

THE ABUNDANT LIFE

John 10:10 (NIV), “The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full.”

(KJV), “The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.”

The thief, of course is Satan. His evil purpose is contrasted with the coming of Jesus for His blessed purpose. Satan has one goal—to keep people out of heaven; to keep them from becoming Christians.

Satan does not give life. He provides all kinds of distractions, from false religions to enticing things in the world. He tries to convince that his way is the best way.” Contrast that with why Jesus came.

Jesus said, “I have come that they might have life.” He is saying, “I came from heaven into this world; I gave up the glories of heaven for one purpose—to give you life.” Jesus is the entrance to life, to real, life.

The latter part of verse 10, “...that they may have life, and have it to the full,” or as KJV says, “more abundantly.” This is a loved promise for many Christians. Is Jesus talking about heaven?

Yes, the abundant eternal life awaits us in heaven. Yet the joys that await us in heaven cannot exhaust the richness of the life Christ gives to every believer. He also gives abundant life now.

His presence makes a difference! That great missionary, Hudson Taylor, once said, “If your father and mother, your sister and brother, if the very cat and dog in the house are not happier for your being Christian, it is a question whether you really are.”

He has hit upon a marvelous truth. Jesus has given us abundant life now. His presence makes a difference in our relationships. I've mentioned to you my Grandma Neifert. She died at age 86.

Whenever I read this verse I get a little bit nostalgic about her. She outlived two husbands. I never knew my grandfather who the family says I resemble. He was killed one evening when his truck ran into a train. My mother was five years old.

At his death grandma was left destitute with five children. Her second husband was much older than her and treated her terribly. Two other children were from her second husband.

When the children were young they lived several miles out of town at what they called the ranch, but really it was just some old buildings, a house and some sheds.

With the young children Grandma couldn't leave them to go to town for a job. There was no welfare, or day-care centers, which she couldn't have afforded anyway.

So she raised chickens and had a little garden. The older boys would collect firewood from the mountainsides around the house.

On weekends they would hitch the horse to the wagon, load the firewood, and the chicken eggs collected that week, and all the children and grandma would go to town, and, door-to-door, would try to sell eggs and firewood in order to make a living.

On school days the children had to walk miles, no matter the weather, to a one-room school house. It was downhill going, but uphill all the way back home.

Grandma did whatever it took to make sure her kids received an education. But the little one-room school house only went through the eighth grade.

In order for my mother to go to high school she got a room in town and did the ironing and house cleaning to pay for her room and board while she went to school.

Grandma later got a job washing dishes in town and she and her second husband were able to buy a little log cabin on the edge of town.

I don't think I mentioned that her second husband was her father-in-law. We called him granddad. She didn't marry him out of love, but out of desperation for food and clothing and shelter for her children.

He was unkind—downright mean. He mistreated her, the children, and later the grandchildren. I remember him very well, but not with any fondness.

He died of old age after all the children were grown. Two of her seven children died during her life-time. One was shot in a hunting accident and the other died of cancer.

My aunts Betty and Helen were born to grandma and granddad. This is where I come in. I was born when they were 10 and 7. Because both my mom and dad worked, Grandma helped raise me.

In fact, the majority of my young childhood was spent under her loving care while trying to avoid granddad. She continued to raise chickens and well I remember butchering days.

The smell of dunking those dead chickens in boiling water and of singing the quill feathers will forever be with me. She sold those fryers to make a living.

She cultivated a beautiful yard full of flowers and trees and grass. It was her pride and joy. She loved God's great outdoors, and loved to go up into the mountains with us jeeping and picnics.

She was still living in that cabin after Luaine and I were married and moved back to Salida to open our business. Our store was about ½ mile from her home and I spent many evenings doing "honey-do's" for her.

She fell and broke her knee which slowed her a bit. But using her walker and a milk crate she would lower herself unto her bottom and scootch around tending her beautiful yard.

Later, after suffering a broken hip, she had to move into a nursing home. This was difficult because her home was just a half-block away, and she could almost see her yard.

One of the reasons I told you that story is because this is where I come from. She helped mold me and instill in me my values.

But I want you to see something else. Grandma had a tough life. She never, in her entire life, had anything or much of the things our world seems to think are important. But she had an abundant life.

She had an unshakeable faith in God. Though she acknowledged the hard, tough times, she never complained.

The memories that she shared were good. She lived a full and useful life. She raised a good family and kept them together. Her children raised good families, and their children are continuing on.

At the drop of a hat she would talk about her Lord and how His presence had sustained her during the tough times, and all the blessings He had given to her . . . her precious children and grandchildren . . . her home, her husbands.

It would have been so easy for her to have been an embittered old woman, to let life rob her of joy. And no one would have blamed her.

We would have understood. But she didn't let life rob her joy. She claimed the promise of John 10:10, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full."

Grandma claimed the promises of her Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ and lived live to its fullest.

I want you to see two truths that I understand about what it means to have the abundant life as promised by Jesus.

I've reached these conclusions as I think about the Christian life and the many roads all of us are on, and as I think about my grandmother's life, and my parents, and now mine and my family.

1. Not all God's blessings await us in heaven.

1 Cor. 2:9 (NIV), "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love Him."

I don't know what heaven will be like. Paul is telling us that we cannot even imagine it because it is so wonderful. But I do know His creation is magnificent.

I've cut wheat from Oklahoma into the Dakotas . . . I've lived and worked in the Great Plains. They're beautiful! You heard me last week talk about the mountains of Colorado . . . they are majestic and awe-inspiring.

I've been to both coasts and beyond. I've traveled by car as far south as Mexico City. I've been to China, Japan, Singapore, the Philippines and Canada. Everywhere there is beauty. God's handiwork is everywhere.

Grandma taught me to appreciate the surprises of God, those ordinary blessings that we take for granted. The oranges and reds of the sunsets we so often enjoy here in New Mexico.

The gentle warmth of sunlight on a cold winter day . . . The splash of a raindrop that we seldom hear in this part of the country. . . . The international language of music which is able tame the restlessness within us (gathered around Grandma's piano).

The gift my family . . . good family brings unexpected strength and support during the hard times. When grandma's family got together, you can imagine the commotion and pandemonium . . . of course, at her little house where there wasn't any room.

We don't get together as often since she is gone. Isn't that sad? Luaine comes from a loving, caring family also . . . and through the years we have tried to instill the strength of family into our children.

My wife and children are some of those special blessings that make life full and abundant. God has given us innumerable blessings.

We keep stumbling upon them in the most unexpected places and at the most unanticipated moments. Slow down; take time to enjoy the blessings of God to you. Not all God's blessings are in heaven.

2. God made both the summer and the winter.

Psalm 74:17b (NIV, "You made both summer and winter.")

By most standards, my Grandmother had an incredibly hard life. But here's the thing—all of us experience trials in life.

We all go through times of summer and winter. The lesson I learned from her is that God is gracious when the sun shines and just as gracious when the wind is cold and sharp.

Out of December God will fashion June. Out of our trials, which sometimes are almost unbearable, He brings victory. In the winters of life God is preparing us for summer.

Jesus said, "I have come that you might have life, and might have it more abundantly"(KJV). Out of the winter of the cross He fashioned the crown.

This message was close and dear to grandma's heart. And we cannot begin to imagine the truly abundant life she is living in the presence of Jesus now. Because all that is best in this world for Christians comes from the darkness of the Cross.

Application:

Jesus gives us life—eternal life with our eternal Christian family—and abundant life in His beautiful creation with family and friends here. Do not take His blessings for granted. Be thankful and enjoy all that He provides.