

The Success That Leads to Defeat and Failure

by Jim Cymbala

The sermon teaches that not everything that looks good is good, and that childlike trust and prayer are essential in times of need.

Duration: 33:36

Scripture: 2 Chronicles 16:9, Matthew 6:33, Matthew 7:21, John 6:39, 2 Timothy 3:16, Hebrews 11:6, James 1:22

Topics: "Defeat"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker emphasizes the importance of true faith and pleasing God. He criticizes pastors who focus on entertainment and showmanship rather than preaching the word of God. The speaker uses the example of King Asa, who initially followed God faithfully but later turned away from Him. He warns against the danger of success leading to failure and urges listeners to maintain childlike faith and trust in Jesus. The speaker concludes by emphasizing that numbers and outward success do not matter to God; what truly matters is how individuals live and whether they truly trust and love God.

Transcript

David was the second king of Israel, but he was the one that God wanted to sit on the throne. And his son who built the temple was named Solomon. He sat on the throne.

After Solomon, there was a civil war, and the 12 tribes of Israel were divided into a northern kingdom and a southern kingdom. The northern 10 tribes were called Israel, the southern two tribes, Judah and Benjamin, were called Judah. But they had Jerusalem in their territory, so in the book of Chronicles, you find out there's kings in both places, king of Israel in the north, all bad, idolaters, not serving God, forming their own religion, and then you have the southern kingdom, some good kings, some not so good kings, reigning in Jerusalem.

About the fourth king down from David was a man by the name of King Asa. He was the son of a king, Abijah, who was a pretty good king. And King Asa's life stands out because he was one of the most different and incredible kings that you could read about in the Bible.

A-S-A was his name, Asa. And King Asa came to the throne, and immediately, he led a spiritual reformation. He started tearing down the idols that had cropped up under the reign of his father.

He started going against the flow. You know, to be a leader, you can't go with the flow. Sometimes you got to go totally against the flow to be a real leader.

You don't tell people what they want to hear. That's not a leader. You don't do polling and find out what they like.

A spiritual leader has to tell people, thus sayeth the Lord, amen? Tell the people what they need to hear, and they'll appreciate it more in the end. He was that kind of king, and he led a reformation. They tore down idols.

On top of that, he instructed the people in the ways of the Lord. He gave all the glory to God because for 10 years, from the time of his coming to the throne, for the next 10 years, the kingdom was at peace. There were no wars.

Here was this outstanding king that the Bible openly tells us just was just unusually spiritual and devoted to God. He built up and fortified certain cities. He gave glory to God.

He instructed the people. He got rid of the idols. And then after 10 years, he was attacked by an Ethiopian army of the Bible tells us one million men.

They're called the Kushites in the Old Testament in some versions, but that means, i.e., the people from the area that we now call Ethiopia. And he didn't look for that fight. God permitted it to come to him, and now he was incredibly outnumbered, and Asa leads the people out to battle and prays in the Bible one of the greatest prayers found in the Bible.

It's a short prayer, which goes to tell us that God answers not always long prayers, but short prayers. Many people think the longer you talk in prayer, the more God will hear you. That's not correct, because God responds to faith, not to words.

He prays a prayer like this. God, you are a God that can save with a small number or a large number. It doesn't matter to you.

Now look at this army that's come against us. But we belong to you, and we're going out in your name. And we're trusting, obviously, not in how many men we have, we're trusting in you.

So God, rise up against these people that are attacking you, end of prayer. And then he had a fight. And as they fought, God was with them, and they defeated the million-men Ethiopian army.

He comes back to Jerusalem. There's great celebration. A prophet commends him.

And what does he do? He starts a further reformation. And he gets rid of other stuff that's in the land that shouldn't be there. I mean, Asa's the mom.

He is really doing what God wants him to do. So after 10 years, he's attacked. Then he wins the battle, prays this great prayer.

And then you have this phenomenal further consecration to the Lord. In fact, he made a covenant with the people, kind of severe to our ears, but this is how serious he was. He made a covenant with the people that anyone who didn't serve God would be put to death.

That's a church you don't want to belong to, boy. You don't want to backslide there. And now the story picks up 26 years later.

26 years later, there's peace for 26 years, all quiet on the Western front, and all fronts, it seems. But the Bible is this strange book that tells it like it happened. And it has no perfect heroes except for Jesus.

One of the reasons you know the Bible is true is it shows us the true story and the weak sides and weak aspects of some of the greatest people in the Bible. It doesn't gloss over it. I'm sure in God's mercy, he's hidden 10 million things from us that went down in people's lives.

They're just not in the Bible because so little is in the Bible about so many people's days and lives and nights and problems. So now we pick up the story. In the 36th year of Asa's reign, Basha, the king of Israel, went up against Judah.

That's the northern kingdom. This would be like a civil war now. See, notice, Basha, king of Israel, went up against Judah.

They're all Jews. They're all Israelites. And fortified Ramah to prevent anyone from leaving or entering the territory of Asa, king of Judah.

So he's trying to shut them down. Asa then took the silver and gold out of the treasuries of the Lord's temple and of his own palace and sent it to Ben-Hadad, king of Aram. That's Syria, which is further north above Israel, the northern kingdom, who was ruling in Damascus.

So this is, read it, Syria. Let there be a treating between me and you, he said, as there was between my father and your father. See, I am sending you silver and gold.

Now break your treaty with Basha, king of Israel, so he will withdraw from me, you get it? In other words, you have a treaty with the people that are attacking me. So break that treaty and attack them because if you attack them, he can't fight on both sides and he'll withdraw from me, you get it? Smart, right? In other words, you attack the people that you've signed a treaty with, violate the treaty. That will pull him away from me.

Let's see if it worked. Ben-Hadad agreed with King Asa and sent the commanders of his forces against the towns of Israel. They conquered Ajan, Dan, Abel, Maim, and all the store cities of Naphtali.

When Basha heard this, the king of Israel, he stopped building Ramah and he abandoned his work. Then King Asa brought all the men of Judah and they carried away from Ramah the stones and timber that Basha had been using to kind of block them and shut them down and with them, he built up Geba and Mizpah. At that time, Hanani, the seer or the prophet, came to Asa, king of Judah, and said to him, because you relied on the king of Aram, Syria, and not on the Lord your God, the army of the king of Syria has escaped from your hand.

We're not the Kushites, Ethiopians, and the Libyans, a mighty army with great numbers of chariots and horsemen, and yet when you relied on the Lord, he delivered them into your hand. He's reminding him of what happened 26 years earlier. For the eyes of the Lord range throughout the earth to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to him in trust.

You have done a foolish thing and from now on, you will be at war. Asa was angry with this prophet, the seer, because of this, and he was so enraged that he put him in prison. Boy, how'd you like to preach a bad sermon, you end up in the slammer, right? At the same time, Asa brutally oppressed some of the people.

Man, what does God have to put that in the Bible for? And yet all scripture's inspired and it's profitable. So let's just see what we learn first, what's going down, and then let's apply it to the day we live in because we live in a totally different day. But let's see what we can learn.

After 26 years of peace, after 36 years of being on the throne, Asa is attacked, which reminds us that no matter how long you serve God, no matter how long you sing in the choir, no matter how long you pastor a church, no matter what you do, where you live, how long you know Jesus, you are subject and you are vulnerable to attack. We'll get into more of that later, but this just reminds us that it's not over till it's over. That's not in the Bible, Yogi Berra said that, but it's very true.

It ain't over till it's over. And it's not over until we die and we go to be with the Lord. Every one of us here, no matter how long you've been the deacon, doesn't matter what experience you had with God, I don't care if you were lifted up to the third heaven, you are susceptible to an attack.

Now notice what the attack revealed when it came to King Asa. Something had to be going down those 26 years. Because when the Ethiopians attacked him after 10 years of him being king, immediately the Bible says he prayed.

He trusted God against a million men. A million man army and he just went to God and in about three sentences prayed a prayer that brought a victory. But now he doesn't pray.

Now he's clever. Now he's going to use his cabeza, his head. He's going to use his intelligence.

So he says, wait a minute, my northern cousins are attacking me. But they have a treaty with Syria further north of them. I'll get Syria to break their treaty and attack them.

I'll pay them off. He took money from the temple. He took God's money.

He took God's money and his own money from the palace and he paid that to the Syrian king. And he said, King Ben-Hadad, you attack them. Forget your treaty, break your word.

I'm telling you, you can do it. Break your word. Because if you break your word and you attack them, it's going to relieve the pressure from me.

And sure enough, they took the money, they attacked in the north and King Basha who was ready to attack King Asa, when he heard there was trouble up north, he said, I'll forget this, I can't do this. Let me go back and protect myself up in the north because what's going on with these Syrians? I thought I had a treaty with them. And it worked.

And now that tells us another lesson. Sometimes, that's the name of this message, the success that leads to defeat. He was successful and he was a loser.

He had his way and he's bankrupt. He used his brain instead of trusting God. He got clever and on the surface, it looked so good, didn't it? Because he got the people attacking him to leave him alone.

So now we learn a lesson. Not everything that looks good is good. We'll apply this to our lives in just a second in a more comprehensive way.

Something must have happened in that 26 years. He had a loose out with God somehow. Doesn't seem that he put up any idols but something happened in his heart where instead of childlike trust and the instinct to pray, no, he's not doing that.

He's being smart. And now a prophet appears to him and the prophet reveals this to him. Don't you know that what God is looking for more than anything else is childlike trust? He's reminded when you trusted God and prayed like a simple child when you were a newer king, didn't God come through for you? But now you're not gonna trust him.

Now you're smarter than God. You don't need God anymore. You're gonna figure this out for yourself, are you? Guess what? You could have defeated both the armies.

You could have taken down everyone if you would have just trusted me. Now you got nothing but trouble coming your way. Oh, now we know that something was really wrong with Asa, that something had gone south in his soul because instead of listening to the prophet and being rebuked and corrected and being humble, he threw the prophet in the slammer.

He threw God's servant in prison. This is the same king that prayed one of the greatest prayers in the entire Bible. Read the Old Testament.

You can't find a better prayer, greater miracle than the victory that God gave Asa and Judah over the Ethiopian hordes. He throws the prophet in the jail. Doesn't like what he said.

That's the way some of us get. Doesn't matter if something's true. If we don't like it, we fight against it.

Never think when you're backslid, you're away from God, you're not thinking what's true. You're thinking what you like. I don't like that.

I don't like that sermon. I don't like that church. The question is not what you like.

The question is God in it. God was in that message. He didn't want to hear that.

On top of that, to show that something was really cancerous in his heart, he began to mistreat the people. And the part that I didn't read, he got sick after that. He got a disease after that.

And the Bible says he still wouldn't turn to God, but he turned to doctors, i.e. charlatans, because back there, there were no doctors. They just did crazy kinds of things. There's no help.

You got worse when you went to a doctor. And why would God put that in the Bible? And I don't like that story because I like heroes. We all like heroes.

I like Superman, Spider-Man, Batman. Man-Man, any kind of man. But just let it be somebody who we can look up to.

And it ends nice. You ride off into the sunset. And everyone says, give me an A, and give me an S, and give me an A, King Asa.

No, that's not the way it went down. Asa died, and he had some good things in his track record, but he died, locking up prophets. Prayed one of the greatest prayer, tore down all those idols, taught the people to seek God.

So what's it all mean to us? Because we live in a totally different era. We don't fight anybody. We're not living in the old covenant.

We're living in the new covenant. Jesus said, pray for your enemies. Don't kill them.

We don't fight battles. We don't take land. Christians don't take land.

We try to win souls. Christ is gonna one day repossess the earth. But right now, we don't try to take land and territory for Jesus.

There's no sacred land on the earth. There's sacredness of the human soul. Christ died for people, not for land.

So what's it apply to us? How does this apply? Well, listen, are we not in a warfare? Can't we identify with King Asa? Even though we don't fight against Ethiopians, or Israel, Northern Kingdom, and we don't fight against armies and all of that, we are in a warfare. But the Bible says Christians are in a worse warfare because that can only cost you your life. The warfare we're in can cost you your soul, eternally.

For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities and powers. Don't you all know that we're in spiritual warfare? They're invisible, not only hosts of demonic powers. This is not, I'm not being crazy.

I'm not being melodramatic. I'm telling you what Jesus taught us, and the New Testament teaches us. Standing up against principalities and powers who have strategies.

The Bible says we're not ignorant of Satan's devices. And don't you realize from this story, he hasn't given up on any of us? If he didn't give up on King Asa, why would he give up on you? Oh, but I've been serving God. I don't care how long you've been serving God.

My mom's in November going to be 100 years old. We're going to have a birthday party for her here on November the 23rd, that's Sunday. We're going to have a celebration, all three services.

She deserves it, don't you think? We're going to have roti, inside the roti, we're going to stuff it with patties, Jamaican patties. We're going to have everything. Flying fish, cuckoo, black rice from Haiti, chicken, roast beef, Polish, Puerto Rican, pasteles, arroz con gondola, the whole thing.

But the lesson is, Satan hasn't given up on my mom. Oh no, come on, she's so sainted. She's a saint and she's, I don't care.

To Satan it doesn't matter. He hasn't given up on one of us. We're susceptible to an attack out of nowhere.

Doesn't matter that you're a pastor. Doesn't matter how long you've been doing it. Doesn't matter that you've written a book.

Doesn't matter if the choirs receive Grammy awards or some accolade, nothing matters to Satan. Don't you get it? The warfare that we're in, that's why the Bible says, encourage each other as long as it's called

today. Why, because we're all susceptible.

Are we not? Are any of us come to a position where we can say I cannot fall? Are any of you here in a position where you don't need Christ every day? Well of course you do, of course I do. That's what this story is about. As we extrapolate it to the day we live in.

Anybody can lose out with God. Lose the blessing. Go backwards.

We were talking before we, as we prayed with the prayer band before we came down here. I was saying to the people, what's been coming to my heart lately is when a person is born biologically, they naturally grow. Even if you mistreat the child.

The child by biological laws will grow, get longer, get heavier with any kind of sustenance. I'm just talking about any kind of normal environment. Biological life grows.

Nobody at nine years old is the same size as when they were born, nobody. But not true in spiritual life. Just because you're born again, just because you're a Christian, doesn't mean you're gonna grow.

No, it does not mean you're gonna grow naturally. No, you need the word. You need fellowship with other Christians.

You need to learn how to pray. You need to learn how to meditate. You have to learn how to worship.

You have to use the gifts that God has given you. Did you know that if you don't grow, you can regress? The thing about spiritual life is you don't automatically go forward. Well, I've been a Christian for 10 years.

That doesn't mean anything. It means, the question is, have you been growing? You can be less kind 10 years after you're a Christian than when you were one week a Christian. You can be meaner, gossiping more, nastier, less prayer, less of the Bible 20 years in.

You can be a preacher and lose your anointing and not even preach from the Bible. And it started out, you were tender and broken before the Lord. And now you're hardly preaching from the Bible.

No, that can't happen. Oh yes, it's happening everywhere. Of course it can.

Because Satan is always looking for a place to attack. We don't automatically grow. Why do you think I plead with you and tell you, and by the way, we're getting a growing number at 12 noon of people in our prayer meeting at Tuesday night.

This last Tuesday was so sweet. Why do you think I ask you to do those things? You think that does something for me, personally, that you come? It's for you. We just heard the Lord encourage us.

We just heard the song. We heard what Carol said. Pray.

We heard what Tanika sang. Pray. When you're broken and you're down, pray.

Satan's gonna try to stop you from praying with other Christians. Well, of course, I'm telling you now. I'll prophesy between now and Tuesday night, he'll give you three reasons not to come and pray because he knows when you pray, you'll get stronger.

And his whole strategy is to get you weaker. Oh no, you don't know my schedule. God knows your schedule.

And priorities are priorities. It doesn't matter if you're in the choir. Nothing matters.

It all has to do with the warfare that we're in. And nobody's out of the woods. Nobody's not vulnerable.

I remember as a new minister, riding in a car in New Jersey, listening to one of the best commentators, scriptural writers, and well-known pastors from the 20th century, from 50, 60 years ago. I heard him as an older man. And he was sharing the story about, after writing great books, he has a book on 2 Corinthians that is just one of the best commentaries on 2 Corinthians there is.

It's in my library. And other books about Isaiah 40 onwards. He said, you know, he retired.

He was going out and writing. He was going out and speaking some. And out of nowhere, out of nowhere, a sewer opened up.

And like 10,000 demons were let loose to attack him. The man had served God for decades. The man had written books that blessed other people.

He had pastored with distinction. And he's sharing this on the radio. I remember pulling over the side of the road because I was riveted.

And he's saying that here he is, an older man with his wife. He gets irritable. He starts to can't stand her.

And now these demonic attacks come in his mind for anger. And then he says, out of nowhere, I got tempted to curse. And I never cursed in my life.

I had evil words put in my mind and I got this instinct. I just wanted to lash out and start cursing. And I said to me, my God, what is happening to me? How could I serve God all this time? Isn't there some safe zone? There's no safe zone except Jesus.

You need Jesus every day. And he went on to share what he learned through this attack that God brought him through and gave him victory over. No one knows the battles anyone's fighting, starting with me.

You don't know any battles. I don't know your battles, except I know we're all in it. Are we not all in it? How many lift your hand and say amen.

And that's why we have to love each other and encourage each other. And you in the webcast watching, you're going through something, you're saying, why, why, why? You got it, Asa. In his 36th year out of nowhere.

Notice what the test revealed. It revealed where he was spiritually. And in this case, almost bankrupt.

He's lost childlike trust. He's lost the instinct to pray. He's lost that thing of just run to God, for us, run to Jesus, bring the problem to Jesus.

Asa did that when he was younger. Is that not that true for some of us? When we were newer in the Lord, younger in the Lord, more impressionable, more tender, the Bible and the Lord, we ran, we ran, we prayed, we cried, we listened, we waited before God. But now we're matured.

Oh, we think we're mature. And that's not maturity. Some of us under the guise of maturity have really lost out on childlike faith.

And just because we got more money and we live in a nicer apartment or house and you have a better car and nicer clothes, remember the success that leads to failure. He won the battle and his strategy worked, but he was a loser. The prophet came to him and said, don't you get it? God's upset with you because you've lost your childlike trust.

You used to pray and believe God for everything, but now you're so smart. You're figuring everything out on your own and you think it worked. It didn't work.

It just looks like it worked. That's not true. That can't be true for us.

Think of the churches in America now that have doubled the amount of people that were coming 10 years ago, but they've lost out with God. No sense of Jesus, no spirit of prayer, no much spirit of love. What goes on is mostly a show, very little of the word of God.

And you say, yeah, but they're running 800 and they used to have 300. Yeah, it doesn't matter how many are running. It matters if God is happy with it.

It matters if it's trusting Jesus, loving Jesus. Numbers don't matter. All these people that come here in a day, that doesn't prove anything.

It's how you all live. That's the thing that God is looking at, how I live, how you live. Come on, let's say amen.

Do we really trust him? Do we really love him? That's a good lesson for us. Just because it looks good doesn't mean it's good. And you can do things by human strategy.

I talk to pastors, I talk to some pastors, I talk for an hour with them and they never mention God or the Holy Spirit in the Bible. All they're talking about is lights and PowerPoints and smoke and camels and cannons and how they're running some kind of show and this draws the people. This is what the church of Jesus is about? Is this what it's gonna come to? Is this what it's all about? He died on the cross, but we have to entertain everybody for a short period of time or they're gonna leave.

So finally, what else can we learn? Ah, the prophet reminded King Asa what we need to remember, that without faith it's impossible to please God. I don't care how long you're singing in the choir, I don't mind how many verses you learn. Asa knew a lot of verses from the Old Covenant, from the Old Testament, didn't do him a whole lot of good.

I was thinking of that verse yesterday in John 6. Jesus said to the religious leaders and the people, you search the scriptures because in them you think you have eternal life, but they speak of me, but you won't come to me. You'll come to the Bible, but you won't come to me. Now that's a heavy thought.

You can actually come to the Bible and never have heart contact with Jesus. You can memorize verses and get meaner every month. Is that not true? Come on, is that not true? Is that not true? It's happened to me.

You can get into a Bible study spirit. Oh no, Pastor Semble, a Bible study is never wrong. No, it is never wrong, but you can study the Bible and if you never get your heart in touch with Jesus and worship Jesus

and surrender to Jesus and let him fill you with his spirit, now you got some kind of weird religion.

You got the Bible without the author of the Bible. Ah, the eyes of the Lord. The eyes of the Lord.

This is one thing still true. You know what the eyes of the Lord are still doing? They're still running to and fro over the whole earth. Just looking.

Who can God show himself mighty for? What miracle can he do? What deliverance can he bring? The eyes of the Lord are just looking through the whole choir and through the whole audience over all the pastors in New York City. The eyes of the Lord run to and fro over the whole earth, waiting to see who he can show himself mighty on behalf of those who are fully committed to him in trust. Not perfect.

Nobody's perfect. If God only helps people who are perfect, he's not helping a soul, but people who want to be right and who trust him, who run to him and pray. Did you know that trouble sometimes is the safest place to be in? Come on, how many know exactly what I'm talking about? Lift up your hand.

You know why troubles and trials and challenges and difficulties come? Because then you go, oh, help me, Jesus. Am I right? But when a lot of times the blessings that we get, do they not become a curse? Blessings can become a detriment because now you're cruising. You don't even need God.

Someone once said to me, you know, Jim, a great man of God told me many years ago, Jim, listen, remember this. The Holy Spirit could leave the earth and some churches wouldn't notice it for five or 10 years because they're operating without any need of the Holy Spirit. They don't need the Holy Spirit.

They got the thing down, but that's not the Christian church. How many know today beyond a shadow of a doubt for you to fight the good fight of faith and overcome the enemy, you need Jesus every day. Just lift your hand up so God can see it.

You need Jesus. Close your eyes with me. God, I would call people to the altar, but we all need to come.

So what's the sense of me asking them to come? Save us from the success that leads to failure. Restore childlike faith to all of us that when trouble comes, difficulties are confronted, that we will be like the little child that runs, runs to the father. Help me, help me, help me, hold me.

I'm in the midst of a storm. I'll be safe in my father's arms. Help us to not think that we're maturing when we're really backsliding.

Help us to remember that we don't automatically grow when it comes to spiritual life. We can actually regress. We can go backwards.

We can lose faith, lose love, lose fervency, lose hunger and thirst for righteousness. We can become complacent. We can get lazy.

We can make excuses and judge other people and never see ourselves. And then when someone says something or we hear a sermon, God, have mercy on us. We want to reject the messenger because the message has hit too close to home.

This is what we learn from your servant Asa. And you put it in the Bible for a reason. So God, what can we say today? Starting with me, I need thee.

I need thee. We all need you. Save us from the snare of the fowler, the trap of the enemy, the devices of Satan.

Save us from plans that look good, promise great success, but we never ran it by you. Never even thought to pray. God, keep being the God of our salvation.

Help us not to trust in ourselves. Those watching on the webcast, those across the street possibly, Lord, make it real for them. Just pray with me for one more second.

There's something else I believe I should say in your hearing to God. God, you promised me all those years ago that if Carol and I would lead the people to pray, you would give me every sermon I needed, that we would always have enough money, both the church and us personally, pay our bills, and that there never would be a building large enough to contain all the people you would send in if we just kept calling on you. In a day where prayer is decreasing, oh God, stir up the spirit of prayer in us.

That we could be a lighthouse for you to encourage other believers that God's not dead, he's alive, he's alive. And if he's alive, then he's the God of the Bible who hears and answers prayer. Let our Tuesday night services be filled with people who have never left the simplicity of childlike trust, depending on you for everything.

Just before we say amen, I believe Lord wants me to tell someone here who wants to become a lawyer, you're not sure you'll ever become a lawyer, the door will open, God's gonna open the door, you will become a lawyer. You're gonna become a lawyer and you're gonna represent Christ doing what he's called you to do. Don't be afraid, it's gonna happen, God's gonna open that door.

We thank you, Jesus, that you're gonna work out your will for all of us here, Lord, today. We can leave this building rejoicing in the God of our salvation. Help us to love one another more, Lord, for by this shall men know that we belong to you because we love one another.

Melt us together, get rid of all barriers, walls, partitions, grudges, resentments, every kind of thing, prejudice of every kind, get rid of it in the name of Jesus, let it come down so that we can just love on each other. We ask all this in Christ's name, and everyone said, would you please stand? I now pronounce you man and wife, all of you. Hug somebody, will you turn around and give a bunch of people a hug, okay? God bless you.

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