

# Does Success Lead to Happiness?

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 12 March 2023

Preacher: Simon Dowdy

[ 0 : 00 ] The reading is Luke chapter 12, which can be found on page 1049, beginning at verse 13. Someone in the crowd said to him, Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me.

But he said to him, Man, who made me a judge or an arbitrator over you? And he said to them, Take care and be on your guard against all covetousness, for one's life does not consist in the abundance of one's possessions.

And he told them a parable saying, The land of a rich man produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, What shall I do, for I have nowhere to store my crops? And he said, I will do this.

I will tear down my barns and build larger ones. And there I will store all my grain and my goods.

And I will say to my soul, Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years.

Relax, eat, drink, be merry. But God said to him, Fool, this night your soul is required of you.

[ 1 : 16 ] And the things you have prepared, whose will they be? So is the one who lays up treasure for himself, And is not rich towards God.

And he said to his disciples, Therefore I tell you, Do not be anxious about your life, What you will eat, Nor about your body, What you will put on.

For life is more than food, And the body more than clothing. Thank you. Thank you. Catherine, thanks very much for reading.

Please do keep the Bibles open. One of our convictions here at Grace Church Dulwich Is that the Bible, Far from being a, Simply a kind of historical record, Is in fact God's word for us.

It's the means by which God speaks to us And addresses us. And therefore I'm just going to pray, And ask for his help, As we hear his word. Let me lead us in prayer.

[ 2 : 20 ] Heavenly Father, We're very conscious that we live, In a particular city, Which is a successful, wealthy city, And that we are, At this very moment, In a particularly wealthy, And successful corner of it.

And we pray therefore, Please would you help us, As we look at your word together, Now, To see what true success is, And isn't. Amen.

Amen. Well, imagine the scene. It was the retirement party of the year, Held in a glittering venue, With fantastic views, Across the city of London.

He'd achieved top marks, In his professional exams. He was one of the youngest ever, To be made partner of his firm. Over the years, He had reaped the rewards of success, And now, At the age of 50, He was looking forward to his retirement.

As he admires the views, Stretching out across the city of London, He thinks to himself, Yes, Life has been good. A fabulous house, In the right parts of London, A pension pot, Which will secure his income, Into the future.

[ 3 : 36 ] He's looking forward to spending, The extra time he's going to have, With his wife, And his family, Enjoying the fruits of his labour, As he divides his time, Between his house in London, And his holiday home, In the south of France.

Yes, He says, Life's been good. I have ample, Stored up, For the future. The next thing he knows, Is a searing pain, Through his chest, And he is dead, Before the medics, Arrive.

The following week, There's a memorial service, Attended by influential city people, With moving appreciations. And yet, There's another verdict, On his life.

Which no one heard. God's verdict. You fool. It's a shocking story, Isn't it? But actually, It's the one, Which we've just heard, Read to us, From the lips, Of Jesus.

Luke chapter 12. Seems to me, It's shocking, Because this is precisely, The person we look at them, And we say, Yes, This person, Is successful.

[ 4 : 47 ] And yet, God's verdict, You fool. And it begs the question, Doesn't it, How can someone's, Life look so, Right, And so, Kind of, Sorted, As if he's got, Everything in place, So together, Yet actually, To be, So wrong.

How is that possible, To get life, So wrong? Well, It's because success, Blinds. Success, Blinds us, To the reality, Of the present, And success, Blinds us, To the reality, Of the future.

And we're just going to spend, The next few, Moments or so, Thinking about each of those, Two things, In turn. Firstly, Success, Blinds us, To the reality, Of the present. And if you've got your Bible, Open, Just have a look, Again, At Luke chapter 12, Page 1049, And sentence, Number 16, To 19.

And Jesus told them a parable, Saying, The land of a rich man, Produced plentifully. And he thought to himself, What shall I do, For I have no way, To store my crops?

And he said, I'll do this, I'll tear down my barns, And build larger ones, And there I'll store, All my grain, And my goods. And I'll say to my soul, Soul, You have ample goods, Laid up for many years, Relax, Eat, Drink, And be merry.

[ 6 : 17 ] Now we're not told, Whether success, Had made this man happy. And yet of course, Like so many successful people, His success clearly, Isn't enough.

As he has his plans, To build bigger, And bigger barns. And he certainly thinks, Success is going to bring him happiness, As he looks forward, To his future retirement, When he can relax, Eat, Drink, And be merry.

Now I'm very conscious, That those of us in this room, I guess, We will all, Perhaps, Describe success, In different ways. For some of us, It may be, The success of career, Or wealth.

For others, We might think of it more, In terms of, Family life. Or having the time, And space, To pursue our, Hobbies, Or, Or sports, Or, Getting top exam results, Or having lots of friends, Or the success, Which then enables us, To go on lots of holidays, We'll define, I guess, Success in different ways.

But however, We define it, Does it really, Make us happy? Think of, Marilyn Monroe, She was one of Hollywood's, Biggest stars, An estimated net worth, Of 27 million dollars, And yet, Despite her, Enormous fortune, She was deeply unhappy.

[ 7 : 41 ] She was married three times, All three ended in divorce, The final years of her life, Were filled with poor health, She died at the age of 36. Or more recently, Think of, Elon Musk, The owner of the Tesla car company, He's spoken, Spoken of his, Deep unhappiness, His enslavement, To his work, Which, While he admits that, Actually, He's unwilling, To change, He has no intention, Of altering.

Or J.K. Rowling, The woman behind Harry Potter, The woman who brought joy, To millions, And yet, She admits, Having felt deep despair, Writing her novels.

Or the singer, Billie Eilish, Describing the feeling, Success brought, She said, You're basically miserable, Half the time. Or the actor, Robin Williams, Who committed suicide in 2014, All it takes, Is a beautiful fake smile, To hide an injured soul, And they will never notice, How broken, You really are.

Success by itself, Doesn't lead, To happiness. And not just those, Who are successful, And famous, In a recent U.S. survey, 92%, 92% Of high achievers, Said, They were unhappy.

As Andrew, Said earlier, You never end up satisfied, There's always, Another inner circle, That you need to, Get yourself, Into.

[ 9 : 19 ] And notice as well, That wealth, Certainly hasn't made, The person in the crowd, Who asked Jesus, This question, Happy. The man who says, In sentence 13, Who says, Teacher, Tell my brother, To divide the inheritance, With me.

Wealth has just, Brought him, A family dispute, About inheritance. And yet, Jesus' reply, Reveals, This far, The far bigger problem, With success, Is that it blinds us, To the reality, Of what matters, Most.

Because the fact is, That life, Is not about, The accumulation, Of stuff, As Jesus says, In sentence 15, Life does not consist, In the abundance, Of one's possessions, In other words, This man is a prime example, Of how not to do, Life.

You know, Life is not, Is not like some kind of, TV game show, When the person, Who has the most, Is the winner. Jesus says the same thing, At the end of our reading, In sentence 23, For life is more, Than food, And the body, More than clothing.

But what does he mean by that? I think the clue comes, In verse 21, Sentence 21, So is the one, Who lays up treasure, For himself, And is not rich, Towards God.

[ 10 : 54 ] Everything that you and I have, Is a gift from God. He made the world, A good world, An abundant world, A world full of beauty, Full of opportunity, And he gives us stuff, Indeed, He gives us life itself, Not to serve ourselves, But instead to serve, Him, To be rich towards him.

And yet instead, Just like the man in the story, What do we naturally do? We naturally serve, Ourselves. Just have a look again, At the way the man, Speaks to himself, In sentence, Verses 18 and 19, And how he is so kind of, He's obsessed, It's just, It's I, I, I, Verse 18, And he said, I will do this, I will tear down, My barns, And build larger ones, And there I will store, All my grain, And my goods, And I will say to my soul, You have ample goods, Laid up for many years, Eat, Drink, Be merry, Kind of as he, As he thinks, And plans, God doesn't get a look in, God isn't mentioned, He lives, As if God, Isn't there, Now that is a common mistake, But it's also a very foolish one, Because God really is there, It's why elsewhere, In the Bible, We're told, It's the fool, Who says in his heart, That there is, No God, Because God is there, And he's made himself known, I mean just think about Christmas, Every year we celebrate, Don't we, The fact that God has, Come to earth, In the person, Of Jesus Christ, That God's not a mystery, He's made himself known, If you want to, Hear more on that, Then do pick it up, In the question time, And therefore to live as if, God isn't there, Is the heart, Is at the heart, Of what the Bible calls, Sin, It's funny isn't it, I guess we, Kind of instinctively, We hear the word sin, And perhaps we immediately think, Of the front page, Of the tabloid newspapers, Well it may not be, Quite so much today, Because Gary Lineker, I guess is all over, The front page newspapers today, But generally speaking, We think, You know, Big crimes, Front page, Of the tabloid newspapers, And we say to ourselves, It's other people, Who are the sinners, And not me, And yet Jesus says,

We all are, It's his diagnosis, Of what is wrong, With humanity, In other words, It's not just the angry atheists, Like Richard Dawkins, Who live as if, God isn't there, Actually, We all do, By nature, If we are honest, With ourselves, We live our lives, Without any, Meaningful reference, To God, We may believe in God, And yet actually, Functionally, In terms of day to day, We live our lives, Without him, As we, Take God, God's gifts, But we ignore, The giver, Despite the fact, That we've been created, By him, And created, For relationship, With him, That is why, Success by itself, Doesn't lead to happiness, And it's why, Jesus is the answer, To this whole question, Of satisfaction, Because you and I, Are not made, To be rich, Towards ourselves, We're made,

To be rich, Towards God, You and I, Are made, For relationship, With God, And it's lovely, To hear Elias, Was it something, From Andrew, Of how he, Had come to put his trust, In Jesus for himself, So that's the first thing, Success blinds us, To the reality, Of the present, Secondly, Success blinds us, To the reality, Of the future, Have a look again, At sentence number, 20, But God said to him, Fool, This night, Your soul, Is required of you, And the things, You've prepared, Whose will they be, Ultimately, This man, Failed to understand, That his life, Was not, His own, Rather, That it's something, For which we have to give, An account, And so, Although he had planned,

[ 15 : 26 ] For the future, You know, I'm going to build, Bigger barns, And bigger barns, Actually his future planning, Didn't take him far enough, He failed to plan, For the judgment, I guess he may have, Believed in the afterlife, In some sense, And yet the tragedy is, He heads out into eternity, And he is completely, Unprepared, You see, He makes the mistake, Of thinking he's in control, And at that point, All his plans, Are cancelled, At a stroke, Because of course, To lose one's soul, Is to lose, Everything, Now what is Jesus saying here, Well surely he is saying, That death is not the end, And although, The idea of, There being a judgment, And a judgment day, Is unpopular, In our culture, As it is of course, In every culture, Actually the alternative,

Is far worse, The alternative, Is a God, Who doesn't care, A God who is, Indifferent to all, That's wrong with the world, A God who turns, A blind eye, After all, We want, Don't we, Our government, To act justly, Whenever there's, Some case of injustice, Or in the police, We want there to be justice, How much more, Do we want God, Do we want God, To be a God, Who acts justly, And therefore, The reason Jesus tells this story, Is as a warning, And like all warnings, It's an act of kindness, So we can take action, And not make the same mistake, That this man made, Living as if, This life, Is all there is, To live for, I wonder if you've watched the film, United 93, It's a few years old now, Directed by Paul Greengrass, It's the story, Of what happens, When America was attacked, The 9-11 attacks,

What happened to the plane, That didn't reach, Its destination, And crashed, Short of its target, And it's an extraordinarily powerful film, To watch, Because of course, We as the listeners, Know how the film, Is going to end, And the film demonstrates, There's a world of difference, Between feeling fine, And being fine, The majority of passengers, On the plane that day, Looked as if, Life was pretty good, Is a wonderfully sunny day, Someone flying off, On a business trip, To clinch that key business deal, Someone else off, On a sunny holiday somewhere, Someone else off to see, A relative or a friend, A loved one, And yet there's a world of difference, Between feeling fine, And happy, And being fine, And one of the great problems, With success, Is it can make us feel, That life is fine,

When it isn't, Which makes it very hard, To think about death, And of course, Even harder, To think about life, After death, And yet it's why, Jesus came, The reason Jesus came, Into the world, God himself, Coming into the world, Was to offer, The forgiveness of sins, To offer life with God, The very life, That we are made for, Life with God, Both in this world, And life with God, In the next, It's what Easter's all about, We'll get to Easter, In a few weeks time, But on Good Friday, Jesus died on the cross, Taking the punishment, For our sins, Three days later, He rose from the dead, Never to die again, Which means, Death isn't the end, As Patasha said, We've got a, Our Easter service, Coming up, I think you've probably, Been given an invitation, Card, We'd love you to join us, As we ask the question, Was the resurrection, Of Jesus fact, Or fiction, Fact, Or fiction, If Jesus didn't rise, From the dead, Then he's still dead, There's no life, Beyond the grave, We might as well live, In this world, Just like the man, In our story, But if Jesus, Did rise from the dead, Never to die again, Why it changes everything, It means that Jesus, Is Lord and King, It means that he will return, At the end of time, Just as he said, He will do, It means he's the judge, Of all, And of course it means, That death is not, The end, So then what does it mean, To be rich towards God, Well it certainly doesn't mean, Kind of buying God off, By going to church, Or giving to charity, Or something like that, No,

[ 20 : 33 ] Being rich towards God, Is, The opposite of what, Our man does, In the story, It's recognizing, That God is God, That is the thing, He failed to do, It's recognizing, That we have to give an account, It's recognizing, That we all fall short, It's what the man, Failed to do, And then wonderfully, It's turning to, Jesus Christ, And it's putting, Our trust, In him, It's beginning a new life, Following him, As lord, And king, In short, It's what it means, To become a Christian, Now someone was here, Last week, And they asked, They asked, They didn't ask me, They asked someone else, Why do you keep gay on, At Grace Church, About Jesus, And now I can tell you that, Because I know they're not here today, They were just visiting, Although they've been enough times, Obviously to ask the, Why do you keep banging on, About Jesus question,

But I hope we can see, Why we do, It's why if you've never really, Investigated, The claims of Jesus Christ, We'd love you to do so, And we'd love you to do so, As an adult, If you've never, Done that, There really is, Far too much at stake, Not to do so, It's very easy I think, To have a kind of, A Sunday school view, Of Jesus, We'd love you to have, An adult view, Of Jesus, And Patasha will say, More later on, About how we can, Do that, Well for those of us, Who do know Jesus already, This story Jesus tells, Is a wonderful, Corrective for us, Isn't it?

Many of us, Are surrounded, By successful people, Successful people at school, Successful people at work, Successful people, In our friendship groups, And yet success by itself, Doesn't lead to happiness, And it doesn't lead, To satisfaction, In the famous words, Of Augustine, You have made us, For yourself, O Lord, And our heart, Is restless, Until it finds, Its rest in you, Let's, Those of us, Who know Jesus, Let's keep rejoicing, In him, And make sure, Our hearts, Are focused, On him, Rather than, On being successful, And instead, On being rich, Towards, God, Let me lead us, In prayer, Let's pray, For life, Is more than food, And the body, More than clothing, Heavenly Father, We praise you, For the Lord Jesus,

Coming into our world, God himself, Coming into our world, Speaking, The very words, Of God, And we want to take, This story, He told, To heart, Thank you, That he rose, From the dead, Thank you, That there is, More to life, Simply, Than this life, Thank you, That there is, A reality, Beyond the grave, And we pray, Heavenly Father, Please would you help us, To trust these words of Jesus, And to live in the light of them, And we ask it in his name, Amen.