

## Work

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**Sermon Synopsis:** We can experience God in our workplace when we see his purpose and calling for us

### Work is like my old papasan chair:

It takes up a lot of space, and we don't know what to make of it (e.g. work=sad necessity)

- This is not a new struggle → ANE accounts of Creation (e.g., Enuma Elish)
- The popular narrative in antiquity = humans were created to be slave for the gods:  
"The people whom he [Marduk] created, the form of life that breathes. He imposed the work of the gods (on them) so that they [the gods] might rest."<sup>1</sup> - Enuma Elish

This was the prevailing narrative of the time:

*Work is awful, and the gods are above that; humans exist to work as slaves so the gods can experience rest and delight.*

- Imagine the shockwaves when Hebrew Bible came in with this narrative:

#### Genesis 1:26-28 (ESV)

Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness. And let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over the livestock and over all the earth and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. And God blessed them. And God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth."

## Work is good

Work: activity involving mental or physical effort done in order to achieve a purpose or result. (SAH parent, student)

- Why is work good? Because we were created to join God in His work...
- "Subdue" = cultivate<sup>2</sup>
  - God created raw substance (Gen1:2) to cultivate its undeveloped potential (Gen1:3-36)<sup>3</sup>
  - John Walton calls the scene in Genesis 1:2, "not yet functioning"<sup>4</sup> (**pile of legos**)
    - We are here to continue God's work of creation! (Gen 1:28).

**A meaningful life isn't possible in spite of work, but because of work**

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<sup>1</sup> *The Epic of Creation. VI.* In "Myths from Mesopotamia: Creation, The Flood, Gilgamesh, and Others." Translated by Stephanie Dalley. (Oxford, 1989). 265

<sup>2</sup> So much of the thought behind this sermon—including this point—was influenced by Tim Keller's *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work.* (Redeemer, 2012). 57

<sup>3</sup> Or as John Sailhamer explains, "He created the universe as a shapeless mass of material, only later forming the world as we now know." *Genesis Unbound: A Provocative New Look at the Creation Account.* (2011). 68

<sup>4</sup> John H. Walton. *The Lost World of Genesis One: Ancient Cosmology and the Origins Debate.* (IVP Academic, 2009). 48

## Work can be frustrating

### Genesis 3:17-19 (ESV)

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; **thorns and thistles** it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. **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."

The curse = the disintegration of every area of human life and flourishing<sup>5</sup>

### This "disintegration" plays out in our work in three ways<sup>6</sup> (Tim Keller)

#### 1. Work is fruitless

- Tough market, bad boss, failure, unproductive, not making ends meet
  - Q: How do you "take dominion" when you can't seem to move forward?

#### 2. Work is pointless

- No meaning
- Ecclesiastes 2:17 "So I came to hate life because everything done here under the sun is so troubling. Everything is meaningless—like chasing the wind" (NLT)
- Example: effect of the industrial age, 20th cent. science of efficiency (conveyor belt)
  - \**One of the highest motivators in the workplace is a sense of autonomy*<sup>7</sup>
    - Q: How do you "cultivate" when you're mindlessly executing a task all day?

#### 3. Work is selfish

- We base our identity on work, and we can end up hurting others to protect us
- Example: greedy bankers in the housing mortgage crisis 2008
  - Q: How do you move from focusing on your own image to reflecting God's?

## Following Jesus changes work

Gospel = God's kingdom has broken into our disintegrated world (No more let sins and sorrows grow, Nor thorns infest the ground; He comes to make His blessings flow far as the curse is found)

### Here's how the Gospel sets you free from the "disintegrations" in work

#### 1. Hope

- Romans 8:22-25 (NIV) "We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies. *For in this hope we were saved. But hope that is seen is no hope at all. Who hopes for what they already have? But if we hope for what we do not yet have, we wait for it patiently.*" (leaf by niggler)

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<sup>5</sup> Tim Keller. *Every Good Endeavor: Connecting Your Work to God's Work*. (Redeemer, 2012). 85

<sup>6</sup> Ibid. 90-113

<sup>7</sup> Daniel H. Pink. *Drive: The Surprising Truth About What Motivates Us*. (). 83-106

## 2. Meaning

- 1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV) - "Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that *in the Lord your labor is not in vain.*"

## 3. Identity

- Colossians 3:3 (ESV) "For you have died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God."

### And they shape the way we approach work

- If we have hope, meaning, and identity in Christ, we can view work, not as a necessity, but as a **CALLING**
- How do we serve and follow God at work?
  - Might be tempted to think doing overtly "Christian" activities at work
  - This was influenced by the sacred/secular divide (68-69) (call- 1 Cor 7:17)
  - **There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is Sovereign over all, does not cry: "Mine!" (Abraham Kuyper)**
  - **God is working IN our work**
    - He cares about your work, as his goal is uniting of all things in Christ (Eph 1:10)
    - So your daily actions ARE spiritual (78)
    - What Tish Warren called, a *liturgy of the ordinary*
- At the very least, being a good Christian at work means simply being competent!

#### Dorothy Sayers

What the Church should be telling [the carpenter] is this: that the very first demand his religion makes upon him is that he should make good tables.<sup>8</sup>

Be your kids mom!  
Bag those groceries!  
Assemble that piece!  
Launch that business!  
Etc.

## Adopting work rhythms

This begins by learning to see God at work in your work.

Let's worship [band and prayer team come forward]

In the Bible, people received the laying on of hands for anointing.

Come receive prayer (four corners) and ask for breakthrough—transform how you see your work

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<sup>8</sup> Dorothy Sayers. *Why Work?*