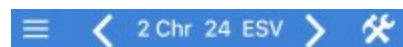


Pitfalls of Success

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It seems success too often brings much trouble. We see this time and time again with Israel's history and numerous kings. It is almost as though times of peace and prosperity (success) creates laziness toward God and eventually brings a person to a point of spiritual ruin.



forsaken the LORD, he has forsaken you.”

21 But they conspired against him, and by command of the king they stoned him with stones in the court of the house of the LORD.

22 Thus Joash the king did not remember the kindness that Jehoiada, Zechariah's father, had shown him, but killed his son. And

One good example of this among many is with King Joash in **2 Chronicles 23** to **2 Chronicles 25**. Joash became king while evil Queen Athaliah was still reigning. This coup was championed by the High Priest Jehoiada. He undertook to safeguard a "son of David" (Joash) and raise him up to the throne. Jehoiada also took pains to safeguard the young king (who was only 7 years old when he began his reign; cf **2 Chronicles 24:1**), until Athaliah could be removed.

And he took the captains, the nobles, the governors of the people, and all the people of the land, and they brought the king down from the house of the Lord, marching through the upper gate to the king's house. And they set the king on the royal throne. So all the people of the land rejoiced, and the city was quiet after Athaliah had been put to death with the sword. (**2 Chronicles 23:20-21** ESV)

Notice that "*all the people of the land rejoiced and the city was quiet...*" after the king was crowned and the queen dethroned and executed. At first, this success proved Joash's mettle. He chose to repair the temple of the LORD, which had been treated shamefully under Athaliah. The temple had been left to rot. Joash changed that by re-instituting the temple tax though the Levites were very slow to act.

So, Joash summons Jehoiada to ask him about it. After this, things began to move. A chest was put in place to collect the money for the temple tax. Verse 10 tells us that all the people were actually *happy* about giving their tax to refurbish the temple; imagine that. By **verse 14**, we are told that everything was finished and the burnt offerings again took place.

However, in **verse 15**, there is a change. Jehoiada was getting old and died at the age of 130. By **verse 17**, Joash is already showing signs of weakness and compromise. Notice the princes of Judah came and chatted with him. They clearly had something on their minds and apparently made their request of the king, who, get this, *acquiesced* to them. Apparently, they wanted to continue worshipping Asherim and other idols and the king *allowed* it! After all he had been through he arrived to a point of being so comfortable in success that apparently existed in his land that he forgot to place the LORD as supreme. He began wandering away.

This was the beginning of the end for Joash. So God sends prophets to warn Joash, which didn't work. Finally, God raises up Jehoiada's own son, Zechariah (different from the Zechariah who

wrote the book that bears his name), to point out Joash's error. Joash responds by actually having Zechariah *killed* by stoning (v 21)!

From this point, God sends the armies of Syria to deal with it. Ultimately, Joash is assassinated by his own servants (v 25). He could not say he hadn't been warned.

How does a person go from loving the Lord, being careful to walk in His ways, to killing a prophet specifically sent by God? It happens solely because Joash stopped *fearing* the Lord. When he was young, he likely feared the Lord (profound, deep, reverential awe). But when everything in the land was great without war, with prosperity, success went to Joash's head as he came to believe God was with him so he could do anything he wanted to do.

Success Isn't Always Success

This reminds me of some very large Christian ministries that have multi-million dollar budgets with hundreds of employees. Leaders likely believe that this "success" proves their spiritual worth and God's blessing. Never mind that many to most of these ministries have wandered away from the truth imperceptibly over the years until they do not even realize how far they have strayed. Yet, the fact that people continue to support their ministry and that ministry essentially has no financial lack seems to prove to them that they are doing well.

Agur, the son of Jakeh wrote a Proverb that, in part, says this:

*Two things I ask of you;
deny them not to me before I die:
Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that is needful for me,
lest I be full and deny you
and say, "Who is the Lord?"
or lest I be poor and steal
and profane the name of my God. (Proverbs 30:7-9 ESV)*

Notice he says, "*give me neither poverty nor riches, feed me with the food that is needful for me...*" Why does he say this? Because he was wise enough to realize that in either great riches or poverty, he knew his tendency would be to "...*deny you and say, 'Who is the Lord?'*" In either case, it becomes too tempting for people to either become lazy with spiritual things, start to ignore God and do our own thing, or bring dishonor to God by doing things that are illegal just to help themselves.

While these ministry leaders may believe God raised them for that purpose, they also often come to believe that they are indispensable to that particular ministry. What often happens then is that family members are given high-paying slots in the company and/or are on the board that makes decisions for that company. This automatically creates a conflict of interest and makes it much easier for those in lead positions to never be questioned.

In the Old Testament, people believed wealth was a sign of God's blessing based on the person's inherent "righteousness." Poor people were so due to His withholding of blessing due to a lack of "righteousness." This transferred over to the New Testament where we note on several occasions Jesus had to correct this wrong thinking in His apostles. Not everyone born with a defect, for instance, was due to personal sin. Not everyone who is wealthy was due to God's blessing. Wealth is often amassed through corruption then and now.

Wrong View of Success Persists

Here in 2021, too many still believe that riches with ministry non-profits are due to God's blessing of that particular group. People see their "success" and think, "*God has truly blessed them!*" When we see a church with few people or a missionary who has worked tirelessly on the mission field for decades without much to show for it, we think, "*God must not be with them!*" This is shameful. We judge by externals. But what of the prophets? Nearly *all* the prophets of the Old Testament must not have been blessed by God because there was little evidence in most cases of any successes at all. In fact, most prophets were killed and most rejected their warnings. Not a "successful" ministry, was it? By the world's standards at least.

I am of the belief that things are darkening terribly in this world as we watch Romans 1 play out in real time. Churches have been and remain closed or limited throughout the USA with some pastors facing serious legal problems. In Canada, two pastors have been arrested for daring to go against the health policies of Canada's government. Pastors James Coates and Artur Pawlowski have both seen the inside of prisons and both pastor churches in Alberta. You can read more about their situations in the latest post by [Elizabeth Prata](#). Pawloski was literally hunted like a dog and made to kneel on a busy street while law enforcement arrested him. They could've simply arrested him at his church (which he forced NO ONE to attend by the way). All he did was open his church doors. People came. It is absurd what is happening in parts of so-called civilized western society.

I think Christians need to seriously question why certain Christian ministries are so successful and I'm not suggesting that *every* ministry is questionable. But questions should be asked. Are they compromising the truth? Are they sidling up to "Caesar"? Who are they in bed with and why? The name of the game appears to be worldly success at all costs. Because of it, these wolves seem willing to do whatever the government tells them, without thinking, without asking any questions, without seeking guidance from the Lord.

I understand that In the beginning of CV-19, no one really knew what was going on. Now, there's no excuse. You've either contracted CV-19 and gotten over it or you've built up a natural resistance to it. The idea that we will have to wear masks indefinitely (per Fauci), is ridiculous and will do more to ruin people's health by compromising their immune systems than keep them from getting sick.

Why do Christians persist in accepting a wrong view of "success," which often translates to mediocrity instead of true spiritual depth and reality? Is it possibly due to Christians being way too involved with the Babylon culture of today. It forces us to see things through the eyes of the world instead of through the biblical lens.

Wealth (success) today is often seen to mean that God has His hand on that person's life. I know of pastors of smallish churches who consistently preach the Word in and out of season. Their ability to exegete and expositionally preach the Word is a true gift from God and something they have dutifully fanned into a flame. Yet, these pastors, who work hard to care for (not lord over), their flocks do not minister to thousands and thousands of people. Compared to seeker-sensitive churches who boast thousands of people every Sunday, these pastors and their churches are not "successful" by the world's standards. How about by God's standards? Are they doing what they are supposed to be doing? It seems so even though they have far fewer numbers to show for it.

I view my "stats" here and on my [Sermon Audio](#) page and while I'm tempted to think, "*Oh woe is me, I only have so many reading my blog or hearing my messages,*" the truth is that articles and audio messages actually get into at least 40 countries worldwide. I see not only which country my messages get into but how many times a message has been heard or an article read. My point is that the people who read my blog and listen to my audios may well be unchurched people. Most of these people are in the USA but a fair number are in other western countries like Canada, South Africa, Germany, the UK, Trinidad, Slovakia, Malaysia, Israel, Singapore, Ethiopia and many other even smaller countries. I'm *not* bragging. I'm simply stating that knowing this helps me to realize it is not the size of ministry that God looks on. It is the *quality* of ministry that God approves.

Success has snares that I'd prefer to avoid. The tendency to move *away* from the Lord is very strong with success. I don't want to do that. I don't want to be found unreliable to Him. I don't want to grieve Him. It is better for me to never have success as the world labels it to lessen my chances of ever thinking that I've gotten too big for God and don't need Him any longer. May God forbid that from happening!