

The Gospel at Work

Ephesians 6:5-9

INTRODUCTION:

There are four verses in the Gospel of Luke that are easy to overlook. The setting is an occasion in the ministry of John the Baptizer. John had just preached a powerful sermon on repentance and people were coming to be baptized.

Baptism was a Jewish rite of conversion. So if a non-jew wished to enter the faith of Judaism one of the things he had to do was to be baptized. The unique thing about John was that he was baptizing Jews.

He was teaching that it was possible to be the physical offspring of Abraham but not be the spiritual offspring of Abraham.

So imagine hundreds coming for baptism. They began to ask John a series of questions.

Luke 3:10–14 (ESV)

¹⁰ And the crowds asked him, “What then shall we do?”

¹¹ And he answered them, “Whoever has two tunics is to share with him who has none, and whoever has food is to do likewise.”

¹² Tax collectors also came to be baptized and said to him, “Teacher, **what shall we do?**” ¹³ And he said to them, “Collect no more than you are authorized to do.”

¹⁴ Soldiers also asked him, “And we, **what shall we do?**” And he said to them, “Do not extort money from anyone by threats or by false accusation, and be content with your wages.”

So you see the question was, “considering my particular station in life and vocation... what should a sincere faith look like?”

That should be on the mind of every Christian, no matter your vocation.

- **The Christian Homemaker** - What should I do? How should my daily routine and schedule look different than a homemaker who is not a Christian?
- **The Christian Real Estate Agent** - How should my work with clients be different than an agent who is not a Christian?
- **The Christian Photographer** - How should my photography experience be different than that of a non-Christian?

If that question has never crossed your mind, today’s text will be revolutionary for you.

CONTEXT: Remember so far we have been in this section of Ephesians where Paul is addressing the functioning of the Christian home. He's spoken to Fathers and Mothers, Husbands and Wives, Children, now he begins to say a word to Bondservants and Masters.

Keep in mind in the Roman Context - slaves were often a part of family unit.

According to the Kent Hughes,

- *"It has been estimated that there were some 60 million slaves in the Roman Empire, and that as many as 1/3 of the populations of large cities such as Rome, Corinth, and Ephesus were slaves."*

Sweeping changes had been introduced through Roman law which radically improved the treatment of slaves.

- Under Roman law slaves could generally count on being set free within 10-15 years.
- Around half of the slaves were free before the age of 30.
- Slaves could own property, make investments, even own his own slaves.
- There was no racial component in Roman slavery - slaves and masters were often from the same ethnic strata.

So I'm not saying that Roman Slavery was great and we need to have that. I am saying that what Slavery was in the first century Roman Empire was very different than the chattel slavery our country experience prior to the civil war.

The closest thing we can compare first century Roman slavery to in our day is the relationship between an **employer and an employee.**

How should your Christianity shape your vocational identity?

ILLUSTRATION: Alistair McIntyre in his book, "After Virtue" shares a classic story where he asks you to imagine that you're standing at a bus stop when a young man you do not know and have never met before comes up to you and says, "the name of the common wild duck is histrionicis, histrionicis, histrionicis"

Now, even though you understand the sentence you don't know how to make any sense of it. In order to make sense of it, you must put it in a story or context. So, three possible stories could make sense of what this young man said:

1. He is **Mentally Ill** - That would explain it, mentally ill people often say things with no context.
2. Perhaps he **confused you for someone else** - what if yesterday someone of your age height and general appearance had approached the young man in a library asking him the Latin word for the common wild duck and today he has mistaken you

for that person sees you at the bus stop and comes up and says oh yeah the name of the common well duck is histrionicis, histrionicis, histrionicis”

3. Perhaps he is a **foreign spy** - waiting at a pre-arranged rendezvous and uttering the ill-chosen code sentence which will identify him to his contact.

Now the story you choose, would determine how you respond. If you think he is a spy, you may attempt to take him into custody before he assassinates someone. Which would be really tragic if he were simply mentally ill.

Well when it comes things like our work, we can only make sense of our work when we ground our work in the context of a story. What story should shape our work?

For many Christians, it's simply how we make a living so that we can do God's real work at church. ***But it seems God tells the story differently...***

1. The Christian Employee

⁵ Bondservants.

The Greek word is ***Doulos*** - Which is translated as either slave or servant depending on the context. A slave was the property of a Master the servant was typically free. The Greek word is the same for both.

So, what should be different about a Christian *Doulos*?

a. A Better Attitude

Ephesians 6:5–6 (ESV)

⁵ Bondservants, obey your earthly masters with fear and trembling, with a sincere heart, as you would Christ,

This is the same Greek word for obedience that was used in the command of children to obey their parents. It was an absolute term. In other words - if it is not sin, you are expected to obey.

We live in a **Post Covid** world where the work force is progressively made up **Gen Z'ers** who think about authority and work very differently than even **Millennials**. They expect you to accommodate, to woo them, to make them feel connected and fulfilled... and if you don't they will simply walk away.

STAT: According to a recent report by **LinkedIn** - More than half of U.S. workers — 61% — are considering leaving their jobs in 2023, noting that a higher percentage of Gen Z and millennial workers are planning to call it quits than any other generation. When asked why, 76% noted that they wished to be their own

boss. ¹

Now, statistically those percentages are staggering. 61% considering quitting and 76% of those wishing to be their own boss. We could be facing a cataclysmic shift in the world work force as we know it.

This is not to be the case among you. Sure, you aren't a slave, you can leave a job if you wish. But if you are going to take a check you are expected to be worthy of the pay you receive.

ILLUSTRATION: My daughter recently took a new job and I told her what my Pastor told me years ago. You go to that job and make it your job to make your employer a raging success. If you have that attitude, most likely one day you will be your own boss.

Zig Ziglar said it this way, *"If you do more than you are paid to do, eventually you will be paid for far more than you do".*

⁶ not by the way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart,

Notice that our sincerity of service is not derived from our opinion of our earthly boss, but rather our heavenly. This is very important. We go to work and ask, "what does my boss want and what does my REAL boss want?"

I promise you, in this day and culture, if you can develop that attitude in the work place you can rise to any station you desire.

Not only a better Attitude at Work, but the Christian Employee produces...

b. A Better Quality

Ephesians 6:5–9 (ESV)

⁷ rendering service with a good will as to the Lord and not to man, ⁸ knowing that whatever good anyone does, this he will receive back from the Lord, whether he is a bondservant or is free.

ILLUSTRATION: As Roman Catholicism grew a distinction developed between the CLERGY and the LAITY. The Priest's work was very important he reported directly to God.... Then there was everybody else.

Well through men like Martin Luther and the advent of the Printing Press, the scriptures became widely circulated and people began to read the Bible for themselves. They noticed that there was not clear distinction between Pastors

¹ <https://www.cnbc.com/2023/01/18/70percent-of-gen-z-and-millennials-are-considering-leaving-their-jobs-soon.html>

and People in the New Testament. But rather, they read verses like this that seemed to say everyone was responsible to God for their work.

What developed was called the, “Protestant Work Ethic”.

Every plowman plowed the field as if he reported to Jesus Christ himself. Every teacher taught as if she would answer to God for her lecture.

Can you imagine how a revival of the protestant work ethic would change our country?

- If you view yourself as a free agent you will tend to always do your work with an eye open for a better opportunity.
- If you view yourself as a hired hand you will tend to only do what is required of you and never exceed expectations.

But if you view yourself as a SLAVE of the Lord you will view your work as an expression of worship. Each task is a sacrifice of praise, nothing is mundane or unimportant.

IF I AM SUCCESSFUL in this sermon - First Baptist Church ought to be the primary source of staffing in North Florida. I ought to have employers regularly contacting me saying, “do you have more like this one?”

2. The Christian Employer

a. A Better Environment

Ephesians 6:9a (ESV)

⁹ Masters, do the same to them,

Just as the service of the Christian employee is an expression of worship, the authority of the Christian Employer is to be an expression of worship.

For the Christian PROFIT is a bottom line, but it isn't the only one. The Christian business owner does not have the luxury of a single bottom line.

You see, you understand that the family is important, so you don't work you employees in a way that jeopardizes their marriage.

ILLUSTRATION: Peter Scazero in his book, “The Emotionally Healthy Leader” tells of a practice he has with his employees. He reserves the right to ask their

wife at any time if she feels loved by her husband. If she answers, “no” that will be grounds for firing. Why? Because family is more important than profit.

Church is more important than profit as well. Do you work your employees to such a degree that they never have time to engage in a local church? What do you think that will do for their soul? Do you want spiritual dead employees?

If you will allow your Christian conviction to shape your corporate policies, you will build an absolutely irresistible work environment.

Not only a better environment.

b. A Better Motive

Ephesians 6:9b (ESV)

9b. and stop your threatening, knowing that he who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and that there is no partiality with him.

The term used suggests the idea of loosening up, or releasing. He uses his authority and power as little as possible and does not throw his weight around or lord it over those under him. He is never abusive or inconsiderate. He realizes that his own authority, though God-given, is strictly functional and temporary. He knows that he and his workers alike are under the supreme authority of God, that their Master and his is not on earth but in heaven. The faithful Christian employer knows that he is a fellow servant of Jesus Christ with his employees, and is accountable to the same Master.

- Does being your servant make them a better servant of Jesus Christ?

Working for you will not make anyone a Christian, but it should give them a distinct advantage. They are going to see the faith on full display day in and day out.

CONCLUSION/INVITATION:

ILLUSTRATION: Something happens when people get serious about their faith. Suddenly, they want to quit work and become preachers and ministers. I had a young man in my first church. He was a high school football coach. He had a team of 50 or 60 young men. He was making a tremendous impact, those kids were being won without a word.

He could do what I could not, he could walk right into that locker room and influence those players for Jesus Christ. Often when a player came to faith, we would let him baptize the player.

Then one day he said, “pastor I love what I am doing for the Lord so much that I’m thinking about quitting my job and giving my entire life to ministry”

I said, “Brother you already are!” The last thing we need is for you to to leave that locker room and start preaching.

Don’t you see it - you ARE in the ministry. Your WORK IS your worship. YOU WILL Give an account one day.

WHAT IS THE STORY YOU LIVE FROM? When you go to work this week, what story are you living in?

May I suggest that the best story is that the God of the Universe knit you together as an image bearer, you are fearfully and wonderfully made. You have a vocation, you have a calling, go to work as an Ambassador of Christ and do your job as if it will meet you again in Eternity.