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**Part 1**

**True Success Isn’t What You Think It Is**

**Numbers 20:1-13 “In the first month of the year, the whole community of Israel arrived in the wilderness of Zin and camped at Kadesh…There was no water for the people to drink at that place, so they rebelled against Moses and Aaron. The people blamed Moses and said, ‘If only we had died in the Lord’s presence with our brothers! Why have you brought the congregation of the Lord’s people into this wilderness to die, along with all our livestock? Why did you make us leave Egypt and bring us here to this terrible place? This land has no grain, no figs, no grapes, no pomegranates, and no water to drink!’ Moses and Aaron turned away from the people and went to the entrance of the Tabernacle, where they fell face down on the ground. Then the glorious presence of the Lord appeared to them, and the Lord said to Moses, ‘You and Aaron must take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, speak to the rock over there, and it will pour out its water. You will provide enough water from the rock to satisfy the whole community and their livestock.’ So, Moses did as he was told. He took the staff from the place where it was kept before the Lord. Then he and Aaron summoned the people to come and gather at the rock. ‘Listen, you rebels!’ he shouted. ‘Must we bring you water from this rock?’ Then Moses raised his hand and struck the rock twice with the staff, and water gushed out. So, the entire community and their livestock drank their fill. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, ‘Because you did not trust me enough to demonstrate my holiness to the people of Israel, you will not lead them into the land I am giving them!’ This place was known as the waters of Meribah (which means “arguing”) because there the people of Israel argued with the Lord, and there he demonstrated his holiness among them.”**

We're beginning a new series today called *"Redefined: The true definition of success.”* Everybody’s interested in success. But what is it? How do you know if you’re a success or not? What does it mean?

*“Be careful what you ask for.”* We all know the punch line, right? *“Because you might get it.”*

But what if that isn’t the real punch line? What if the real answer is, *“Because you might not know what you’re asking for?”*

We know God wants “success” for us. The tension resides in the fact that we don’t always define success the same way He does.

How do you define success?

How you define it matters.

Let’s be honest, everyone wants success. I’ll bet you’ve never awakened in the morning to a thought like: “I sure hope I fail today…in my marriage, in my business…in my ministry…in my finances.”

You might think success is measured by how you look, by what you have, or by who you know. Did you know these are false measurements of success? I’ll talk more about this next week.

What if God doesn’t connect success to any of that at all? What if God’s definition is more about things like faithfulness… obedience… serving… loving… giving… believing… attitude?

We live in a culture that’s totally misrepresented true success. In my opinion, success needs to be REDEFINED. It isn’t just doing something big. In fact, not everybody’s called to do something big. I try to get this across to our team all the time. We have hundreds and hundreds of Dream Teamers here at Calvary, and multiple locations, serving and giving, and if it wasn’t for every one of them, we couldn’t do what we’re called to do. They may never be the one in front of the camera, but they’re still a big part of what we’re doing. Their jobs may not seem as significant as others, but they’re being faithful in what God’s called them to do. That’s success!

God isn’t so interested in your being the star of the show as much as He is that you do your best with the part He’s given you.

Believe it or not, there’s no place in the Bible that says we’re called to be “successful.”

**1 Corinthians 4:1-2: “So then, let us [who minister] be regarded as servants of Christ and stewards (trustees, administrators) of the mysteries of God [that He chooses to reveal].  In this case, moreover, it is required [as essential and demanded] of stewards that one be found faithful.”**

Do you see it? True success is faithfulness.

If that’s true, that means whether famous or nameless, prominent or unknown, great or small, God’s definition of success remains the same, and success is equally available to all. God hasn’t placed success out of reach. He doesn’t dangle it in front of us like a carrot on a stick. Success is possible for everyone. Anyone can be a success in God’s eyes. Anyone can be faithful.

It’s imperative that we fully understand this and we take it to heart if we’re to truly be successful.

A vignette from the life of Moses clarifies this point. Let’s review our theme text in Numbers 20.

Forty years after the incident at Rephidim (Exodus 17) where God ordered Moses to STRIKE the rock, providing the Israelites with water, Moses again (Numbers 20) faced a thirsty people.

Bitter accusations were thrown at Moses.

**Numbers 20:3-4: “The people blamed Moses and said, ‘If only we had died in the Lord’s presence with our brothers! Why have you brought the congregation of the Lord’s people into this wilderness to die, along with all our livestock?’”**

Distraught, Moses and Aaron fell on their faces before God, and God gave them these instructions in **verse 8. “Take the staff and assemble the entire community. As the people watch, speak to the rock over there, and it will pour out its water.”** So, Moses gathered all Israel around him.

As he surveyed the vast multitude of grumblers and groaners, his anger burned. He said in **verse 10-11**, “**‘Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?’ Then Moses raised his arm and STRUCK the rock twice with his staff. Water gushed out, and the assembly and their livestock drank.”** Again, another water miracle 40 years later. Cool, clear water gushed forth, and every one of the million-plus people and animals drank their fill.

What a huge success! Right?

Moses and Aaron no doubt embraced each other, and a thunderous roar rolled across the multitude. Moses was again the hero. Through him God met the needs of the people. Israel was miraculously preserved and refreshed. And they gave glory where it belonged—to God. It was another success of Moses’ great life. Another trophy in his case.

But that was earth’s point of view!

From heaven’s perspective Moses had sadly failed. In his fury Moses had disregarded God’s direction to SPEAK to the rock, and instead had STRUCK it twice. His tragic failure was of such proportion he wouldn’t fulfill his life’s dream of leading Israel in the promised land. God said in **verse 12, “Because you didn’t trust me enough to honor me as holy in the sight of the Israelites, you won’t bring this community into the land I promised them.”**

In other words, “Moses, you weren’t faithful.”

Why was Moses’ unfaithfulness so significant that it cost him the promised land? The reason is that the rock typifies Christ (1 Corinthians 10:4). And by striking the rock, Moses was spoiling the picture of Christ! The first smiting of the rock, 40 years before, pointed to the crucifixion of Jesus. By striking the rock again, Moses was crucifying Christ a second time! That’s why the Lord told him this time to speak to the rock, not strike it.

Believer, Jesus’ one sacrifice on the cross is perfectly perfect and completely complete. There’s no need to strike the Rock again. Just speak to the Rock. You speak to the Rock by agreeing with and speaking God’s Word. Jesus is the supplier of all our needs. The waters that flowed from the rock typify all that we need in life, be it health, prosperity, a better relationship with a loved one, a new job, a new house… whatever we need flows from Jesus our Rock.

In 2020 don’t strike…only speak…and all that you need will flow in abundance!

But there’s a lesson from the life of Moses that teaches us that one can be regarded as hugely successful in life…and yet be a total failure. Heaven’s perspective is drastically different from earth’s point of view.

It’s possible to give people exactly what they need, and yet be a failure. It’s possible to be held up as a great success and to receive the accolades of people, and yet be a failure. It’s possible to have lots of followers and likes, and yet be a failure.

The reason Moses so miserably failed was that he wasn’t faithful to God’s word.

God’s primary call is to faithfulness.

Faithfulness is possible for us all this year.

The following are four simple things to consider about success. I hope they’re helpful to you.

As you remain faithful in 2020…

**1) Allow success to be something God gives you, not something you take.**

You can’t force success no matter how hard you try. You can work hard, and that makes a big difference, (God wants you to do your part), but God’s timing doesn’t always match our desires. However, His timing is right!

Mature believers have learned to wait on God’s timing. Immaturity says, “I want it my way and I want it now!”

There’s always a tension between THE REAL and THE IDEAL. You have to learn how to live with that tension because it won’t go away. You must work toward the ideal but wait on God’s timing in the real. You must trust Him. That’s called faith!

While you’re living in the middle of the real and the ideal, rest in these three realities:

* ***GOD LOVES YOU!*** Believe that you’re the object of His love. He ALWAYS desires the best for you. **1 John 4:10** says, “This is love: He loved us *long before we loved him*. It was his love, not ours. He proved it by sending his Son to be the pleasing sacrificial offering to take away our sins.”
* ***GOD TAKES CARE OF YOU!*** Believe that His life is your life and your life is His life. You’re one with Him. You aren’t a twig tossed about by the tides of life. **Philippians 4:19** says, “I am convinced that my God will fully satisfy every need you have, *for I have seen* the abundant riches of glory *revealed to me* through the Anointed One, Jesus Christ!”

* ***GOD REWARDS YOU!*** Believe that He’s a rewarder of those who seek Him. **Hebrews 11:6** says, “And without faith living within us it would be impossible to please God. For we come to God in faithknowing that he is real and that he rewards the faith of those who give all their passion and strength into seeking him.”

It isn’t uncommon for us to try to “take” success from God. Meaning, it’s something we expect, or feel entitled to… in our way and in our timing. Of course, that never works well.

You may be in charge, but you aren’t in control.

When you take success into your own hands, it’s incredibly heavy, often short-lived and usually exhausting. When God gives success, you still work hard and get tired, but the fruit tastes so sweet. The load is lighter, and there’s more than enough joy and meaning to replenish your weariness and refresh your soul.

The people who take success into their own hands usually destroy their lives (1 Timothy 6:9). They have hardship, stress, marital problems, health problems, and on and on (1 Timothy 6:10). They might be “successful” in one area from earth’s point of view, but it cost them in other areas. If you allow God to give you success, **Proverbs 10:22** says, **“The blessing of the Lord will make you rich, and no sorrow will be added to it.”**

**2) If you’re blessed with success, never forget where it came from.**

One of my mistakes is that I pray less in seasons of success. I continue to learn that it’s during times of success that I need to pray most.

It’s easy to subtly drift from the truth that ultimately grace makes it all happen, to “I made it happen.” I really don’t ever believe that, but I can begin to live and behave as if I think that way. That’s a subtle and dangerous difference.

God is gracious and kind to provide His favor.

Whatever small or large success I may be blessed with, I must acknowledge and thank God for it daily and realize that it’s Christ in me.

**Philippians 4:11-13 “I have learned to be content in whatever circumstances I am in. I know how to get along with humble means, and I also know how to live in prosperity; in any and every circumstance I have learned the secret of being filled and going hungry, both of having abundance and suffering need** (whatever small or large success I may be blessed with, I acknowledge…). **I can do all things through Him who strengthens me.”**

**3) Don’t sell your soul for continued success.**

Success to the soul is like sugar to the palate; you just want more and more.

When I have an Oreo cookie, my first thought is never, “Well I’m good now.” I think, “Just one more,” and that thought never ends. There’s nothing wrong with an Oreo cookie, but I can sell out my health if I keep eating them.

When it comes to success, many of us are highly driven and dedicated. And when we get a “taste” of success, we may be tempted to pay any price for continued success.

Where do you draw the line?

Do you protect and put your marriage and family first? How about your physical health? And your spiritual rest, ironically, can be at high risk even when your time is dedicated to “good things.” How would you describe your prayer life—is it all that you want it to be? What about your generosity? You used to give God the very first of what he blessed you with, but then you got a little taste of success and now you don’t make the effort. Are you living a life that’s obedient to the God’s Word? Knowing God’s Word isn’t enough. Success only comes when his Word is faithfully obeyed. When are you going to stop using the cop out that God’s Word isn’t clear? The fact is God’s Word is clear. In fact, it’s painfully clear. As Mark Twain once said, “It’s not what I don’t understand about the Bible that bothers me; it’s what I do understand!” What about your church? Regular weekly worship used to be a top priority in your life and now when it’s only convenient.

These are good questions for a personal check up.

**4) Failure is a springboard to future success.**

From earth’s point of view, we would say there are people who are more successful than others, but no one experiences continued success throughout their life.

Failure is inevitable, but it isn’t final.

Failure can knock you down, and sometimes it can feel like it knocked you out. But you can get back up. You can remain faithful.

What you and I learn from our failures makes us better people, better leader, better spouse, better parent. How we apply what we learn makes all the difference.

* Sometimes we may need a more experienced and wiser friend or mentor or counselor to help us navigate the difficult seasons.
* Sometimes we need a fresh start.
* Sometimes it’s nothing more than a good night’s sleep and start again in the morning.

Whatever the case might be for you, embrace failures as part of life, learn all you can and keep pressing on.

The bible says that the lovers of God may fail seven times, but they’ll continue to rise over and over again (Proverbs 24:16).

True success is faithfulness. Do you want to be a success this year? Ok. This year let’s simply be faithful in our marriages, in our families, in our ministries, in our giving. You may have failed last year, but you can rise again.

Faithfulness is what’s required. But here’s the good news:

**Luke 12:48 “From everyone who has been given much, much will be required.”**

Let’s look at this through the lens of grace. What’s the “much” that’s been given? It’s Jesus himself.

And what’s the “much” that’ll be required from you? It isn’t your “successful” results in life. Your successful results are NOTHING in comparison with what you’ve been given. **God’s divine favor is better than any of your human results!** You’ve been given *Much* therefore *Much* is required.

Talk about the Much you’ve been given…God’s given you all grace in his Son, Jesus. So, what does God expect to see in you whatever small or large success you may be experiencing right now? The answer is in the question. The Much that’ll be required is the Much that’s been given. It’s nothing less than Jesus himself, because nothing less than Him will do. In this new year…nothing less than Jesus will do.

Now, with this understanding, listen to…

**Galatians 5:22-23: “But the fruit of the Spirit (of Christ in you) is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, FAITHFULNESS, gentleness and self-control. Against such things there is no law.”** In other words, faithfulness isn’t something you can do yourself. The faithfulness that’s required in your life is the faithfulness that’s been given to you in Christ.

**Today’s Confession: True success is faithfulness. The faithfulness that’s required in my life is the faithfulness that’s been given to me in Christ. (Galatians 5:22-23)**