

Success
9-16-2012

Mark 8:27-38

27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, "Who do people say I am?" 28 They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." 29 "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Christ." 30 Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him.

31 He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again. 32 He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him. 33 But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the things of God, but the things of men." 34 Then he called the crowd to him along with his disciples and said: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. 35 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me and for the gospel will save it. 36 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, yet forfeit his soul? 37 Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? 38 If anyone is ashamed of me and my words in this adulterous and sinful generation, the Son of Man will be ashamed of him when he comes in his Father's glory with the holy angels."

Define success for me. If I were to ask each of you to write down a definition of success for me, how would you respond? Take a couple of seconds and think about that. What really is your definition of success? I probably will ask you about it again in just a few minutes. I know I've told this story before, but it is worth telling again. When I was teaching high school in Farmville in the mid 80's, I asked my students how will you know when you are successful. I got a lot of responses, but one I'll never forget: When I have a new truck, a black lab, a new double wide and a wife. That was this young man's definition of success. Each of us have our own definitions of success. Is it a million dollars in the bank, or your mortgage paid off, or having no debt, or owing your own successful business. Maybe it is a combination of several, of these. My father had a dream of what success was. To be successful, he had to build his own home and start a successful business his sons could take over. At one point in my life, I dropped out of college, got married and went to work for my father in his business. His success was realized. He had built the house we grew up in; he started that business, and now I was working for him. I was getting prepped to take the business over. Then, I spoiled daddy's dream of success. I quit working for him and went back to college to become a teacher. He was crushed; I had ruined what he felt like success was supposed to be. Momma had to convince him that that was his dream, his idea of success, not mine. He was successful in his business, it just wasn't my idea of success. You see, we each have a different idea of what success is.

Peter had an idea of success as well. Listen to his idea, starting with verse 27: ***27 Jesus and his disciples went on to the villages around Caesarea Philippi. On the way he asked them, who do people say I am?" They replied, "Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, one of the prophets." "But what about you?" he asked. "Who do you say I am?" Peter answered, "You are the Messiah."*** Jesus was the king, the messiah. But Peter had Jesus as the king who was going to build that conquering army and defeat the Romans; run them out of the Middle East and back to Rome. The messiah, the savior; but the savior of what? The Jews are under Roman rule. To them, saving them meant getting rid of the conquering Roman Army. Saving meant freedom on earth, freedom from Rome. With Jesus as the King, the twelve disciples as his twelve generals, man what an army. Wow, just think, if God can help David defeat Goliath, and help Joshua bring

down the walls of Jericho, just think what we can do with Jesus as king and us as his generals. Peter had a worldly idea of success. Let's listen to the next few verses starting with thirty: **Jesus warned them not to tell anyone about him. He then began to teach them that the Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders, the chief priests and the teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and after three days rise again.**³² **He spoke plainly about this, and Peter took him aside and began to rebuke him.** Wait a minute; this didn't fall in line with Peter's idea of success. I can just imagine Peter: Whoa, Jesus, come here. What are you talking about? You're the messiah, the king. You aren't going to be killed. You're going to lead us against the Romans. As soon as the scribes, Pharisees, and the teachers of the law recognize who you are, they will be on our side. They will help us raise the army we need. God will tell them. And what was Jesus' reply: listen to verse 33: **But when Jesus turned and looked at his disciples, he rebuked Peter. "Get behind me, Satan!" he said. "You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns."** Can you just imagine how Peter felt. Talk about having the bubble of success burst. But Peter, just like a lot of us, just doesn't understand what success is. Earlier I asked you to define success. I hope each of you had some type of definition in mind. I told you I'd come back to it again in a while. Well, a while is here. When you thought about your definition of success, how many of you simply defined it in terms of worldly gains? Is your home paid for? Do you have a million bucks in the bank? Is your business booming and making you all the money you want it to? Are your children happy and healthy? Now, how many of you included Jesus Christ in your definition? How many of us, I'm including myself in this one, but how many of us could Jesus have been speaking to in verse 33 when he said: **Get behind me, Satan!" You do not have in mind the concerns of God, but merely human concerns.**" I'm guilty. I am a sinner. I have human concerns in mind.

Christ goes on in verses 34 thru 37: **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.**³⁵ **For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.**³⁶ **What good is it for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit their soul?**³⁷ **Or what can anyone give in exchange for their soul?**" This past Monday night we had a joint Elder's and Deacon's meeting and I opened the meeting with this as my devotion scripture. I went on to say that I don't think that Christ was saying that we have to give up our physical lives, that is we don't have to literally die. What he is telling us instead is that we have to give up our old ways of living. We need to stop living a worldly life. We need to begin to live a Christ-like life. We need to begin to think of what God has in store for us and what God would like us to do. Sunday before last I challenged you to do something. Each morning, before you do anything, brush your teeth, comb your hair, before you do anything, ask the question, **God, what can I do for you today?** Then be quiet and listen to what he has to say. I have to admit, the first week I only asked four days. Last week I wasn't much better. I guess four out of seven is better than zero. You see, my problem, when I get up in the mornings, I have too many worldly things on my mind. By six o'clock, I've gotten up, brushed my teeth, got dressed, read my emails, sent at least one sometimes two or three, checked Facebook, Maggie and I have sat on the front porch and discussed our day, and I have finished my second cup of coffee. Then I head back to the bedroom to begin to get ready for work. During that whole process, I'm thinking about what work at Pitt Community College has in store for me that day. That happens five days a week. That is just my routine. Should I let the world, should I let my routine get in the way of God? Should you let the world or your routine get in the way of God? We all know the right answer to that question, but what do we do about it. Christ told us, **For whoever wants to save their life will lose it, but whoever loses their life for me and for the gospel will save it.** Give up your worldly ways. How many of you have asked just once in the last two weeks, **God, what can I do for you today?** If not, why haven't you?

Peter was right with his answer about who Jesus Christ was. Jesus is the Messiah. However, he didn't go far enough in his answer. Don't get me wrong, I'm not blaming him. I'm just not sure he knew enough at that point in time to be able to finish with the rest of the answer. Listen again to verse 34: **"Whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.** Christ tells us at that point, being a Christian comes in two parts. First, you have to believe Jesus is the Christ, the messiah. But secondly, you must experience the cross. You must take up your cross, you must deny your own selfish ways, your own worldly desires and take on the burdens of others, just like Christ himself took on our burdens. Instead of serving our own selfish desires, we are to serve God and other people. For some of us, and I'll include myself

in this one, for some of us that will mean a radical change. I'll pick on me for a moment to give you a couple of examples. Guerry, when is the last time you got in your truck and went to visit someone who lives alone and doesn't get out much; not a good answer. OK Guerry, you have several friends outside this church who have lost spouses in the last year or so. Have you asked any of them out to dinner lately? Humm... OK Guerry, you have a co worker who is in the hospital; have you gone to see him. Or, how about the secretary at the college whose husband left her several months ago, have you stuck your head in her door just to say hi and say I've been praying for you. A good friend of yours lost her mother several months ago. Have you stopped by her house just to talk with her, just to say hi? Or, Guerry, have you been too busy with your own little selfish self to think of someone else. Pick up your cross, Guerry and think of someone else. Can you carry part of their burden? It's doesn't feel good, but it's easy to pick on me. I know the answers and if I'm totally honest with myself, I'm not doing a very good job of carrying my cross. I'm not doing a very good job of easing someone else's burdens. As Christians, each of us has to ask ourselves these questions daily. Are we experiencing the cross? Are we trying to help others with their burdens? Are we getting outside ourselves for the good of others?

Let's go back to the beginning of today's sermon. Exact words: Define success for me. If I were to ask each of you to write down a definition of success for me, how would you respond? Let's change those words just a bit: As a Christian, define success for me. If I were to ask each of you to write down a Christian's definition of success for me, how would you respond? Success, I really don't think God cares how much money you have in the bank. I don't think he cares whether your mortgage is paid off or if you are debt free. He doesn't care if your business is making money or losing money. God does care if you can deny yourself, take up your cross, and follow Him. Nobody ever promised you the way of the cross would be easy. However, we have been promised that in the end, the rewards will be worth the burden. Take up your cross, follow Jesus.