

Success

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[0 : 00] Do you have a Bible where you turn back with me to Joshua, chapter 1? I think it's very providential that Derek is away this Sunday because the subject of success is something that his supporters know very little about and probably he would struggle to have any concept of how to preach a sermon on success.

I did prepare that statement before this weekend's results. But I wonder if you could choose a minister to preach on success, who could you choose?

Well, there's Billy Graham, obviously, I'll Billy Graham, but the other Billy Graham, the greater evangelist, surely he could preach on success. Tim Keller, a man who has seen his church grow in New York, who writes more books than I have had meals and speaks at every conference, going, surely he could come and preach on success.

Or he could go on, people like Rick Warren or other people, or have seen success within the church. Unfortunately, Derek tried all these individuals and none of them were available, so he handed it up with me instead.

But actually, I wonder who God would choose to preach on success. I wonder sometimes does God see success as we see success?

[1 : 32] And actually, I'm not sure success is actually a bad thing. When I first came to this topic on Tuesday morning, my thought was that success was something that Christians shouldn't have.

But as I thought about it and prayed about it and it's something perhaps we can talk about, there is actually, I think, a common desire within each of us to not only feel but to be successful.

But I think the problem is that we measure success or we define success often in the wrong way. I came across a few definitions of success. Someone has said that success is something everybody wants to buy but nobody wants to pay for.

Or success for those of us who are in business is that it's something that can delegate all the responsibility, shift all the blame and get all the credit.

Or for those of us who are married, I'm sure we would agree that success is getting the mother-in-law to leave early. It was interesting. I did a survey amongst some of my colleagues this week of what is success, how would you define success?

[3 : 02] And of all of them, one person said happiness was success and everybody else said to have enough money to be able to retire on.

And of course the world standards give us different measures of success. Luxury, wealth, achievement, fame, beauty, brains and brawl.

I suspect most of us don't meet those categories. But within the church, how do we measure success?

A big church, someone that comes out twice on a Sunday, someone that really goes to the prayer meeting every week, someone who looks and says the right things.

Again, I'm not sure that's how God defines success. I came across, and for those of you under 30, a bookshop, it's something about you going read books rather than just get it off your Kindle.

[4 : 10] And I went to this bookshop and this is what one bookshed was, How to Succeed. He had six chapters, chapter one, Become What We Think About, chapter two, Desire Exactly What You Want, paragraph three, Determine the Price You Have To Pay, chapter four, Commit to Pay the Price, chapter five, Work Hard One Day At A Time and chapter six, Never Give Up.

But God's formula for success is completely unlike the world's formula. His formula works for every person, every situation, every age group.

And the pathway that we travel to be successful in God's kingdom and his formula for success, I think we will see is very different from that of the world.

I want to look at three principles that Joshua is given in chapter one. As we know, Joshua was a hard task to follow.

It's always difficult if you, the person that follows the successful beginner of a company or a charity, is always difficult to follow in their footsteps. We read in Joshua one one that Moses, who had led the people for all the years in the desert, had died.

[5 : 41] He wasn't going to take them into the promised land. Joshua was now the leader. He was going to not only lead them into the land, but as we read all the way through the book, he was going to conquer the land and give them a nationhood.

And he was going to be successful. But right at the start of his tenure, of leader of the country of Israel, the people of Israel, he was told three things by God.

The first is found in verses six, seven and nine. Be strong and courageous.

Three times God commands his leader to be strong and courageous. What's courage? Well, with lots of different words for it.

There's valor, there's confidence, there's holding your nerve, there's guts, there's grit, there's backbone, there's bravery. But interesting, you will never find courage, you will never find these words used when someone is at ease.

[7 : 04] You know, when you're sitting back, having your cocoa at night, watching the television, you don't need to be that courageous. Courage comes when something is facing us that is difficult.

When the odds are against us, when the pressure is on, when if you like we're having to go out and do something, that is when we need to be courageous.

David, when he goes into the valley of Eli to take on Goliath, is courageous. Moses, when he goes back to Egypt and looks pharaoh in the eye and says, let my people go, is courageous.

Elijah, when he challenges the prophets of Baal and Mount Carmel, is courageous. And for those of us who are Christians, when we go out into our workplace, or our neighbourhoods, or our friends, are called to be courageous.

It comes in the midst of conflict and struggle. So why did God tell Joshua to be courageous?

[8 : 29] What was Joshua going to face that was so difficult that he needed to be courageous? Not only was he the leader of Israel, but as we say, he's got a project to complete.

He had to get the people across into Canaan. And that was no easy job. If you know the Bible, you know that this is where the people of God were 40 years before under Moses' leadership.

You know perhaps from your Sunday school days that 12 spies went in to Canaan. And they came back with stories of giants living in the land, that they were simply like grasshoppers.

And only two, one of them being Joshua, said we can do this. The other 10 said no, we're too scared. There were seven other tribes or nations in Canaan at this time.

They were bigger and stronger than Israel. And so by human standards, Joshua was facing an uphill battle. He had every reason to turn, tail and run.

[9 : 45] But God encourages them right at the start to be strong and courageous. I wonder as I look at my life, as you look at your life, are you strong and courageous?

You see most of us, if we're honest, face an uphill battle in our lives. We feel often the odds are against us.

There seems to be hundreds of times that we face impossible situations. Illness, disability, broken relationships, financial hardship, the loss of a job seems to just keep hitting us or different things hitting us.

More internal conflicts hit us. We find it difficult, if we're honest, to be personally with our personal integrity. We find it difficult to remain faithful when no one is looking.

We seem to have an emptiness, a loneliness, even when we go away on a Sunday night. We're tired of being misunderstood by our friends or by our colleagues.

[11 : 13] And perhaps this evening you need to hear God's gentle voice to you, to be strong and courageous.

You see sometimes we sell Christianity as a kind of Green Pastures mountaintop experience. But if you read however superficially the writings of Paul, the teachings of Christ, it's clear that we're in a conflict, that we're in a battle, that we're fighting for God, that it's not easy being a Christian.

And we need to be strong and courageous. But there's something else we dare not overlook. Even though Joshua and his nation were small in comparison, look at what God says.

Look at verse 19, look at the tipping point for Joshua. Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid, do not be discouraged.

And almost you could put in brackets why, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. See that's the difference, that we have the Lord our God with us.

[12:44] If you have a Bible, turn with me back a couple of books to Deuteronomy 7 and verse 17. Deuteronomy 7 verse 17.

We read these words, you may say to yourselves, these nations are stronger than we are. How can we drive them out? But do not be afraid of them.

Remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and towards Egypt. You saw with your own eyes the great trials and signs and wonders, the mighty hand and outstretched arm with which the Lord your God brought you out.

The Lord your God will do the same to you or the people you now fear. Moreover, the Lord your God will send the hornet among them until even the survivors will hide from you, have perished. Do not be terrified by them. For the Lord your God who is among you is great and an awesome God. See just like Joseph, the nation of Israel, we may see ourselves as small in comparison to the enemy.

[13:58] But we have somebody by our side who tips the scales in our favour. You see God's formula for success does not start with self-help books, does not actually start with a lot of self-analysis.

It starts with being strong and courageous. But you see there is an addendum that I want to make to make this absolutely complete.

For the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go. You see real success it does not measure on your strength, it's not even on your courage alone.

It's the knowledge that God is walking with us, it's the knowledge in who we put our faith in. If we put our faith in Christ, he is strong, he is courageous and through his spirit he gives us those attributes.

You see don't miss the point. For Joseph to lead the people into the land of Canaan, the claim God's promise he must be strong and courageous.

[15:19] He can't be like his previous fathers who grumbled and complained. Again if you look at Deuteronomy 1 verse 26 we read these verses.

But you are unwilling to go up, you rebelled against the command of the Lord your God. You grumbled in your tents and said the Lord hates us so that he brought us out of Egypt to deliver us into the hands of Amorites to destroy us.

Where can we go? Our brothers have made our hearts melt in fear. They say the people are stronger and taller than we are. The cities are large with walls up to the sky.

We even saw the anachites there. Then I said to you do not be terrified, do not be afraid of them. The Lord your God who is going before you will fight for you as he did for you in Egypt before your very eyes.

And in the wilderness there you saw how the Lord your God carried you as a father carries his son all the way you went until you reached this place. In spite of this you did not trust in the Lord your God.

[16:40] You see the outcome previously for the people of God was fear and unbelief. And in fact God's anger came upon them. They were put into the desert for another 40 years.

And God does not want Joshua and his generation to make the same mistakes. And the same is true for us. You see we can apply this principle strong and courageous to ourselves.

But we can also apply it to our congregation and to congregations here in Edinburgh. How do we see ourselves?

95% of our fellow citizens in Edinburgh were not being in church today. The overwhelming majority of people in Edinburgh want nothing to do with Christ and his church.

In human eyes we are an insignificant amount of people on the edges of society. But that's not how God sees us tonight.

[17:59] That's not how Jesus is looking at us tonight. You see the people of Edinburgh may see us as insignificant as having no influence upon them.

And we may just buy into that and say let's just be satisfied. Let's just stick together. Let's huddle around and keep everybody else out.

But you know I think that kind of philosophy is a weak excuse for a weak faith. Why? Not because of any strength or courage that you and I might have.

But because of who our faith is in the Lord Jesus Christ. The Creator of the world. The man who came and died on a cross and rose again.

His spirit indwells each of us as believers tonight. You see in God's successful formula the first thing to do is to put our faith in God.

[19 : 04] To allow him to make us strong and courageous. And to know that wherever we go whatever happens this week that he is there in the midst of us.

But the second principle that Joshua is given is found in verse 7 on success. That is obedience to God's commands.

Notice that in verse 7 be careful to obey all the law. We live in a pick and choose society.

My wife's favourite sweets in all the world are pick and mix. She was the greatest sadness when willies closed down and pick and mix went.

Because she likes a wee bit of that and a wee bit of this and a wee bit of that. And we all like that don't we? We all like a bit of pick and mix in our life.

[20 : 09] And the danger is that we get into a bit of pick and mix attitude when it comes to our Christian faith. Well I want to be a joyful person so I'll take some of that joy.

And I quite like to be peaceful and kind and nice so I'll take some of that as well. But I'm not sure about patience and I'm not sure about forgiveness.

Not sure I can stomach them. And we pick and choose characteristics from our faith. Those of you who are regular attenders will remember that just before Christmas Derek did a series on the fruit of the spirit.

And we went through them individually. And each week do you remember Derek tried to remind us that these weren't pick and choose. It was a bit like a tangerine there were segments and to get the whole tangerine you needed all the segments.

And the same is true with the obedience to God. We can't just choose bits of a Bible that we like and ignore the ones we don't like.

[21 : 21] You see the law that Joshua was given was very detailed. Joshua and the people of God were expected to learn it, to meditate on it and to apply it.

Now those of us who live post the cross do not live in the same relationship to the law as that of Joshua. But we do live by those principles.

You see I think we are good sometimes as the former Presbyterian evangelicals to say well yeah we really hold on to that doctrine.

Or we really criticise that way of life or that sin. I wonder if we are honest in our own hearts do we have a hierarchy of sin.

Well gossip that's not really a sin. Unforgiving somebody who's done something to us. Well God understands that.

[22 : 25] And we cut a guy's sins and we say some sins are more acceptable than others. That's not how God's word sees it.

Jesus said that there were two commandments that most important. What were they? Love the Lord your God with all your heart soul mind and strength and love your neighbour as yourself.

Paul calls that the fulfillment of the law that love is the fulfillment of all that God commands us to do. James in his book calls it the royal law.

Whatever you call it God's formula for success wouldn't be complete without us being obedient to God's commands.

Last Sunday we met at the Brunchfield church plant for the second time. And we've been looking at the last couple of times what it means to love God and to love your neighbour.

[23 : 35] And Neil took us to Luke 10 25 the parable of the good Samaritan one that we know so well. In that you remember that the religious people, the holy people walk by and it's the Samaritan the person that no Jew would have contact with that helped and loved the person that had been robbed.

And Neil reminded us that to love God means that we have to knock ourselves off the throne. That God can have no competition, that he has to be number one.

And to love people is to love them practically. Someone in the group hopefully pointed out that it's the small things that we do that often make the difference as well as the big things.

I wonder do I truly love the people I work beside? Do I love them as God loves them?

Do I serve them in a servant way? Again it goes completely against our culture.

[25 : 01] But do we metaphorically wash our workmates' feet on a regular basis? In regard to our neighbourhood, in regard to the people that we socialise with, do I love them as God loves me?

Do I seek to serve them as God serves me? Do I truly love God? Do I truly love my neighbour with my heart, soul, mind and strength?

And thirdly and finally, the interesting thing that Joshua is told by God is found in verse number eight.

And that is he needs to be saturated in God's word. I hate by a new technology. One because I'm completely incompetent at setting it up.

And secondly I get impatient. Recently we got a new DVD player and I just went straight forward, opened out the box and tried to set it up.

[26 : 17] And within ten minutes I realised that I got it completely wrong because I couldn't get anything to come up on the screen. At which point I went back and read the instructions and then it almost made sense.

Why? Because the person that had made it and invented it and created it gave me the instructions on how to work it. But I thought I knew better.

And the same is true when it comes to our Christian work. How many mistakes have I made in my life because actually I thought I knew better than God?

That I knew better than God's law? You see often things happen not because I'm faced with a major temptation, it's simply because I'm ignorant or I'm stupid towards God's law.

You see and because of that I suffer the consequences of my stupidity. You see my ignorance was deliberate, it was voluntary, it was because I thought I knew better.

[27 : 38] And if we're honest how often do we live our lives without consulting God's word? Or when it comes to the big decisions then we go to God's word.

But when we face day to day decisions within our work or our family or within different situations, how often do I think what I know best are just do it my way?

And you see it's not just simply reading God's word. Notice what Joshua is told to do and what I said, he's told to meditate upon it, to let it saturate himself, to let it take control of himself.

Often when you prepare yourself and you're as challenged as you hope the congregation will be.

And as I look back on the week that's been, how long have I spent in God's word?

You see that confession is good for the soul and so let me confess before you all, one of my great weaknesses is soap operas. I absolutely love Emmerdale, Coronation Street, you name them I can tell you what's happening in them.

[29 : 08] I waste so much time watching rubbish, whether it's law and order, soap operas or sky sports.

And yet compare that to the amount of time I spend reading God's word and meditating on God's word.

And sometimes I wonder why I keep falling into the same sins, why I keep doing certain things, why I live with certain consequences and if I'm honest it's because I don't spend enough time in God's word.

I wonder do we simply leave our Bible here in church metaphorically on a Sunday? How often do I switch off the telly or switch off the computer or whatever it is and just spend time in God's word?

Not just reading it but trying to understand it and then trying to obey it. To allow the spirit of God to speak to me into my situation.

[30 : 29] Why? Because you see ultimate success in God's eyes is not how much your pencing scheme is at the end when you retire.

It's not how big a house you've got or how successful you think you've been. Those things will pay into significance. Why? Because God's success is this, have you been faithful to me through your life?

You know when we face judgment and we were all faced judgment, not in regard to what we've done in regard to our sins, but in regard to how we've acted in this world since we came to faith in Christ.

God's not going to ask you how many hours you're putting at work, how many friends you had, how nice a life you had. His success will be have you been faithful to me?

You must small things and do your big things. And his reward for success will be when he says well done, my faithful and true servant.

[31 : 49] Well done for running the race, well done for being obedient, well done for sharing your faith, well done for standing at the end.

That's God's success, that's how God will measure success. And that's why we need to be brave and courageous, we need to follow God's law and we need to spend time in it, understanding it and following it.

Let's pray.

It's easy, so easy to stand and say words and it's easy to sit and listen to words. But we pray collectively that you would help us to know what was from you and what we can forget.

And I pray that you would help us to remember what you want us to remember through your Holy Spirit. And that you would help us to apply it and help us to be obedient to it.

[33 : 15] Father, where we need to change, would you give us the courage to change? Where we need to be more bold, would you give us the courage to do that? And would you give us time this week to spend in your Word, to understand it, to obey it and to apply it?

And Father, help us to remain faithful to you as you remain faithful to us. Help us to continue to strive, to run the race.

And may we do that not in our own strength and our own wisdom, but only through you and your wisdom and your strength.

And we pray this in Jesus' name, Amen.