

Rico Tice

What is Success?

Luke 12:13-21

Well, gents thank you very much for coming out this morning, I wonder if you can see this piece of paper that's in front of you on the tables. I'm just going to throw out a bit of the Bible and I just don't know what you make of it. Here's a bit of the Bible, it's Jesus telling a parable so you can fold it up and put it in your wallet. I find it really compelling. Let me read it to you, say a few words about it, and then I really hope it will be food for thought. Let me read it to you, so here's Jesus, it's Luke 12, one of the biographies of Jesus, and this is the story we hear him tell:

Someone in the crowd said to him, "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Jesus replied, "Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?" Then he said to them, "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; a man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions."

And he told them this parable: "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop. He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods. And I'll say to myself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry."' But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?' This is how it will be with anyone who stores up things for himself but is not rich toward God."

I don't know what's wrong with me but I find myself constantly reading the most inane, ridiculous material, in fact I think that's why I got my Third, I think my reading was hopeless. I do hope you spend your reading time slightly more profitable than I do. Here, for example, is something I read recently. It's a list of lost property left on British Rail trains over the last couple of years. Anyone read this? No, I thought I may be the only who had had a look at this list. And at the top of this list was, to my astonishment, was a human brain which was left by a medical student on an away day. I don't know what you make of that, but that may be the ultimate in absent-mindedness, I'm not sure. Other things on the list include a pair of stuffed gerbils, a glass eye, a motorcycle and a wooden leg, and the mind boggles as to whether the same person left them all on the train, that's what I was thinking.

Well, by contrast gents this morning, and thanks for coming out this morning, I'd love you to do a small exercise with me. Henry Ford said this, "Thinking is probably the hardest work there is, which is the probable reason why so few engage in it." But could you put your mind to this question this morning: do you think you're a successful person? Do you think you're a successful

person? And I'm not so much saying have you been in the past or do you think you will be in the future, but right now at this point in time, would you consider yourself successful? And I guess there'd be a whole array of us here. My brother was always incredibly successful. He was head boy, he was captain of all the school teams. I nearly put on my upper form I was his brother, but you know I don't know where we'd be on the range. There'd be some who'd say, 'look, you know with all modesty Rico, I think I am.' There'd be others who have been put down so often their confidence is rock bottom, they don't think they are. Most of us, I guess, would be mucking around somewhere in the middle. But the question is, what would constitute success as far as you're concerned?

And there comes before us this morning in this passage from Jesus, a man who from every point of view would have been considered successful, and yet extraordinarily God's judgement on him, the Creator's judgement on him, was that he was a dismal failure. And do you see that as we look down, gents, third line up from the bottom, fourth paragraph. "But God said to him," this is his obituary, "'You fool!'" 'You fool!' This is the funeral card of my best friend from university, and I took his funeral two years ago, he died of an aneurism, and I went to his grave with his father last year in the Midlands, we stood at his grave, his father broke down at his grave. And his father pointed at the headstone of his son and said, "I don't know what to put on his grave. What words shall I put on his grave?" Well, his dad didn't know what to write on his son's headstone, but actually God writes the words on this man's headstone. 'You fool!' And it's interesting in the Greek, not that I know Greek, I've just said that to impress you. But apparently in the Greek the word 'fool' literally means without thought, so it means without using your brain. And it's not that he didn't think, he did, this guy made plans, he sat down, he thought and thought and thought, in fact his mind time was absolutely full, it really was. But he didn't think about the right things, he didn't think about the really important things in life.

So let's just give our minds to that this morning, the dividing things that constitute success and failure in this story. It's a very striking story but it had to be. Jesus had been talking about eternity, he had been talking about the things of God, people should be riveted. The Bible says God has put eternity into our hearts. So, 6th August 1982 my godfather gets killed and suddenly I'm thinking about eternity, and suddenly my heart opens up and I go, 'what's going on there.' And this chapter has been about that, so verse two is a bit like Gladiator, Maximus, "What we do in life echoes in eternity." Verse two we read, "There is nothing concealed that will not be disclosed." Verse 5, "Fear him who, after the killing of the body, has power to throw you into hell." That's pretty striking. Verse 8, the future, we learn belongs to this figure, the Son of Man. And people are listening, it's eternity, what do we do with that, I know life is short.

And then suddenly, bang, there's a massive interruption, do you see verse 13, let's have a look at that, sorry the first line of it, this is verse 13 of the chapter, massive interruption and this guy said, "Someone in the crowd said to him, 'Teacher, tell my,'" wretched, "' brother to divide the inheritance with me.'" By the way it doesn't say the word 'wretched', I put that in, I think that's what he means. He says, "Forget about eternity! Forget about this super-spiritual rubbish, pie in the sky when you die. That doesn't put bread on the table. Just grow up, that's not reality. Tell my brother to divide the inheritance, the will." You know what they say don't you, where there's a will there's a family. That's what's going on here, isn't it?

And here are two brothers falling out for good over money. So their relationship is coming to an end over who's going to get Granny's sideboard and clock. And it happens, doesn't it. Do you know I've got a friend, I've got a colleague, he took a funeral and during the funeral one of the members of the family removed from the parental home what they wanted, during the funeral. Can I say, don't do that, it annoys people, it's annoying. Sort of puts a bit of a shadow over Christmas, you know? So this guy is absorbed by possessions, he can't be doing with Jesus' teaching. So, have a look down do you see Jesus' reply, "'Man, who appointed me a judge or an arbiter between you?' Then he said to them, 'Watch out!'" So Jesus, having been so rudely interrupted says, "Watch out! ... A man's life does not consist in the abundance of his possessions." And then he arrests us with this parable. This incredibly angry guy who's got a rip in his pocket to go serve at court against his own brother, put it back in his pocket, step back and say, 'look, what's important, what's crucial here?'

So we get the story, do we see as we look down, second paragraph, line five as we look down. "The ground of a certain rich man produced a good crop." So this guy knows exactly how to work the EU subsidies. And the stables have been converted into garages and there are four family cars. And in city terms I guess you'd see him commuting in from Sunningdale every morning, in he'd go. Sorry if any of you do that, don't mean to be rude about that. But his wife shops at Harrod's and Harvey Nicks. He'd have a house across next to Ernie Ells on the Wentworth Estate, wouldn't he? He'd be playing golf there, loves to play the west course every Saturday morning. And the kids, well the boys would be at Harrow or Eaton, the girl would be at Downe House. He drives an Aston Martin. That's his life, and if you saw him commuting in you'd nudge your mates as you walk past First Class. You'd say, 'look at him, he's made a fortune you know. Take his advice. He's no fool. Amazing guy.' So he's a partner at Goldman Sachs, and he is the guy that actually saved Goldman Sachs billions of pounds. You know they ended up with 8 billion on the sub-prime stuff, but they were at 51 exposure. He's the one who got them out. He's a very bright guy. And you know he sold shares, he went straight down to Harrow, went straight down to Downe House, paid off the school fees. When the housing slump occurred a bit he said to his

wife, 'It's a home, it's not just a house it's a home.' He's a bright guy, he knows how to do it, take his advice he's no fool.

Have a look down, do we see that, third paragraph, "He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all my grain and goods.'" So you see he gets a better harvest than expected but there's no panic, there's no waste, he's not going to flood the market. He gets out his calculator, he does his sums, he does his work, he sees it's definitely worth paying for a massive grain storage mountain. Bigger profit than normal this year, there's no point in letting Gordon Brown get his hands on it, so he calls in his accountant and he works out how to invest it. And then, having planned and worked and thought and planned a worked, it's amazing because he's eventually able to arrive at, there it is, line 8, he's eventually able to say to himself, "You have plenty of good things laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry." So he retires early at 47. It's just absolutely fantastic, he's done it. Left school aged 18 and said, 'I want to retire by my mid-forties,' and he's basically done it. He's retired early. And doubtlessly the Sunday Times colour supplement would run an article on him entitled, "The Man Who Knew When To Stop." And those people slogging up, commuting into the city, they'd read it and they'd say, 'Very wise, very wise.' And we see that he's now trying to get his handicap down to single figures, he wants to get down to single figures on the west course at Wentworth, now that's a battle. So he's going to try and shoot under eighty every time as he goes out. And he's also a member of Royal St. George's where, actually, down in Sandwich he's built the most fantastic holiday home, wonderful, overlooking the bay.

Well I wonder if you can imagine it, gents, the retirement party has come and gone, it's a lovely Sunday afternoon in the summer at Sandwich. The sun's sort of bouncing off the water, it's a beautiful day. His wife is with the staff clearing up in the kitchen. He's got a long cool glass of orange, what do you think, perhaps orange juice in his hand? He's standing on the veranda looking out over the bay. The congratulations from his friends are ringing in his ears, they're saying, 'we saw the article; I don't know how you did it. We're going to have to go on working for years, you've made it.' And he looks down and there are holiday brochures on the little side table behind him. There are safaris, there's skiing, he doesn't know, Courchevel, Aspen, Verbier, Val d'Isere, but he's going to buy a chalet because he doesn't want to be mucking around with time shares, not with global warming. You've got to go when the snow's good. So he says to himself as he looks down and he sees the safaris and the skiing, and he looks out and he sees his boat, and he looks behind him and he sees the wonderful house he's built, and he looks across, he can see Sandwich and the golf course, and he says to himself, "You've done it! You've done it! You've retired early. You've plenty laid up for years and years and years. Take life easy: eat, drink," and suddenly, there is a searing pain in his chest and he is dead before they get him in

intensive care. Verse 20 can we see if we look down, there it is line 10, fourth paragraph, "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.'"

Well they hold a memorial service for him in the city, some church in the city, I guess St. Helen's Bishopsgate, that's a good place for a funeral. And the trade journal will say what a loyal servant of the company he was, and his chairman will say what an example he was to his profession, and God will say to him, 'You fool!' And gentlemen I've taken funerals of men like this, and my godfather died 6th August 1982, he was like this. I took a funeral of a young mum who had been killed in a car crash, and an old lady at the funeral said to me, she said, 'Rico, do you know what failure is?' I said no, and she said, 'This is failure. Failure is being successful at the things that don't matter.' Failure is being successful at the things that don't matter. And the money, where did all the money go? Well the lawyers tidied up most of it, but actually it went to his son who was a worthless guy. I mean, he was a good chap, a bit of a laugh, but all he liked was wind surfing, that's fine but that's all he liked. So he just spent the money for twenty years wind surfing around the world. Broke his mother's heart. And the eternal world? Well, all was lost, there was nothing. He was not rich towards God. Poverty-stricken eternally, in terms of the soul.

Now I don't know what you think about that gents, but do you reckon it might have made the guy with the rip in his pocket put it back and actually go, you know what, before I kick off with my brother, what is important? I think it would have made him think about it at least. And when it comes to success in life we all want to be successful, but this guy makes two fatal mistakes and I think they're fairly common and let me just throw them out to you. I've never met anyone who wants to fail, I think we all want to succeed but what were his two mistakes. The first mistake was this, this guy lived as though God was not there. Now we don't know much about this guy, we don't know if he was a good husband or a philanderer, we don't know if he was a good father or he beat his children. All we know is that at the end of the passage do we see, he was not rich towards God. Now here's the issue, I don't doubt for a single moment that if you walked up to him on the street with a vox pop and you said, "What do you think about God? What do you think about the creator?" he'd say, "Lovely! Look at the Wentworth, it's beautiful. Look at the rhododendrons down there. Have you seen the view from Sandwich? It's amazing." "Do you believe in God?" "Yes." But he lived as though God didn't exist. He'd have said, "You know, I'm not so much C of E, Church of England, I'm more C and E, Christmas and Easter. Get along then." And it's very striking how self-centred he is, do you have a look down at that third paragraph. I, me or my comes eleven times. "He thought to himself, 'What shall I do? I have no place to store *my* crops.' Then he said, 'This is what I'll do. I will tear down *my* barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store all *my* grain and *my* goods. And I'll say to *myself*.'" He thought he was self-sufficient actually he was self-centred. And selfish people are such a pain aren't they, they really are. Samuel Butler wrote about two incredibly selfish people, Mr and Mrs Carlisle, and

he wrote this, "How good of God to cause Carlisle and Mrs Carlisle to marry one another, and so make two people miserable instead of four." He's just absolutely focussed on himself this guy. So do you see the end of the third paragraph, do you see what he's got, it's all about himself. So he's got treasure, "plenty of good things," he's got leisure, "take life easy," he's got pleasure, "eat, drink and be merry." But God the giver of it all, well actually God's on the back burner. And the Bible says very clearly, some people here will be very able in business, the Bible says your ability to make money in business, Deuteronomy 8, is given by God to take the opportunity, to work hard, to keep going at stuff, to find those deals and make them, it's given by God. And he might have thought that a bit, but here's the issue with this guy, and this is sexist but it's how he felt. Religion really is for the wife and children. Men don't bother with religion. He says I like religion because it's a nice handrail for the wife and kids, but I don't need it. Look at the house I've built, look at the career. I was in the Sunday Times when I retired! Look at what I've achieved, I don't need religion but it's nice for the wife and kids, I like them to do it. That's where he stood, that's really where he's at. Successful men don't need religion, they don't need God. So he lived as if God wasn't there and God said to him, 'what a fool you are.' Why, because God is there and he showed himself.

I come from a family where my mother is totally dominant; she's a total matriarch. The only independent decision my father's made in forty-five years is recognise Angola is a sovereign state. But anyway, I was at home on a day off and my mother said to me, "Richard, I want you to baby-sit your brother's kids." So I had to baby-sit them for a day while they all went off for a wedding, and it was a pretty hefty experience, I tell you. So we played rugby, we played cricket, we played football, we went to the ducks. Someone should have told me at bath time it's helpful if you mostly take your own clothes off, I got drenched at bath time. But anyway, middle of the afternoon while her brothers were having a little sleep, the little girl, Lena Joy, she's three, said to me she wanted to play hide and seek. I said, "Lena, I'd love to play, how do you play?" I don't know if you've noticed that with little ones, you have to get the rules clear before you start otherwise if there is a ruling in the middle of the game, it tends to go against you. So I said, "Lena, how do you play?" She said, "It's easy. You shut your eyes, you count to ten, I go and hide behind the dining room door and you come and find me." I said, "Lena, I've got that clear, shut my eyes, count to ten." She said, "Those are the rules." I said, "Ok." I shut my eyes, I counted to ten. "Is Lena underneath the kitchen table?" Howls of laughter from behind the dining room door. "Is she under Mummy and Daddy's bed?" Howls of laughter from behind the dining room door. "Is she behind the dining room door?" She shot out as though she was spring loaded. I said, "What are we doing now?" She said, "I'm going upstairs to hide under Mummy and Daddy's bed, you have to come and find me." I said, "Ok." Now here was the issue, I found out later on that Lena has been convinced, sadly by the family, that her uncle is such a thick idiot that unless she keeps speaking she'll never be found. And the fun in hide and seek is being found, it's not in hiding. And she

knows that unless she keeps speaking, three months later she'll be dragged out as a skeleton from underneath Mummy and Daddy's bed.

Now here's the issue, gentlemen, we speak to get into relationship with each other. If I arrive here and you don't bother talking to me, we can't know each other. And here's the issue, gentlemen, God has spoken. The Bible says very clearly that God has spoken to us about his Son Jesus Christ, and he has spoken to us so that in our brief lives that are incredibly short, and this guy, I don't mean to be pompous, we played at Twickenham together in 1987, he was as fit and as strong as anyone, aneurism and he's gone, I can't believe he's gone. But God has spoken so that before we die we can get into relationship with him, the God who gives us each breath, and above all he has spoken to us about his Son. And he says, "What do you make of my Son who rose from the dead? Who said to a dead girl, 'Talitha koum', 'little girl get up'? Who stood up on the lake of Galilee and said, 'wind be still' and it was flattened?" What do you make of him? Who said in the Sermon on the Mount love your enemies, pray for those who persecute you, and then as he was being judicially murdered cried out for the people killing him, "Father forgive them, they know not what they do"? That correlation between life and lip is miles from where I am. And he says to us, Jesus Christ is to be as central to your life as a ball is to a game. Now the issue here is lots of people here, think it's just a load of rules, there are a few in the Bible I guess they're ok but frankly they're a bit of a bore. But actually no he's to be as central as a ball. He doesn't just come so that we can meet him, he sent his Son to die on the cross so that we could be forgiven.

A few years ago I was playing rugby in Bristol against the club side called Dings Crusaders. And I arrived at the Dings ground and I saw my opposite number, he was enormous. He had a number three on his back, I knew he was opposite me, I tell you he was built like an outside toilet. Do you know, you look at a guy like that and you think, 'what does his mother look like?' The guy was just massive. And I looked round and he wasn't warming up at all, I thought I wonder why that is, and I looked round and he was holding a tiny baby boy in his arms. And I thought maybe he's not playing, maybe he's babysitting, maybe his mother's playing, I didn't know. Just before kick-off he handed this baby across and he ripped me limb from limb as he walked onto the field. Honestly, the strength in his chest, it was like a car in second-gear. Halftime he went straight back to the baby boy. Second half he came back on and he threw me around like straw in the wind. As the final whistle went and I stuttered off, that baby boy was back in the man's arms. There was no question who the father was, there was no question who the son was. Now do you think God loved his Son Jesus Christ any less than that? Yet he sent him to die so that I could be forgiven, and yet all over this country there are men that say, "God will accept me because I've lived a decent life." Well why did he send his Son to die? If living a decent life was good enough, why did he send his Son to die? Many here will be fathers, you wouldn't let your son die for anyone. God loves me enough to send his Son to die, and people say, "I don't need him, I'm a good guy." And

this guy lives as though there's no God, and God calls him a fool, he says, 'I've sent you to have my Son as central to life as a ball is to a game.'

Secondly, and let me close with this, I'm closing now gents if you can just bear with me just a couple more minutes, secondly this man lives as though there is no judgement. Can we have a look down and see that, it's very striking, have a look down, line ten again, the second to last paragraph, "But God said to him, 'You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you.'" This man's framework for living missed out what he couldn't change which was that there is a day when God will say, 'your life will be demanded from you.' He says, 'I've given you life, I've given you each breath, I'm now asking whether we are in relationship and I do that on Judgement Day.' And may I say, gentlemen, it's a wonderful thing there's a day of judgement, it's brilliant, because it means how I treat you matters to God and how you treat me matters to God and how we treat the world matters to God. It's great there's a day of judgement, it means ultimately there's fairness. There'll be some people here who have been treated appalling and I'm saying to you the people who did that to you will be judged. I watched this film recently, Slumdog Millionaire. People said it was a great film, I thought it was a very striking film, but I tell you what, that boy who's an orphan getting his eyes burned out, and as I saw it happen, his eyes burned out so he can earn more begging, as I saw it happen I said to myself, 'there is a judgement to come, there is a place called hell,' as I saw what those people had done to that child, and it's a replay of what does happen. And the resurrection of Christ proves that we will be raised and judged. Here's the issue gents, you know this because you've buried friends, life is so short and it gets faster and faster and faster. My dad defines middle-age as follows, 'you bend down to do up your shoelaces and ask, what else can I do while I'm down here?' And old age is, 'to my dentures I'm accustomed, to my deafness I'm resigned, I can cope with my bifocals but oh I miss my mind.' Life is just very short, and the question is actually has God sent us, actually has he sent his Son into the world so that actually we can know him and is that actually what marks success in life, what I do with Jesus Christ, who is meant to be as central to me as a ball is to a game.

Failure is being successful at the things that don't matter. Failure is being successful at the things that don't matter. God longs to have us in relationship with him and actually he says the success or failure of any life is what you do with my Son. I sent him to be in relationship with you. Please, before Judgement Day take advantage of that.