

Work as Worship - Chris Baker - 10/5/25

- What is our created purpose as humans?
 - To glorify God, or you could say to worship Him
- What is our mission as Christians?
 - The Great Commission - Matt 28:19 - To be a disciple of Jesus who makes disciples of Jesus
 - The Great Commandment - Matthew 22:37-40 - love God with all heart, soul, and mind and love your neighbor as yourself
- What have we been taught that looks like?
 - Evangelize/share the gospel - the good news about Jesus
 - Come to church
 - Teach people the Bible
 - Pray (both for other people and myself)
 - Serve the poor and needy
 - etc
- You could probably summarize most of those activities as “ministry”
- What do you spend most of your time doing?
- Types of work survey
 - Who here works in occupational ministry?
 - Who is a full time student?
 - Who works inside the home?
 - Who works outside of the home doing something other than occupational Christian ministry?
- So roughly _____ percentage of you work in something other than direct ministry
 - That means most of you spend 40 hours or more at work each week in an environment that is not directly or explicitly “ministry” related
 - If you love Jesus and believe his mission for you is ministry activity like we talked about before, do you see that as a problem?
 - Is there any pressure or maybe confusion related to that?
 - Does that concern you?
- We believe in and teach “all of life discipleship”
 - In case that phrasing is unfamiliar, that just means that following Jesus involves following Him in every part of your life
 - We want to bridge the gap between Sunday and Monday
- So what does it mean or look like to follow Jesus in how I think about or do my work?

- “Redemptive Historical Narrative”
 - The story of scripture, and therefore all of history, can be understood in 4 main parts
 - **Creation, fall, redemption, and new creation** (or restoration, or consummation)
- It’s the Gospel of Jesus
 - Creation - God created us in His image to love Him and one another
 - Fall - We fell when we sinned against Him by choosing ourselves over Him and others; by dethroning Him as rightful King of our lives in our hearts and by our actions, which rightly deserves God’s rejection and death, eternal separation from Him
 - Redemption - The Father sent His only Son to take our place on the cross, to die in our place so we could be reunited with Him, which we begin to experience now by receiving His Holy Spirit if we trust and believe in Jesus
 - New creation - One day, Jesus will return to judge sin and usher in His kingdom in full. He will remove sin, pain, and death entirely from everyone and everything in His new creation which he makes by reuniting heaven and earth to make a kingdom where we will be fully present with Him and with all of our brothers and sisters in Christ forever
- Key to understanding God, ourselves, and our world, including work
- What is work? Definition of work
 - According to Baker's Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology - work is "The expenditure of physical or mental energy to produce sustenance and culture"
 - Theologian John Stott says "Work is the expenditure of energy (manual or mental or both) in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God."
 - Under either of those definitions, work is not just what we get paid to do
 - What types of activities would fall into this broader definition of work?
 - This also includes the work we do at home to care for our homes or families
 - It includes school
 - It includes our volunteer efforts out in the community as individuals or with churches, ministries, and other organizations
 - And so on and so forth
 - When I say “work,” I’m talking about all of those things
 - That means this sermon is for everyone because everyone works under that definition, whether you get paid or not!

Part 1 - Creation

- Work in scripture
 - Where does work first show up in scripture?
 - Many people say Genesis 3 - the fall
 - I think this is a reflection of how we think about work, but I believe God wants to redeem that
 - Work actually makes its first appearance in Genesis 1:1
 - Genesis 1:1
 - *"In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth."*
 - Here we see it starts with God's work
 - Then we see it show up for mankind later in Chapter 1
 - Genesis 1:26-28
 - *26 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." 27 So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. 28 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."*
 - Man was created to reflect God's likeness
 - God works, so man works - and God calls it GOOD
 - Genesis 2:15
 - *15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.*
 - What about the purpose of work?
 - We know the garden was paradise and there was work to be done, but that it was good and life-giving
 - Work was given BEFORE the fall
 - Work is cursed, but it's not the curse
 - John Bryson, former Acts 29 board member and pastor says it like this "Work is a pre-fall blessing, not a post-fall curse"
 - Matt 22:37-40
 - *35 And one of them, a lawyer, asked him a question to test him. 36 "Teacher, which is the great commandment in the Law?" 37 And he said to him,*

“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind. 38 This is the great and first commandment. 39 And a second is like it: You shall love your neighbor as yourself. 40 On these two commandments depend all the Law and the Prophets.”

- God’s character and His design for us are both reflected in the Law and Jesus says God the Father designed everything in a way that connects and benefits **God, Others, and Us individually**
- That means work cannot properly be understood or fulfill us the way God designed it to if we separate it from loving Him, loving others, and seeing how He is loving us through it
 - Let’s apply those three to God’s design for work
- Work was made to glorify **God**
 - In the Old Testament, there is a Hebrew word “avodah”
 - There are a few Hebrew words for worship, but one of them means both worship and work
 - They understood that work, if done to glorify God, was a form of worship
 - In the New Testament, Colossians 3:23 says, *“Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men”*
 - When done in obedience to God and aimed at pleasing Him, work glorifies God regardless of how much satisfaction we take in it or how much others appreciate what we do
 - It also glorifies God to be good stewards of the gifts and skills He’s given us
 - Work is an opportunity to show the worth of God, which is what “worship” is
 - It’s from the old-English “worth-ship” - to demonstrate worth
- Work is a way to serve and love **others**
 - Even if people don't appreciate the work we do, every job serves people

- God made us to find joy in serving others, and work does that
- Our work is the most tangible way we love others
 - Do you ever think of your work as a way to “love your neighbor”?
- We subject ourselves to the difficulty of work so that others can be cared for, have relationships, enjoy God's creation, do their work, serve others, resolve differences, be given justice, be protected, etc.

■ Work provides purpose, provision, and joy for us

- It is a byproduct of focusing on the first two things, glorifying God and serving/loving others
- The more we connect the first two with our work, the more satisfaction we will derive from work
 - It's the "upside down kingdom" at work
 - You want to enjoy work more? Focus more on loving God and others through it, and you'll get more joy
- The more we neglect any of these three categories, the more our work will feel burdensome and pointless
- But the more we do it God's way, the more we benefit from it also
- And it's good to enjoy that benefit as a gift from God
- We are stewards caring for God's kingdom, not kings building our own -
 - but Romans 8:17 and Galatians 4:7 say we are HEIRS to God's kingdom so it actually benefits us to help build God's kingdom!

- So if work is good and God's design is so good, what happened? Why doesn't it work like it's supposed to?

Part 2 - The Fall

Why is work broken?

- Biblically
 - It is cursed
 - Gen 3:17-19
 - *17 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; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. 19 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."*
 - Because Adam and Eve didn't trust God, and they were given dominion over the earth, everything broke, including work
 - Everyone experiences that, everyone feels that is true
 - work is both satisfying and painful and toilsome
 - Side note - it's actually a great place to find common ground as you try to show people God's truth

- But what are some of the practical and specific ways we see that curse playing out?
- I want to look at 4 big areas in which sin curses our work
 - **1 - Identity** - we are told we find it in our work
 - First question when you meet someone - "What do you do?"
 - God did make it an important part of who we are, but without God, it can try to replace Him as a source of our identity
 - **2 - Purpose of work**
 - The world says work is about
 - Money
 - Power/influence
 - Completely self-serving
 - Building our Kingdom - Work is the key to our kingdom
 - **3 - Sacred/secular divide**
 - There are two kinds of work, God's work (sacred) and everything else (secular)
 - What's wrong with that view?

- Most people aren't in paid ministry and never will be! Is their work less important?
 - Is God less concerned with some types of work than others?
 - A lot of us in here probably struggle with this: working a "secular job", but trying to serve in "ministry" as well
 - I've counseled with lots of people who, when they get really passionate about their relationship with Jesus, they begin to feel like their job doesn't matter if it's not direct ministry
 - Of course, some are actually called into ministry jobs
 - But the effects of the fall are still in play on this one - toilsome and hard
- **4 - Extreme perspectives** - Idol vs. Idle - where are you on the spectrum?
 - Idol
 - We either worship our work or worship ourselves through our work by using it mainly to serve ourselves
 - Work is everything
 - Henry Ford said "Work is the salvation of the human race, morally, physically, and socially."
 - Idle
 - We don't see the significance of it at all, so we see work as just some necessary evil that we must get through
 - The highest goal in life becomes escaping work
 - This isn't a new problem by the way, or reserved for non-Christians
 - In 2 Thessalonians 3, Paul references people that are just sitting around waiting on Jesus to return
 - He had to correct them - "If anyone will not work, let him not eat."
- So how does this mess get fixed? The gospel!

Part 3 - Redemption

- Let's just work our way back through those 4 areas sin broke
- **1 - Identity**
 - Understanding our identity is an essential place to start

- Our identity is who we are, not what we do
 - If we know Jesus, our primary identity is a child of God, the King of Kings by the grace of God, not because of anything we did or didn't do, but by what Christ did on our behalf
 - Verses on Identity
 - Galatians 2:20 - it is no longer I that live, but Christ who lives in me
 - 2 Corinthians 5:17 - I am a new creation, the old is gone, behold the new has come
 - Romans 8:14-15 - we adopted sons of God by whom we cry "Abba, Father!"
 - To be workers is part of our God given identity when viewed from His perspective
 - but we are freed from having our core value tied to what we do
 - We get to work as a way to demonstrate our love of God and others because God loves us already, not to try to earn it from Him or other people
 - We work FROM our identity not FOR our identity
- What about the broken views of the **purpose of our work**?
 - Many people have been taught implicitly that the Gospel only brings purpose to work if we use it to evangelize people at our place of work
 - That's actually true also and a great thing for sure, but I believe the work itself matters and becomes worship
 - Our view of the purpose of work gets restored to God's original design we talked about - worship of God, love of others, and benefits for us
 - The gospel brings balance to extreme perspectives of **Idle vs. Idol**
 - We no longer have to fall into one ditch or the other
 - Idol - we don't worship it or what it gets us either, God has made us rich beyond our wildest dreams in every good thing!
 - 2 Corinthians 8:9
 - *9 For you know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that though he was rich, yet for your sake he became poor, so that you by his poverty might become rich.*
 - This isn't the prosperity gospel

- These riches are much more precious than money
 - These are the riches of God's love, His presence, His kingdom, and His people
 - Idle - we don't slack at our work because it glorifies the God we love and He and His glory are our source of joy
- The Gospel bridges the **Sacred/Secular Divide**
 - All work is eternally significant when it is aimed at glorifying God!
 - Abraham Kuyper (late 1800s-1900s theologian) - *"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!"*
 - Colossians 1:16
 - *16 For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him.*
 - Someone once told me they didn't believe in the concept of "the secular"
 - They viewed the world as divided into the sacred and the "desecrated"
 - The more we grow in applying God's design for work motivated by the Gospel, the more we restore it as sacred
- (IF TIME - if not, skip to 4 - New Creation)
- I want pause here to say a few words about a Biblical reality that flies directly in the face of the sacred/secular divide
- 4 types of work
 - Creative
 - Artists
 - Builders/construction
 - Designers
 - Entrepreneurs
 - Sustaining
 - Service related companies/maintenance
 - Teachers - maintaining helpful knowledge, passing it on to the next generation
 - Redemptive
 - Doctors
 - Counselors

- Church work - paid and unpaid
- Consummating/finishing
 - Farmers harvesting a crop
 - Builders finishing a project
- Which of these are most important, most holy, most Godly?
 - People usually say Redemptive
- Which of these exists because of sin?
 - The other three existed before sin and will exist in the new heavens and new earth
- I'm not diminishing redemptive work, Jesus shed His blood doing it, but redemptive work has a limited shelf-life
 - One day it won't be necessary, but the other kinds of work will continue
 - So is one kind really any more holy than another?
 - Speaking of the new heavens and new earth...

Part 4 - New Creation

- Will there be work in the New Creation?
 - Revelation 22:3
 - *"No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship Him."*
 - "Serving" carries the connotation of work
 - Both Isaiah and Ezekiel reference work when describing what the New Creation will be like
 - We don't know the exact types of work there will be, but we are pretty confident there will be some type of work
 - Now many of you may be disappointed to hear that there will be work
 - But keep in mind that the only reason for that is the current pain and frustration associated with work
 - Work will be totally free to be a joy and a blessing to God, others, and us
 - I encourage you to dig deeper than we have time for into a Biblical view of the New Creation by reading Randy Alcorn's book "Heaven"

Closing

- Unique opportunity of the church - the Church is represented by her people in EVERY sector of society
 - How much would our whole community thrive if we really gave people a vision for how to see their work as a mission from God?
 - We touch EVERY part of our culture!
 - Even just in this church, we have people engaged in just about every industry there is in our community
- What effect would that have on what people thought about Jesus?
- We won't see it in full until Christ returns, but what an opportunity we have to glorify God now by pursuing it and by giving people a taste of Jesus' kingdom now!
 - Lord, let your kingdom come on earth as it is in Heaven

Discussion/reflection Questions

- What broken view of work do you most struggle with?
- How would the work you are currently doing look different if you grew in your gospel perspective on it?
- What would our communities look like if they were filled with believers who had a gospel-centered, gospel motivated view of work?

Resources

- books
 - "Why Your Work Matters" - Tom Nelson
 - "Work: The Meaning of Your Life: A Christian Perspective" - Lester DeKoster

- "Every Good Endeavor" - Tim Keller
- "The Gospel at Work" - Sebastian Traeger, Greg Gilbert
- "Joy at Work" - Dennis Bakke
- "The Other 6 Days" - R. Paul Stevens
- "Doing God's Business" - R. Paul Stevens
- websites
 - Center for Faith and Work - www.faithandwork.com

Credit to:

- Shad Berry
- Cole Huffman
- Dr. Lowell Bakke - <https://www.bgu.edu/about/faculty/lowell-bakke/>