us a life that is amazing.

But in saying all that and with everything that's going on, it's probably very easy to think, surely it's too good to be true. It seems impossible. How can Jesus do all of that?

How can all that be real? How can it be true that we're not actually meant to die? How can it be really true that we're promised eternal life in God's amazing pasture?

[27 : 46] How can we possibly really believe all of this? Well, I think that there's only one way that we could prove all of this to be true.

There's only one way that Jesus can show that he really can give life in this way. There's only one way that Jesus can prove that he has destroyed the power of death and that he has defeated this thief.

There's only one way he could do it. And that one way would be if Jesus himself had risen from the dead.

And the amazing thing about the Gospel is that that is exactly what he did. And that's why Christianity stands or falls on the truth of the resurrection.

If Jesus is not risen, then our faith is in vain. But if Jesus is risen, then you can have hope and joy and peace because he has come so that you might have life too.

[29 : 05] That's why Christianity is the best news that the world has ever heard. The other day I was watching the news and I saw a clip on the BBC News website from Nicola Sturgeon's daily briefing.

And in the briefing she was being questioned about all the restrictions that they've put on society. And the reporter said, you know, are they not a bit draconian and a bit heavy in terms of the restrictions?

And Nicola defended the actions of the government and rightly so. And she said something fascinating. She said, what we can't do is bring people back to life.

And that's true. That's why our situation is so serious. But I wish that Jesus could have been at that press briefing because he could have said, that's exactly what I have come to do.

And that is exactly what Christianity is all about. Jesus has come so that you might have life. He's come so that you might be safe forever. He's come so that you'd have all that you need.

[30 : 24] He's come so that you can be free to thrive and enjoy God's amazing creation. He's come to bring you and be part of an amazing loving community. And he's come to give you purpose and peace and meaning forever.

Jesus wants you to have all of that. In fact, as we see at the very end of verse 10, he wants you to have all of that in abundance.

And that's why everything that we have said today has been a massive understatement. All the goodness and blessing and joy of what God is promising us is not just life.

It's life in abundance. And the absolutely incredible thing is that Jesus laid down his own life to make it happen.

He's the shepherd that lays down his life for the sheep. Jesus died so that you might have life.

[31 : 44] And that life gives you and me hope and security and peace and certainty, no matter what might happen today or tomorrow in the rest of our lives.

God is promising us amazing life. And he wants to pour out his blessings upon us in abundance.

And when I say all that, I really hope that you are thinking, how do I get into this? Well, Jesus gives you the answer.

He says, I am the door. And all you have to do to enter that door is trust him, pray to him and say, Lord Jesus, please, may I have life.

Amen. Let's pray. Lord Jesus, we thank you so much for everything that you have done for us.

[32 : 57] Thank you that you are the door and you are the one through whom we can find life.

Thank you so much that you came to give us life. Help us all to see anew today, maybe even for the first time, what the gospel is all about and the fact that you've promised to give us life that is stronger than any virus, stronger than any circumstances, stronger even than death.

And in your mercy, oh God, may we all find that life. Amen.