

Lessons from a Life Wasted

April 24, 2017

by

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On Wednesday morning, April 19, 2017, the sports world woke up to find out that Aaron Hernandez, former football player for the New England Patriots, was found dead in his prison cell. Aaron Hernandez was a name that had been in the news all throughout 2013, when his arrest and imprisonment for the murder of Odin Lloyd sent shockwaves through the sports community. He quickly became one of the most hated and despised men in the history of American sports. Although he came up in the news a handful of times over the next few years, Hernandez's name was essentially forgotten by most people as he sat in prison... until a week ago. Upon completion of the autopsy, medical examiners pronounced Hernandez's death as a suicide. Aaron Hernandez's brief 27 year life will forever be viewed with a mixture of hatred, disgust, and sadness.

While the average Christian will find it impossible to relate to a man like Aaron Hernandez, I believe his life holds some incredibly valuable lessons for us as Christians. In our Americanized, pleasure-driven society, many people often have their priorities in life completely backward. From the time kids are old enough to talk, they're being taught to get a good education so they can get a high-paying job, marry the most attractive person they can find, and spend every waking hour trying to upgrade to a bigger house or a nicer car. The bottom line is that Americans grow up constantly under the false impression that life is about pleasing **themselves**.

I'm sad to say that this impression doesn't just exist with people in the world. This delusion has crept into the New Testament church as well. I'm not at all arguing that working a high-income job or upgrading your house is wrong. But this mindset that obsesses over worldly possessions is completely contrary to Scripture. In [Matthew 6:19-21](#), we find Jesus telling His disciples, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

In this passage, Jesus makes it incredibly clear that no matter how much wealth we accumulate in this life, no matter how nice our new boat is, or no matter what kind of iPhone we have, on judgment day it will all be worthless. Take Aaron Hernandez for example. This was a man who was one of the premier athletes in the world. He won a national championship in college and became one of the best players in the National Football League, making

millions of dollars. By worldly standards, this guy couldn't have been more successful. And yet, where did he end up? All that fame, all that wealth, and he ended up hanging himself in his prison cell.

There have been many historical examples of individuals who achieved incredible wealth and fame, and yet their lives were empty and miserable. There was a void in their lives that money and worldly pleasure couldn't fill. Oftentimes people don't realize until it's too late that nothing can fill that void, other than God. That's why the Hebrew writer tells Christians, "Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, 'I will never leave you nor forsake you.'" Is wanting a new car wrong? Not at all. Is making a lot of money wrong? Absolutely not. But if you're seeking to fill an emptiness in your life with worldly pleasures, in the end you will fail. Unfortunately it takes men like Aaron Hernandez to show us that laying up treasures on this earth will profit us nothing.

There's one final point I'd like to bring up regarding the life of Aaron Hernandez. Obviously, this was a man who was at an exceptionally low point. Here he was sitting in a prison cell for murder, hated by everyone, and facing the reality that his freedom would forever be on a leash. It's hard to imagine anyone in this world who would sympathize with such an evil man. And yet when I picked up my phone on Wednesday morning, and I saw the news story, I felt a pang of not just sorrow, but also sympathy. Because Aaron Hernandez was a man who had completely lost **hope**.

Despite the horrendous acts that he committed, Aaron Hernandez was still offered the gift of God's grace. Despite being viewed with disgust by everyone around him, God's love and grace never left him. Sadly, he rejected that gift of grace, and elected to kill himself. His story reminds me of another story of another criminal who was killed while serving his prison time. Jeffrey Dahmer is a man who might challenge Aaron Hernandez for the title of the most despised and hated man in recent memory. Jeffrey Dahmer was a man who raped and killed seventeen people. When people refer to some of the most evil men in our nation's history, Dahmer's is a name that is frequently brought up. And yet, Dahmer's story has quite a different ending than Aaron Hernandez's story.

In May of 1994, while serving his prison time, Jeffrey Dahmer was baptized into Christ and became a Christian before being killed by a fellow inmate six months later. I can't think of a more powerful example of a Christian's hope than that of Jeffrey Dahmer. A man who committed some of the most brutal and inhumane acts against other human beings that we've ever seen, and yet at his lowest point, he accepted God's gift of grace, and died a repentant, baptized believer.

I pray that we as Christians will continually look to the example of men like Aaron Hernandez and Jeffrey Dahmer. Hernandez was a man who put far too much stock in earthly pleasure, and as a result it cost him his life. As Christians we would be wise to learn from his horrendous example. Laying up for ourselves treasures here on this earth will certainly result in our spiritual death. Instead, we should constantly take joy in the fact that we have the eternal hope that Paul tells the Corinthians about in **1 Corinthians 15:55-57**: “ ‘O Death, where is your sting? O Hades, where *is* your victory?’ The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.”

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