

## A. Introduction

1. It's the first weekend of the New Year. It's a fresh start in a lot of ways. We are starting a brand new series. It is called I'm Too [Blank] For Faith.
2. I picked this topic for a lot of reasons. The biggest reason is because so many people are struggling with the whole idea of faith. There's a voice in their head that asks, "Who needs this?"
  - a) Who needs religion?
  - b) Who needs faith?
  - c) Who needs God?
  - d) Isn't that stuff out of date and old fashioned for people driving horses and buggies, making buggy whips, and wearing broad brim hats and homespun cloth, and speaking Pennsylvania Dutch?
3. So all the voices inside our heads that whisper excuses, denials, evasions, and reasons that push God away... I want to speak to those voices.
4. Because what if those voices are actually bringing you down? What if they're sucking away your joy bit by bit, undermining your confidence, and basically making you limp when God designed you to soar?
5. So, I'm Too [Blank] for Faith.
6. There's another big reason in my heart for this series. That reason for people who Aren't Too [Blank] For Faith. For people who are unashamedly Christian, unapologetically biblical, and you're on board with Jesus.
7. If that's you, I want to equip you. I want to put tools in your tool belt. I want to help you know what to say. If your neighbor says, I don't need God-slash-Jesus-slash-faith-slash-religion-slash-whatever, I want you to have some ideas what you might say.
8. So let's be ready.

B. Today, we're going to fill in the blank with the word "successful." I'm too successful for faith.

C. What would Jesus say to the voice that says, "I'm too successful for faith"?

D. Let me read a paragraph of the Bible, and then dig into it.

1. *But Jesus said to him, "Once upon a time, a man planned a big dinner party and invited a great many people. At dinner-time, he sent his servant out to tell those who were invited, 'Please come, everything is now ready.' But they all, as one man, began to make their excuses. The first one said to him, 'I have bought some land. I must go and look at it. Please excuse me.' Another one said, 'I have bought five yoke of oxen and am on my way to try them out. Please convey my apologies.' And another one said, 'I have just got married and I am sure you will understand I cannot come.'"* (Luke 14:16-20, Phil)

E. What would Jesus say to somebody who says I'm doing fine. I don't need God in my life. I'm doing fine without him. I'm too successful for faith. What would Jesus say?

F. I think he would make one statement, and ask three questions.

## II. I'm Too [Successful] For Faith

A. I'm happy for your success.

1. That's the statement I think Jesus would make. He was glad when people were happy for the right reasons. Jesus loves people. Jesus loves you. He wants the best for you.
2. I grew up in the church. A very little church in Chicago. Some of the best people I have ever known were part of that church. They were my second family. They loved me and blessed me a lot. They taught me God's Word, and I think I learned most of what I know today about God at that tiny church in the big city.
3. But I also had some unlearning to do.
4. All through my childhood and into young adulthood, I had this impression that God was most happy when I was most miserable. It was like misery was a sign of spirituality. Self-loathing was a sign of spirituality. Beating yourself up was a sign of spirituality.
5. One of our youth group members actually wrote a song about it. It goes like this:
  - a) I wake up every morning, at the break of day,  
Go over to the mirror, look at myself and say,  
I am a worm.  
I'm low-down, good for nothing at all,  
I don't walk down the street, I crawl,  
I go around feeling one inch tall,  
And everyone's better than me.
6. My impressionable mind somehow got the impression that the more I groveled, the more God smiled.
7. All of that is a lie. None of it is true. It twists God into something he is not. In fact, it is the opposite of how God feels.
8. God rejoices over people. God celebrates your success. God wants your life to be abundant and full. He loves you like an ideal Father, and what ideal Father doesn't want his kids to thrive?
9. God is not against wealth. God is not against success. God is not against you being healthy, wealthy, and wise.
10. Jesus said:

- a) *"If any of you were asked by his son for bread would you give him a stone, or if he asks for a fish would you give him a snake? If you then, for all your evil, quite naturally give good things to your children, how much more likely is it that your Heavenly Father will give good things to those who ask him? (Matthew 7:9-11, Phil)*
11. To whatever voice you hear that says, I'm too successful for God or faith or the Bible, Jesus would start by saying, I'm happy for your success.
  12. This year, 2018, is a year of outreach for Neighborhood. We are planning a series of events to bless our community... Really practical stuff. But also hoping to open doors for people to meet Jesus.
  13. I mentioned it a while back... I'll remind you: it's called the Real Life Redding Event series.
  14. Let me give you one of the most important outreach tips I've ever learned. When you are sharing Christ with a person, don't get into a tug of war. Ever. Want to know what a tug of war sounds like?
    - a) A person says, "I'm too successful for faith."
    - b) You say, "No you're not."
      - (1) That's a tug of war. Don't do it. Rejoice with those who rejoice.
    - c) Instead say, I'm happy for you, and if the day ever comes when that's not working for you, hit me up, and we can talk about Jesus.
  15. Jesus would say, "I'm happy for your success." That's his statement. Because you don't win people to Christ by beating them up with the Bible. Well, there is one exception: religious people. Really religious people. In the Bible, they got slammed. Other than that, don't get in a tug of war.
  16. Jesus would say, "I'm happy for your success." Then I think, if the person were open to a conversation, I think Jesus would ask some questions.
- B. What if you're missing the big picture?
1. As I was thinking about how to approach today's message, I figured it would be best to rewind as far as possible, and set the whole thing in the biggest possible context. The biggest mental, spiritual, biblical context possible, which is this:
  2. Here is God.
  3. Here is the human race.
  4. The study of God is called Theology, but since theology is such a broad term, and it covers all the topics in the Bible, there is a more precise term for the study of God...
    - a) Theology Proper... the organized study of everything the Bible says about who God is and what he is like — his nature, character, names, and ways.
  5. The study of the human race is called anthropology, from the Greek word that means human. But since anthropology is also a very broad word, there is a more precise term for that too...
    - a) Biblical Anthropology... the organized study of everything the Bible says about human nature, including our origin, purpose, identity, and destiny.
  6. Someone says, "I'm too successful for faith. I have all the money I need. I'm healthy. I'm in a great relationship. My kids are awesome. My retirement is set. I'm involved in helping my community. I'm all good. I'm a spiritual person."
  7. But aren't you missing the bigger picture?
    - a) On the anthropology side, you are missing...
      - (1) ...that humans are sacred beings, created in the image of God.
      - (2) ...that we have a moral obligation to our Creator.
      - (3) ...and that we have the potential for a kind of success that matters forever, and can actually alter the shape of eternity.
    - b) You are missing a spiritual dimension that is personal and relational, and logical.
    - c) Above all else, you are missing the one Friend and only Savior who makes the most difference to a human being both for time and for eternity.
      - (a) To say I'm too successful for faith is to miss all that. It is to shrink your own dignity, and settle for something far less than God made you to be.
    - d) To say I'm too successful for faith is also to miss the mark on the side of theology proper. I think Jesus might gently say...
      - (1) ...tell me, exactly, how you define success.
      - (2) And then he might add, tell me, how will the success you have now in this earthly life help you tomorrow in the eternal realms of the heavenlies?
      - (3) What if there is a God?
      - (4) And what if, as the Bible says, he is holy and pure and right? What if his standard of success is absolute, and what if he demands perfection?
        - (a) You shall be blameless before the LORD your God. (Deuteronomy 18:13)
    - e) On the side of theology proper, the voice that says I'm too successful for God does not understand the perfection of God, the justice of God, or the eternality of God. They fail to deal with the nature of God as Creator, Savior, and Judge.
    - f) On the side of biblical anthropology, they do not understand the fallenness of human nature, the corruption of sin, the depth of our unworthiness, and how even the best of us, compared to God's standards, falls impossibly short of the ideal.

- g) You may be prepared financially, physically, and even in your relationships. But are you prepared for the most important factor of all?
  - (1) *Prepare to meet your God! (Amos 4:12)*
    - (a) You say, I don't believe in God and all that.
    - (b) I say, What if you're wrong?
    - (c) You say, That's a chance I'll take.
    - (d) I say, But what do you have to lose?
    - (e) You say, My independence.
    - (f) I say, Service under God is a greater freedom than independence under sin. Like I said, I'm happy for you. Hit me up if you ever want to talk some more. I'm here for you.
- 8. I'm happy for your success. What if you're missing the big picture? Here's the third thing Jesus would say:
- C. Where do you find your purpose?
  - 1. The purpose of a watch is to tell time. If the watch tells time accurately, you can say it's a good watch. But if it's always running ahead or running behind, then it's not a good watch. You make that judgment call based on the watch's purpose.
  - 2. It's the same way with a human life. How do you know whether a human life is a well lived life or a wasted life? How can we tell true success from manufactured success or superficial success?
  - 3. Just like the watch, you make that judgement call based on our purpose.
  - 4. Who are you? Why are you here? Where are you going? What is the purpose of life?
  - 5. If you subtract God from the equation of who you are, there is no purpose, but what you make up, no right and wrong but what you're born with, and no future but either ashes and dust, or the diffusion of your personality into a cosmic blob. Either way, you're done.
  - 6. If there is no transcendent purpose, if there is no identity, if there is no meaning but what we make up, then there is no such thing as success either.
  - 7. Because all you have is you, in your little bubble, telling yourself you are doing a good job for all you hard work, and somebody else, in their little bubble, telling themselves they're doing a good job in their mom's basement playing video games, and you're both successful at something that, when the bubble pops, won't even matter.
  - 8. But you say, it will matter to the people who come after me.
  - 9. Really? No it won't. Because they're all in their little bubbles patting themselves on the back for their self-defined successes too.
    - a) You have a lot of money.
    - b) You have a lot of education.
    - c) You have a lot of power.
    - d) You have a lot of clout.
    - e) You have a lot of possessions, toys, sex, influence, friends in high places.
  - 10. Great.
  - 11. For what?
  - 12. What good is it? What does it get you?
  - 13. At the end of the day, all you can say is it makes you feel good.
  - 14. And that is the one truth you've been trying to avoid saying. You are a hedonist. You live for pleasure. The pleasure of success as you define it. You are successful at making yourself happy. That is your purpose.
    - a) It is Hedonism. Let us eat, drink, and be merry for tomorrow we die.
    - b) It is Selfism. The gods of pleasure are pleased.
      - (1) And the God of heaven weeps even as he still calls your name.
  - 15. All the little purposes in your life become purposeful when you make room for God first, and everything else after him.
    - a) *"But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. (Matthew 6:33)*
      - (1) Jesus came to give you a purpose: to fill you with grace that you might manifest his glory.
      - (2) He came to give you an identity: you are spiritual royalty, an heir of heaven, and destined to share the throne of the cosmos.
      - (3) He came to define your value: you are precious to God, and worthy of honor, dignity, and love.
      - (4) He came to teach you true success: lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, for where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.
  - 16. You say, I'm too successful for faith, and Jesus says, what if it's all in your own head? Where do you find your purpose?
  - 17. The last thing Jesus might say is this:
  - D. Where's the grace?
    - 1. You're working, you're striving, you're succeeding. You're wearing yourself out.
    - 2. But you're successful.
    - 3. You're an achiever. You're an over achiever. You've even won awards. You're succeeding, but you're teetering on the brink of collapse, and nobody knows.

4. You are a self-made person. You've lifted yourself up. You have genuine pride in what you've made of yourself. You're successful, but you're paying a very high price.
5. There is a time and place where God says to work. Yes. We don't deny that.
6. But there is a time and a place where God says to sit down and rest, and to let him do the work.
7. Because the great invitation from God is not to work, but to rest.
  - a) *"Ho! Everyone who thirsts, Come to the waters; And you who have no money, Come, buy and eat. Yes, come, buy wine and milk Without money and without price. Why do you spend money for what is not bread, And your wages for what does not satisfy? Listen carefully to Me, and eat what is good, And let your soul delight itself in abundance. Incline your ear, and come to Me. Hear, and your soul shall live; And I will make an everlasting covenant with you-- The sure mercies of David. (Isaiah 55:1-3).*
8. This is grace.
9. Grace is God working, and you resting.
10. God giving, and you receiving.
11. God achieving, and you trusting.
12. Grace is God doing for you what you could never do for yourself.
13. Grace is a gift, not a paycheck.
14. Grace is love in action.
15. Grace is God sending Jesus.
16. Grace is Jesus dying on the Cross.
17. Grace is God punishing Christ for your sins instead of punishing you.
18. Grace is Christ crying out It is finished.
19. Grace is God now sending out the invitation... come and dine. Without money, and without price. The price is paid. Sit down. Unburden yourself. Enjoy my company. I want your fellowship, he says.
20. Don't let business stand in the way.
21. Don't let the pursuit of success crowd out the ultimate success of all.
22. Because what if, in the opinion that matters most... success is not defined by what you do or don't do.
23. Grace teaches me the most important lesson of all:
  - a) The kind of success that matters to God is measured by the sheer quantity of grace and blessing that flows through my life.
  - b) And that is a function of faith.
24. That is a very different kind of success.

### III. Conclusion

- A. To the person who says "I'm too successful for faith", I say, try faith. Because Jesus is ready to open whole new dimensions of success in your life.
- B. A long, long time ago, there is a verse in the Bible that became really special to me. I dwell on it a lot. I've adopted this as what I would call my personal life verse, like having a theme song or an anthem.
- C. I thought this would be a great way to start 2018, and a great way to tie up this talk.
  1. *Thus says the LORD: "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, Let not the mighty man glory in his might, Nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, That he understands and knows Me, That I am the LORD, exercising lovingkindness, judgment, and righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight," says the LORD. (Jeremiah 9:23,24).*
- D. Happy New Year.
- E. May God's richest blessing flow through your life in this new year.