**SERMON SERIES:**

**LIVING A VICTORIOUS CHRISTIAN LIFE**

 **“The Victory Of A Seeking Heart”**

*Jeremiah 29:10-13*

Let’s begin this morning by finding our Scripture reading, Jeremiah 29:10-13.

Today we take another step in our journey together through our summer sermon series “Living A Victorious Christian Life.” We’ve discussed how we can have victory every day by living in Christ instead of in the old self, “in Adam”; by living consciously under grace rather than under the law; and by remembering that we’ve received the righteousness of Christ, and that we’re clothed in his good, pure, holy nature.

Last Sunday we explored the victory we can experience when we allow the Holy Spirit to fill us. When we’re willing to put aside our fears of “What will he ask me to do?!” we can access the greatest source of power in all creation! So in order for us to stop living in worry or fear, we need to be people of seeking hearts. What’s at the core of every victorious believer is a heart that relentlessly pursues God.

Our Scripture reading shows how God promised to honor those who search for him—even when they’re in harsh or difficult seasons. The mighty nation of Babylon had already deported many people from Judah. It wouldn’t be long before Babylon would strike against God’s chosen city and carry away most of the remaining citizens of Jerusalem into captivity.

God instructed the prophet Jeremiah to send a letter to that first group of exiles. He told them not to listen to the false prophets who were promising the Hebrews that they’d soon be returned to their homeland. Instead, God’s message to them was to “Get comfortable!” Jeremiah 29:5-7 instructed the people to build homes, settle in, marry and have children. They were to pray for the peace and well-being of Babylon—if things went well for Babylon, things would go well for the Hebrew exiles as well.

Then we read the following: *10This is what the Lord says: “You will be in Babylon for seventy years. But then I will come and do for you all the good things I have promised, and I will bring you home again.  11For I know the plans I have for you,” says the Lord. “They are plans for good and not for disaster, to give you a future and a hope.  12In those days when you pray, I will listen.  13If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.”*

To a humbled, enslaved people, God said he hadn’t forgotten them. Yes, they were being punished for their sins and disobedience. But God still had a plan and a purpose for them, despite how things looked at the moment. He told them that when they were allowed to return home, if they’d seek him with all their heart they would find him.

Many Christians lose the victory because they stop seeking God. They become satisfied with the status quo. They fall under the spell of doing the same things over and over. They lose the sense of God’s grandeur―of his immense power―of his desire to see us grow―of his ability to make it happen!

The victorious Christian is always hungry to know God more deeply, to know his truth more accurately, to know his ways more fully, and to follow him more perfectly. While many may be content to just “sign up, show up, and pay up” once a week, the victorious believer yearns for more fellowship with the Father, more truth from his Word―with more fruit and evidence of God’s grace in his or her life.

***I’m a collector. I’ve been collecting comics books on and off since I was thirteen. I’ve got thousands of them and whenever I’m in a used bookstore or flea market I’m on the lookout for comics to dig through. When home video arrived in the early 1980s—I became a collector of movies. I’ve always been a movie buff, and for the past thirty-five years I’ve collected movies for enjoyment. And as Felicia will tell you, if I spot a used bookstore, you’d better just turn me loose! I’ve been an avid reader all my life and I love browsing through bookstores.***

***Now if you collect anything, you know that part of the fun of being a collector is “the search.” You know what I’m talking about: that sense of anticipation--the “thrill of the hunt.” When I see a stack of comics or a used bookstore, there’s a moment of excitement and hope—because perhaps in that stack or that store I might find something I’ve been searching for—or even better, something I didn’t even know existed! This is why collectors spend time carefully rummaging thru yard sales, flea markets, or estate sales: we’re seeking that elusive or unique item. And as we search, our hearts beat faster in anticipation and excitement.***

That’s the *essence* of what it means to seek God. We yearn to knowGod’s presence and power more fully and deeply, so wecommit ourselves to the hunt. There’s anticipation, hope,excitement; and unlike a movie or a book, God *wants* to befound by us! He longs to reveal more of himself to us.Psalm 105:4 tells us *Search for the Lord and for his strength; continually seek him.* So how might we do this? How can we look for God *wholeheartedly,* as Jeremiah said? Let me offer a few thingswe’re familiar with but need reminding of…

**Worship** is a place where our seeking hearts can find God: but wehave to put forth the effort to seek God in worship. Simply showing up and going through all the prescribedmotions isn’t enough. We have to *want* to encounter God.

Now we recognize that God is already present in this placebefore we ever get here. We *come into* his presence becauseGod is already here waiting for us. But we must do our partand choose to engage with him in worship. Engaging in worship is work. It takes effort, intentionality.We cannot experience the fullness of God if we’re notactively looking for him and wanting him. Many Christianslive in defeat because they’ve long since stopped expectingGod to do anything in worship. ***Pastor and author R.C. Sproul says, “We are so used*** ***to not having and sensing God’s presence that we don’t miss it.”***

Those who truly hungry for more of God also **seek God in prayer.** This seeking in prayer is easily combined with worship:try spending a few minutes in prayer before worship begins. Pray in your seat. Pray at the altar. Pray with someone else. Strangely, it seems that many Christians are afraid of our altars. Of course, I’m being a bit facetious here, but if you think about it people coming to altars seems to happen less and less.

I’m not talking about coming for salvation but just for prayer. In every church I've served there were always a faithful handful of people who came to the altar when offered the opportunity. But most didn’t. Some may’ve had physical or health restrictions that prevented them from coming forward. Some may’ve not needed to. But I think one reason Christians remain afraid of our altars is because we’re too concerned about what others will say or think.

Jesus said in Luke 11:10, “*For everyone who asks, receives. Everyone who seeks, finds. And to everyone who knocks, the door will be opened.”* Not “Some people will receive.” Not “A select few will find.” Not “Only those who have it all together will have the door opened.” EVERYONE who asks, seeks, knocks! And we do that through prayer—consistently, faithfully, passionately.

A final component is **seeking** **God in the Bible**. Investment in the Word of God helps bring us victory. The Bible is the primary way God has chosen to make his voice known to us. The more time we devote to the Scriptures, the better we know his voice. Jesus said*, …[The* *shepherd] calls his own sheep by name…*

*When he has brought out all his own, he goes on ahead of them, and his sheep follow him because they know his voice* (John 10:2-4).

Defeat, confusion and misdirection happens because we simply don’t know our Master’s voice like we should. Too manyChristians are content to let the pastor tell them what to think and what to believe. They don’t take time to read for themselves*.* Preaching the Word of God is important, and it’s important for usto hear and respond to it. But if the only exposure we have toGod’s Word and God’s voice is through a twenty or twenty-five minute sermononce a week, that’s not enough.

Much like being a collector and looking for a rare, out-of-print, or unusual item, the time we devote to the Scriptures rewards us with much greater and more lasting benefits. The HolySpirit implants the Word within us, calling it to our memory and need at different times. And much like being a collector,there’s still the thrill and expectation of discovering God inthe depths of his Word.

 ***So I want to issue you a challenge this morning. If you attend a Sunday school class, I want to challenge you to set aside three minutes at the beginning or the end of your class for prayer. And I’d like you to use the Scripture verses that serve as your lesson for that day. Have someone read the Scripture lesson aloud and then enter a time of prayer centered around that passage. Pray for whatever you wish but use the verses as a guide.***

 ***For example, let’s say your Sunday school lesson in Psalm 23. Read the psalm out loud and then let the class offer prayers for God’s shepherding care, those going through the valley of death, the blessings we have from God each day, for protection, or for God’s kingdom. In other words, link your prayers to the Scripture reading for that week. If you accept this challenge, I guarantee you’ll find a deeper, richer, warmer element to your prayer life.***

 ***If you don’t attend Sunday school, I’d like to challenge you to spend three minutes in prayer for our worship service before you get out of your car. Pull in and park, and pray together as a family for your needs and for the different parts of the worship service. If you accept this challenge, I guarantee you’ll find a deeper, richer, warmer relationship with your family and more expectation for worship.***

We read in Deuteronomy 4:29, “*And if you search for him with all your heart and soul, you will find him.”* If you’re not afraid of finding God―if you’re not afraid of growing in your faith―if you’re not afraid of living out your witness before the church, then accept this challenge. And watch what God does with your willingness to draw closer to him and find victory with a seeking heart!

Let us pray: *O God, who is ever more anxious to be found than we are to seek, you have told us in today’s Scripture reading* 13”If you look for me wholeheartedly, you will find me.” *We humbly ask for a heart that is supremely devoted to you and your glory. Remove from us all unworthy pursuits that distract us from a deeper, richer, warmer relationship with you; turn our hearts toward the things of your kingdom and our hands to the work of ministry. Help us rise to the challenge that has been put before us, that we might experience your transformative power in our lives, our Sunday school classes, our families, our church, and our neighborhoods. May your grace be ever directed toward your children’s good, and our devotion and loyalty to you alone. In the name of our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ; amen.*