

DCF:

Have you been to your 10 year high school class reunion yet? Or, do you remember when you went? What was it like? You noticed how everyone got older. You found out who got married and how many kids they had. But sooner or later you talked about your career. Some worked in a factory. Some went to college and became managers. Some started their own business. Sadly, some spiraled into addiction and some died. Afterwards, if someone were to ask you who was a success in life and who was not, you'd rank them by how they were doing in this life. Successful classmates were those who had good jobs and raked in the dough.

If someone asked you **“ARE YOU A SUCCESS?”** what would you say? Would you look in your closet and your garage to define your life? Or, would you listen to your Lord and see what He has to say about it? Come with me today to listen to Jesus as He defines what true success is. We'll see the world's definition of success, and more importantly, God's. Let's go to the ultimate answer book and listen to the words of Christ.

Part One: The world's definition

How would you like thousands of people eavesdropping on your conversation? That's what was happening to Jesus. He was speaking to His disciples and at the same time people were listening in to what He had to say. Jesus didn't mind, because that's one reason why He had come to this world. He wanted as many as possible to hear the words of eternal life and words of wisdom for this life.

Since Jesus was speaking with authority and wisdom, a man asked Jesus to settle a dispute for him. "Someone in the crowd said to Jesus, 'Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.'" Sounds like a reasonable request, doesn't it? At first glance, Jesus' reply might seem a little bit harsh. "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" But as we read on, we see that Jesus understood this man's motivation perfectly. ***“Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed.”*** In those days the oldest son got twice as much of the inheritance as the rest of the family. He was responsible for the family, and if his mother was still alive, he had to take care of her. This man, the one who asked Jesus to tell his older brother to split the inheritance, was motivated by greed. He wanted more than what he was getting or entitled to.

Jesus then used a parable - an earthly story with a heavenly meaning - to warn His hearers against the sin of greed. The rich man in this parable was focused exclusively on the possession of this world. Take a moment to glance over the words of this rich man. Notice how many times he calls the stuff he has "my barns, my crops, my grain, my goods". This man was extremely focused on the stuff he had. He had worked hard to accumulate this stuff for retirement. He thought the purpose of life was to get as much as possible so that you could relax and enjoy life.

There was no mention of God at all in this man's life. He used all his wealth to serve himself, not God. He used all his time to work for money and goods, not God. He was focused on this life, and made no preparations at all for the life to come. He was a success according to this world's definition, but he was an absolute pauper when it came to the standards of God.

We must confess that we are not immune to the temptation of greed. It's not just the desire for money. Jesus tells us ***“be on guard against all kinds of greed.”*** The desire for money, for attention, for praise and social standing, for things and for power can all be pathways to the sin of greed. We are tempted by greed to leave a mark, a legacy, an inheritance that others will praise. I think most of us are tempted by the sin of greed for money. We have all sorts of rationalizations when it comes to money, don't we? We tell ourselves we can't depend on Social Security so we must gather as much money as we can. We're told by financial advisors to pay ourselves first. We think we must provide for our family. True. They are a blessing from God. But He tells us if we have food and clothing to be content with that. And yet, we are tempted to focus on better clothes, trips and toys for them. After all, that's what the world considers success. How well off are you and your family? Get more. Spend more. Focus on money.

Our sinful nature always strives for more for me. We see what our neighbors have and are envious. We are tempted to measure our happiness by our bank account and our possessions. Oh, we can focus on money, but what is the end result?

The rich man in our parable today didn't get to enjoy any of what he had worked so hard to get. That very night he died and every single bit of his hard work went to someone else. He died, and lost everything. After all, you can't take it with you.

There's the story of a man who tried. He told his wife just before he died of some disease that he wanted all his money buried with him. She promised she would. So, at the funeral, just before they closed the casket, she stepped up and placed a piece of paper in with him. A friend saw what she did, so she asked her "What did you put in your husband's casket?" She replied "He wanted to be buried with all his money, so I wrote him a check." You truly can't take the things of the world with you when you die, can you?

"A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." So, what does make you a success? Let's take a look at God's definition and see.

Part Two: God's definition

That's what's most important. He created us and crafted us to praise and glorify Him. All the time and talents that we have are gifts from Him. He wants us to use them for His glory. He has given us a faith that realizes who we are. We are redeemed children of God. He sent Jesus to suffer and die to pay for our sins so that we might enter heaven. He watches over us and guides us in our lives. Knowing this, we use our voices to praise Him in worship and in our daily lives. We sing hymns in church and say "Thank God" in our daily conversations when He gives us something good. We praise and glorify our Lord when we are honest, open, loving and kind. We praise and glorify God when we use the things God has given us to support and extend His kingdom here on earth, storing up spiritual blessings instead of earthly ones.

So often we forget that God is the One who has given us absolutely everything we have in life, including earthly things. He's given us life and family. He's given us food and clothing. You know, the basics. And, He so often gives us more than we need! He blesses us with a second car, or a house with air conditioning. He blesses us with the means to go on nice vacations or have a rewarding hobby. He gives us blessings that we can save for future expenses, no matter what they may be. We are truly abundantly blessed by the Lord, to the extent that unbelievers of this world might look at our stuff and say that we are successful. Truly, the Lord has blessed us physically.

The challenge is to keep the focus on Him and remember what makes us truly successful. What makes us truly successful is God's gift of faith. Focus on that. Remember your purpose - to praise God. Remember your treasure - the forgiveness of sins and eternal life. Remember that you are a priceless child of our heavenly Father. Remember that God has chosen you to inherit heaven. That's what the gift of faith gives us. Forgiveness of sin and life eternal. What is more valuable than that? Keep your eyes on Jesus, and you will be successful. Not just for 80 years on this earth, but for eternity. When it comes to money, you can't take it with you. But when it comes to your faith, your forgiveness, you can. All the way to the end of time. That's what God calls success.

And oh, how rich you are right here and now! Maybe not with money and possessions, but you have something that money can't buy. You have the gift of peace between you and your Lord. You know He has forgiven you, even if you can't forgive yourself. You know that He is working all things out in your life for your spiritual good. You know you are never alone. You know you have someone that sympathizes with your bad days and rejoices with you in your good ones. You know you have someone that is always listening to you and who loves you more than you love yourself. You have a rock you can cling to, a mighty fortress to which you can flee, a shepherd who lovingly is by your side every moment of every day. You truly are rich, rich in the love and care of God Himself.

My friends, no matter where you are on the social ladder of this world, remember that because of your faith, you are a success!

AMEN