

A Beautiful Life

Jason Abbott

What's the measure of a successful life for you? If you were able to look back upon your life and assess its success or failure, what would a standard of excellence, of a life well-lived, look like for you? If you were to plot out all the goals you want to realize before you pass-away, what would they be? To be renowned in your field? Or to be remembered as a beloved father or mother or friend? What's your measure of a beautiful life—a life well lived?

Well, today's passage tells us a lot about what *should* form a Christian's view of success in life. Let's read God's word, then we'll pray for our study of it.

Philippians 1:12-26

¹² Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear.

¹⁵ It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. ¹⁶ The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. ¹⁷ The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. ¹⁸ But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice.

Yes, and I will continue to rejoice, ¹⁹ for I know that through your prayers and God's provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance. ²⁰ I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death. ²¹ For to me, to live is Christ and to die is gain. ²² If I am to go on living in the body, this will mean fruitful labor for me. Yet what shall I choose? I do not know! ²³ I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far; ²⁴ but it is more necessary for you that I remain in the body. ²⁵ Convinced of this, I know that I will remain, and I will continue with all of

you for your progress and joy in the faith, ²⁶ so that through my being with you again your boasting in Christ Jesus will abound on account of me.

I think we can get at the Christian view of a beautiful life—a life well lived—by asking two questions of the text: (1st) What has happened that makes Paul rejoice? And, (2nd) What will continue to make Paul rejoice?

Let's ask each in turn.

1. What has happened that makes Paul rejoice (vv. 12-18)?

You've very likely had someone ask you the question—When you lookback on your life, if you could change something, what would it be? When I try to answer, I always find myself thinking of Marty McFly and Doc Brown in *Back to the Future*. Marty has that photo of him and his siblings from 1985, and, as he fumbles around in 1955, his older brother's face begins to be erased—as a horrified Doc exclaims—“Erased from existence.” The ripple effect! Great Scott!

What would happen to my kids or my wife if I changed something in the past? Would I be a Christian? Would I be a pastor? Would I be your pastor at First Free? (Some of you are beginning to wish I'd go back and change something.)

Well, certainly, if we were in Paul's situation, if we found ourselves in prison, then we'd want to travel back in time and change a few things. But, not the apostle! He isn't thinking that way. Paul looks at all those past events, all that has happened, as catalysts for the gospel. That's what he tells us.

Now I want you to know, brothers and sisters, that what has happened to me has actually served to advance the gospel. As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. And because of my chains, most of the brothers and sisters have become confident in the Lord and dare all the more to proclaim the gospel without fear (vv. 12-14).

Paul sees his current situation and its results and is encouraged. He might be in prison, but would all these palace guards have heard about Christ if he weren't? Paul might be in chains, but would these other Christian brothers and sisters preach without fear if he weren't? Paul tells the church at Philippi to be encouraged by this.

He tells them and us that the plans of the Lord aren't and cannot be foiled by a prison. In fact, God is sovereignly using his situation to empower the gospel.

I wonder if you see things like this in the midst of your trials.

Church, Paul rejoices not despite of, but, because of his chains. He knows they further God's gospel purposes. And, even though he had his own ideas and purposes about how things should go, Paul rejoices because he trusts that the Lord's are better than his are. Paul trusts that the Lord God is good and is sovereign and is working, even and *especially* in his trials.

Remember last week's passage, the one right before this one? There Paul says that he's "confident of this, that he [the Lord God] who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Philippians 1:6). If that's how Paul encourages others, if that's the basis of the hope he's giving to other people in the church, then it must be the same hope he personally trusts in and feasts upon. And, friends, it is. Thus, Paul is able to rejoice in his chains because he is certain that God is using it to bring about good in him and good in others.

And, this is true for you too. So many times in my ministry, I have seen men and women who have gone through some real trial—the loss of a child, the betrayal of a spouse, some sort of addiction—and even though it was traumatic and terrible for them, once they're on the other side of it, it becomes the very thing the Lord uses to preach good news to them personally and through them publicly.

...Well, that's a lot. But, it's only one of the things that has happened to Paul which makes him rejoice. Listen to what he says next.

It is true that some preach Christ out of envy and rivalry, but others out of goodwill. The latter do so out of love, knowing that I am put here for the defense of the gospel. The former preach Christ out of selfish ambition, not sincerely, supposing that they can stir up trouble for me while I am in chains. But what does it matter? The important thing is that in every way... Christ is preached. And because of this I rejoice (vv. 15-18).

So, apparently, because of Paul's situation, gospel preaching about Christ is on the rise. Some have heard about Paul and preach Jesus courageously and honestly for the glory of God. Some, however, are preaching the gospel with selfish ambition.

They are preaching true things about Jesus, but they are doing it for their own glory and not the Lord's glory.

You can imagine that these selfish preachers are hoping to increase the heat for Paul as he's on trial—make the gospel seem like a big problem to a judge.

Paul's response to all this? *Hooray! Good! The true gospel is being preached!* Would you react this way? Would you rejoice in the midst of these strange events?

Natalie and her sister started and run a Christian business. It helps its members memorize Scripture. You get a little beautifully designed tattoo and a little key-chain and a devotional to help you contextualize the verse and meditate upon its meaning. It's a great little company that helps its members memorize a Bible verse each month of the year.

Now, a little-known fact about their company is that I'm its spiritual advisor or, as I like to call it, resident theologian. Basically, this means once in a blue-moon they ask a question concerning such and such a "Christian" group who's interested in partnering with DWELL—their company.

They just want to know if there are any red-flags with any of the organizations; they just want to be wise as they serve the Lord in their work.

Recently, they had an unusual request. A very large Christian-ish cult called and wanted to use them for a conference. They wanted them to provide a large order of tattoos with a memory verse. Natalie and Vera were uncomfortable with the idea, and I totally understood why. But, this text helps guide our thinking on such issues. Did the group want them to print anything that wasn't true? No...they wanted a verse of God's word; they wanted lots of people to memorize God's word. I was like—*Awesome! It'll be like gospel espionage! You should totally do it!*

Friends, I've met many people who've grown-up in heretical denominations, yet who've come to know Jesus through reading Scripture. The Bible is powerful—“Sharper than any double-edged sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Hebrews 4:12). Amen! Amen! Amen! Get the Bible into their hands and their hearts!

We as a people need to rejoice whenever and however the gospel goes forward in and around us. We need to rejoice in unison with Paul; we need to sing with him—

“The [most] important thing is that in every way, whether from false motives or true, Christ is preached” (v. 18).

Often we need this reminder because we get upset that the gospel is preached by people, and in ways, that we don’t agree with. But, that doesn’t upset this apostle in chains. He just wants the world to hear the truth about Jesus. So should we!

Well, let’s move to our second question.

2. What will continue to make Paul rejoice (vv. 19-26)?

This afternoon the Cardinals and the Cubs will play a baseball game. And, they’re very much in a fight for first during the last few games of the regular season. Very likely one of them is going to win their National League Division.

(Something the Cardinals have done 13 times and the Cubs 7 times.)

Anyway, if the Cubs win this afternoon many of you will rejoice a little bit. And, if the Cubs win the division, you’ll rejoice a little more. However, if the Cards win today, I’ll rejoice a little bit. And, if they win the division, I’ll rejoice a bit more. You see, in the game of baseball, our rejoicing is tied to winning. If we don’t win—if we don’t survive to play on—we don’t rejoice.

But, for Paul, nothing can or will interfere with his rejoicing. Look at the end of verse 18 as well as verse 19 with me again.

...and I will continue to rejoice, for I know that through your prayers and God’s provision of the Spirit of Jesus Christ what has happened to me will turn out for my deliverance (vv. 18-19).

Now, we’re tempted to stop right there and nod in agreement with these words from Paul. We like the sound of this. We like the word “deliverance” at the end there. It sounds like winning. It sounds like triumph—a lot like a last second movie rescue. Yes, please! Give us more of that, we think.

But, if we stop at verse 19, we aren’t getting the full picture of this deliverance or of what will sustain Paul’s rejoicing into the future. Verse 20 is the epicenter here. It’s the heart of this passage. Listen to what Paul says there.

I eagerly expect and hope that I will in no way be ashamed, but will have sufficient courage so that now as always Christ will be exalted in my body, whether by life or by death (v. 20).

For Paul (and for you and me if we follow Jesus), deliverance is the exaltation of Christ in us. It means he's exalted in our thoughts, in our feelings, in our words, and in our actions. It means he's exalted in us whether by our life or by our death. This is a radical view of success in life. It's a radical thing to rejoice over.

Kyle was 22-years-old. He was young, tall, and handsome. He was engaged to a beautiful young lady. They were both believers working in an outdoor ministry in Colorado. They had good friends, a strong faith, and a bright future.

On a crisp March morning, Kyle went out hiking in the Rockies with friends. It was something they had done many times. They were all competent and careful. Nevertheless, in the spring, deadly avalanches can trigger and develop quite quickly. And on that morning, that's precisely what happened. Before they could seek shelter, they were swept under a wall of ice, rock, and snow. And, though Kyle's two friends survived, he did not. He was very suddenly taken—*just 22-years-old.*

And, we're tempted with the world around us to think—*What a tragic waste!* We're tempted to think that there were too many things left undone in Kyle's life—marriage, a career, children, and grandchildren. We don't immediately think success when we think about lives like Kyle's life.

Yet, friends, his life was an overwhelming success. *His was a beautiful life!*

Our little church in Missouri was given the honor of performing his funeral. We had to borrow a large church's building to host the throngs of people who came. The gospel was preached as he would have wanted. Many testimonies were given, and it was clear that Kyle had exalted Christ in his life.

- He had loved well in the name of Jesus.
- He had spoken well on behalf of Jesus.
- He had conducted his relationships honorably in submission to Jesus.

Kyle exalted Christ in his short life. And he exalted Christ with his early death. In the sight of the Lord, Kyle's was a life well lived—a successful and beautiful life. Do you see things that way? Do you value things that way?

Whether you live to be very old or you die tomorrow, live beautifully for God.

Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus (Philippians 4:4-8).