

1. Intro
  - a. We are obsessed with success, power → some books w/ my honest titles
    - i. *How to win friends and influence people*
      1. How to manipulate people to like you and then exploit them for your own personal gain
    - ii. *Schmooze: How to Rub Shoulders with Influential People*
      1. How to lie through your teeth to people you don't really care about so that you can one day use them for your own purposes
    - iii. *Public Speaking for Success*
      1. How to manipulate people with your words so you can feel better about yourself
    - iv. *Make Yourself Unforgettable: How to Become the Person Everyone Remembers and No One Can Resist*
      1. How to find your meaning and purpose in life in other peoples' opinions about you (or) How to have a lousy self esteem
  - b. We love celebrities, we follow politicians, we chase the American dream
    - i. We believe that if we could just succeed, if we could just be the boss, if we could just get a little more power and influence, leave a legacy, then our lives would have meaning and purpose
    - ii. We sacrifice our families, our kids, our marriages, our health
      1. Teresa's old law firm
    - iii. We strive for this, manipulate for it, and live for it
    - iv. And at the end of the day, it might be a complete waste of time and possibly outright offensive to God...why? So glad you asked
  - c. Idol Factory → Final week on success, power
2. *John 3:22 After this Jesus and his disciples went into the Judean countryside, and he remained there with them and was baptizing.*
  - a. backdrop → Jesus begins his earthly ministry, God on the movie
    - i. Not the kind of baptism we did last week necessarily
      1. Baptizing them because the kingdom of God is at hand
      2. a call to repent and commit to God's purposes, not their own
3. *[23] John also was baptizing at Aenon near Salim, because water was plentiful there, and people were coming and being baptized [24] (for John had not yet been put in prison).*
  - a. Introduce John → Jesus' cousin, baptized Jesus, announced coming kingdom
  - b. success, right? people coming, being baptized, reason to rejoice
4. *[25] Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. [26] And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him."*
  - a. Nobody knows what the disagreement was between John's disciples and the Jewish authorities, but verse 26 is what really matters...
  - b. John's followers came to him → The guy you baptized, the guy you helped raise up is baptizing people and everyone is going to him

- i. John you poured into this guy, you invested in him, and he just stole your crowds right out from under you
  - c. We should rejoice when we see good things happen to others, right?
    - i. When your friend gets a raise, when your co-worker gets a promotion, when a church down the street grows, when your high school buddy wins the lottery, gets married to that knockout girl or that stud of a guy
  - d. But we don't. We might on the surface, but deep down we think...
    - i. Like HE deserved the raise/promotion/girlfriend/spouse/child/job
    - ii. Like THAT church deserves to have people going to it
    - iii. Like SHE deserved to win the lottery
  - e. Why do we do that? Because we worship an idol of success
    - i. What is that? It's finding your identity in whether or not you are successful - specifically successful in the eyes of the world
    - ii. People who have an idol of power and success think, "Life only has meaning if I have if I have power and influence over others."
    - iii. Their greatest nightmare is humiliation, failure, being a loser
    - iv. Those closest to them feel used - a pawn on the person's climb to the top
    - v. Their emotional outburst is venomous anger
  - f. You know you struggle with this if you...
    - i. Get jealous if someone is more successful than you, like you have lost value because they have been successful
    - ii. Think that you only have meaning if you have money, power, fame, fortune, notoriety
    - iii. When that doesn't happen we feel angry, we use people, and if we never have success as we define it, we crawl in a hole of despondency, feeling like we are void of all meaning and purpose
    - iv. Think God could never use someone like you, and that he can only use famous people or well-known people
    - v. Are constantly jealous of everyone around you and think, "How come good things never happen to me?"
    - vi. Secretly rejoice when those around you, even loved ones, fail
  - g. But **there's nothing wrong with wanting to be successful, but it depends entirely on how you define success.** → What is a successful life?
    - i. Having the most money, the most things, the biggest church, the most power, the greatest influence, fans, followers, kids who behave, tight abs?
  - h. **What is a successful life?**
- 5. [27] John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven.
  - a. At the heart of all idolatry is us creating a distortion out of something that God has given us to be used for his glory → we take something good and turn it into the source of our identity instead of reserving that place for God and God alone
  - b. With success idolatry, that stems from the "domain" or sphere of influence God has given us

- c. God gives everyone a different domain → we have nothing unless he gave it
    - i. The question becomes, why did he give it?
    - ii. Not so you or I could feel better about ourselves, but for God's Glory
  - d. Any influence that you have (as a XYZ) was given to you by God...for himself
    - i. You didn't earn it, you didn't manipulate for it, you didn't pick yourself up by your bootstraps → It came from God, why? For him
  - e. A successful life realizes that: **Any influence that God gives you is for His Glory, not yours**
6. *[28] You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.'* *[29] The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete.*
- a. John was given a very specific task to do → to proclaim the coming of Christ
  - b. In doing that, he was successful. He did exactly what God told him to do
  - c. **You can't determine how big your sphere of influence can be, but you can determine what you will do with it**
    - i. Will you use it for your purposes or for God's glory → THAT is success
  - d. John was a failure in the eyes of the world (beheaded), but a success in the eyes of God because he used fulfilled the calling of God on his life to glorify Jesus
    - i. It's important to note that John wasn't successful because he did all the right stuff for Jesus
    - ii. He was successful because he worshipped Him as His God and Lord → the overflow of that was an obedient life lived for God
    - iii. At the end of the day, true success isn't found in the world, it's found in worshipping God, being satisfied in Him, trusting Him, obeying Him
  - e. **A successful life is a worshipful, obedient life**
    - i. And that is quite freeing b/c you don't have to be the best, the strongest, the most well-known, the richest, or whatever it may be
7. *[30] He must increase, but I must decrease."*
- a. John concludes w/ a powerful truth
  - b. When we worship success, power, influence, we forget why we are here
    - i. We forget who our God is
    - ii. We forget that we are created and He is the Creator
    - iii. We forget that he formed us, not the other way around
    - iv. We forget that we are for his purposes, not he for ours
    - v. We forget that we are supposed to seek his face, not just his hand
    - vi. We forget that we should be thankful for WHO he is
  - c. When we worship success, we begin to think and act as if we were God, but the truth is that he must increase, and I must decrease
    - i. That doesn't mean we need to wallow in mediocrity
    - ii. You MIGHT be a successful person by the world's standard → wealthy, influential, over people, place of power → That's not evil or wrong
    - iii. You decreasing doesn't mean that you leave your position of authority

1. it means you increase God by using your influence for His Glory
  2. John didn't quit the ministry because he wasn't as popular as Jesus, he kept on doing his thing until it killed him
  3. **The influence God has given you is to be used for His Glory, not your own identity**
- iv. And if you are sitting here thinking, "I'm not influential, I have no power, I am not even successful," realize this:
    1. **Success is not measured by what you accomplish, but by who you worship**
    2. Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Jesus, Paul, Peter = failures in world's eye
      - a. But in the eyes of God, they were utterly successful
  - d. So what do we do? **Repent and replace**
    - i. Imagine a people that drew their worth not from what the world said about them, but from what God said about them
    - ii. This leads so well into our next series, **Identity Crisis: becoming who God already says that you are**
  - e. **A successful life is a worshipful, obedient life** → A life where he becomes greater and you become less.
8. Response
- a. This series has been heavy for all of us & quite convicting
  - b. As you feel convicted by God, which is a good thing, remember that the answer isn't to do more and to try harder, but to surrender and worship Jesus Christ
  - c. You can't do enough, sacrifice enough to make yourself right with God, but Jesus Christ led a perfect, idol-free life and died a criminal's death
  - d. The Bible says that in Jesus we can be forgiven → past, present, future
  - e. If you have trusted in Jesus Christ, you are forgiven. You don't need to keep trying harder, the work has been done by Christ
  - f. Still, we struggle with idols to this day, and we will until we die
    - i. The process of us being right before God is called justification
    - ii. The process of us becoming like Christ is called sanctification
  - g. Today we want to give you a chance to respond, to destroy your idol symbolically and to repent internally
  - h. Explain firepit, source idols, or "my relationship with Jesus"