

The good life of a dead seed

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- [0 : 0 0] Let's pray. Heavenly Father, would you glorify your name this morning? Would you speak through me as I bring these words to these people?
- And would you continue the great mission that Jesus began when he heard some people, some foreigners, wanted to hear from him?
- I thank you that your son came to die for all people. And as a room full of non-Hebrews and people from all over the world, I ask, Father, that you would glorify your name in this place.
- Show us Jesus. Bring people from darkness to light. Equip us as his followers. And give me your grace as a flawed man as I preach.
- Amen. Amen. Amen. My name is Nick. I'm on the pastoral team here at St. Paul's. I'm probably a little loud because I can hear myself bouncing off all these walls.
- [1 : 1 0] Maybe you just turn me down a bit, Greg, because my voice is warming up. Do you want to live a good life? Everyone does.
- Right? But what is a good life? Shut your eyes. Imagine what your life looks like.
- Have you left a legacy? Is it full of great successes? Did you will an inheritance to your family? Did you share great memories? Live great experiences?
- Secure comforts? Passed down wisdom? Showed respect? Enjoyed friendships? No regrets? You can open your eyes.
- The world will tell you how to pursue the good life. Your family? Your culture?
- [2 : 1 2] Media and advertising? A good life from your youth to your death is defined for you.
- It might even change generation to generation and year by year. It's plastered on billboards and it's spoken quietly and subtly in the background.
- It's all pointing you to a good life that benefits you the most in the end. So in response to the world, you are pursuing your good life.
- Some of what the world says you should do in your life, you accept. And some you reject. You see it in your choices.
- You see it in how you live your every day. And we can see you living that life. And we can't see. But what you live by is your desires and your motivations.
- [3 : 1 5] That all year by year are about pursuing your good life. You might have even reassessed what a good life looks like and written down some resolutions. Hands up if you've got a list of New Year's resolutions.
- Anyone? Anyone written them down? Anyone got them in their phone or in their diary or on their fridge or on a tattoo? Anyone broken their resolutions already?
- It's my birthday this week. I've just, yeah, well done to me. I got old. I hung around. But I like to write some resolutions to mark every year of my life.
- They're my new plans for hope and change as I reassess what a good life looks like for me. But that's the worldly process.

We decide what the good life is for us. But Christians believe that God defines a good life. He plans and purposes every life in a time and a place.

[4 : 23] And he bids us choose his way over ours. He shows us the good life through Jesus. Jesus gives his followers principles for living a good life as our example.

And they counter everything that the world says is good. What your family or your culture, the media, the billboard, say is a good life.

Jesus will show you how to live another way. The good life shows us how to live for others and not ourselves.

Living a worldly way to a good life will lead to death, says Jesus. But following him his way will lead to the good life and to eternity with him.

So if you want to live a good life and you want to follow Jesus, we need to know what that life looks like.

[5 : 29] Right? Well, good news. We're in a season of church called Running the Race where we look into the lives of Christians throughout history from as Hebrews that Ash quoted at the beginning of church today are in this great cloud of witnesses.

People who've lived life before that we might follow like them in their following of Jesus. And today we're going to meet a very faithful, very flawed man called Adoniram.

Now, we don't have a name tag machine working today. Anyone here called Adoniram? Adoniram. Now, it's not a very popular name anymore. I'm very thankful for that.

It's very tricky to type, write down and remember. But he's who we're going to hear about today. You'll see how God helped turn Adoniram from his self-defined worldly view of a good life towards God's good life for him.

And my hope is that you'll discover a vision of God's good life for you. Take a step toward discovering what that looks like as he calls you into a good life, as defined in John chapter 12.

[6 : 46] So let's get to know Adoniram a little bit. Let's look at our passage today. And let's see how living God's good life made an impact for Adoniram. Adoniram. He was born over 200 years ago, in the late 1700s, in the northeast of America.

His parents were Christians. His dad was a pastor. Adoniram was a very gifted child. Very. He graduated high school at 15.

He entered university at 16. He was top of the class and valedictorian at 19. But by the time he finished university, he declared that he had no more faith in Jesus.

You see, young Adoniram met people at university who spoke against the Christian worldview. His friend at uni, Jacob Eames, led him into a way of thinking called deism, where one's logic and reason and view of the world was the only acceptable way that you could find God.

Adoniram publicly rejected the church and its message, following Eames' way of thinking into skepticism against the church, into his own self-determined view of reality.

[8 : 15] He gave up becoming a pastor like his father. He ended up becoming a playwright. He banded together with like-minded men and wandered around living in the moment.

He had a goal to move to New York and write plays and maybe live a bit of the good life that the media says is a good life that you and I wouldn't know. But that life led him into broken relationships, into petty crime, and away from the good he expected to get out of that good way of life.

So he decided to reboot, set some new resolutions. He thought, I'll go right back to the start. I'll go home and I'll figure out my new way.

So he went home. But the final night before he got there, he couldn't get all the way home, so he had to stop at a country inn. So he went to find his room for the night and they said, yeah, we've got a room, but there's a problem.

The person in the room next to you is dying. We're not sure he's going to live through the night. With the choice of sleeping outside or in a bed, Adoniram took the bed and the night was full of screams and anxiety.

[9 : 48] There was beating on the wall. And somehow Adoniram managed to fall asleep and woke up the next morning to silence. Silence. And as Adoniram prepared to leave, he went downstairs and discovered that the man next door had indeed died.

And who he was. His name was Eames. Jacob Eames. Adoniram had witnessed his friend's violent end.

Eames, the man Adoniram had followed into the good life that had failed him, was now dead in it. Adoniram just froze. He went to a chair and sat for an hour.

Thinking about how he was probably headed the same way. And over time, over time, he saw that that moment was a miracle.

That moment was a way that God saved his life. And by no means was it a coincidence. God's intervention here led Adoniram not just to go home and rethink his life, but actually reconsider what a God who would care so much to put him in that inn on that night might offer him.

[11 : 14] And to his family's joy and the shock of his peers, he became a Christian. Born again. Visibly different. Once spiritually dead.

Now alive. Eager to live God's good life. Adoniram took the Bible seriously. He spent time in it. He allowed his worldview to be reshaped by it.

By Jesus' principles of a good life. And in John 12, we see one of Jesus' principles for living that Adoniram exemplified in his life.

That he lived out. So grab your Bibles out. Go to John 12. Sarah's just read. Have a look at verse 25. I'm going to read from there. Anyone who loves their life will lose it.

While anyone who hates their life in this world will keep it for eternal life. Whoever serves me must follow me. And where I am, my servant also will be.

[12 : 22] My Father will honor the one who serves me. As people marinating in a modern world, 200 years after Adoniram, I've got to tell you, this passage should be offensive to you.

Jesus says, hate your life in the world. Hate what the world says is a good life. As it only leads to death and eternity without God.

Adoniram had just had a lived experience seeing that. His friend who had led him astray, but who he respected greatly, was dead.

The good life of this world is no good life at all. And then Jesus says, the Father will honor the one who serves him. And receive his presence for eternity.

But to receive God, we must hate. Strong word. Hate the good looking life that the world shows us.

[13 : 31] And follow Jesus into a good life that he defines. Hating worldly good life is costly and isolating. And Adoniram took Jesus so seriously that he was willing to pay whatever cost Jesus was calling him to pay.

And here's the cost of hating our life in the world. Look at verse 24. Very truly I tell you, unless a kernel of wheat falls into the ground and dies, it remains only a single seed.

But if it dies, it produces many seeds. Jesus is not talking about farming. This is a parable that he tells, describing his good life.

Jesus' good life for himself. He is the seed. He's going to die. It's his plan. As it says in verse 33. It's his plan.

He alone can hate the life of the world this way. For he died for the sins of all people. And because he died, fruit can grow.

[14 : 46] His followers are the fruit. And Jesus knows the intensity, the plan for his good life. Sarah read it really beautifully in verse 27. Now my soul is troubled.

And what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour? No, it was for this very reason. I came to this hour. Jesus, fully aware of his coming death, chose to let his father define his good life.

To bear the wrath of God for the sin of humanity. We cannot know that loss or imagine the cost. But Jesus did not remain a single seed.

His father's plan was for fruit. And he yielded to that good life. And if you trust in Jesus, you are a seed of Christ.

You are the fruit of his death. It cost Jesus everything. For you to have his good life to live. This parable is also an example to follow.

[16 : 04] And we do not need to die for the sins of others. Because Jesus did that once and for all. But we are to hate our worldly life to the point of readiness to lose all that the world says is a good life.

Our comforts. Our safety. Successes. Our reputation. Hating that stuff because it's not the good life. To be a seed of Christ is to bear fruit.

That's the good life. It's costly. It's costly. And it's good. His example.

Lived out in the most extreme possible way. Is that we, his followers, would just like him not remain a single seed. But to bear him fruit. Dying. Dying. Being thrown deliberately into the ground so that there would be fruit born.

To give our life away for the sake of others. That whether it be on a train. In your household. In Chatswood. Or the other side of the world.

[17 : 20] That in a spiritual desert. There would be life through Jesus Christ. And who were those fruit? Look back at verse 20.

Will you? Verse 20. Some Greeks. Some non-Jews. Asked to see Jesus. They go and speak to the disciples who have Greek names.

Andrew and Philip. Who probably understood their language. And all we know is that Jesus heard about it. He didn't speak to them. No.

He had a plan. Jesus must have been waiting for this moment. Like a wise farmer. Watchful. Looking for the right season to plant the seed.

That moment. That request. From people from a foreign land. To know him. To hear from him. That was when he knew he had to die. Verse 27.

[18 : 22] It was for this reason. Verse 23. And at this hour. That Jesus came to be planted. And raised to life. For all people.

Verse 32. All people. Good life is following Jesus. So that. We are to be planted.

And crops might grow. Multiplying salvation. Multiplying salvation. Wherever Jesus plants us. That's the good life following Jesus. Self-sacrifice.

For the sake of the salvation of others. Adoniram heard this. And fixed his remaining life on becoming a missionary.

He handed over his good life. In the world. To a people who knew nothing about the Bible or Jesus. In Burma.

- [19 : 21] In Asia. It's now called Myanmar. We're going to hear. Where this good life led Adoniram. This story changed my life. I really hope you're encouraged by it. Adoniram had to fight the church.
- To go on mission. It seems laughable nowadays. Church. Sometimes looks like it's fighting for people. To go on mission.
- But no one had ever left America. To do anything like this. He had to get support. And permission to travel. It would take 18 months. He had to learn the language.
- He had to word by word. Translate the Bible. From original language. Into Burmese. All while the locals didn't want him there.
- [20 : 23] Would persecute him. Isolate him. And refuse to accept him as a white person. All the message he carried. And Adoniram knew this. And willingly took all the risks.
- In fact he knew it is a certainty. That this mission. Would lead to his death. Kill him. Perhaps without seeing any fruit. But he was compelled by God's persistence with him.
- His immeasurable grace over his life. To take the message of Jesus to a people. Who would never hear it. Unless Adoniram went to tell them.
- But he didn't risk it alone. He got married. To a young Christian girl named Anne. Listen to Adoniram's letter.
- To Anne's father. Asking for her. His permission. To get married. It was Adoniram. I have now to ask.
- [21 : 33] Whether you can consent. To part with your daughter. Early next spring. That sounds normal. To see her no more in this world. Whether you can consent.
- To her departure. And her subjection. To the hardships and sufferings. Of missionary life. Whether you can consent. To her exposure. To the dangers of the ocean. They had to travel by ship.
- The fatal influence. Of the southern climate. Want and distress. Degradation. Insult. Persecution. And perhaps a violent death. Can you consent to all this. For the sake of him.
- Who left his heavenly home. And died for her. And for you. For the sake of perishing. Immortal souls. For the sake of Zion. And the glory of God. Can you consent to all this.
- In hope. Of soon meeting your daughter. In a world of glory. With the crown of the righteous. Brightened. With the acclamations of praise. Which shall resound.
- [22 : 31] To her savior. From the lost. Saved. Through her means. From eternal woe. And despair. That's the good life.
- That Adoniram offered. To this girl. And she was just as keen. To live it with him. And listen to. Listen to what.
- You might reflectively. If you're a child. Or a parent. Might expect this father to say. His father said. If she wants to go.
- Okay. Ann's dad declared that. That life. Was a good life. For his little girl. I could stop here.
- And this story be enough. I'm astounded. That this young married couple. Exchanged their youth. And young love. For hardship. And loss. And by the willingness.
- [23 : 37] Of a father. To hand over his daughter. To a death. That he can't prevent. But you need to hear. This whole story. So I'm going to speed through.
- What happened to Adoniram. Ann. And their family. And as I do. I encourage you. To keep your eyes open. And consider whether you agree. If this. That this is a good life.

Ann and Adoniram. Made it. To Rangoon. Their new home. In Burma. In 1813. And they were immediately. Battling sickness. Malaria.

Dysentery. Cholera. Whole bunch of diseases. That we have names for now. That they could not even. Dream of battling. Back then. And while Adoniram. Studied the language. And translated the Bible.

Ann raised. Children. They raised their family. Three out of four. Of Adoniram's children. And Ann's children died.

[24 : 39] Ann wrote this letter home. To her friend. After the death. Of their only son. Our hearts were bound up. With this child. We felt he was.

Our earthly all. Our only source. Of innocent recreation. In this heathen land. But God saw it necessary. To remind us. Of our error. And to strip us.

Of our only little all. Oh may it not be in vain. That he has done it. May we so improve it. That. He will stay his hand. And say. It is enough.

Soon after. Adoniram was imprisoned. Imprisoned. They rounded up everyone.

Who was a foreigner. All the men. And imprisoned them. He was. Tortured horribly. And you didn't get food.

[25 : 33] Or help at all. Unless someone came to. Help you in prison. So Ann. Every day. Went back and forth. From their child. To the prison. To care for Adoniram.

They had colleagues. Who had gone with them. On the mission. Some of whom died. During this season. And then. Even when Adoniram. Was released.

At long last. Ann and the child. Were very sick. And then the child died. And then Ann died. And Adoniram.

Just broke. He lost all sense. Of God's nearness. And voice. He wandered. In his faith. Doubting the last decade.

Or so. Of trying to get. A mission. In Burma. Off. Up. Up and running. And. He just slipped. Into despair. His mental health. Failed him.

[26 : 30] In his fear. He destroyed. Everything. He'd written down. Thankfully. Not his translation. Work. But every letter. He even.

Wrote a final letter home. To say. Please destroy. All my possessions. Everything I've written. To anyone. Organize it. For it to be destroyed. Hoping to somehow.

A plea. Appease God. And to stop the horrors. In his life. And in his mind. He even dug. His own grave. And sat by it. And that could have been.

Where it ended. But he got. One more letter. One more letter. With bad news. But God. Did another miracle.

And saved. Adoniram's life. Saved him from himself. Again. Adoniram's brother. Had turned away. From Christianity. When he was young.

[27 : 28] As he followed. In his older brother's footsteps. Away from Jesus. Adoniram. Had pleaded. With his brother. Day after day. Even on the dock.

Before getting on the boat. To Burma. Believe in Jesus. There is no other good life. And he wasn't a believer. When he left. But this letter.

Told that before his death. This brother had come to faith. In Jesus. And the joy. Of God. Reignited. In Adoniram. Bad news.

Gave him hope. And it took a year. But he returned to himself. To God. And to the mission. That he and Anne. Had established. And it was now.

1831. And the gospel. Exploded. Across Burma. Nothing changed. In the way they did their ministry. But all of a sudden.

[28 : 34] People were traveling. Up to five months journey. To come and hear. The Jesus man. The Jesus man. They called. Adoniram. They came to receive.

The gospel. In their own language. They came to hear. A flawed. Broken person. Who was from somewhere else. Tell them of what they needed.

Deep in their heart. The lowest. To the most powerful. Began to long for Jesus. And accept the message of hope. To know God. Have eternity with him.

Through Jesus death. In their place. Thousands. Came to faith. Hundreds. Were trained. To share the gospel. And plant churches. Fruit.

From a dead. Seed. Eight years. After Anne died. Adoniram. Got married again. He married a widow. Of a missionary. In a far off.

[29 : 31] Country. Like him. Another country. Whose husband. Had passed away. While they. Were sharing the gospel. There. And Adoniram. Heard of her. Began to write letters. To her. And they.

Got married. And she. Left that mission. In good hands. To come and join Adoniram. Her name was Sarah. They share the gospel.

In Burma together. Until she too. Sadly. Passed away. And then. Years later. Adoniram. Got married again. To a like minded.

Follower of Jesus. Named Emily. Who even though she was a good 20 years younger than him. There's no scandal. Because she signed off to a life following Jesus.

And followed Adoniram. Even beyond his death. Sharing the gospel in Burma. There's so much I'm leaving out. I said this week.

[30 : 32] I could. Confidently. Give a six hour sermon. On his life. And joyfully stand here and give it. As someone who is stage fright. And doesn't like being up front.

It's. A wonderful. Good life. But here's a final picture. Of this good life. For you to consider. Adoniram had 13 children.

Seven died. Adoniram and Sarah and Emily. And their children. Endured incredible suffering. Alongside all those.

Who left. Their homes. To join them. And then one final time. Adoniram too. Got sick. As was the custom then.

You get in a ship. And you go back to a better climate. You go back to America. And you hope. That you will recover. But sadly. Two days. Three days. Into that journey. Adoniram.

[31 : 30] Died. He was buried at sea. That means thrown overboard. There was no funeral. There was no other believer on board.

Only thing we know about. His death. Is its violence. And the longitude and latitude. And that was it for Adoniram.

And his good life. Or was it? Because today. In Burma. Now called Myanmar.

In 2023. This Sunday. 3,700 churches are going to meet. There are going to be roughly 600,000 people at those services. And every single church that gathers today.

That I've just numbered. Can trace their existence to the life and mission of Adoniram, Anne, Emily and Sarah. And so many others who were there with them.

[32 : 35] Countless seeds were grown and re-sown in the once spiritual desert of Myanmar. What a legacy. What a good life.

And so we get to 11 o'clock on a Sunday morning. Where the person preaching says, so what are you going to do about it?

I think. I want to encourage you to redefine what you think a good life is. I think we can all hear it. We can all be challenged.

If you don't yet follow Jesus. If you're very aware that you are considering him. Or you say you do. But life says you don't.

Listen to Jesus in John 12. About what living life your way might lead to. And listen to Adoniram himself. From a sermon from 200 years ago.

[33 : 43] Speaking to those who dabble in following Jesus. Yet live life their way. Adoniram says to you. Inquire not whether a fact is agreeable to his own reason.

But whether it is in the book. The Bible. His pride is yielded to divine testimony. Your pride is still unbroken.

Break down your pride. And yield to the word of God. We've seen on the screen today. Invitation. Which is a code that you can scan. To come explore Christianity.

Come speak to me. If that's you. Or scan the code. That's on the screen. But if you do follow Jesus. You might find.

It daunting. To tell your workmates. Or your family. That you're a Christian. Let alone living up to. The standard of Adoniram. That I've just shared. I've laid awake at night.

[34 : 46] Worried that I'm not going to measure up to that life. That's not the point. God's love for you.

Does not demand. That you measure up to Adoniram's standard. Is that you pursue. The principle. Like I said before. It may not be Burma. But it might be the train car.

It might not be the other side of the world. But it might be in your household. So if you follow Jesus. I encourage you to. Pick up the book. Pick up your Bible.

And as an exercise. Read John 11 and 12. And then John 19 and 20. See Jesus power.

To raise Lazarus. His friend who had died. From the dead. And then in the next chapter. In verse 12. As we've just read. Commit to dying himself. Even though he had power over death.

[35 : 44] Committing to dying. For your sake. And then in 19 and 20. Go read about it. Consider the good life.

That you have planned. And take the next step. Reassess. The good life. That Jesus has. For you. It might risk a friendship.

Or a job. It might cost. Your worldly treasures. Or your time. But are you willing to say no. To the good life. Even to hate it.

To follow Jesus. His way. And there might be part of you. Right now. That says no. Nick. I'm. I feel like. I'm not willing to do that.

I'm not willing to do. What Adoniram did. Consider Jesus. Is. Is. Your first step. Consider his willingness to die.

[36 : 43] For you. And lose his all. And you might be full of fear. About what you might lose. But consider. Jesus willingness to face this hour.

He saw foreigners like us. Looking for him. He was willing to die. So that his followers. Could share the word. With us.

Share the word. With me. God might be calling you today as well. To consider a life. Completely. Life altering. Change in your life.

Relationships. Career. Where you live. Even. Preach the gospel overseas. But ask God to speak to you. And show you. Ways to be his seed. And grow.

Grow from the book. Grow in reflection. Grow in prayer. And listen to God this week. Speak to a fellow believer. About what God has called you to do. And get ready.

[37 : 44] For more of what the good life was. For one follower of Jesus. To make an impact in your life. And maybe to follow in their steps too. As we.

In the next two weeks. Hear about two more. Great lives. Lived in faith. From the cloud. I said. I've heard about Adoniram.

And I made a big deal in my life. Here's what I mean. I've been using Adoniram's first name. The whole time. It's been on purpose.

I wanted Adoniram. And Anne. And Sarah. And Emily. To feel as normal as the. People. Who are in this room. I know Ali. And I know Tanya.

And I know. Nick. I know. Merle. I know many of the faces in this room. These people who. Did these incredible things. Were as normal. And as regular.

[38 : 40] And as flawed. And as lovely. As you. But there's another reason. When I first heard about Adoniram. I was a newly married man.

I was excited about. What that meant. And in time. God blessed. My wife and I with a son. And we called him Judson. It's another weird name.

Right? Like Adoniram. Adoniram. People call Judson. Justin. Or Johnson. Or Jetson. Or Justice. Never Judson. Eventually they got it right.

But I would tell them. That he's named after. A missionary to Myanmar. Called Adoniram. Adoniram Judson. He's named after Adoniram Judson.

Anne Judson. Sarah Judson. Emily Judson. I hope that. My boy. My daughters. My wife.

[39 : 39] All of you. Might come to know Jesus. Greatest treasure in all the world. And live. The good life his way. Go live it for the sake of God's glory.

And the joy of all people.