

Faith at Work: Created to Work

Genesis 2:1-15

Preached by Pastor Jason Tarn at HCC on August 18, 2024

Introduction

- ❖ This morning we're beginning a new series focused on the theme of integrating our spiritual lives with our work lives. We're calling it *Faith at Work*. The goal is to help you connect your faith in Christ with your career or your pursuit of a career – for those of you still in school or in training.
 - **Now even as we use the language of career, it's important to stress that our focus in this series won't be limited to a typical 9 to 5 job.** Because that wouldn't apply to every Christian. Many of you are students right now, so obviously you don't have a career. Though I'm sure you aspire to one day. But some of you are stay-at-home parents. You're definitely working hard – but not in a paid position. And then some of you are retired. And some of you are unemployed. So not everyone has a career.

- ❖ That's the limitation if we only speak of careers. **That's why it's helpful to adopt the language of vocation.** It comes from the Latin for calling. And the point is that everyone has a God-ordained calling or vocation – and it doesn't have to look like a normal 9 to 5. Not everyone has a career. But everyone has a vocation. **Everyone has a God-ordained reason to be on this earth, in this particular season of their life, to do good work that glorifies God and blesses others.** That's your calling. That's your vocation.

- ❖ So if every one of us has a vocation, then the question remains: **Is your faith in Christ shaping how you approach and how you carry out your respective vocation?** How does your Christianity apply to your work? What does your faith in a personal Lord and Savior have to do with your job, your vocation? We don't ask those questions enough in church.
 - **Churches spend so much of their time trying to disciple each other to faithfully walk with Jesus.** We focus so much on developing your character, building spiritual habits, sharing the gospel, and serving in a ministry at church. But we often overlook the workplace, the classroom, or wherever you carry out your particular vocation.
 - Let's say you work 40 hours a week (on the low end for many of you), and you get eight hours of sleep each night. **Out of the 112 waking hours in a week – over a third is spent at work.** And that doesn't include the time you spend on the road commuting. So if the church doesn't talk about what your faith has to do with your work, then we've left you with little direction for how your faith applies to a significant portion of your waking hours.

- ❖ This is such an important issue for the Church. Because it's complex and requires careful biblical thinking and 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. 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. They work for the weekends. They work to have the means to enjoy their hobbies. **Or perhaps you have a more spiritual purpose.** You work to make money, so you can give it to the church or to other godly causes. Or you work to evangelize your co-workers or clients.

- ❖ **But in the end, work is, for you, just a means to another end.** And because it can be frustrating and tiresome and distracting from your real goals in life – **work is often viewed as a necessary evil, a curse, that you simply have to endure on this side of heaven.**
 - But is that what work is all about? Is it just a means to facilitate other life goals? 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 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 fails miserably 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 the 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 placed upon mankind as a consequence of sin.
 - **We have this idyllic picture in our minds of the Garden of Eden, before sin entered the picture, as this land of leisure.** Where Adam and Eve laid on beds of roses while trees lowered their branches to place their fruit at arms reach. And then sin came and ruined it all. After Genesis 3, Adam and Eve had to start working for their food. They were cursed. Cursed to work. A curse that continues to this very day.
- ❖ That's how a lot of people – how a lot of Christians – view their 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 for life in paradise. It's not a result of sin.** It's what we were made for. It's a unique way in which we, as humans, reflect God's image. Look at chapter 2:1, *“¹Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. ²And 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. ³So 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.** It was something God was 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 to be "*good*" – to be "*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 were commanded to, "*be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it.*" The idea of subduing the earth suggests that – even though God's creative work was finished (as we read in chapter 2:2) – **a large part of what he created was still undeveloped and in need of additional creative work.** That's where our work comes in.
 - Look at v15, "*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 were living in paradise. **But if they expected to reap a good harvest every season, they had to work for it.** They had to work if they wanted to eat.

- ❖ This might come as a surprise to you. **Again, many of us 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 and lay food at their feet. The first pair sounds more like Adam and Snow White.
 - But that's not what life in Eden was like. **Adam and Eve had to work the Garden and keep it up.** God's work was done, but theirs had just begun. **As the only creatures made in his image, human beings 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 and fill the earth (1:22). **But only us 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 animals.** Humans work while animals just survive. We can do creative work that reflects the work of our Creator. **Human work is a participation in and continuation of God's creative work.** It's about cultivating and fashioning what he has already made. Like God in Genesis 1, when we work we're bringing order out of chaos, making things beautiful, making things good, making them better, contributing to the joy and flourishing of all creation. 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 part of the original 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 are 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 rather than primarily resters.** Six days of work; one day of rest.

- ❖ And even when Jesus returns and the New Earth arrives, we'll still be working. Think about it: **If work was present in paradise before the Fall, then you'd expect to see work in the new creation after the Fall is reversed.** The eternal Sabbath rest that's been promised to God's people is a promised rest from our struggle against sin and the flesh (Heb 4:9). It's a promised rest from toilsome work. But it's *not* a rest from work itself.
 - 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 – they'll often say what they miss is work. They miss doing something meaningful and useful. **This is why it's foolish to make retirement a vocational goal.** It's sad when people sacrifice health and relationships to secure for themselves an early retirement. Only to discover that humans were not made for extended leisure.

- ❖ The second implication is this: **If work is what define us as humans – if it's what sets us apart from animals – then all work is dignified and all work is an extension of God's creative work.** This is 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 you 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 tend to see more dignity in the work of the executive. We would be distraught if our child were to choose the assembly line over the corner office. And yet, in God's eyes, both are workers and both reflect his image – the image of the Divine Worker.

- ❖ So think about your vocation, and ask yourself: **How do I reflect the image of God in my vocation?** In what ways am I extending God's creative work in my work? **Health care professionals,** you reflect God in the way you restore health and sustain life. **Engineers,** you're like God in the way that you, in a sense, create time! You give us more of it by making things work faster and more efficiently.
 - **Artists,** like God, you make things beautiful. You take the beauty of what he's made, you capture it, and enhance it for our joy. **Teachers,** like God, you fashion young minds. Like God, you bring order out of chaos. **Accountants,** you reflect God by creating the stability and sustainability needed for individuals or institutions to flourish. **Lawyers,** you resemble God as you work to establish justice and right order. **Tradesmen,** like God, you fashion the things of this earth into good, beautiful, functional things. You could say God is like you – he came to earth as a tradesman.

- ❖ **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 environment conducive for the rearing of children. **Retirees,** you may not be working anymore, but you can still reflect God in the way you live – not with a mind to be served – but to serve others with your time and resources.

- ❖ **Students**, you may not be working yet, but these are the questions you should be asking. This is way you should be thinking about your career path. Seeing and appreciating the inherent goodness of work. Not treating work as a curse. And not treating some forms of work as more dignified than others and 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 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 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 consequences.** It was not an isolated affair affecting just their personal 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."*¹
- ❖ And that would include work. **It's not a curse. But work is under a curse.** So here in v17, we see that curse of sin. *"¹⁷And 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; ¹⁸thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹By 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."*

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

- ❖ 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 corner office to pursue. You'll never "make it" because every time you get to the top, there's always a taller ladder to climb. **Your career makes for a pitiful god because it'll always leave you dissatisfied.** Especially if you're expecting it to provide you ultimate meaning and purpose. If you're wanting your job to define you.

- ❖ But that's how we train people to think – from a young age. What's one of the most common questions we ask little kids, "What do you want to be when you grow up?" And the assumption is that they have a myriad of options to choose from. You can be whatever you want to be! **And we grow up with this notion that what you choose for a career is of ultimate importance. Because it's life defining. You are what you do.** That's why one of the first questions we ask when we meet someone new is usually, "What do you do?" I don't really know how to view you – how to categorize – unless I know what you do for work.

- ❖ **I don't think past generations were as obsessed as we are with figuring out what you wanted to be when you grew up.** In generations past, you would probably just pick up your father's trade. Your career options were mostly limited by your geography, your local context. You weren't as preoccupied with what you did for a living. **You just 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.**
 - Look, I'm not saying every thing was better in the past. Or that past generations had it all figured out. I'm just acknowledging that we live in different times. **People today – especially young people starting out in their careers – are convinced that your work that defines you.** Your vocation 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. They struggle with this feeling that their work is meaningless. They want to be doing something more meaningful, more significant. "Maybe I need to change jobs. Maybe I need a new career path." **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 me ultimate meaning and purpose in life.**
 - The fact is that work is under a curse. 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, joy and satisfaction; to be your source of meaning and purpose in life – then you're basically asking your vocation to play god.** I'm sorry to say 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 God is the one who placed work under a curse – ensuring there will always be a degree of toil and frustration in it – to serve as a constant reminder and warning *not* to worship our work. *Not* to center our lives on our careers.**

- ❖ And he's the one who sent his Son 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 placed upon work. **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 the curse has now been lifted off our work, that doesn't mean the toil and frustration of sin's effects is suddenly gone. They'll remain in our work until Jesus returns.

- ❖ But in the meantime, the work of Christ – 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* your'e ultimately working for.**
 - As a Christian, you're working for the Lord (cf. Col 3:23). No matter your job. No matter who's your boss or 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. Worship is not just a synonym for music and singing. **It's not just what takes place within the four walls of a church.**
 - **We have this mistaken 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 story of three stone masons, hard at work, who were approached by a casual observer. "What are you doing?" the observer asked the first mason. "I'm cutting stone," he replied. The observer 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 observer 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 completely changes your perspective. **It keeps you from falling into the danger of making work an idol** – of assigning too much 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 on 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 mornings 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?**