

## Faith at Work: Created to Work

Genesis 2:1-3,15; 3:17-19

Preached by Minister Jason Tarn at HCC on November 2, 2014

### Introduction

- ❖ Imagine going to medical school, spending years receiving all that training, all that learning, but no one ever prepares you to put it into practice on the hospital floor. You talk about the body, about diseases, about treatments, and yet you never discuss how all that learning is going to translate into the hospital or the clinic – where you spend the majority of your time.
  - Or imagine attending law school. Again with years committed to learning the law, and yet what if no one ever prepares you to put it into practice in the courtroom – where you spend the majority of your time?
    - You'd probably conclude that that med school or law school was shortsighted. Imbalanced. They invested so much time developing a professional in the classroom but failed to prepare them to apply all that learning into the very setting where they are to carry out their profession.
  
- ❖ I think the same criticism could be laid against the church. We can be just as shortsighted and imbalanced in our discipleship of Christians. We can spend so much time on developing our Christian character, our habits and disciplines, our spiritual gifts to be used on Sundays or in small group – and yet we overlook the very setting where we spend a majority of our time.
  - I'm talking about the workplace (or the classroom that's preparing you for the workplace). ***How does your Christianity apply to your work?*** What does your faith have to do with your work? We don't typically ask these questions in church.
  
- ❖ But let's say you work forty hours a week (on the low end for most of you) and you get your eight hours of sleep each night. That means out of the 112 waking hours in a week, well over a third of it is spent at work. And that doesn't include all the time spent commuting each day.
  - And knowing the type of work that most of you do, a forty-hour work week is a pipe dream. You're closer to fifty or sixty. **So you actually are spending half or more of your waking hours each week at work or in commute to and from work.**
    - So if the church fails to discuss what your faith has to do with your work, then we have left you with little direction or instruction for how Christianity applies to a significant portion of your life – of your waking hours.
  
- ❖ This is such an important issue for the Church. Because it's complex and requires careful biblical thinking and careful balance. **There are many people who live to work.** For them, their work is their life passion. They invest so much time, so much effort, so much meaning and significance into their career and career advancement. Work is everything.
  - **But then there are those who work to live.** Work is only a means to fund and facilitate their true passions in life. I work for the weekends. I work to play, to have the means to enjoy my hobbies, my friends, my family. Or perhaps we have a more spiritual purpose. I work to make money, so I can give it to the work of the Church or to other godly causes. Or even better, I work to make disciples among my co-workers or clients. **But in the end, work itself is a just means to another end.** And because it can be frustrating and tiresome and distracting from my real goal, **work is often viewed as a necessary evil, a curse, that we have to endure on this side of heaven.**

- ❖ *But is that what work is all about? Is it just a means to facilitate other goals and other pursuits? Or is there meaning and purpose in work itself? But then where do you draw the line and not fall into idolizing work and making it everything – not allowing your job and your job performance to define you, to give you ultimate meaning and purpose?*
  - This morning I have three simple truths. **1) Work is good.** I want to counter the idea that work is a curse or a necessary evil. **2) Work is not God.** Yes, work itself is not a curse but it is cursed. It's cursed by sin to be a toil, even the best of jobs. So work can't serve as a god that defines you and gives you ultimate meaning. **3) Work is worship.** Work is a means but not just a means to another earthly end. Work can be a means of worship, of glorifying your Creator who created you to work.

### Work is Good

- ❖ Turn with me to Genesis 2. I want to start in the beginning of the Bible because I want to demonstrate that, **from the beginning, work was a part of God's good created order.** It's not a curse. Having to work for one's food, to work to provide for yourself and for family, is not a punishment God placed on mankind as a consequence of sin.
  - **I think we have an idyllic picture in our minds of the Garden of Eden as this land of leisure.** Where Adam and Eve just laid on beds of roses while trees lowered their branches to place their fruit at arms reach.
    - And then came sin to ruin it all. After Genesis 3 everything was shot to hell. Adam and Eve had to start working. They had to labor for their food. They were cursed. Cursed to work. A curse that continues to this very day.
- ❖ That's a common perception. That's how a lot of people, a lot of Christians, view work. But that's not how the Bible views it. **The Bible, especially here in Genesis 2, sees work as part of God's good design – not a result of sin.** It's what we were made for, and it's a unique way in which we, as humans, reflect God's image.
  - Read with me starting in chapter 2:1, "*<sup>1</sup>Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. <sup>2</sup>And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. <sup>3</sup>So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.*"
- ❖ **Here God is described as a worker. Creation was his work.** The work itself was described for us in chapter 1. He's described as creating all things by the word of his mouth. He speaks and something comes out of nothing. That's God at work. He brings order out of chaos. He makes all things beautiful. That's work for him.
  - On the seventh day, it says, God "*finished his work*" and he rested. He sabbath-ed. He "*rested from all his work that he had done in creation*". **So work was there in the beginning. It wasn't an afterthought. It wasn't a punishment.** And it was something God's doing. Work is not beneath him. It's not a burden; it's a joy for him.

- We're told throughout chapter 1 that God creates something, takes a step back, scans his work and declares it "good", "very good" (1:31). He delights in all of it. And that's why God invites us to join him in his work.
- ❖ We see back in **Genesis 1:28** that Adam and Eve are commanded to, "*be fruitful and multiple and fill the earth and subdue it.*" The idea of subduing the earth suggests that – even though God's creative work is finished as we read in the beginning of chapter 2 – **a large part of what he created was still undeveloped and in need of additional creative work.** That's where our work enters the picture.
- Look down in **chapter 2:15**, "*The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it*". Some translations say "to cultivate it". To make things grow, to keep the garden up, to maintain it.
    - **Adam and Eve are living in paradise, and yet if they expect to reap a good harvest every season, they're going to have to work for it. They'll have to work if they want to eat.**
- ❖ This might come as a surprise to you. Again, we have this perception that the first pair just walked around the garden and trees lowered their branches and offered up their fruit. Crops would just spring up by themselves. Forest animals would forage the woods for them and lay food at their feet. That's more like Adam and Snow White.
- But that's not what life was like in the Garden, in paradise. **Adam and Eve had to work that garden and keep it up.** God's work was done, but theirs had just begun. As the only creatures made in his image, humans were called to the unique task of creative work. Think about it. All the creatures – the birds of the air, the fish of the sea, the beasts of the earth – are all told to be fruitful and multiply, to fill the earth, sky, and sea (1:22). But only humans are told to be fruitful and multiply, fill the earth, *and work.* And subdue. And cultivate and keep.
- ❖ **Work is what sets us apart from the animals.** Humans work. Animals survive. Yes, I know lions have to work for their food. They have to hunt it down. But that's not the kind of work we're talking about.
- We're talking about creative work done in the likeness of our Creator. **Human work is a participation in and continuation of God's creative work.** Our work is about cultivating and fashioning what God has already made. Likewise, bringing order out of chaos, making things beautiful, making things good, making them better, adding to joy and shalom on earth. That's what work is all about, and it's inherently good.
- ❖ *What are the implications?* There are two in particular. **First, if work is good, part of the goodness of creation, then that means we were not created for mere leisure.** We were not made to simply relax. We were made in God's image, in the image of a Divine Worker.
- Now we're not made to constantly work. We're called to sabbath – to work six days and rest a seventh (cf. Ex. 20:9-11). **But it's always six days of work; one day of rest.** Not the opposite – to rest for six days and work really hard for one.

- ❖ Granted, in God's eyes, we're not mere workers. Yes, he created us for more than just work. **But it's true that we were designed to be primarily workers versus primarily resters.** Six days of work; one day of rest.
  - And even when Jesus returns and the New Earth arrives, I believe we'll still be working. ***If work was present in paradise before the Fall, why would you be surprised to see work present in paradise after the Fall is reversed?*** The eternal Sabbath rest promised to God's people is a promised rest from the struggle against sin and the flesh (Heb. 4:9). It's a promised rest from toilsome work but not from work.
  
- ❖ We were created to work, and this is why the loss of work is so deeply disturbing. It's not just because we lack an income stream. **Unemployment hits us deeper. It strikes at something far more fundamental within us.** This is why you talk to people in nursing homes or people on disability – those whose lives are marked primarily by rest – and they'll often say what they miss is work. They miss doing something meaningful, something useful.
  - **And this is why it's foolish when people make retirement their vocational goal.** When they bend over backwards, sacrificing health and relationships, to secure for themselves a cushy, early retirement. Only to discover that humans were not made for extended leisure. As nice as it might sound, we were not made to walk along beaches and collect seashells for 20-30 years until we die.
  
- ❖ The second implication is this: **If work is what define us as humans, what sets us apart from animals, then all human work is dignified and all human work is an extension of God's creative work.** This is such an important point to make, especially for us. For a community like ours that places so much value in professional careers, in knowledge-based work versus careers that involve learning a trade, using your hands, and manual labor.
  - **The executive at Toyota and the worker on the assembly line, when you boil it down, provide the same product.** They serve you in fundamentally the same way. You need a means of motorized transportation. They offer you a car. But we see more dignity in the work of the executive. We would be distraught if our child were to choose the assembly line over the window office. And yet, in God's eyes, both are workers and both reflect his image – the image of the Divine Worker.
  
- ❖ So think about what you do for work, and ask yourself: ***How do I reflect the image of God in my work? In what ways am I extending God's creative work into my vocational realm?***
  - **Health care professionals**, you reflect God by creating health and joy – the joy of the sick made well. In a sense, like God, you're creating and sustaining life itself.
  - **Engineers**, you create infrastructure for the flourishing of civilization. You create time! You give us more time by making things work faster and more efficiently.
  - **Artists**, you create beauty. You take the beauty of what has been made, you capture it, and enhance it.
  - **Teachers**, you fashion young minds and raw talent, truly bringing order to chaos.
  - **Accountants**, you create stability and further opportunity for individuals/businesses.
  - **Lawyers**, you bring justice out of unjust circumstances.

- **Tradesmen**, you make and fashion good things, beautiful things, out of raw material. The Lord himself came to earth as a tradesman, so you're in good company.
  - **Homemakers**, you may not have a salary but you're truly working and reflecting the work of God in the way you create a safe, loving, nurturing environment for the rearing of children and the flourishing of families.
- ❖ **Students**, you may not be working yet but these are the questions you should be asking, and this is way you should be thinking about and evaluating your career path. Seeing and appreciating the inherent goodness and dignity of work. Not treating work as a curse. And not treating some forms of work as more dignified before God and thereby make career choices based on faulty assumptions.

### Work is Not God

- ❖ But having affirmed the goodness and dignity of work, we have to balance that out with our second point. Work is good, but **work is not God**. A large part of your life should be committed to work and the preparation for work.
- But work is not all there is to life. **If you look for your life's meaning and purpose in your work, you're asking to be disappointed.** Because you're asking work to play God. But your job, your career, can't bear the weight of godhood, the weight of these godlike expectations you place on it to define you and to satisfy your ambitions.
- ❖ Work can be very satisfying – since it's what we were created for. **But work can also be frustrating, pointless, and exhausting.** Even if you have your dream job, if you're at the pinnacle of your career, you'll still experience frustration and disappointment. Just as you did when you were just starting off at the bottom of the ladder.
- *But why?* I thought work is part of God's good creation? I thought we established that it's not a punishment? **Work is not a curse. That's true. But it is cursed.**
- ❖ Look at Genesis 3:17-19. Before we read it, let me tell you what's happened since chapter 2. Adam and Eve sinned against God. They doubted his love for them. They bought the devil's lie, and they disobeyed. **And their sin had cosmic ramifications.** It was not an isolated affair affecting just their personal lives or private walk with God. It affected all of creation.
- As one writer puts it, *"The effects of sin touch all of creation; no created thing is in principle untouched by the corrosive effects of the fall. Whether we look at societal structures such as the state or family, or cultural pursuits such as art or technology, or bodily functions such as sexuality or eating, or anything at all with the wide scope of creation, we discover that the good handiwork of God has been drawn into the sphere of mutiny against God."*<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Al Wolters, as quoted in Timothy Keller's *Every Good Endeavor*, 88.

- ❖ And that would include work. It's not a curse. But it is under a curse. So here in v17, we see God placing work under that curse of sin. *"<sup>17</sup>And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; <sup>18</sup>thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup>By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return."*
  
- ❖ So from the beginning, Adam and Eve were supposed to work – to cultivate and keep up the garden. That hasn't changed. But now, due to the curse of sin, **work is painful and tiresome**. It's backbreaking. **Work is frustrating and frequently fruitless**. The earth is now stingy in giving up its crops and instead brings forth thorns and thistles.
  - We experience the same kind of fruitlessness all the time in our own work. We're never able to accomplish all that we set out to do. **No matter how many goals we achieve, we always seem to be asking ourselves, "What next?"** No matter what you accomplish there's always another degree to get, another promotion to receive, another rung to climb, another corner office or reserved parking spot to work hard after. You'll never finally "make it" because every time you get to the top, you'll realize there's always a taller mountain to climb. Your career makes for a pitiful god because it'll always leave you dissatisfied if you're expecting it to provide you ultimate meaning and purpose, if you're wanting your job to define you.
  
- ❖ This is a much needed word for me and my peers in my generation. **Gen-Xers like myself and the Millennials that followed grew up being told that we can grow up to be whatever we want to be**. We can do whatever we want to do as long as we put our minds to it, work hard, and eat our vegetables.
  - So from a very young age we're always asked the question, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And the assumption is always that we have a myriad of options to choose from. **We've grown up with this notion that what you choose for a career is of ultimate importance. It's life defining. You are what you do.** That's why the first thing we say when we meet someone new is usually, "What do you do?"
  
- ❖ Generations of the past didn't grow up asking each other what they wanted to be when they grew up. There weren't too many choices. You would just pick up your father's trade. Your career options were (for the most part) limited by your geography, your local context. **You didn't put so much stock into what you did for a living. You made a living, you provided for your family, you gave back to the community, and – if you were a believer – you did it all for the glory of God.**
  - But these are different times. **And people today – especially young people starting their careers or about to – are convinced that it's your work that defines you.** It gives you identity and meaning in life.

- ❖ And that's why they get a few years into their careers and start feeling restless. They feel like they've fallen in a rut, a routine. They struggle with a sense that their work is meaningless. They want to be doing something more meaningful, more significant. "Maybe I need to change jobs, change career paths."
  - **Or maybe I need to realize how much I've turned work into an idol – how much I've assigned to it godlike expectations to provide ultimate meaning and purpose.**
- ❖ The fact is that work – your work, your career – is under a curse. The curse of sin. So sometimes it will be painful. Sometimes it will be frustrating or boring or feel pointless. **If you were expecting it to give you a reason to get out of bed every morning, to offer you hope and joy and satisfaction, to be your source of meaning and purpose in life, then you're basically asking your job to play god.** Sorry but it's going to fail you.

### Work is Worship

- ❖ There's only one God, and he doesn't fail. He's the reason to wake up each morning. He's the source of ultimate significance. He's the giver of hope and joy. He's the one who satisfies.
  - **And he's the one who placed work under a curse – ensuring there will always be a degree of toil and frustration – to serve as a constant reminder and warning for us *not* to worship our work or to center our lives on our careers.**
- ❖ And he's the one who sent his Son in the flesh, into our world, to get to work (cf. Jn. 5:17). Jesus had a job to do and that was to live a life of perfect obedience to God – the kind of life Adam and Eve failed to live, the kind of life we're failing to live. And to die a death for the curse of sin – a death we justly deserve to die.
  - **Galatians 3:13** says, "*Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us – for it is written, "Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree".*" This curse that he bore for us – includes not only the curse of eternal condemnation but the curse of work's pain and futility. **Jesus not only redeemed humans from the curse, he redeemed the ground. He redeemed work.**
    - Now just as we know the curse has been lifted over those who put their trust in Christ as their Redeemer, we also know that our struggle with sin's effects will remain until the our Redeemer returns. So just because, in Christ, the curse is lifted off of work, doesn't mean the toil and frustration of sin's effects is immediately gone. They'll likewise remain in our work until Jesus returns.
- ❖ But in the meantime, the work of Christ in redemption, the Gospel, still matters to your work. **Because of the Gospel, you don't have to find your identity, your ultimate meaning and purpose in life, in *what* you do. You can find it in *who* you're ultimately working for.**
  - As a Christian, you're working for the Lord (cf. Col. 3:23). No matter your job. No matter your boss, your direct supervisor. God created you to work. **And when you work – the way he designed you to work – your work becomes worship.**

- ❖ **What is worship?** It's not just singing praise songs. It's not just what we do on Sundays. It's a very unfortunate habit that we've fallen into when we use the term *worship* as a synonym for music and singing. "Let's have some worship first, then we'll have a wordtime, then we'll split up into groups and share."
  - I don't want to be *that* guy who's always correcting you when you misuse the word *worship*. I guess that's why I've bided my time to just say it once for all from the pulpit. So here it is: **Worship is not just singing. It's not just what takes place within the walls of a church.**
  
- ❖ **We have this unhealthy notion that on Sundays we worship but on Mondays we go back to work.** But for those who recognize they're created in the image of a Divine Worker and redeemed from the curse by the work of a Divine Savior – work is worship. Worship is all that we do that's done in faith and done for the glory of God.
  - **If you can finally treat your work as a form of worship, it changes everything.** There's this great story of three stone masons, hard at work, who were approached by a casual visitor. "What are you doing?" the visitor asked the first mason. "I'm cutting stone," he replied. The visitor asked the same thing to the second mason, "What are you doing?" "I'm making a living," the second mason replied. Then to the third mason the visitor asked, "And what about you?" The man replied, "Oh me? I'm building a cathedral for God and his people."
  
- ❖ When you see work as an act of worship, as a means of reflecting and magnifying God, then it changes your entire perspective. **It keeps you from falling into the danger of making work an idol**, of assigning too much value and significance in what you do. On the flip side, **seeing work as worship keeps you from the danger of devaluing work** and treating it merely as a means to facilitate your own leisure.
  - The work you do and the way you do it is a means to worship the living God. So when you get to work Monday morning, ask yourself this: ***What can I bring as an offering of worship on this workday in my workplace?*** We often speak of coming to church on Sunday morning with an offering of worship – a song, a prayer, a broken and contrite heart, a spiritual gift to be exercised for the love of God and neighbor. We come with the mindset of coming to glorify God.
    - That's the same attitude you should have tomorrow morning. *Friends, what kind of offering of worship do you intend to bring?*