

## 2. He Came to Bring Abundant Life

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[ 0 : 0 0 ] Well, can we turn to John's Gospel, chapter 10, once again? And particularly, let us look at verse 10. John's Gospel, chapter 10, you'll find it on page 896, and verse 10 in particular.

And in verse 10, can I ask you to look especially at the second half of the verse. So the second half of the verse begins like this.

I came that. That's a rather wonderful way for Jesus to begin a sentence, isn't it? I came for a particular purpose.

Now, as Christmas approaches, the more thoughtful people, I don't just mean Christian people, but lots of thoughtful people may ask, why did Jesus come? Of course, Christmas has become a largely secular festival.

Indeed, it may have been a largely secular festival for a very long time. And yet, thoughtful people around us might well be asking what Christmas is really about. Why did this baby, who is said to be God and man, come?

[ 1 : 1 0 ] Was it to show us how to live an authentic human life, a life of integrity and love? Or was there perhaps something more to it than that? And surely, it's good for us as well.

Many of us are, of course, Christian people. It's good that we should take time, every Christmas, to ponder again why Jesus came. And in a verse like this one, John chapter 10, verse 10, Jesus tells us, at least one of the reasons why he came.

He tells us, I came that they, that is, my followers, may have life and have it abundantly. So Jesus came on that first Christmas, 2009 years ago, and lived and taught and died and rose and ascended into heaven that his people should have not simply life, but have it abundantly.

His purpose in coming was that ordinary people, like you and me, should possess and enjoy a quality of life that he calls abundant. So let me ask, what quality of life do we hope for?

What quality of life do we look for? As a clue to this, picture yourself for a moment with toothache as you wait in the dentist's waiting room for your appointment to come along.

[ 2 : 2 8 ] Have you been there? I'm sure you have. Well, as you wait for your appointment, you pick up a glossy magazine, perhaps in the doctor's surgery, you pick up the glossy magazine and you flick through the pages of the glossy magazine.

And what do you like to look at particularly? Maybe it's a photograph of a beautiful room, a sitting room, an interior thing, a kind of ideal home sitting room with the finest furnishings and fabrics around it.

lovely curtains and armchairs, a fireplace flanked perhaps by two China Dalmatian dogs. Do you like to look at that sort of thing? Maybe it's a photograph of a lovely highland scene, a view of the Cairngorm Mountains taken on a sunny day in early June.

Maybe a shot of the mountains of Sutherland. Maybe it's a picture of a lovely Cotswold Stone 18th century house in Oxfordshire or Gloucestershire surrounded by lovely gardens.

And in front of this house there's a beautiful sleek car. And out of the car there steps a beautiful woman elegantly dressed, accompanied by a very handsome man also in lovely clothes.

[ 3 : 3 4 ] And you look at the scene and you say to yourself, I wish that was me and my wife. Isn't there something in us that longs to enjoy beautiful things and beautiful scenes?

Isn't it really a longing for heaven which has somehow been misdirected and becomes a longing for earthly beauty? There's a deep desire inside us for a life that is full and richly varied and satisfying and tranquil.

A quality of abundant life that we don't really know in the struggles of our daily existence. The reality is that there we are in the dentist's waiting room with toothache.

But our hearts long to be drinking in the atmosphere of some place of great beauty. Now isn't it lovely to hear the Lord Jesus say, I came that my people should have life and have it abundantly. What he's emphasizing here is the world to come. So much of the gospel is about what is promised for the future. He's emphasizing the life of the great future.

[ 4 : 39 ] John's gospel is all about the way to eternal life. But the reference is also to life in this world because although at one level our life in this world will always have its difficult and dark shadow, even here and now the Christian is conscious of being richly blessed.

If I were to ask you to raise a hand if you were conscious of great blessings in this life, I know that a lot of hands would be quickly raised. This applies here and now as well as in eternity.

So Jesus came to give his followers abundant life. Blessings and joys in this world amidst the tears and struggles and unadulterated blessings in the world to come.

Now if you're a student on the Cornhill training course or possibly an ex-Cornhill student, you'll be saying, come on Edward, have you forgotten something?

Context. Context. Don't take that wonderful saying in verse 10 out of its context. Well thank you brother or sister for that reminder. You're absolutely right. A Bible verse, any Bible verse has to be read in its context if we're to get a full and proper understanding of what's really going on.

[ 5 : 48 ] Mind you, it's the same with any piece of writing, isn't it? Whether you're reading Shakespeare or Enid Blyton even, you can only understand a sentence or a short excerpt if you place it carefully in its context.

The context determines what's going on. So what is going on here in the 10th chapter of John's Gospel? The short answer is that Jesus is speaking here to a hostile crowd or at least a partly hostile crowd.

He's not speaking to a group of happy admirers who are listening respectfully to his every word.

This audience here had some friends in it but many of those who were listening were enemies.

Now how do we know this? Well look at verse 7. Jesus again said to them. Well who is this them? They're mentioned, you'll see in verse 6 as well where the evangelist, John, tells us that they didn't understand what Jesus was saying to them.

So we have to look back to verse 40 in the previous chapter where we discover that it's a group of Pharisees who are in conversation with Jesus. And look at what Jesus is telling them in verse 41 of chapter 9.

[ 6 : 57 ] He's telling them that they're spiritually blind and guilty before God. Now people don't normally become your friends and admirers when you've just said that kind of thing to them, do they?

We learn even more from chapter 9 verse 39. Jesus said, for judgment I came into this world that those who do not see may see and that those who may see sorry, those who see may become blind.

So why did he come? Notice it's another saying describing why he came into this world. He came there in verse 39 to force a division between those who receive him and those who reject him.

So his coming into this world is divisive. It separates the world's population into two great divisions. On the one hand those whose eyes are being opened to see who he is and on the other hand those whose eyes are blinded to him.

Jesus never came to unite society always to divide and that's exactly what happens at the end of the Good Shepherd passage. Look at chapter 10 verse 19. There was again a division among the Jews because of these words of Jesus.

[ 8 : 10 ] Many of them said he has a demon and is insane. Why listen to him? Others said these are not the words of one who is oppressed by a demon. So this audience has a lot of bristling and hostile people in it.

Jesus speaks these lovely words about the Good Shepherd bringing abundant life and a lot of his hearers say in verse 20 he's demon possessed. He's crazy to say these things. Now once we're aware of this hostile atmosphere it helps us to see what Jesus is doing in his Good Shepherd speech of verses 1 to 18.

He is not instructing the already converted. He's tackling his opponents here and he's exposing their wicked ways. Throughout the Good Shepherd passage he is contrasting himself the Good Shepherd with thieves and robbers with sheep rustlers look at the whole of verse 10.

I've only read half of it haven't I? But look at the whole of verse 10. The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy whereas I the Good Shepherd came that my sheep might have abundant life. Jesus is never one to mince his words. In this passage he calls his opponents thieves and robbers and strangers and hired hands. He's speaking directly to some in his audience.

[ 9 : 31 ] He's also speaking to those who eventually had him nailed to a cross. That's where it led some of them. But not everybody in his audience was hostile. Verse 19 shows us that they were divided.

Yes, many dismiss him in verse 20 with contempt but others in verse 21 are curious and thoughtful. These are not the words of a man oppressed with a demon they say.

Now just imagine that you're a member of that crowd on that particular day and I'd like you to put yourself into the shoes of one of the curious ones one of the ones who is not dismissing Jesus. Now you're not yet a Christian but you're very interested in Jesus and you're there in the crowd because you want to listen to him. You sense that what he has to say is of supreme importance so your ears are pricked up and you're listening to this good shepherd sermon very eagerly.

Now what is Jesus teaching you as a person who is not quite yet a follower of his? Well, he is warning you about the thieves and robbers. He's saying don't be so naive as to think that all who claim to be religious are true and good.

[ 10 : 47 ] The fact is that there are thieves and robbers about. And in this context he's obviously referring to the Pharisees who are hardening their attitude towards him. So Jesus is saying to these interested ones these ones who are curious to hear him the potential sheep if you like he's saying become wise about these Jewish leaders.

Don't be ignorant about their real intentions towards you. They are not benevolent religious teachers. They want to steal you. They want to steal you from me. They want to possess you and dominate you and ultimately to squeeze the very life out of you.

If you allow yourselves to be gripped by the oppressive straitjacket of Pharisaic Judaism you will perish in the end. These people have no good intentions towards you.

They want to enslave you. I'm the one who can give you life if you will but come to me. So this great saying of Jesus in the second half of verse 10 has not as it were dropped out of a clear blue sky. It comes in this painful adversarial context in which Jesus is battling with his opponents. What he is saying is false religion and its advocates will destroy you but I will give you abundant life.

[ 12 : 07 ] And what is true of the Pharisaic Judaism of the first century AD will be true of any false religion. Any religion apart from the liberating gospel of Jesus enslaves people and ultimately destroys them.

Just to give one example of this some of you will know that Willie Philip and I went to Delhi in India just a few weeks ago. Now I can't claim to be deeply acquainted with Hinduism but I saw enough of the effects of Hinduism on people in India to see what a destructive and dehumanizing thing it is.

Let me give just one example of what it does to people. As you probably know in Hinduism most animals creatures are regarded as divine even rats rats have rat temples dedicated to them. But while animals are deified people especially people of lower caste are despised. Now in the city of Delhi we saw large numbers of feral dogs big mongrels heavy dogs which roam the streets sometimes in packs and because the Hindu people regard them as worthy of worship these dogs have become quite fearless.

And we had a number of occasions when we were walking along the street there was a dog on the pavement we had to walk around it even step over it rather gingerly. We had to watch our step giving it a wide berth. In the city of Delhi we learned that there are 260,000 of these feral dogs.

[ 13 : 39 ] 260,000 and they are fed daily at the city's expense because they are so important. Vehicles drive around every evening tossing out chunks of meat to give to these wild dogs and yet in this city which has a budget to feed its dogs vast numbers of low caste Hindus live in utter squalor and degradation treated with complete contempt by people of higher caste.

How those Hindus need the good shepherd? Let's love the Hindus but let's be against Hinduism. The best thing we found in Delhi was the Christian people that we met shining faced lovely enthusiastic gospel preaching Indians who are so keen to get the gospel out into different parts of India.

If you ever get a chance to talk to an Indian Christian who has been converted to Christ from Hinduism ask them to tell you about the real Hinduism as it's practiced in India and I think you will

hear a story of slavery and degradation.

It's a very sanitized version of Hinduism that we tend to get in this country. Now here's another thing to think about. In our country as well here in Britain as our society becomes more and more secularized isn't it true that animals are gathering importance at the same speed as human beings are losing it?

so our pets our farm animals even wild animals like foxes become increasingly cherished almost with adoration while at the same time our society toys with euthanasia and passively accepts the abortion of 200,000 babies unborn babies every year.

[ 15 : 25 ] both false religion and aggressive secularization are portrayed surely here in verse 10. It is these forces that steal and kill and destroy but Jesus gives abundant life to those who trust him and follow him.

Now turn with me and let's look more closely at these verses because in them Jesus teaches us a number of aspects of the lovely life that he gives to those who belong to him. Now the picture the metaphor that holds this passage together is the picture of the shepherd looking after the sheep Jesus of course is the shepherd the good shepherd and his sheep are all those who have placed themselves under his loving rule and protection.

Remember that a shepherd doesn't only care for his sheep and protect them he also rules them sheep need discipline as well as feeding and protection and in using this metaphor of the sheep and the shepherd Jesus is tapping into a very rich Old Testament theme you'll find it famously in Psalm 23 the Lord is my shepherd therefore I shall want nothing and you'll find it also in prophets like Ezekiel and Jeremiah to be shepherded by the Lord God is the very thing that we were made for but to be sheep without a shepherd another Old Testament phrase which Jesus picks up and uses in the Gospels that is the great disaster so let me point out three things about the good shepherd and the sheep which help us to see what this abundant life of verse 10 is all about first the good shepherd calls his own sheep by name you'll see it there part way through verse 3 the sheep hear his voice and he calls his own sheep by name and leads them out now the implication is clear if he knows each one by name and calls each one by name it means that he knows everyone to be known by the Lord is synonymous with belonging to the Lord do you remember that terrible moment in Matthew chapter 7 towards the end of the Sermon on the Mount when Jesus pictures himself confronting people on the day of judgment people who have claimed to have achieved great things in his name but actually they were never real followers of his at all and he says to them

I never knew you depart from me you workers of lawlessness I never knew you and in Matthew chapter 25 in the parable of the ten girls the five wise and five foolish girls the bridegroom has to say to the five foolish girls who are begging to be let into the marriage feast which is a picture of heaven he has to say to them I do not know you to be not known by Jesus is not to belong to him in this life or in the next so when we read in John chapter 10 verse 3 that the good shepherd calls his own sheep by name we know that he knows them and surely he knows them thoroughly if you're a Christian you can be sure that you are both known and loved he knows your name and he knows everything there is to know about you we live out in Ayrshire and we have a few acres of rough grazing at our house out in the country and a year or two ago a local man was grazing a few of his sheep on our grass by mutual agreement interestingly his name was

Mr. Shepherd and sometimes when he used to come over and look to his sheep I used to go outside and talk to him and there were various things that he had to do regularly trim their feet because they get foot rot checking them for maggots shearing them of course in the summer and I was amazed to discover just how much Mr. Shepherd knew about each one of his sheep he knew the pedigree the family history of each animal he knew who its parents were and its grandparents he knew which ones were susceptible to foot rot and which ones had a particularly troublesome digestive system he knew which ones were likely to win the first prize at the local shows and I realised that he knew these sheep so well because he cared so deeply about their welfare now this is what Jesus is saying about the human sheep in his flock he not only knows the name of each of his human sheep he knows everything about each one he knows its strengths and weaknesses he's thoroughly acquainted with the odd features with the personal peculiarities of each one aren't you personally peculiar some of you certainly are and so am I but if we belong to Jesus our personal peculiarities are deeply understood by him the sinful peculiarities he will be working to remove and he expects our cooperation in that task but as for the rest of our quirks and characteristics the great joy is that he knows them if the greatest disaster in human life is to be not

known by Jesus on the day of judgment the greatest blessing is to be known by him to be called by name to be cherished by him this is part of the abundant life that he gives to his people it's the opposite of being a meaningless piece of flotsam or jetsam on the surface of the world some people who are not

[ 21 : 01 ] Christians feel just like that does my life really mean anything I hurry and scurry about for 70 or 80 breathless years and then I disappear am I of any consequence does anybody care is there anybody out there to care Jesus says I call my own sheep each one by name and I lead them out and they find pasture so there's the first thing now second the shepherd leads his sheep and they follow him he leads them and they follow look at verse 4 he goes before them and the sheep follow him for they know his voice now verse 3 is about how the shepherd knows each of his sheep by name verse 4 is about the sheep's happy response the sheep follow him because they know his voice so these sheep are not lost in the highways and byways of life they have a settled happy purpose they know who to follow because they have come to know his voice now friends if you or friends perhaps I should say if you think of yourself as a rugged individualist you might not like verse 4 very much rugged individualism has been highly valued in western civilization for the last century or two be your own man that's the motto isn't it find out who you are and then be yourself and be sure that you're not quite like anybody else

I guess it's the kind of spirit that took Edmund Hillary to the top of Everest in the 1950s perhaps it's the kind of spirit that makes Richard Branson today such a successful entrepreneur there's even a man I heard of on the radio just the other day who's quadriplegic I forget his name but quadriplegic means paralyzed from the neck downwards can't move his arms or legs so he's in a wheelchair and he is now sailing the Atlantic at this very minute did you hear about it I think there are two or three other people on board to see to his cooking and personal needs and so on but he's doing all the sailing himself that's the rugged individualistic spirit now if you fancy yourself as a rugged individualist you might look at verse 4 and wonder if it's a bit tame just look at verse 4 you might say do I really want to follow somebody else can't I be my own man and take the lead in my own life I'm tough look at me I can shin up Ben Nevis in three hours I've got rippling pectoral muscles do I want to follow somebody else the answer is you need to or else you will end up in the worst kind of trouble

Adam and Eve decided to take the lead in their lives in the Garden of Eden they decided they would not follow the Lord's instructions or follow him and the Lord alas had to sentence them to death the paradox is that men and women were made to follow Christ and to submit to him and we can only discover an authentic human life if we do we deceive ourselves if we think that doing our own thing will bring us happiness and joy it will bring us in the end nothing but confusion and the truth is that there is nothing quite so bracing or challenging as to follow Christ to become a Christian will always mean to set your face into the wind it's much easier to walk the other way with the wind at your back but to follow Christ is to put yourself in harm's way it's to lay yourself open to ridicule and even persecution there is nothing namby-pamby about being a Christian in fact to follow Christ life long will require a great degree of determination now in that case you might say why should anybody want to follow this shepherd well the answer comes in verse four the sheep follow him because they know his voice in other words they've come to recognize that the things he says are the only things worth listening to they've come to realize that he's the only leader who speaks with real authority and truthfulness the Christian comes to realize that to live for Jesus and to follow him to be prepared if necessary even to die for him is the only way to live the Christian has come to trust his voice and to know his voice to know that what he says makes sense and thus the one who follows Christ's lead gradually realizes that he's no longer at sea without a compass he's no longer casting around wondering how to where to go he now has a leader and he realizes that this leader is the only leader worth following that's abundant life to be no longer lost no longer at the mercy of one's own rugged individualism so this abundant life that Jesus gives it consists first in Jesus calling his people by name and knowing each one intimately second Jesus leading his sheep so that they can follow him and now third the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep there it is in verse 11

I'm the good shepherd the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep now friends think of that has it struck you how very strange that idea is the idea that the shepherd laying down his life for the sheep might be a good thing for the sheep just think of the millions of sheep that there are in the British Isles I don't know how many there are 20 million something like that would it be good for

those sheep if their shepherds all died I rather doubt it I would have thought that the death of shepherds up and down the British Isles would be very bad news for the sheep of Britain and just imagine a flock of sheep on a typical Scottish farm let's imagine it's winter time so we have all the sheep gathered together in a fine big barn gathered off the hills because of the cold weather and there they are being fed indoors and protected from the worst of the weather and then one day their loving shepherd comes to them comes to the barn he sees to their feeding and watering he supplies them with hay and concentrates and mangle wurzels he puts fresh straw down for their bedding he looks after them beautifully as he has always done every day but then in full sight of all the sheep he climbs up the tall silo tower beside the barn up the steel ladder at the side of the silo tower right up to the top of the tower until he is something like 80 foot up in the air and then standing up and balancing himself on the very top of the tower he looks down to the sheep and he shouts down to them my dear sheep I love you I love you so much that I am doing this for you and he throws himself off the top of the tower and lands on the concrete below killing himself instantly and one puzzled sheep turns to her neighbour and says to her in what conceivable way ermintrude is that a demonstration of love now the answer to this riddle is all in the little word for f-o-r the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep it means on behalf of the sheep for the sake of the sheep it's a word from the vocabulary of sacrifice and it means quite simply that the good shepherd lays down his life in order to save the lives of the sheep this is not a gratuitous absurd act of of suicide this is life for life it's the voluntary laying down of his life so as to save many lives if a father should dive into the sea to rescue his drowning child with the result that the child is saved but the father is lost that father has laid down his life in order to save the child's life it's a purposeful act of self-sacrifice done in order to bring rescue now that's the nature of the death of the good shepherd not a meaningless suicide but a purposeful act of rescue motivated by sheer love so that the sheep should be able to enjoy abundant life and as for the abundant life itself what is it like what is it like well in its fully developed form in the world to come in eternity we don't know for certain though the bible certainly gives us lovely glimpses of it especially in the book of revelation this is a life that not only lasts forever it's characterized by justice and righteousness you know how peter in second peter says that the world to come will be the home of righteousness righteousness will be at home there which it clearly isn't here it will be characterized by justice and peace and joy there isn't a whiff of pain or mourning or tears death is totally absent the

[ 30 : 26 ] glorious kingdom of heaven is characterized by life relationships the relationships between those who belong to the kingdom are perfected sin and guile and deceit and oppression and everything that blights lives on earth will be gone and at the center of the whole joyous experience will be the Lord God the Father and the Lord Jesus with the marks of his crucifixion still upon him lest we forget the price of our enjoyment of bliss and we shall worship him and we shall look at his face and as we look at his features we shall realize that we have the fulfillment of everything that we've ever longed for is that what you want?

I want it I know that many of you want that it's the very thing that we were made for but it may be there are some here tonight who are not sure does it seem very costly to submit your life to the will of somebody else?

Do you cherish what you think of as your freedom? But what kind of freedom is it with only yourself as the captain of your soul? Don't you need a better master than your own little self?

Every human being needs to come to the good shepherd he commands it repent he says and believe the gospel there's no life to be found except in glad submission to him this is why he came let's reflect upon it again this Christmas time I came that they might have life and have it abundantly let's bow our heads and we'll pray together how we thank you our dear Lord Jesus that you are no hired hand you're not one who leaves the sheep when danger comes but you remain with those who are your own sheep and you love them and care for them and we acknowledge gladly Lord Jesus that it is good for us nothing could be better than that we should be sheep in your flock and be able to look to you as our guardian and our helper and leader so we pray dear Lord Jesus that you will help us to look up to you to rejoice in seeing you as our shepherd and knowing you and that we should be able to discover by your grace and help more and more of what this abundant life means even here on earth as we look forward to the fulfillment and development and consummation of it all in the kingdom of heaven how we thank you and we pray these things for your dear name's sake

Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen Amen