

How do you measure success in life?

How do you measure success in life? How do you know when you will reach that level of being successful in life? In many ways, that is a fascinating question. After all, who wants to be a loser in life? We all want to achieve success in life. So, where do we find it, and how do we measure it? Where do we look for success in life?

The most common place to look for success is found in our careers. A man named Clay Christensen had taught for 30 years at the Harvard School of Business. A video clip of him caught my eye this past week. It was titled: *"How will you measure your life?"*¹ He has a number of different theories of how people do that. He says that *"our careers provide that immediate evidence of achievement; we close a sale, we ship a product, we finish a presentation, we close a deal, we get promoted, we get paid."* He carries that thought one more step by speaking of how we often find ourselves taking that same theory of success into our personal lives, we think it will give us happiness. Yet, as time goes on, that bar of happiness keeps changing. We find ourselves needing bigger evidences of achievement. He gets to one of his conclusions and says: *"and I reached the strangest conclusion: 'that God doesn't employ accountants or statisticians.'" He goes on to talk about how when we take the numbers generated by businesses, the wealth we accumulate, the higher up in the organization, and apply it to how we measure success in our life, we will not feel successful. Therefore, he concludes that God has an infinite mind; he has a complete understanding of what's going on in the world. God doesn't measure success in the same way that we may judge success. It changes our whole perspective in life.*

Today, we meet one of God's prophets who was struggling with this question: *"How do you measure success in life?"* Jeremiah had an awful job. God's call to Jeremiah was to preach repentance to the people of Judah. But because of the hardened hearts of these people, Jeremiah's message of repentance became a resounding gong of judgment. Arguably, Jeremiah's ministry was the most difficult and most thankless of all the prophets. No one wanted to listen. Nothing changed. Jeremiah loved God, but even he got frustrated. He even began to think if God is in control of everything, then why doesn't he feel successful. He was alone. He was unloved. He was hurting. In chapter 15 of the book of Jeremiah, he lashes out to God and says: **"Why is my pain unending and my wound grievous and incurable? You are to me like a deceptive brook, like a spring that fails."** (Jer. 15:18) He wrestled with the question: *"How do you measure success in life?"*

Jeremiah wanted God to carry out his judgment on the nation of Judah. He begs God in chapter 20: **"Lord Almighty, you who examine the righteous and probe the heart and mind, let me see your vengeance on them, for to you I have committed my cause."** In other words he is saying to God: *"Let them have it!"* Nothing happens. He keeps preaching. In our text this morning, we see God even giving the people of Jerusalem an out. **"Whoever stays in this city will die by the sword, famine or plague, but whoever goes over to the Babylonians will live. They will escape with their lives; they will live.' And this is what the Lord says: 'This city will certainly be given into the hands of the army of the king of Babylon, who will capture it.'" What happens? Jeremiah gets tossed into a muddy well. How do you measure success in life?**

It was a question that Peter was asking in the other two lessons today. Peter trusted that Jesus was the Son of God. But Peter had those thoughts of glory in following Jesus. Peter liked the crowds. He liked Jesus doing miracles. He liked following a powerful God who could do miracles. Jesus was everything that Peter had hoped for. Except Peter did not want a Savior who had come to suffer. The cross was not part of the picture for Peter. This kind of Jesus is not the kind Peter wanted. Yet, this was exactly the kind of Savior that Peter needed. Jesus makes it plain to Peter and the rest of the disciples, Jesus came to die. *How do you measure success in life?* You measure it through death and suffering. It was a lesson that both Jeremiah and Peter needed to learn.

Can you sympathize with Jeremiah and Peter? We like a Savior to give us many outward successes in life. But Jesus has promised us that we will share in His suffering. We cannot escape the cross. He doesn't promise believers that they will

¹ https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tvos4nORf_Y

have so many blessings and variety of things in their lives. He doesn't promise us that we will have so many outward things in our life. He doesn't promise us success in the way the world does. To illustrate, let me tell you about my trip to Woodman's this week. I don't shop there much. I can probably count the number of times I have been there on one hand. I have nothing against anyone who either works or shops there. But I don't like it. Why? I find it too big. I find it frustrating to have the same product scattered in different locations throughout the store. Even when I asked someone who worked there for help, we traveled to all different corners of the store. In many ways, it is overwhelming to shop there.

It got me thinking that maybe that's how life is for us. Life can be so big and overwhelming at times. We don't know where to turn for help. Life doesn't always have all these aisles of blessings in front of us. In fact, Jesus promises us that we will suffer. Success in life is found in suffering. Like Jeremiah and Peter, we don't like to hear that suffering is a blessing to us. True success in life is found in the cross. Because it is there on the cross, that we see God's solution to the problem of sin. That's the lesson that Jesus wants to teach Jeremiah, Peter and us. Peter tells us later in his life: **"Dear friends, do not be surprised at the fiery ordeal that has come on you to test you, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice inasmuch as you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed."** Christ did not come to make us comfortable, happy, successful people. He came to save us. Every suffering we go through in our life as a Christian draws us closer to God. Just as the Devil fought against Jesus, he is fighting against us. He wants us to not trust this suffering Jesus.

Yet, it is in the suffering of Jesus that we see true glory. We know how the battle ends on the cross. Satan is defeated. Jesus wins. Peter would win because he trusted a Savior who won everything for him. Jeremiah would live another day. He would be rescued from the pit. Yes, he would go on to suffer another day. Yet, each day of suffering would bring him one day closer to heaven.

How do we measure success in life? We measure it in Jesus and his sufferings. We pick up our cross and follow Jesus. As we follow Jesus, he assures us that we will have crosses to carry. Jeremiah and Peter and the other disciples would have crosses to carry. But Jesus has promised us that he will never leave us alone. He will be there to rescue and save us. There we will see the joy that Jesus wants to give us for eternity. Amen.