

Truth for Today

The Bible teaching radio programme

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How can God use me in the world today: A fulfilled life

Introduction

Good morning. Our talk this morning, "A fulfilled life", is the second in our series on "How can God use me in the world today?" A fulfilled life is not necessarily dependent upon being fully busy and active every moment of the day. Nor does it require unlimited wealth to supply every need. A fulfilled life is better described as a contented life, a satisfied life or indeed a happy life.

My wife and I feel very satisfied when we arrive at the end of summer and we have filled a freezer with a variety of soft fruits from our garden. However, the amount of work to achieve a freezer full of soft fruit could not be described as happy. Picking and processing the fruit is not a pleasant activity; it is laborious and messy. Being satisfied in this way is relatively short lived. The whole process is repeated the following year and thereafter annually, as long as we want soft fruit. No doubt there will come a time when we decide that the effort outweighs the benefit and the fruit bushes will be up rooted and replaced with grass! We did this a few years ago with our vegetable patch. The back breaking toil and a glut of vegetables was replaced with the purchase of sensible quantities from local shops!

The scriptures that I will be considering this morning will show how a lasting fulfilled life can be achieved. The scriptures are from the Lord's last conversation with His disciples as He journeys from celebrating the Passover to the Mount of Olives where He is betrayed by Judas Iscariot. John 13-16 cover the whole conversation before the Lord's amazing prayer in John 17. Before considering the detail of the two scriptures, I think it might be of interest to show that early Christians had the assurance of a fulfilled life. John the Gospel writer, who was probably the last surviving Apostle, outlived his fellow Apostles who met brutal deaths. But this did not turn John or the other Apostles away from living a fulfilled Christian life and proclaiming the Word of God.

James is the first Apostle who is recorded as being killed with the sword by Herod in Acts 12:2. Prior to James, Stephen was stoned to death by the Jews, Acts 7:59. The account of Stephen's faithful life is given in Acts 6:5-7:60. These early events of martyrdom did not dissuade the early Christians. In Foxe's book "*Christian Martyrs of the World*" we read of the terrible atrocities against the Apostles and early Christians. This only seemed to increase their devotion to live a fulfilled life for Christ. Only the Apostle John died in his old age rather than being killed. John was quite elderly when he wrote his Gospel but his account, inspired of God, is a clear declaration that Jesus is the Son of God, John 20:31. So the horrendous deaths of fellow believers did not in any way deter John. It was not just in the first century that Christians were martyred; it has continued ever since, up to our present time and rarely does it reach headline news. This emphasises the importance of reaching out with the Gospel to those who are heading for a lost eternity and eternal judgment.

Now let us look at two scriptures from John 15 and 16 under the following headings:

1. A Fulfilled Life - Love and Obedience
2. A Fulfilled Life - Freedom to Ask

1. A Fulfilled Life - Love and Obedience

Let us read from John 15:9-17, "*As the Father hath loved me, so have I loved you: continue ye in my love. If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love; even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. These things have I spoken unto you, that my joy might remain in you, and that **your joy might be full**. This is my commandment, That ye love one another, as I have loved you. Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends. Ye are my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants; for the servant knoweth not what his lord doeth: but I have called you friends; for all things that I have heard of my Father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me, but I have chosen you, and ordained you, that ye should go and bring forth fruit, and that your fruit should remain: that whatsoever ye shall ask of the Father in my name, he may give it you. These things I command you, that ye love one another.*"

In John 15:9 we have a remarkable statement by the Lord Jesus. The love of the Lord Jesus to those who believed on Him is the same as the love that the Father has for His beloved Son. The Lord completes the statement by saying, continue or stay in my love. Remaining in the conscious enjoyment of divine love goes hand in hand with obedience. The opposite of obedience is rebellion. A rebel would not be happy in staying close to the Lord. Therefore, John 15:10 is a word of encouragement from the Lord's own lips, "*keep my commandments*". We have the Lord as the prime example of obedience and it is His desire that we should be just the same.

What was the Lord's intention? "*That my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full*" (John 15:11). The joy that the Lord Jesus had in being obedient to the Father, He wanted the disciples and us to experience that same joy permanently. In so doing our joy would be full. This was the Lord's intention, "*that your joy might be full*". We can see the clear dependence on obedience. It raises the question, How much do I love the Lord Jesus? Am I ready to be fully committed to Him? The alternative is a half hearted, fair weather Christian. The Lord Jesus never said that being a believer would be easy. John 16:33 states that we will have tribulation in this world. Our fulfilled life is a life full of joy which is intended never to diminish in any way no matter what the world throws our way. No one suffered like the Lord Jesus. Isaiah 53:3 states prophetically that He was the "*Man of Sorrows*". But our Lord Jesus **was not a sad man**, conversely He **was full of joy**.

The next outcome of this joyful life where divine love is the normal daily experience is expressed by the Lord's next command to us. "*That ye love one another, as I have loved you*" (John 15:12). The Lord now gives a specific commandment. What better way to show our love for the Lord by expressing that divine love towards other believers? This love is not dependent upon a response. It is a love that is determined by the mind. It is a love that seeks the best for others regardless of the cost. I say this in the light of John 15:13, "*No one has greater love than this, that one should lay down his life for his friends*" (JN Darby Translation). But there are many other ways of demonstrating our love to believers though we might not be called upon to give our life for others. Do we say unkind things about others, regardless of whether they are true or not? Do we look out for ways to be helpful or are we so busy with things that we do not notice fellow believers in our local fellowship? Are we keen to support missionary endeavours thousands of miles away from home but neglect the believer in the next street? Let us be challenged as to the Lord's commandment, "*that ye love one another*". Love is not just saying nice things about each other; love must involve acts of kindness.

John 15:12b tells us how much we should love one another, "***as I have loved you***". To get the measure of the Lord's love we only need to consider the cross.

In John 15:14 the Lord says we are His friends. We often like to dwell on that statement. It gives great comfort. Christians are the friends of the Lord Jesus. We do not find the Lord ever saying that He is our friend. I know that we sometimes sing that well known hymn, "What a friend we have in Jesus". Maybe the Lord Jesus did not have to say it as it is self evident because of all that He has done! But John 15:14 goes on to say "*if ye do whatsoever I command you*". Earlier we considered the necessity of being obedient to stay in the enjoyment of the Lord's love. Now obedience is linked to friendship, "*ye are my friends, if...*" It often seems to be in this world that people like the benefits but not the responsibilities that go with them. It is a great thing to be classed as a friend, especially of the Lord Jesus, which is why John 15:15 is so precious. The Lord could have kept us in the relationship to Himself as servants and that would have been marvellous. But no, the Lord has drawn Christians even closer, His friends! If we had time to go into other New Testament scriptures, even greater blessings would be seen, but we do not have the time to do so this morning.

John 15:16 reminds us that the Lord is sovereign; we have been brought to Him. Primarily the Lord was speaking to the disciples but by extension it is true in relation to all believers. This in no way alters people's responsibility in responding positively to the message of salvation. If we read the early chapters of Romans, we find that God has His message to all people and no one has any excuse. John 15:16 also mentions about being fruitful. This takes us back to the beginning of the chapter when the Lord referred to Himself as the true vine and believers are the branches to bear fruit (John 15:1-8). So what is the fruit that the branches bear? It is to show the features of Christ to an unbelieving world. It is not primarily good works that we are expected to do. Galatians 5:22-23 lists the fruit of the Spirit which should be seen in a Christian. There are nine features of that Fruit starting with love and ending with temperance or self control. It is worth taking time after this broadcast to look up the Fruit of the Spirit.

Finally as we end with John 15:17, the Lord goes back to His previously stated command, "*that ye love one another*". If the Lord thought it important to repeat this command then it is important for us to think very seriously as to how we respond to it. A fulfilled life can only be true if we are fully in tune with our Lord and Saviour.

2. A Fulfilled Life - Freedom to Ask

Let us read from John 16:23-24, *“And in that day ye shall ask me nothing. Verily, verily, I say unto you, whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full.”*

In the John 16:1-22 the Lord Jesus speaks of difficulties to come for believers, of the coming of the Spirit of God, of the Spirit's work in the world and of the guiding support and help for the Lord's followers. Also, the Lord speaks of His going away and this was by way of the cross and the grave. But in a few days their sorrow would be turned to joy at the Lord's resurrection and ascension into glory. It is from this point that the Lord Jesus now leads them into the secret of the freedom to ask the Father by prayer in the Lord's own name. While the Lord Jesus was in this world the disciples communicated with Him face to face. But once the Lord is absent, then a new channel of communication is opened to them. The face to face is replaced by believing prayer to the Father whom they cannot see. No other religion offers a direct link of communication to the living God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. Because of faith in the work of Christ at the cross, His Father is our Father as we have been brought into a family relationship with God. As the Lord Jesus said on the first resurrection morning, *“I ascend unto my Father, and your Father; and to my God, and your God”, John 20:17.*

John 16:23 at first reading seems to be a blank cheque where we can ask for anything that we like. But we need to recognise the importance of the words, *“In My name”*. What does it mean, *“In My name”*? It does not simply refer to finishing every prayer with a few words such as - *“this we ask in Your name Lord Jesus, Amen”*, although there is nothing wrong in closing a prayer in this way. When we think about the Lord's name as mentioned in John 16:23, it has to do with such things as authority, what the Lord Jesus would want and what God the Father wants. If we look at Acts 16:18, we see Paul commanding in the Lord's name and liberating a person who was demon possessed. Liberating people from demons was done by the Lord when He walked the streets of Palestine. Now you might say that Paul was not praying. Well, we normally associate *“asking”* with *“praying”* as we conventionally know it. But it does not need to be. Peter when he was sinking in the water did not have time to pray extensively, he simply shouted out, *“Lord, save me”*, Matthew 14:30. We must exercise the authority of the Lord's name with great care. It is not for selfish requirements. What does Jesus want when we ask? When the Lord was here He did those things that pleased the Father. What does the Father want? On the mount of transfiguration the Father said *“This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye Him”*, Matthew 17:5. The Father's desire is that the world might listen to His Son, as we need to. Therefore, we must conclude that prayer or asking is a serious matter and not something to be rushed. There are different kinds of prayer, personal, family, church fellowship and so forth. In our prayers we will cover our own issues, intercession for others and worship, each appropriate to the occasion.

The last phrase in John 16:23 is, *“He [the Father] will give it you”*. Why is it that our prayers are not always answered? Or it appears that way? No doubt there are a number of reasons why this may be so, such as:

- We ask wrongly.
- It is not the right time so far as the Father is concerned for the answer to come.
- The answer comes in a different way to what we thought.
- We are being encouraged to persist in prayer.

In John 16:24 the Lord repeats what has just been stated in John 16:23 but adds *“that your joy may be full”*. Full here means filled full, no room for any more! So we have no doubt at the Father's willingness to give. The Lord Jesus wants us to receive. There is a full joy to be experienced with this asking and receiving. If there is a lack of joy then the difficulty must be with *“me”*. There are two interesting verses written by John in his first epistle. Let us read these.

1 John 3:22, *“And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.”* 1 John 5:14, *“And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us.”*

The same thoughts are being taught by John, consistent with the Lord's own words to His disciples but John brings in three important points that are conditional to receiving answers. The first is *“because we keep His commandments”* (1 John 3:24). The second is *“do those things that are pleasing in His sight”* (1 John 5:22). Last, *“according to His will”*. (1 John 5:14)

Earlier this morning we linked love and obedience, keeping the Lord's commandments. This is living a godly life and following the instructions as to how we should live. It is not how I think I should live or how other people think I should live but what God has commanded in the Scriptures, especially the New Testament.

Next we find that it is about what we do. Doing those things that please God. It is not selfish actions. It is demonstrating the fruit of the Spirit in what we do, as mentioned earlier.

Last, *according to His will*. How do we know the will of God? The following scriptures may help us to understand.

Romans 12:2, "*be not conformed to this world*". We are not to be moulded into the ways and thinking of the world. If we are, then we will become morally bankrupt and useless to God.

Ephesians 6:6, "*Not with eye service, as men pleasers; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart*." What are our motives in the work place? Get as much for as little effort as possible?

1 Thessalonians 4:3, "*For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication*". The will of God teaches sexual purity for a Christian.

1 Peter 3:17, "*For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing*". You might suffer for being a Christian even though you have done nothing wrong, but this is still the will of God.

Now, in closing, we can summarise what a **fulfilled life** is all about. It is living the Christian life each day knowing that God the Father finds pleasure in a life that displays those qualities and features that were perfectly seen in His Son, the Lord Jesus, when here in this world. It involves keeping the commandments of the Lord Jesus, doing those things that please the Father and living in the will of God. Then it brings the wonderful freedom to approach the Father in Jesus' name knowing that when we ask, the Father hears us, and the right answer to our requests will come at just the right time. I close with a verse from a poem by Anna Olander.

*If I gained the world but lost the Saviour!
Would my gain be worth the life long strife?
Are all earthly pleasures worth comparing?
For a moment with a Christ filled life!*

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