

"Glorifying God in Our Work"

Sunday AM, August 25, 2024

Cedarview Community Church, Newmarket ON

I. Introduction

- A. Good morning everyone. It's great to be here today and, for those of you wondering, don't worry. Pastor Don will be next week. While I know that I'm looking forward to Pastor Don's return, it has been a real treat to hear from so many others at Cedarview. We really are blessed to have so many gifted people here.
- B. This morning I want to share with you some ideas related to a theology of work. If you have a good memory, you might remember a similar topic from a Sunday night in 2014 and I'm hoping to pick up on some of those themes. I've realized that if you really want to have a good series, you start one part, wait ten years, and then follow up with the second part.
- C. I should pause here to note that I didn't say a theology of *works*, I promise I'm not going to try to convince you that our salvation is by works. Instead, I want to take a look at what the Bible says related to our work.
 1. The work of Christ on the cross is not connected to what we do—that's the beauty of it.
 2. But that doesn't mean that God doesn't care about what we do in fact spend our days doing.
- D. To help us get started, I thought'd share two examples of what *wrong* thinking about our work often sounds like within the church.
 1. Some years ago a seminary posted an ad in *Christianity Today* with the following text.

"I wanted to become a CEO, but then God called me to something greater...I sensed God was calling me to full-time ministry."
 2. A pastor I know posted this to his Facebook page.

"Spent some quality time with a former gang leader. We come from completely different backgrounds but had so much in common. Mainly the way Christ changed our lives. Would you join me in praying for Mario—his dream job is in the medical field, but I have a hunch he is going to do some incredible things for the Lord!"
 3. Apparently being in "full-time ministry" is greater than being a CEO. It seems, if this is right, that one can't do "incredible things for the Lord" within the medical field.

- a) This is the sort of language that comes easy to many Christians, but we've got to be careful with it.
 - b) What's the rationale for thinking that God couldn't use Mario to do great things for the Lord right within the medical field?
- E. You see, in many Christian circles, and I imagine to some extent it's even true at Cedarview, we have a tendency to think about different kinds of jobs that people do and then rank them accordingly.
- 1. So, for example, if someone heads off to be a missionary in some far away land, we'll they're the real super-Christians.
 - 2. But if you don't have enough faith to do that, maybe you'll seek full-time employment as a pastor in a church.
 - 3. If you're not Godly enough for that, then maybe you'll pursue a career that is focused on helping others. Perhaps as a doctor or a schoolteacher.
 - 4. But if you can't quite do that, well then you'll *just* do your best in some other chosen career. And, hopefully, if you do well enough and donate enough of your salary to ministry work, then you'll work your way back up to being level with one of these other positions.
- F. Well, my view is that is all completely wrong and I think we inadvertently accept this picture because we tend to have wrong ideas about work itself. My goal this morning is to help us see that we can each truly and *fully* glorify God in our work regardless of our particular career path.
- G. To do that, we're going to work through some well known passages of Scripture and see how they relate to our work. But, before we go any further, let's pray.

SERMON POINTS

I. Our being image bearers of God is directly connected to the nature and purpose of work.

- A. I think part of the reason we have created this hierarchical picture of work is that we can easily forget what it means to be created in God's image and we misunderstand the nature and purpose of work.

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.**

- B. We are image bearers of God. That's something we hear people say, but we may not always pause to reflect on what it actually means in practice.
1. Being an image bearer of God means that he has created us to reflect who God is.
 2. Another way of thinking about this is that we are to imitate God, and when we do imitate him, we bring him glory.

Ephesians 5:1 Therefore be imitators of God, as beloved children.

3. When we engage in activities that reflect who God is, we are not only living according to our designed purpose, but we are also glorifying God through those actions.
4. We'll come back to this in a few minutes, but it's important to note now that just by showing up and working hard, by being reliable and consistent, you are glorifying God. This is because those activities themselves reflect who God is. In being diligent at your work—whether that is in an office, a school classroom, a field, or in your home—you are imitating God. You are reflecting who God is. You are bearing his image and, in doing so, glorifying God.

- C. Consider this passage from Genesis chapter two.

Genesis 2:1–3, 15 Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And 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. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation... The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

1. First, note that the Bible tells us that “on the seventh day God finished his *work*.” Even God’s own creative activity was “work.” That becomes more evident when we notice that God rests on the seventh day.
 - a) Have you ever thought about why God created in six days (or six ages corresponding to days, or through evolution over thousands of years, or whatever your view of creation is)? No matter how you think God created, you’ve got a being capable of speaking things into existence *ex nihilo*.
 - b) If God could, by merely speaking, bring something into existence from nothing, then couldn’t he have also just brought the entire universe into existence fully formed? Sure he could have! Why think he had to first bring into existence a formless heaven and earth, and then create light, and then create land, and then create plants, etc.?

- c) I think part of the answer is that God sees the value in taking something disordered and making it orderly. In taking something formless and forming it. That is, God sees value in work. Think about your own job. How much of your job is doing something similar? If you're a teacher, you take disparate thoughts and ideas and organize them into a way that your students can learn them. If you're a stay-at-home mom, you surely know what it's like to take a disorganized house and bring order to it. If you're an accountant, you properly order the business's financial books.
2. You may have never thought of it this way before, but in all these things you are imitating God's own creative activity of work. But you're not just imitating his creative activity, you are also imitating his sovereignty.
- a) Some of us oversee large groups of people, others oversee the completion of relatively small or minor tasks. But in each case, there is something over which we exercise control. Things within that sphere operate according to how we set things up. Whether that is large or small, we exercise sovereignty over it. When we rule in a way that is reflective of God's rule over the universe, we bring him glory. And, of course, when we fail to do so, we sin.
 - b) So, if God himself works, when he could've done things different, that should show us there is something important about work itself. In other words, *work* can glorify God on its own—it's not something that is just used to do something else that glorifies God.

II. God designed humans for work; work is *not* a result of the Fall.

- A. It's important to note that right from the beginning God had a plan for mankind to work. Note verse 15 from Genesis 2.

Genesis 2:15 The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Work is *not* something that came about because of the Fall. Working the Garden was part of God's original plan and, evidently, that plan had us working six days and resting one (not the reverse).

In his book, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective*, the biblical scholar Ben Witherington has this to say: "It is perfectly clear that God's good plan always included human beings working, or, more specifically, living in the constant cycle of work and rest" (Ben Witherington, *Work: A Kingdom Perspective*, 2).

1. The Fall most certainly effected how we go about our work, but it's important to get clear that work itself is not a curse.
2. In our culture today this is very easy to overlook given that so much of our society seems to think work is something to merely be endured. The real goal is to make

enough money so you don't have to work. Or, perhaps, to win the lottery so you can spend the rest of your days at the beach. However you can make it happen, hurry up and retire because that's when life will really begin.

- a) I have a good friend from high school who once told me he wanted to work hard enough to make enough money that he could retire at 40.
 - b) That's a pretty ambitious goal and you know, he did it. He's brilliant and has a great work ethic and was able to retire at 40.
 - c) However, he didn't actually retire. Why? Well it's not because he's greedy and just wants even more money, it's because he came to see the good of work itself and that we are not created to simply loaf around all day.
3. Historians and economists often talk about how the "Protestant work ethic" contributed to the development of the capitalist west because there were so many people who saw their work as a mechanism for worshipping God. Today, I'm afraid, it seems some Christians have become enamored by the socialist's desire for a utopian conception of society without work.
- B. Scripture tells that this is not God's plan for us. In the Garden of Eden—paradise defined—God had a plan for Adam and Eve to work. And it's not something that he did simply because he's mean and vindictive. The reason God always had a plan for us to work is that God is a worker and, as we saw earlier, we are created in his image.
- C. When we work, especially when we see it as a way to glorify God, we are living according to how we are designed. And, contrary to what the world wants us to believe, there is life in that because when we live according to our design, we flourish.

III. Our work is not just instrumentally valuable. It is also intrinsically valuable.

- A. Unfortunately, in my experience, many people will say that they understand what it means to be created in God's image, and that they agree we glorify God by imitating him, but they fail to see how their work can, all on its own, glorify God.
1. That is, they think that the only way their work can glorify God in their work is by being an office-based missionary.
 2. Or, perhaps, they think the way they are supposed to glorify God is by treating their work as a means to donating more money to the Kingdom.
 3. While these are good things, they are not the only way we glorify God in our work. And we should be very glad about that.
 - a) If you work by yourself there's probably not a lot of opportunities to be an office-based missionary. I guess you could share the gospel with yourself, but I'm not sure that is going to keep you going every day. But if being a missionary at

your work were the only way to glorify God, then you'd miss out on something important and devalue your work.

- b) Similarly, if you have a job that doesn't pay well, you're just not going to have a lot of money to donate to the Kingdom. For those of you who are currently in school, it's good to treat your academic studies as a form of work, but as much as you might like it, you're not getting paid for that work. So, if you think work is just about earning money to donate, but you don't have any money, then you're going to end up devaluing your academic studies because you *wrongly* think that work isn't connected to your love and worship of God.
- B. While sharing your faith at work is good, and donating to the Kingdom is good, those are not the only ways you glorify God through your work. You see, these things are good, but focusing on them treats work as if it is simply an *instrumental good*.
- 1. However, the value of our work is not just found in what we produce with it. Instead, work is *intrinsically* valuable—it doesn't just have instrumental value.
 - 2. This distinction between intrinsic and instrumental value is very important. You and I are intrinsically valuable, we're valuable for what we are—human beings created in the image of God—and not simply for what we produce.
 - a) As a quick aside, I think this is why God allows people to continue to exist in Hell. Because we are intrinsically valuable, he allows us to continue with our rejection of Him. If God were to simply annihilate the unrepentant, a view that is becoming increasingly popular, it would be like him saying, "You aren't producing what I want, so you're not valuable. I'm just going to eliminate you from existence entirely."
 - b) So, perhaps oddly enough, the reason God continues to sustain people's existence in Hell is because he sees his creation as being intrinsically valuable and not valuable for what that creation produces.
 - 3. In Colossians chapter 3:23–24 we see a picture of how we are to approach our whole lives, in including our work.

Colossians 3:23–24 “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.”

- a) Our work is valuable because in it we reflect God's image and serve our Lord Christ.
- b) It's not just the outcome of that work, but the work itself that is a service to Christ.

4. As long as the work you are doing is not contrary to God's word, then you can be sure that God is pleased to see you doing that work well.
 - a) Recall our passage from Genesis 1

Genesis 1:26 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."
 - b) We were created to exercise dominion and, in doing so, we reflect God's image—because he has dominion over us. However, the *way* we exercise that dominion also matters. That is, not all work is pleasing to God. Even if you're a really good thief, you can't expect your doing that well is going to be pleasing to God.
 - c) But if what you are working to bring about is not contrary to God's commands, and the manner in which you bring it about isn't either, then you can be confident that doing it well will be pleasing to God and will bring him glory.
5. This also means that you shouldn't think the only reason you work is to give money away to charitable causes. You should be generous, but don't degrade the value of the work itself. In creating man in his image, God instills value into the work of all people.
6. As Tim Keller put it in his book, *Every Good Endeavor*, "[Work] has dignity because it is something that God does and because we do it in God's place, as his representatives" (Tim Keller, *Every Good Endeavor*, 48).

IV. Closing Remarks

- A. Maybe ten years from now this can be part three of my series, but just quickly as I wrap up, it's important to note that a proper understanding of our work not only allows us to derive meaning and significance from that work, but it also contributes to a case for the truth of Christianity itself.
 1. The Christian worldview provides an explanation as to why we can (and should) find meaning in work.
 2. It explains why those without work find life less fulfilling.
 3. When we look at the world around us, we naturally want to have an explanation for what we find. Why is there something rather than nothing? On what basis can we hold others to a moral (and not just a legal) standard? Why is there so much suffering?

4. For years Christians have attempted to provide answers to these questions, and we should continue to do so. But, the Christian worldview also explains how and why we derive meaning from our work. And in doing so provides additional positive evidence for its being true.
- B. I hope that we now have a better understanding of how God views our work. However, even with that understanding in place, as we go about the business of our day-to-day lives, we can sometimes allow the enemy to try to distort that understanding. If he can do that, he can take your focus off glorifying God.
 - C. Be on guard for the enemy's efforts to drag you down by leading you to think your work doesn't matter because you spend your workweek doing something other than full-time vocational ministry.
 1. What God cares about is your obedience to him. If he's calling you be a full-time minister, then do that. If he's calling you to be a CEO or to work in the medical field, then do that. If he's calling you to stay at home, then do that.
 2. Regardless of where you find yourself, be intentional in seeing how your work reflects who God is and take heart knowing that as you spend time in the office, or in the shop, or wherever, that you are bearing God's image as you engage in your work.

V. Let's Pray