

## Source of Life's Fullness • John 1:15-17

At the very longest, life is brief and there is not a whole lot that we can do to make it longer. But, while we don't have too much to say about how long we live, we can do something about the fullness of the life that we do have. I, for one, would far rather have a short life that has been full than a long life that has been empty. The fullness of life is what makes it good and positive and happy. And that's what God wants for us, too.

When God became man in the person of Jesus Christ he made it possible for our lives to be filled to the brim with the very best. In fact, I can comfortably say that if your life is full and good and positive it is because of Jesus Christ. On the other hand, if your life isn't full then this message is especially for you. So listen carefully and take advantage of the full life that is available to you through Jesus Christ.

In John 1:15-17 we have a triple description of the fullness of life in Jesus Christ and how it becomes available and possible. The first of that three-part description in verse 15 tells us about life with the right rank. There it says, "*John (that is John the Baptist) testifies concerning him (Jesus). He cries out, saying, 'This was he of whom I said, 'He who comes after me has surpassed me because he was before me.'*"

John clearly recognized the rank of Jesus. In ancient days in the Middle East ranking in society was important. Of course, ranking in our society is important, as well. My guess is that most of us know how we rank in comparison with other people in our neighborhood, at school or at work. And, if it's true for us, it was even more apparent in the first century in Palestine.

John's society was very structured with lots of rules of rank. By society's rules John was way ahead of Jesus. For one thing, he was older than

Jesus. Not by much, just six months, but even that had some weight in a society that gave a great deal of emphasis to seniority. But far more important than that little difference in age was the fact that John had a head start on Jesus in his public ministry. John's public ministry was well established long before Jesus showed up. John had baptized a multitude of people. John was acknowledged as a prophet. Friends and enemies alike recognized John as a prophet sent from God.

By contrast, Jesus was an unknown. His biggest bid to fame was that he was the cousin of John the Baptist. Nobody knew him. Nobody cared. (If The Jerusalem Post had conducted a Gallup Poll it would have showed a 90% positive attitude toward John and 0% name recognition for Jesus!)

Maybe society ranked Jesus on the bottom, but John ranked him on the top! John the Baptist did not care what society said about ranking. In fact, he wasn't influenced at all, even by his disciples who were concerned that John ought to have a higher ranking than Jesus. John might have said, "Jesus comes after me in age, in public ministry experience and in popular recognition. But get this straight . . . Jesus was first!" John knew

that Jesus existed forever before John was born, that Jesus started his public ministry with the creation of the world, that Jesus was the ruler of the people whether they recognized him or not. John knew without a doubt that Jesus was Number One.

No matter how others ranked Jesus, in the mind of John the Baptizer Jesus was first. John lived the

pre-eminence of Jesus. John was not influenced by what other people thought. John shouted out his loyalty and allegiance to Jesus Christ. John bore witness. His behavior and words showed clearly that John knew he was sub-ordinate to

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Jesus Christ. In other words, if you look at John and listen to John if will quickly come through loud and clear that Jesus Christ is unquestionably Lord of John's life.

So, how do you rank Jesus Christ in your life? That is the single most important question you will ever answer. No matter how old you are or how much experience you have or what other people think about you . . . how do you rank yourself in relationship to Jesus Christ?

If Jesus Christ is ranked number one in your life it shows as clearly as it did in the life and the words of John the Baptist. It's not a secret you can keep. It shows in your speech and your actions. Your life is full and satisfied to the brim!

But, if you rank Jesus anywhere else but number one in your life, you have a problem. Your life is not full or satisfied or good or joyous. It shows up in the way you talk and the way you act and the way you look. It shows up in selfishness, a critical spirit, pride, materialism, unhappiness, confused priorities, foul language. It shows!

One Christmas when our children were little we took them to see a large animated display at a downtown department store. The line was very long but it was well-worth the wait. The magnificent displays captured the children's imagination. I liked it myself. But I noticed that our 5-year old son was looking intently at a very real-looking stuffed owl that appeared to be looking back at him. As I quietly walked behind him I heard our son finally say to that owl, "Do you have a staring problem?"

After a long hard look at your life, maybe you need to ask yourself the obvious question: "Do you have a ranking problem?" Is Jesus Christ other than Number One in your life? Is he not absolute Lord of your life? Do you not live for him and him alone?

Make a decision to allow Jesus to be your Number One Lord! Then and only then will you experience fullness of life, satisfaction, purpose, joy and contentment. What about it? Do you have a ranking problem? If so, what are you going to do about it?

Verse 16 talks about life with the right source. It says, "*From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.*" You see,

Jesus Christ is full of whatever we need in life—health, spouse, job, direction, energy, purpose, happiness, money, salvation, assurance, peace. Jesus is God! Therefore, he has whatever we need. It's true! We can spend a lifetime grumbling about what we don't have. We can spend a lifetime searching elsewhere for fullness of life. But the only right source for meeting our real needs is Jesus Christ alone!

William Barclay was a world-famous Bible commentator. He was also a newspaper columnist in the United Kingdom. Here is a paragraph he wrote about Jesus:

In Jesus there dwelt the totality of the wisdom, the power, the love of God. Just because of that Jesus is inexhaustible. A man can go to Jesus with any need and find the need supplied. A man can go to Jesus with any ideal and find that ideal realized. In Jesus the man in love with beauty will find the supreme beauty. In Jesus the man to whom life is the search for knowledge will find the supreme revelation. In Jesus the man who needs courage will find the pattern and the secret of being brave. In Jesus the man who feels he cannot cope with life will find the Master of Life and the power to live. In Jesus the man who is conscious of his sin will find the forgiveness for his sin and the strength to be good. In Jesus . . . "the spring of divine life" becomes available to men.

Do you believe that? Do you really believe it? Do you truly believe that whatever you need to make life full is to be found in the right source of Jesus Christ? It's true! Jesus Christ is the source for fullness of life and the meeting of every need.

In verse 16 we are told, "*From the fullness of his grace we have all received one blessing after another.*" Grace refers to the goodness of God. The grace of Jesus Christ is limitless. And from the fullness of that grace he just keeps on piling on one blessing after another.

It works something like this. Last week you were hit by an unkind criticism that hurt you. You needed special grace to carry that burden. God blessed you with grace for then but now you don't

need it anymore because that matter is over. Now this week you face a serious health issue and you need new grace, a new blessing, from God. So, God gives you the new grace that you need. When you were young you needed grace for youth. Now you need grace for middle age. Someday you will need grace for old age. Then, someday you will need grace for dying. God will shower you with grace upon grace upon grace . . . one blessing after another!

It is not a matter of good works. God gives us blessings out of his grace, his goodness. The grace of God is the assurance that our needs will be met.

Have you ever traveled across the “Big Sky Country” of Montana? You come over a hill and are stunned by a breathtaking horizon as far as your eye can see. It is so big and so beautiful that you can hardly take it in. You drive through a day you think you will never forget and you experience the sunset. But the next morning you arise and drive over another hill as the sun begins another day and you see another horizon that is bigger and better so that you forget the beauty of yesterday as you drink in the wonder of today’s beauty. And on and on and on it goes.

So it is with the grace of God. Every day there’s a new sunrise; every day there’s a new horizon; every day there’s a new blessing. And God’s grace is sufficient. So, don’t look to the world and don’t look to yourself and don’t look to others as the source of fulfillment in life. Look to Jesus! Accept him! Believe in him! Trust him! Count on him! Depend on him!

In verse 17 we find the third part to the description which is life with the right motive: *“For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ.”* This sentence tells about two ways of motivation in life: Life under law and life under grace. This is one of the most important lessons of Christian living.

The Old Testament law came through Moses. It was good and it was helpful but it was incomplete. It didn’t give a full revelation. The law pointed to the later coming of Jesus Christ but he

had not yet come. The law was especially effective in showing people their sinfulness and loss. The law was good in that it was preparatory, leading to Jesus Christ. That’s what the apostle Paul writes in Colossians 2:17: *“These are a shadow of the things that were to come; the reality, however, is found in Christ.”* When you read and understand God’s law and his holiness you become keenly aware of your sinfulness, weaknesses and inadequacies. You realize how desperately you need a Savior.

However, if you stick with the law, you have a very improper motive for life. That’s not just referring to the Old Testament law but a legalistic approach to life by rules and regulations. People who do that are overwhelmed by their sin. They constantly have a sense of inadequacy and weakness and failure and guilt. Then they begin to transfer it to other people. They become hostile and critical and put other people down. Their lives are empty when they should be full.

The gospel brings a complete turn around. Instead of life under law we are offered life under grace. Jesus Christ brought grace . . . the freedom to live freely under God’s goodness. And Jesus Christ brought truth . . . the true realities which were only foreshadowed and predicted under the Old Testament law. Life lived under the grace and

truth of Jesus Christ is full and good and free and joyous and much, much more.

Life under grace is far better than life under law! Humanly, we would expect that release from rules and laws would lead to

sin. This proves the greatness of the grace and truth of Jesus Christ because Jesus Christ produces happier and holier lives with grace than ever could be produced with laws. If you haven’t learned the freedom of living the Christian life under grace instead of law you really have a marvelous treat ahead! It is William Barclay again who said, “With the coming of Jesus we no longer seek to obey the law of God like slaves; we seek to answer the love of God like sons.”

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In the Rocky Mountain west, and particularly in the state of Colorado, there are many small plane crashes every year. Many times those planes and the victims aboard them have never been found because the crashes have occurred in remote mountain areas.

I remember one plane crash where the survivor lived for several weeks. During that time he eked out an existence, writing a diary in the crumpled fuselage of his single engine plane. He finally died of exposure. The next spring some hikers found the plane, the body and the diary. It was only a few hundred yards from a highway traveled all winter by thousand of motorists.

That pilot died needlessly. Help and happiness were so near and yet so far. Why? We can only guess. Maybe it was out of ignorance—he just didn't know. Maybe it was because of disbelief. Perhaps he heard the hum of truck tires or the occasional beep of a tourist's car, but he just

wouldn't believe it was true; he thought it was a hallucination. Or maybe it was a delusion. Maybe his mind told him something that was contrary to reality. Whatever it was, he was so near and yet so far from help and from happiness.

Maybe your life is being eked out in the crumpled fuselage of unfulfilled dreams. Maybe your diary is one of shattered hopes, bitter resentments or empty days. If so, listen carefully. You can have fullness of life in Jesus Christ.

Don't miss out on God's rescue. Don't miss God's very best. Don't miss God's fulfillment because of some unnecessary and tragic ignorance, disbelief or delusion. Don't be far away now that you are so near! Fullness of life is yours through Jesus Christ. Life with the right rank! Life with the right source! Life with the right motive!

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