

Life From The Mouth Of God

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I'd love us to turn together for a wee while tonight. Back to Deuteronomy chapter eight, and we'll read again at verse three. And he humbled you and let you hunger and fed you with manna, which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, that he might make you know that man does not live by bread alone, but man lives by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

And it's that last section I want us to think about, and these are very famous words because they're quoted by Jesus when he was tempted by Satan. As we read in the Gospel narratives, Jesus was led by the Spirit into the wilderness.

He had not eaten for 40 days. The devil comes to him and says, If you are the Son of God, command these stones and loaves, command these stones to become loaves of bread.

But Jesus answered, It is written, man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that comes from the mouth of God. So we're going to think about this. Our title tonight is life from the mouth of God.

And I want us to think about the fact that we need to recognize, and a truth that lies at the heart of the Gospel, the fact that the only way that we will really have life is through the truth and power of God's word. And as we think about that, and as we look at this chapter, we're going to consider three things, which are our three headings, half-life, full-life, lived-life.

[1 : 3 4] Hey, this end a bit cryptic. Hopefully that all makes sense for the time we reach the end. So starting here with half-life, what do I mean by that? Well, what I want us to think about is the fact that very often in life, it can feel as though our lives are a trade-off between quantity and quality, or to put it another way, between surviving and thriving.

And on our own, we will very often default towards one of these. So on the one hand, sometimes people, sometimes we can be very, very anxious about our own survival.

So we just want to live as long as possible. And we think the key thing I need to have is a long life. And so we think maybe 80, maybe 90 years, that's what I've got to try and have.

So to achieve that, we'll eat healthily, maintain a good exercise regime, we'll be conscientious about our health, we'll take good care of our finances, we'll plan wisely for our retirement. And we're just thinking, whatever happens, I just need to survive as long as I can. And so even if my life is dull, it needs to be long.

On the other hand, sometimes people just want to thrive. They just want our lives to be as full as possible. So not much thought is given to the long term, the aim is just to live for the moment.

[3 : 0 4] So we want to get as many experiences as we can. We want to do as much as possible. And whatever it might be, food, drink, sex, money, live for the moment, forget about tomorrow.

So this is like the opposite mindset. Even if my life is short, it needs to be exciting. And so some people will gravitate towards one or towards another of these.

And sometimes people can be a mixture of both depending on the stage of life that they're at. The Israelites in this chapter and in this period of their history, they were a mixture of both.

So when they first escaped Egypt and they had left slavery and they were heading towards what they thought was freedom, they were confronted by the Red Sea, which at that moment they didn't think they would be able to get past. And they realized that Pharaoh was chasing them.

They were cornered. And at that moment, they said to Moses, we would rather still be slaves than face the danger and the certain death that now confronts them. And you see that in Exodus 14, they said to Moses, is it because there's no graves in Egypt that you've taken us out into the wilderness?

[4 : 22] Why have you done this? Is this not what we said to you? Leave us alone so that we can just be slaves. It would be far better for us to serve the Egyptians than to die in the wilderness.

So at that moment, it's just like we would just prefer the misery of slavery as long as we can just survive. We just want our lives to be long and not to be cut short. Later on, we see the opposite.

So when they are then they get through the Red Sea, God delivers them magnificently. They eventually come to Mount Sinai. God calls Moses up to the top of that mountain and where he goes and meets with God, receives the Ten Commandments.

The people are at the bottom of the mountain and they get fed up waiting. And they're saying, where's Moses? Is he ever coming back? What's he doing? And they decide to get all their gold together and they make a golden calf.

They start to bow down and worship this golden calf. And basically they have a party to celebrate this idol that they've made. You read about that in Exodus 32. Moses was delayed to come down from the mountain.

[5 : 33] And so they said to Aaron, let's take our rings of gold. Let's make an idol. And they rose up early the next day. They brought burnt offerings and peace offerings. They sat down to eat and drink and rose up to play. And later on in that chapter, Moses comes down and he hears the sound of shouting and dancing as they're celebrating together.

No thought of tomorrow. They just want a party. They just want to thrive. And the pattern continues throughout the Old Testament. One minute the Israelites are begging God just to keep them alive.

They'll do anything to survive. And then the next minute, they're partying like there's no tomorrow. They are indulging in all sorts of activities that maybe give them a thrill for a moment.

But in the long term, we're very, very harmful to them and to their nation. It's so easy for us to fall into the same pattern. And so sometimes we're listening to the voices that say, you've just got to survive.

And that's a message driven by the fear of something going wrong. And so often that's how we can go into each week of our lives. We're just afraid about something going wrong. There's a constant anxiety about what might happen. Huge pressure to make sure that everything in life is lined up so that nothing bad will happen.

[6 : 53] And that often will apply that to our health and the length of time that we live. But we can also apply it to other areas of our lives to think about our career or our wealth or our school grades or our reputation. We think that's just going to survive and stay healthy and stay well for as long as possible.

We're driven by a fear of something going wrong. Other times though, we're driven by the voice that says, you've just got to thrive in the moment. And that's a message driven by a fear of missing out.

And so often we will ignore advice that we know is wise in order to grab an experience that we hope will be satisfying.

And that can happen in a thousand ways. Sometimes it's just having another drink, even though we know we've maybe already had one too many. Maybe it's taking a risk in a car thinking, I just want to feel a bit more speed.

Maybe it's looking at pornography in the hope that it's going to quench a thirst for intimacy. Maybe it's being just a bit dishonest or a bit difficult at work because we know it'll actually get us ahead of our colleagues.

[8 : 01] And there's hundreds of other ways that can happen that I'm sure you can think about it. The key point I want us to consider is the fact that when the trade-off between surviving and thriving becomes dominant in your life, it leaves you with only half life.

In other words, it rubs you. People who are desperate to just survive, desperate to stay safe, desperate to be secure, desperate for everything to go according to plan, desperate for nothing to go wrong, they are miserable most of the time.

Full of anxiety and living under a constant cloud. Life becomes tense and depressing, it might be long, but it's dull. Survival on its own can be very stifling.

People who are on the other side of this contrast, the people who are desperate to thrive, the people who are chasing the next thrill, who are going to eat and drink and indulge in whatever they can find, like the future doesn't matter, the people who are just filling themselves with all of that.

What's all that stuff doing to you? It's killing you. It's robbing you of life. And that maybe sounds a bit extreme.

[9 : 34] It's actually true. The evidence is everywhere. How many times do we see people's lives cut short because of bad choices that they've made that are driven by the thrill of a moment?

And even when people's lives aren't cut short, they're not always cut short, so often the thing that we thought was going to help us thrive, that was going to give us a thrill, what does it actually give us?

It gives us regret. Now, I'm aware that, you know, in everything I'm saying here, I'm kind of pushing us all to the extreme examples of either side of this contrast.

And so, please don't misunderstand me. I'm not saying that planning for your retirement is a bad idea. It is a good idea. And it's wise to do that. I'm not saying having a nice dinner is wrong. So there's obviously nuance and balance to what I'm saying.

But I hope we're all likely that the main point I'm trying to make does stand. So for some people, life is just about surviving. I just need to have bread every day.

[10 : 38] For other people, life is all about thriving. I just need bread, but it's got to taste good. And I'm not really thinking about tomorrow. Both of them are going to leave you with half life.

And God is saying it does not need to be like that. Why? Because man does not live by bread alone.

And that takes us to our second point, full life. When the Bible uses the word live or life, it is not a never making a trade-off between surviving and thriving.

Because God wants us to have both. In other words, God does not want you to have half life. God wants you to have full life.

And you see that so clearly and so magnificently in this chapter. In verses 14 to 16, you see one of the many times, and you see this pattern of language again and again and again, Israel is reminded that God has rescued them.

[11 : 56] He has delivered them out of slavery. They are now protected from danger. They were provided for in their time of need. The Lord brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery. He led you through the wilderness with the scorpions and snakes.

And over the thirsty ground where there was no water, He gave you water. He fed you with manna in the wilderness that your fathers didn't know, that He might humble you and test you and do good to you in the end.

And so when they finally got to the Promised Land, they were safe. They were delivered from slavery, delivered from their enemies. They had survived.

But that is only half of what God wanted for them. It is only half of what God wanted for them. And you see that earlier in the chapter in verses 7 to 10, the Lord is bringing you into a good land, a land of bricks of water, of fountains and springs, flowing out in the valleys and hills, a land of wheat and barley, of vines and fig trees and pomegranates, a land of olive trees and honey, a land in which you'll eat bread without scarcity, in which you'll lack nothing, a land whose stones are iron and out of whose hills you can take copper, and you shall eat and be full, and you shall bless the Lord your God for the good land that He has given you.

In other words, God's bringing them into a beautiful land, a land full of resources and blessings and opportunities. The Promised Land is not the land of manna.

[13 : 29] It's got so much more to offer. And so yes, the Promised Land was a safe place to live, but it was also to be a brilliant place for them to live.

And that's because God does not want the Israelites to have half-life. He wants them and us to have full life. But the key point is that everything that's happening here in the Exodus and in the Entity to the Promised Land and everything that the Bible is pointing us towards is all coming back to the fact that full life comes only from the mouth of God.

That full life that God wants us to have, it comes from God's Word. It comes from the fact that He is speaking to us. God's mouth is where life comes from.

And this is actually a massive theological point that runs right through the whole of the Bible that applies at so many levels and yet is so easy for us to miss.

Because you see it on page one of the Bible. Everything that this says about life coming from the Word of God, it applies on page one of the Bible.

[14 : 48] It lies at the very heart of the doctrine of creation. Because the great emphasis of the creation narrative in Genesis chapter one is that the tool that God used to create everything else that exists is what?

His voice. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was about form and void. The darkness was over the face of the deep and the spirit of God was hovering over the face of the water and God said, Let there be light and there was light.

In other words, God speaks the universe into existence and from that point God speaks through His creation. We call that general revelation.

The world around us is declaring the glory of God. We sang about it in Psalm 19 together a few minutes ago. And so from the very start of the Bible, from the very start of God's purposes, it is His Word that brings life.

But it doesn't just apply to creation, it also applies to providence. So these two great doctrines, creation and what we call providence, creation is the fact, is teaching us that everything originates from God.

[16 : 08] He's the creator of everything else that exists. Providence tells us, I should have warned everybody here, but I normally hear that my handwriting is just...

It does say providence. Providence is that great doctrine where God, he doesn't just sort of set the world off and then leave it. No, God is upholding everything.

He is ruling, upholding, directing and governing all of His creatures and all of their actions. He's not a remote or a distance or a detached God.

He is sustaining and upholding the universe at every moment. How does He do it? He does it, I was meant to bring up Sam too, I forgot to do that. He does it by the Word of His power.

That's what's captured so powerfully in Hebrews 1, 1-3 long ago and at many times and in many ways, God spoke to us by our Father, to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days He's spoken to us by His Son, whom He appointed the heir of all things, through whom also He created the world.

[17 : 13] He's the radiance of the glory of God and the exact imprint of His nature and He upholds the universe by the Word of His power. And all of this is pointing us to the fact that everything, all of life actually comes back to the power of God's Word.

And it's teaching us about the extraordinary power of God. It's teaching us about the nature of God. I don't know if I'm going to explain this very clearly, but I think it's always helpful to think about this, that when God created the world, He didn't have stuff, because there wasn't material stuff before material stuff was created.

So God didn't have things, didn't have tools, didn't have matter. But God, as we know, has always existed, Father, Son, Holy Spirit, perfect relationship of communion, fellowship, love, interaction.

So God didn't have stuff. What did He have? He had His voice. And as He spoke, all His purposes began to be accomplished.

What God declares comes to pass in creation and in providence. And it's reminding us of how incredibly powerful God is.

[18 : 45] Omnipotence only needs an utterance for something to happen. In other words, omnipotence, the all-powerful nature of God. For God to do something, He just needs an utterance.

Omnipotence only needs an utterance. And it happens. Everything originates in God's Word.

That means even our bread, our actual physical bread, comes from God's Word. So we're saying God's Word lies at the heart of creation. All the plants, all the soil, everything created by God.

And then all the seasons that bring about the growth of wheat, harvest, everything. All of it is sustained by the power of God and His providential governing of the world through His Word.

Everything comes from God's Word. So whether it's us thinking about our bread, whether it's the Israelites thinking about the pomegranates and the resources and everything, all of that, all of the great blessings of the life that God wanted to give His people, it all can be traced back to the power of God's Word.

[19 : 57] Life comes from the mouth of God. But even more importantly, then all of that is the fact that everything that God is wanting us to see here is taking us far beyond our daily needs of food and water and provision.

It's teaching us that through God's Word, through what God's Word is teaching us, we're discovering that we are not just made to survive for as long as possible, nor are we made to seize the moment and then disappear.

We're actually made for something far better than that. Life is far more than that because we are made to know God and to live in a beautiful relationship with Him and with one another.

And we only discover that through what God has spoken to us through His Word. That is actually what life, that's what life really is. To know God, to be in a relationship with Him and to share that relationship with one another.

Of course, it all makes perfect sense. You think back to God's nature as the perfect Holy Trinity, Father, Son and Holy Spirit. That's life, that relationship together and life for us is to actually experience something that's modeled on that.

[21 : 27] That relationship of knowing God and His love, that relationship with one another as people made in His image created by Him.

And you and I know that sin has ruined all of that. But the amazing mission and message of the Bible is that God wants to restore us to the life that we were created to have.

But the only way we can have that, the only way we can fulfill our potential, the only way we can become what we were made to be is by getting back to the thing that started all in the first place.

By getting back to the Word of God, by listening to what He is saying. And God is saying to humanity, you're in danger and you need to be rescued.

That's where sins left us. We are guilty before God. We need the blood of Jesus Christ to cleanse us. But God is also saying, I am calling you to be a new humanity, to turn away from sin, to live the way I made you to live.

[22 : 35] In other words, God wants to break the power of death so that you can be safe and secure, surviving forever. And God wants to lead us in a new direction, to be part of His family, to build a community of love and joy and peace and patience and all the other fruit of the Spirit.

In other words, He wants us to lead us into a life where we really are thriving. In other words, the Gospel wants us to have both, to have full life.

And that's what makes the Gospel so amazing. It is a message of salvation that is life giving. Jesus, who spoke the Word, the world into existence, now speaks new life into us through the Gospel.

As Paul says, God who said, let light shine out of darkness, has shone into your heart to give light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ Jesus.

Now, all of this is so important because it corrects two big misunderstandings of the Gospel that all of us can easily fall into. The first is when we think that the Gospel is just about surviving for eternity.

[23 : 45] Now, obviously, eternity is incredibly important. But many people make the mistake of viewing the Gospel just as a survival ticket for eternity. In other words, they know that God is there, that judgment is real, that eternity is long.

And the result is to think, well, I've got to get my ticket to heaven because it'll be really bad if I don't. And yes, maybe being a Christian is going to be a bit rubbish now, but I know I'm going to need it when I die.

And lots of people think like that. It creates two mindsets, it creates the mindset that thinks, yes, I will become a Christian, but not now. And it creates the mindset among Christians who are just grinding their way through life with very little joy.

It doesn't need to be like that because the Gospel is way, way more than just a survival ticket into heaven. Because the Gospel gives us new direction, new purpose.

The Gospel gives us an explanation for life that actually makes sense, the Gospel tells you that you are gifted by Him and able to serve Him. The Gospel brings you into a beautiful family that stretches all across the world.

[24 : 52] The Gospel offers us wisdom and comfort and encouragement in a world that so often bruises us. The Gospel means that we can start each week together rejoicing in the fact that Jesus has risen and death is not the winner.

And the Gospel means that you can wake up every day and go to bed every night knowing that Jesus is never letting you go. That the Holy Spirit dwells in you and He's never leaving.

And at every moment you are so utterly loved by your Father in heaven. And that is the fullness of life that God's Word is revealing to us.

The Gospel is so much more than just a survival ticket to heaven. But the second big misunderstanding of the Gospel is that we can think, yes, I know I need God's salvation, but I don't really need His wisdom.

And again, that's such an easy trap to fall into. We think, well, I know God needs to save me for eternity, but in terms of my day-to-day life, I think I know best. And I kind of just want to go my own way.

[25 : 58] And we actually will think very often in our Christian lives that if I'm going to thrive, God actually has to listen to me. And my plans need to come into place.

And things need to happen when I want them to happen in the way that I want them to happen and all the stuff that I don't want to happen. Well, God needs to keep that away from me.

That's not the life of discipleship and that's not actually the way to life in all its fullness. And we must not fall into that trap of thinking that, yes, I need God's salvation, but I don't really need His wisdom day-to-day.

It's not through. We need God's Word at every step we take. We need the Gospel to shape every single part of our lives. This is incredibly easy to prove because if you think about the stuff we experienced day-to-day, the stuff that you'll probably experience this week, someone in your family or at work gets on your nerves.

Fallen human wisdom says, raise your voice. God's wisdom says, be gentle. Someone makes a stupid mistake in their lives. Fallen human wisdom says, broadcast it.

[27 : 07] God's wisdom says, show them grace. Someone's life is a mess. Human wisdom says, keep your distance. God's wisdom says, show them compassion.

When temptations are right under your nose, fallen human wisdom says, indulge yourself. God's wisdom says, control yourself. When opportunities and responsibilities come our way, fallen human wisdom says, use that power to gain.

God's wisdom says, use that power to serve. Which of these makes for a better life?

It's all reminding us of how much we need God's voice for life every day. And so we mustn't think that the Gospel is just giving us eternal survival, even though it is.

And we must not think that we will be better off following our own ideas, even as Christians instead. We can listen to the beautiful, magnificent words that come from the mouth of God.

[28 : 14] And as we listen to those words, oh, he just reminds us that you are safe today, tomorrow and forever. Here's two examples.

Jesus said, my sheep hear my voice and I know them and they follow me. I give them eternal life and they'll never perish and no one will snatch them out of my hand.

And Romans 8, 38, 39, Paul says, for I'm sure that neither death nor life, nor angels nor rulers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor anything else in all creation will be able to separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord.

If you want your life to be safe, these are the words we need. And their promises are so precious for us and for the people that we love so dearly.

And as we think about going through our day to day lives, the Bible's got such brilliant instructions for us. Here's an example from Thessalonians 5. This gives us a life that's so rich and exciting and positive.

[29 : 29] Paul says, I urge you brothers, admonish the idol, encourage the faint hearted, help the weak, be patient with them all. See that no one repays anyone evil for evil but always seek to do good to one another and to everyone.

Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you. Do not quench the spirit, do not despise prophecies, but test everything, hold fast to what is good, abstain from every form of evil.

Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. Whatever your job, whatever your salary, whatever your house, whatever car you drive, whatever you've achieved or not achieved, if day to day we are living lives shaped by that truth, our life is awesome.

It's so, so good to live a life shaped by the gospel God wants us to have full life. But last of all, he wants us to have lived life.

So also two things here that I should tell people who don't come here often. My handwriting is terrible and that thing on the wall is my enemy. We're nearly there.

[30 : 46] All of this is teaching us that God wants you to have life and it's so important to recognize that this word in Deuteronomy 8.3, it's not commanding you to listen, it's calling you to have life.

God is not saying, I want you to listen to me. He's saying, I want you to live. And that is so important for us to remember that if Jesus is not calling us to follow him so that we just listen to him and we're kind of just tapped in this restrictive life of slavery to him that we know is important, he's not saying, listen to me, he's saying live.

And you will live through my word. And that is at the heart of what the gospel is about. God wants you to live and this is going to sound really blunt, but it is the truth.

Satan wants you to die. God wants you to live. Now, we actually misunderstand what those concepts mean because so often we just think that living is existing and dying is expiring.

It's not true. Living is knowing God and enjoying an eternal relationship with him. That is what living really is and death is separation from God, a tearing apart of what is meant to be together and eternity in the sorrow and agony of hell.

[32 : 17] And that's what Satan wants and he is trying to get you there by getting you to settle for half life. So he wants us to obsess over our survival in this life when all the time we're just putting off what we can never escape.

And so our lives might end up long. Our eternity can still end up lost. Or Satan wants to seduce us with the throes of today, thriving in every way we can, forgetting about eternity in any way possible.

The end result is the same. We've pushed God away, we've rejected the words of eternal life and the key warning is that half life will lead to squandered life, which will ultimately lead to lost life.

And the gospel is offering us something so magnificently different. The gospel offers us eternal life through faith in Jesus. And the point that I want to close with is that God wants that eternal life to be a life that is lived.

Eternal life is lived. And the key point is that that starts now. As Jesus gives us eternal life in the gospel, we always talk, theologians will always talk about how there's two aspects of that that are distinct but inseparable.

[33 : 36] We talk about the already and we talk about the not yet. And in regards to eternal life, there is always an already and a not yet aspect to it.

And there's just a couple of things I want to highlight as we close. The first is that all of this means that what we do this week is done in light of the eternal promises of the gospel.

And so that's why we are on mission this week and for the rest of our lives. That's why we want our church family to be a foretaste of heaven. That's what the church should be that already you're getting a foretaste of what we've not yet come to experience.

Those of us, our brothers and sisters who have died, they are now experiencing more of the fullness of that. Our church, when we come together, when the church meets all across the world, it's a foretaste, a first fruit of that.

That's why we want the gospel to shape every part of our lives, every part of our lives. And that's why following Jesus every week is so exciting because eternal life has begun and it's being lived.

[34 : 39] The Christian can wake up every day and say, today I am eternally safe and for the day ahead I'm following Jesus and I'm going to go for it for the next 24 hours. And you've got these two magnificent things side by side, the eternal reality of your security in Christ and the wonderful opportunity of what tomorrow is going to bring for all of us.

And we want our lives to be shaped by that. And if our lives are shaped by that, then they're not going to be squandered. They're going to be lived.

Our lives are going to be lived in all their fullness. But the second key point that we must not forget is that lived life is not always easy.

And that's always going to be the case when we're in this part. Because the day when all pain and sorrow and suffering is taken away belongs here in the not yet.

Right now, until Jesus takes us home, things will be hard. Israel experienced that. They knew that there were hardships and they were tested.

[35 : 50] And the tragic thing about Israel is that they were failed. I'm not going to show you the bits, but you just have to read the chapter again. It's all very easy and obvious to see in the chapter. Israel was tested, they failed.

Jesus was tested. And he did not budge an inch. And the reason Jesus did not budge when the devil tested him was that he knew that he was never going to trade the thrill of something right now and compromise everything that God had not yet accomplished.

And he rested on God's word. He knew that Judaism 8.3 was true. And that's what made him stand firm when the devil tested him.

And God will test us too. God will test all of us in our lives. But you must remember that God is never testing your ability. He's never ever testing your ability.

He's testing your dependence. And I think that's the key thing that we have to remember. All your abilities come from God anyway.

[37 : 03] So he doesn't need to test you on those. But the question is whether you're going to lean on him. And whether you're going to listen to what he's saying. And whether you're going to live your life knowing that man does not live by bread alone but by every word that comes from the mouth of God.

And when we live in dependence on God, when we are going through our lives realizing, Lord, there is loads happening and I can't do this without you. When we are following God's calling in our lives.

And when we are thinking, Jesus, I am going to live for you and you're going to be more important to me than anything else. Do you know what you will have? You will have a full, fantastic, exciting, challenging, joyful, rich, magnificently lived life.

And your choice is that or a wasted life. Amen. Let's pray.