

South Bay Community Church
Sermon Reflection
Have You Found It? - Biblical Success
11 & 12 June 2022
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Scripture: Jeremiah

Sermon Preamble

Have you found the thing you have been searching for your whole life that you see every day when you turn on the TV or scroll through social media? Have you found the thing that you were told will bring you joy, make your life peaceful, give you the patience, surround you by people who supposedly love you more, and you feel like you belong? Perhaps you are in this chase to achieve a certain level or status in life that has a standard set by society, and it gets you caught up in a rat race. The thing is success. The world has defined success, but God has a completely different definition. What exactly is it that makes you successful?

Worldview of Success

Merriam Webster dictionary defines success as a favorable or desired outcome or the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence (eminence meaning fame or recognized superiority, especially within a particular sphere or profession). When we look at this definition, who decides what is favorable and what is not? Who sets the standard for this desired outcome? What's the amount of money that you need to have in order to be considered wealthy? This is the Worldview of success: We are now living in a time where everybody wants to be instantly famous and wealthy, thinking that it's going to fill this void within them. But Scriptures say we are to live in this world and not of this world. By being followers of Christ, we go by God's definition of success.

Biblical Success

The definition of success through the biblical lenses is simple: In the eyes of God, success is obedience and faithfulness to God. There are many stories in the Bible that perfectly illustrate this biblical success, but for this message, we will focus on Jeremiah. We will focus less about the story of God's judgment and hope for the future and more about Jeremiah's character displayed in his faithfulness and obedience. We are going to look at Jeremiah's journey through the two different lenses of the worldview vs. the biblical view.

Who is Jeremiah?

Jeremiah wrote the books of Jeremiah and Lamentations. God calls Jeremiah to be a messenger of God's justice and grace. He was also known as the Weeping Prophet. "Today I appoint you to stand up against nations and kingdoms. Some you must uproot and tear down, destroy and overthrow. Others you must build up and plant" (Jeremiah 1:10). Jeremiah's faithfulness and obedience is illustrated when God called him to be a prophet to Judah. Jeremiah condemns Judah for its sins, prophesies destruction, and accuses Judah's leaders. Restoration is promised, and God's promised judgment arrives.

Worldview of Jeremiah

Now let's put on our worldview lenses and take a deeper look at Jeremiah's journey. Recall that the worldview definition of success is a favorable or desired outcome, or the attainment of wealth, favor, or eminence. There is a lack of response from Judah who continues to rebel, and Jeremiah becomes frustrated. We see his frustration: "To whom can I give warning? Who will listen when I speak? Their ears are closed, and they cannot hear. They scorn the word of the Lord. They don't want to listen at all. So now I am filled with the Lord's fury. Yes, I am tired of holding it in!" (Jeremiah

6:10-11). This verse clearly illustrates Jeremiah's frustration with Judah because of them not listening. Jeremiah's mission was to tell Judah about their wrongs, and to tell them to turn back towards worshipping God, but the people did not listen. The people of Judah had multiple chances to turn their ways around, but they continued to worship false idols. Jeremiah becomes frustrated.

Despite his frustration, Jeremiah does not stop his obedience and faithfulness to God. Jeremiah continues his message from God to the people until they become fed up with him, and his enemies plot to kill him. "Then the people said, 'Come on, let's plot a way to stop Jeremiah. We have plenty of priests and wise men and prophets. We don't need him to teach the word and give us advice and prophecies. Let's spread rumors about him and ignore what he says'" (Jeremiah 18:18). If we were in Jeremiah's situation, would our flesh have been telling us – "It's not worth it. I give up! The people are not listening to me and are now trying to kill me." Perhaps Jeremiah knew his destiny if he continued to pursue what God was telling him to do, even if it meant suffering, and it may ultimately result in his death.

Jeremiah weeps

With all his pent up emotions of frustration, hurt, and a broken heart, Jeremiah weeps. "Jeremiah mentions, 'My grief is beyond healing; my heart is broken. Listen to the weeping of my people; it can be heard all across the land....I hurt with the hurt of my people. I mourn and am overcome with grief'" (Jeremiah 8:18-19, 21). Lamentations is known as the book of tears. "I have cried until the tears no longer come; my heart is broken. My spirit is poured out in agony as I see the desperate plight of my people..." (Lamentations 2:11). Jeremiah's grief ran so deep that he became known as the weeping prophet. His tears were not self-centered or from personal loss. His heart was broken because he knew that the selfishness and sinfulness of the people would bring them much suffering. Jeremiah likely felt like he had failed in his mission.

Judah rebelled and did not follow anything Jeremiah had to say as directed by God. They hated him for telling them about all their wrongs they have done, and they wanted Jeremiah dead. Again, success is a favorable or desired outcome. Viewed through the worldview lenses, the outcome was not favorable. The people were trying to kill Jeremiah for what he was saying. The desired outcome of Judah turning away from their sins and going back to worshipping God was not accomplished. In the eyes of the world, Jeremiah was a failure.

Biblical view of Jeremiah – Jeremiah called to an impossible task

Let's put on our biblical lenses and look at this from a different perspective. Jeremiah is called by God to an impossible task. Jeremiah's mission was to help Judah turn away from their sins, but God was calling Jeremiah to deliver a message that God knew the people would not receive.

The Lord even tells Jeremiah to stop pleading and praying on Judah's behalf. "Pray no more for these people, Jeremiah. Do not weep or pray for them, and don't beg me to help them, for I will not listen to you" (Jeremiah 7:16). God is not going to listen to Jeremiah's prayers for Judah. But the Lord still tells him to deliver a message. Just a few verses later in verse 27, the Lord tells Jeremiah, "Tell them all this, but do not expect them to listen. Shout out your warnings, but do not expect them to respond" (Jeremiah 7:27). Let's put ourselves in Jeremiah's situation. Our thoughts might be – Why am I sending them this message if they are not going to listen? What is the point? Yet God still tells Jeremiah to prophesy, even though he knows that they will not listen. Jeremiah continues to obey.

Perseverance is the key as Jeremiah continues to trust in the Lord

Jeremiah declares, "Lord, I have not abandoned my job as a shepherd for your people" (Jeremiah 17:16). Perseverance is the key. Jeremiah is being rebelled against and finds out that people want to kill him, but God called him to prophesy. So Jeremiah continues to push through all the suffering and threats. Have we quit doing something just because it has gotten too hard, or because

people are not listening to us, or because we did not feel valued? Have we felt that nothing is going our way, and we get to this point of doubt, loneliness, and hurt? We then cry out to God, but we don't feel God is doing anything. That is exactly what happens to Jeremiah.

The Lord is still present with Jeremiah

Hear Jeremiah's complaints. "Then I said, 'Lord, you know what's happening to me. Please step in and help me. Punish my persecutors! Please give me time; don't let me die young. It's for your sake that I am suffering. When I discovered your words, I devoured them. They are my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God of Heaven's Armies. I never joined the people in their merry feasts. I sat alone because your hand was on me. I was filled with indignation at their sins. Why then does my suffering continue? Why is my wound so incurable? Your help seems as uncertain as a seasonal brook, like a spring that has gone dry'" (Jeremiah 15:15-18).

Hear the Lord's response. "The Lord says to Jeremiah, 'They will fight against you like an attacking army, but I will make you as secure as a fortified wall of bronze. They will not conquer you, for I am with you to protect and rescue you. I, the Lord, have spoken!' (Jeremiah 15:20-21). The Lord assures Jeremiah that God is present even if Jeremiah does not feel it. Even when we don't see it, know that God is working. God's work never stops, and God's hand is always upon us.

Jeremiah passed on a spiritual inheritance

A spiritual inheritance is something that cannot be seen, counted, or measured. It is the priceless gift one can pass on to others. Even though Jeremiah did not have a wife and children, many seeds were still planted in others who heard his message. Many people were there watching Jeremiah and listening to his message from afar. There are haters who act like they don't agree with you, but secretly want to be just like you. Some people hate on you because they really want what you have.

How many people were impacted by Jeremiah's faithfulness? Surely, somewhere in the crowds, somebody was picking up on the obedience and faithfulness that Jeremiah displayed. What Christian values are we passing onto not only our families, but also to others we come in contact with?

Jeremiah faithfully served God for 40 years. This was 40 years of the people ignoring him, rejecting him, persecuting him, and even plotting to kill him. By the world's definition of success, Jeremiah was unsuccessful. But Jeremiah did not fail in his task as he remained faithful to God.

Minister Ashley Watson's biblical success personal testimony

After four years playing varsity basketball for a nationally ranked team, and ranked as a top 10 point guard in California by ESPN Rise Magazine, Ashley received an athletic scholarship to play basketball at Georgia State University. Ashley Watson revealed that her faith was really tested.

From a worldview perspective, success at Georgia State means turning the team into a winning team, scoring lots of points, being seen as a celebrity, and being an outspoken leader/captain of the team. These measures of success did not occur. Ashley was different, frustrated, hurt both physically and mentally. Ashley felt that all her hard work had gone to waste, and she was not being recognized for those good things she did. She felt she had failed and wanted to quit on numerous occasions.

Let's look at this experience through biblical lenses. God called Ashley out to the wilderness to a place with no family and no church home. Ashley stayed tight to Jesus by attending weekly Bible studies, being disciple by other athletes, and found a church home. Living a holy life set apart for God, Ashley was different. Ashley emitted light and joy to teammates and coaches. It was the joy of the Lord and the peace that surpasses all understanding that they were seeing. After playing for 4 years, Ashley stayed at Georgia State and became a graduate assistant coach. Others, including her coaches, confirmed for her that they saw hope and saw Jesus in her. This affirmed for Ashley that all her work on or off the court was not a waste.

We live to be a light to others and to bring others to Christ. We pray that God's love will shine through us. Isn't this what we live for? Just like Ashley, there are people who feel like they are failing and not even recognizing the fruit that they are bearing.

Ashley's feelings were: I wasn't the leading scorer. I wasn't the team leader the coaches thought they were getting. I didn't make the huge impact expected to help turn the team around into winning. From the worldview, I was a failure, but not from the biblical view.

Like Jesus whom we follow, suffering and/or persecution may come. When you have a game at the home court of your opponent, you are going to be booed. They might throw things at you. They are not going to agree with you. Recognize that the world is not going to agree with the people of God. You will get booed: you will feel like you are getting harassed; you will feel like an outcast; you will feel alone, but you are doing what God has told you to do. Knowing what we know about Jesus, Jeremiah, and Ashly, according to society's standards, Jesus was a failure, Jeremiah was a failure, and Ashly was a failure. But in God's eyes, Jesus was a success, Jeremiah was a success, and Ashly is a success.

Application on how you can be successful

The application to be a success from the biblical view takes some effort to live out. It requires being obedient and faithful to God. It requires a deeper understanding of God's voice in your life. We get so addicted to the approval that comes from others that we cannot even receive the approval that comes from God. Jeremiah knew the voice and will of God. Jeremiah did not just see it, but he knew it at a deeper level.

It requires for you to know who you are in Christ. Blessed is the human who doesn't need the approval of people because the approval is already received from God. We are the righteousness of God in Jesus Christ whether others like us or not. We are loved by God; we are chosen; we are adopted into God's family; we have the joy of the Lord! It doesn't matter what others say. We are children of God, and we should carry ourselves as such with our head held high thanking God for the purpose God has for us.

Growth happens in the application of the scripture and not just in the knowledge of it. Some people think they are a good Christian because they read the Bible a lot. But what if they just like to read? Are you a good Christian because you have memorized scripture and followed all the laws? Newsflash: the Pharisees did that, but they went against everything Jesus was trying to accomplish.

How do you measure biblical success? Ask yourself if you are yielding more of yourself to God so that you can yield the fruit of the purpose God planted inside of you. You can only yield YOUR fruit. If you are coaching, coach. If you are a teacher, teach. If you are a helper, help. If you are a student, go to class.

God wants to set us free from yielding somebody else's fruit. So stop worrying about what society tells you. Instead, think about what God would like for you to do.

Have you found it?

So our question again is: Have you found it? Have you found that success? There is no need to locate it because it is already in you. You just have to do it! Say yes to God's guidance over your life. When Jesus says yes, nobody can say no.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Worldview of Success

What are some of the measures of success adopted by the worldview of society? How much importance do you place on these worldview/society measures of success in your life journey?

Biblical Success

Viewed through biblical lenses, what is the definition of success? How is the worldview/society definition of success completely different than the biblical view of success?

Who is Jeremiah?

God called Jeremiah to be a prophet of God, in speaking and showing to other people (shining our light), about God. As followers of Christ, why does God have a similar calling on us in our life journey?

Worldview of Jeremiah

Personally, what is your response when you share God's Word or share your shining light with another without them hearing God's Word or listening to you? If you feel frustrated, are you willing to continue in obedience and faithfulness to God as guided by the Holy Spirit? Why is this important?

Jeremiah weeps

In obeying your calling from God to be a prophet of God to a fallen world, in what circumstances have you felt grief, even like Jeremiah, with weeping. What was the reason that you were weeping? Was it more from personal loss or from grief for others whom God calls you to, but they reject the message and light of God?

Biblical view of Jeremiah – Jeremiah called to an impossible task

In what circumstance have you or might you feel that there is no point in you sharing God's message with them, if they are not going to listen?

Perseverance is the key as Jeremiah continues to trust in the Lord

If God wants you to obey and plant a seed in another (such as all humans made in the image of God from last week's message), why is it important to continue to share and obey as a prophet of God despite suffering, persecution, and oppression from those others?

The Lord is still present with Jeremiah

How do we know that God is present with us, and God's hand is always upon us, even if we do not personally feel it?

Jeremiah passed on a spiritual inheritance

When we obey God and are faithful in shining the light of God and sharing God's Word, what is the potential impact on others who watch and listen from afar?

Minister Ashley Watson's biblical success personal testimony

What is your personal testimony on biblical success as defined by God?

Application on how you can be successful

Biblical success in obedience and faithfulness to God has requirements for applying to our lives. One is a deeper understanding of God in your life, and knowing who you are in Christ. Another is the application of scripture, not just the knowledge of scripture. Another is yielding the fruit of the purpose God has planted inside of us. Which of these resonate with you to apply and why?