

Harris Creek Baptist Church
Dale Wallace
Series: The Good Life
October 30, 2022

Life in Our Work

Colossians 3:22-4:1

22 Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 23 Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. 4 Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.

Morning, Harris Creek! How are we doing? If we haven't gotten to meet, my name is Dale. I'm the College Community Director here at Harris Creek, and we're glad you're here. Welcome home.

About a year ago, I was on a date with my wife. It was going really, really well. The only problem: I had put my phone on the table face-up. That's this mistake that we sometimes make. I got this text message. We both saw it, and it was from somebody that was on the board of the organization that I used to work for. I worked for an organization called Vertical. It's a campus ministry over at Baylor, and one of our board members texted me. This is mid-dinner, total no-no, totally shouldn't have seen the text, but we both saw that I'd gotten the text. What ended up happening was that I looked at Jaycee and had this pretty honest conversation. "Hey, is it okay if I respond to this text message?" She had seen who it was from, and she knew it was important, so she said, "Of course. You can respond to the text message." Just so you know, it wasn't just a board member. To me, it was like a hero. It was Baylor men's basketball coach, Scott Drew. I'm pretty sure it's the first time he's ever texted me. In fact, it was the day of the first game, so I kind of freaked out! I was like, "Does he need me? Do I need to go? Did I need to get to the Ferrell Center? Did I miss it? Was I supposed to be there?" It was a preseason game, so I'm getting worried. I look at my texts, and I realize Coach needs something from me for Vertical. I ask: "Hey, Jaycee, is it okay if I do this task for Coach Drew and send it to him?" She says, "Yes," and so I end up doing this task really quickly and efficiently and do what he needs me to do.

I start with that this morning because, as I look back on that story, I realize that *who* I was working for was really, really important. In that moment, the reason why I was so efficient and I was excellent, and the reason why it was important is because of *who* I was working for. That's what we're going to look at this morning as we look to the Scriptures. We're going to see who we work for. *Who* we work for changes *how* we work and even *why* we work—because of who we work for.

If you've been with us, you know that we've been in this series called "The Good Life," which is a stewardship series. We're stewarding the things that God has given us, and this morning we're going to talk about stewarding work: how to experience the good life by stewarding work, and,

specifically, through working for the Lord. What we've been learning in this series is how to experience the good life in stewarding our body, in stewarding our thoughts, and all the talents and things that God has given us. This morning will be about what God has given us through work.

That really is one of the things that God has given us. We talked last week about how God has given all of us time, talents, and treasures. I think work is, at minimum, time. At minimum. One-third of our entire lives will be spent working. One-third. So, it's at minimum, time. For some of us, our talents intersect with our time, which is a gift. This is something that God has given us to steward. Really, if you think about this at a very basic level: if work stinks—if one-third of your life *stinks*—it is hard to experience the good life. It is hard to experience the good life.

I have a friend in town from Dallas this weekend, and I told him I was teaching on work. He says, "Man, I could use that. Work stinks!" And that isn't the word he used. He says, "Man, work is tough! Work is tough!" I think that, often when we think about work, we think the problem is that we need a new job. We need a cooler job. Maybe we need more money. Maybe we need more flexibility, more time off, more meaningful work. Maybe we need to retire early, or work from home, or work for ourselves. I don't know what it is that you think the solution is to the problem of work, but what we're going to see this morning is the problem is that we don't have a Biblical view of work. We don't have a Biblical view of work. If we can change our perspective around work, no matter what you do, whether you think it's really meaningful or you think it has zero meaning, it will make work good—because of what the Bible says. It will make that third of our lives not this heavy burden that stinks, but, rather, this easy yoke that God walks with us in to bear fruit.

I just want to start, before we jump to the text of Colossians 3; we're going to be in verses 22 through chapter 4, verse 1. As we're turning there, I just want you to know: this is for everyone. This is for my friend over here that's retired. This is for my friend who *is* the boss. This is for the employee. This is for the stay-at-home parent. This is even for the students. Think of work as, "What is the God-given responsibility that I have today? In this season, what is the God-given responsibility that I have?" Again, we'll be in Colossians 3:22 through 4:1.

Before we jump into the book of Colossians, here's the context. Paul is writing to the church in Colossae. He's just trying to show them, "Hey, Jesus is the greatest! Jesus is supreme." Paul uses this word 'preeminent.' It just means that Jesus is the G.O.A.T. He's the Greatest Of All Time! He talks about how that changes things. Earlier, in Chapter 3, he says, "It's putting off the old and putting on the new." Then, he starts talking about how who Jesus is as our Lord and as our Savior changes every compartment of our lives. It changes our families; it changes our children; it changes the way we work. Jesus changes everything. That's the context where we jump into.

Verse 22: **"Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people-pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven."**

What we're going to see this morning is:

1. How to work;
2. Who we work for; and
3. Why we work.

The first thing in the text that stands out is this language of slavery. "Bondservants" is the first word. This context that Paul is writing to is completely different than the injustice that we think of when it comes to slavery. As we interpret this text, everyone agrees that this could really be interpreted for us as the employers and employees. The employees are the bondservants, and the employers are the bosses or the masters. Verse 22 could be reread, "**Employees, obey in everything those who are your bosses, not to please people or your bosses, but work with a sincere heart, heartily.**" Remember, Paul's speaking to the Colossians, saying, "Hey, because Jesus is Lord, because He's supreme, He's preeminent, He holds all things together. He's the GOAT. He's our Lord and Savior. *He's* who we work for." That changes how we work, so we're obedient. The way to experience the good life, as we steward work. How we work is by being obedient with sincere hearts. That's our first point this morning.

1. *The Good Life: Honoring God with work. How? Obedient and sincere hearts.*

Straight from the text: obey, in everything, with a sincere heart. What does it look like to obey and be sincere? What does this mean for us today? I think the word that we can apply in our world today is "submission." You should submit to your boss. We hate that word! I get it. We hate it, but that's what Paul is telling the church in Colossae. Be submissive; work thoroughly, humbly, thoughtfully, honorably, with clarity, timely, and with your whole heart, even a pure heart. We work from the heart. We work hard from the heart.

I'll just admit: my generation—millennials and below—we somehow have thought that everyone in this world serves us. I'm chief of this! "My boss needs to fix these things. They answer to me." That's really a problem with my generation and the ones that are rising in the ranks. It's so opposite of this biblical world view. Obey. Be submissive. Humbly—with a sincere heart—work. Work. More practically, what this could look like is to be obedient and work with a sincere heart. Turn work in on time. Respond to emails in an honorable or timely manner. Give feedback that's constructive and with gentleness. You deescalate drama in the office. You work with excellence. You sell with sincerity. You manage with encouragement. You cook with joy. You wait tables with humility and grace. Maybe you clean the house with joy. Maybe you market with creativity. Whatever it is, add value. That's what it means. Obedient and sincere hearts add value joyfully where God has you, no matter what you're doing. I wish we could spend more time talking about work. I wish we could do a 5-week series on work. I think that would be lit, but we don't have that time.

Genesis 1-3 is something you should read. Work is something we were made to do, pre-Fall. Most of us just think work is cursed. You're right: it is cursed post-the Fall of Man. But before the Fall of Man, God gave Adam the Garden to work and to fill. In fact, God Himself filled and formed the Earth. If you have some time this week, read Genesis 1-3 and see how God worked, what God gave Adam to work, and what we have now because of the Fall and work. That's a case study for another time.

Lastly, chapter 4 verse 1 tells the bosses—the CEOs, the managers, the leaders—be fair and just, and care for your employees. Don't just pad your own pockets and elevate profits over people. You care for your people. We work obediently, with a sincere heart. I think so many of us think it matters so much *what* we do. We are obsessed with what God wants us to do. Just remember when you were about 18 to 22 years old, and you'd think, "*What* does God want me to do? Life depends on it! What is it?" I love when old people say, "I'm still trying to figure out what my dream job is." That's one of my favorite phrases. I think that makes complete sense because it matters less *what* we do. It matters so much *how* we do it. It matters so much *how* we do it. You don't have to love your job. You don't. You are there to work hard. For the person who doesn't like their job, this gives meaning. This gives purpose. I think there's two exceptions I need to acknowledge. First, we're not obedient if we're asked to do something immoral, or anything along those lines. I just want to acknowledge that. We don't do that. We're not obedient to that point. And we're not obedient to the point of becoming a workaholic, of being controlled by work in a way that would be unhealthy and dishonoring to God. These are the two caveats I want to give to us today. How we work, though, is so important.

I heard this week about an employee who works at a company and was continually being promoted. Every year he'd get promoted twice, but every year HR would also come to him and say, "You need to quit sharing your faith at this workplace. You have to stop. Too many people are complaining. You absolutely cannot keep doing this." Every year he just kept getting promoted twice. What's crazy is that he was so excellent at his job. He brought so much value to work that they couldn't fire him no matter what he did. He was too good. They couldn't lose him. As he worked with an obedient and sincere heart, it opened the door for conversations around the Gospel. "Why do you work so hard? Why are you humble? 'Listen to your boss'; your boss is a jerk! Why don't you gossip about how your boss is a jerk?" It opens up the door for the Gospel. When we work obediently, sincerely, and heartily, it opens doors and opportunities. If you're a bad employee or a bad boss, it closes the door. How do we experience the Good Life through work? It's how we work: with obedient and sincere hearts. Let's keep reading and see *who* we work for.

Verse 23: "**Whatever you do**—notice that: whatever you do—**work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men.**" The second point, as we see how we can experience the Good Life as we steward work, is that it's *who* we work for; it's for the Lord.

2. *The Good Life: Honoring God with work. Who? For the Lord.*

This changes everything. It's more than getting the text from Coach Drew. It's ten bajillion times better, even though Coach Drew is awesome. We work for the Lord. I want to just pause before we get into how this plays out in our day-to-day. When it comes to working for the Lord, we just have to pause and acknowledge that this is written to the church at Colossae, where they knew Jesus. They're not working so that God will love them. They're not working day-to-day so that God will be more pleased with them. They've already received. The only work that matters is the work that's been done through Jesus Christ on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. These people aren't working so God will love them. They understand the Gospel. I just need to acknowledge that. In understanding the Gospel, it means is that He's our Savior. He has saved

us. He's also our Lord, which means He's our authority. He is who we work for. We work for the Lord. Christ is who we work for. It's our second point. Who do we work for? For the Lord.

Work isn't just to please your boss or impress others with your status or money or gifts. It's working for the Lord, which is weird, because I think there are some good phrases we're taught. "Be a student of your boss." "Exceed the expectations of your boss." I agree with these things. We should learn our roles, develop in our roles, be excellent in our roles. Here's the distinction: we don't work to impress our bosses. Our work will impress our bosses. You're not working *to* impress them. You're working *for* the Lord. The work will naturally impress and encourage your boss because you are working for the Lord.

This is easily the biggest shift that we need to make in order to experience the Good Life. Again, it doesn't matter what we do vocationally. You do not need to leave here and go get a job in the non-profit sector or go work for a church. You just need to do what you have been given—the job you have been given—and do it for the Lord. That's it.

As I was thinking about it this week, I was thinking, "What if Jesus was giving my quarterly evaluation?" I've been here since June. What if I sat down with Jesus and He said, "All right, Dale, we're going to go ahead. How are you doing at the things you've been assigned to do as the College Community Director? How are things going? Work/life balance?" I realized that it would be kind of weird. Jesus is all-knowing. So, if He was giving my evaluation, He would know all those times when we slack off. He would know when we procrastinated. He would know when we're wasting time on social media, or news, or (for me, somehow) Zillow. Why Zillow? I've got to get rid of Zillow! I don't get it! It doesn't feel as bad as social media, right? He would know! He would know. It's not just that we would work excellently if we realized that He was our boss and He was who we were working for; we also would have balance. We wouldn't be workaholics because He's called us to rest. He's called us to find rest in Him. It was a part of the top Ten Commandments in the Old Testament. I understand Jesus fulfilled it, but I think He would want us to have rest as well. How would our lives and our work look different if we were working for the Lord?

I heard this week about a company who went from a 60-hour work week to a 30-hour work week. They only made one rule: Everyone is going to work half as much time and the only rule is that we're going to cut out everything else. No text messages, no social media, no news. You cannot be distracted. We are going to work focused for 30 hours instead of 60. What ended up happening is that they were more productive, more efficient, and more profitable because they were less distracted. It made me think: what if we understood we work for the Lord? We would be so much more excellent.

I think, sometimes, when we hear the phrase, "Jesus is our boss," it kind of feels a little bit shallow, which isn't true at all. I really want you to think of it in this different way. I really want you to think of it as though you are a secret agent. This is it! You work for Jesus on this earth, but you just have "Accountant" by your name. You're just an accountant, but you're a secret agent (*Dale pantomimes holding a gun and dodging bullets*), saying, "How can I move the Kingdom forward with my excellence? How will that open the door for the Gospel so that more people can know about Jesus, even though I just crunch numbers?" That's what it means to work

for the Lord. It doesn't matter if you're flipping burgers, or you're a lawyer, or the head coach of the men's basketball team, or you're the water boy. You're a secret agent to further the Kingdom. You work for the Lord. Who we work for changes everything. Everything. It changes *how* we work—obediently and sincerely. We work *for* the Lord. Let's see how that changes *why* we work.

Verse 24: **“knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ. 25 For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done, and there is no partiality.”** So, the third way that we experience the Good Life as we steward work is that we work, not for money, but for future reward. Our *why* is for future reward.

3. *The Good Life: Honoring God with work. Why? Future reward.*

Again, I'll just acknowledge that we work to provide for the needs of our family and to be generous to others. Absolutely. We're going to talk a little bit more about that and stewarding money over the next few weeks, in a different way. So, at a base level: yes, money is to care for our needs. But at a high level, we work for the reward from the Lord. He's our boss. He's who we work for. Work shouldn't just have to do with money. We work for the future inheritance. You might say, “Dale, this is weird. This is too much Christian stuff.” Just think of it this way. How many of us have had an internship in our lives? (*Dale raises his hand.*) It's not rhetorical. You can raise your hand. A lot of people. A lot of people have had an internship. What is an internship? It's when you get paid nothing, or very little, for the hope and understanding that one day there will be a reward for the work that you do. It will open the door for the right opportunity. So, we can understand working for something in the future. Just think about medical residents. They still don't get paid, even though they've got the white coat and everything, but they know that there's a future reward. Those are future earthly rewards. How much better is ours? Future reward is why we work, but so often, almost all of us have complained about work and, specifically, money. So often our complaints are about money. So often we're trying to climb this ladder of money, going from job to job, opportunity to opportunity, instead of following the Good Shepherd, who may have us at a lower-paying job for a season to be a secret agent in that place to further the Kingdom.

I was reading this week about the Great Resignation that happened over the last few years. Seventy-one percent of people that left their jobs in the last two years say “pay” was the reason they left. Pay. You see, we aren't experiencing the Good Life because so often we think the Good Life is about money. It's just about more and more and more and more money. Paul is showing the church in Colossae, as we learned last week, the Good Life is preparing for the better life. It's working for the future reward. That is our why.

I want to go back to the text. At the end of verse 25, Paul says that **“there is no partiality.”** I think part of the way that we fall for this trap of money being the only thing that matters is that we treat people differently based on what they make. I think that Paul, in the text, is saying, “Hey, there's no partiality! It doesn't matter if you're the CEO or the entry-level person; there's no partiality. There's no difference in value to God. There is no partiality.” For me, that was convicting this week. Think about the story I just started with. I love Coach Drew, but I can't treat Coach Drew differently than anyone else in the world. Anyone. There's no partiality. Work

isn't just for money; it's for a future inheritance. This really may be most meaningful to the stay-at-home parent, who kind of feels some guilt for not being paid for the work that you do. Yet your faithfulness, and patience, and excellence, and thoughtfulness, and prayer, and discipleship, and evangelism at the parks during the day, or the cleaning with joy—whatever it may be that you're doing faithfully—I promise you: there will be more reward in Heaven for that stay-at-home parent than for the millionaire CEO who mistreats employees, has a terrible product, and isn't generous. For that stay-at-home parent, it will go so much better for them because work isn't just about money. It's about the future reward.

In summary, in order to experience the Good Life, we're meant to steward work. How? By being obedient and working with sincere hearts. Who do we work for? For the Lord. Why do we work? For the future reward.

I want to close with the story of a man named Harry. I'm going to read it to you, so stick with me as we close this morning.

“My mother was left a widow when I was about two years of age, and I had a younger brother only three weeks old. As my mother had a difficult time caring for two little children for a number of years, I went to work as soon as I was old enough. One time, during school vacation, I went to work with a cobbler. (That's a shoemaker. I had to look that up.) A cobbler named Dan Mackay, in L.A. He had a little shop, and it was papered most beautifully. Instead of fancy paper, he had a lot of old-fashioned Bible almanacs pasted up, and there were big bright texts, so that people who came into that shop would find the Gospel message facing them. He would put a Gospel tract in every parcel that was made up and would speak to nearly every customer about their souls. He was a preacher of the Word, seated there at his cobbler's bench. When I went to work for him, I must have been a rather lazy boy. After he would soak a pair of soles in water, I had to hammer out all the water out of the soles until they became hard and solid, and then he would nail them to the shoes. I used to grow very tired of hammering those soles hour after hour, and constantly wished for something easier.

On my way home, I had to pass another shoe shop. I could see the cobbler there cut a pair of soles, soak them in water, and put them right on the shoes without hammering them at all, and every time he drove a nail into them, water would fly all over the place. This interested me very much. One evening, I said to him: “You know, my boss makes me hammer all the water out of the soles. But you put them right on damp and soft when you get them out of the water.” The man gave me a very sly wink. “They come back all the quicker this way, my boy!”

Harry thought he had learned something, so he went back to his boss and said, “Look here; I don't know why you make me hammer these soles. The man in the other shop doesn't do that. He says they come back all the quicker, and he gets more jobs.”

My boss took out his Bible, and he read: “Whatever you do in word or in deed, do all to the glory of God.” Then, he said: “Harry, perhaps I have been a little thoughtless. I have forgotten that you are just a lad of twelve years of age and it is tiresome work hammering all day. I shall do some of them myself and will teach you to do something else for the rest between times. But I will not allow anything to go out of my shop that is not well-done. It is different with me than it is with

the other man. That man is not saved. He does not know the Lord, but I do. I would love to be a preacher of the Gospel, but God has not gifted me in that way. But He has shown me how to cobble shoes and has put me right here to glorify Him. You know, when the Lord Jesus Christ comes again, and I stand at His judgment seat, I expect to find every shoe that ever went out of my shop in a big pile there. The Lord will take them and look over each one. I expect Him to say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant!’”

What if that one-third of our lives was laid at the feet of Jesus and, as He looked through our work, would He be able to say, “Well done, good and faithful servant?” Working for the Lord will bring the Good Life because the Good Life is found in prepping for the Better Life. Let me pray that we would.

God, would you change our perspective? I think we sometimes just think that by your grace we’ve been saved through faith because of the cross of Jesus, but then we forget how that changes absolutely everything in our lives. Lord, would you change our perspective? Would you help us understand that we work for you, Lord, to give you glory? That changes how we work and even why we work. Lord, I pray that you would help us to be faithful this week as we work—no matter what our responsibility is, no matter what our title is—would you help us to work with obedient and sincere hearts, *for* you, knowing that there’s a future reward? Lord, help us. Would this give us both the Good Life and would it also further your Kingdom in Waco and across the world? Lord, we love you. We pray all this in your son Jesus’ name.