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*Transforming Daily Life*

719 Earl Garrett Street  
Kerrville, TX 78028

Three Sermon Outlines on  
*Work and Faith*

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**“Downward Mobility:  
Humility & The Workplace”**

Rich Roush, M. Div.

SERMON NOTES

*The  
High Calling  
of Our  
Daily Work*

*Making a real living connects you to a bigger picture,  
a grand design, an abundant life.  
Each of us has only a small part to play, but what a part!  
It's the high calling of our daily work.*

– Howard Butt, Jr., of Laity Lodge  
TheHighCalling.org

# Three Sermon Outlines on Work and Faith: Downward Mobility: Humility & The Workplace.

Rich Roush, M. Div.

## *The Intent of the Outlines:*

Within the past six months or so I have been punched in the gut by a couple books from the '80s. The two books are Gordon MacDonald's *Ordering Your Private World* and Henri Nouwen's *The Selfless Way of Christ: Downward Mobility and the Spiritual Life*. The takeaway from both, for me at least, is one thing: Humility—more specifically, gospel-centered humility as foundational for my vocation as a pastor. I know that these sermon outlines are typically given as resources for pastors to pass along as sermons to their congregations. But, if I may, I would like to not just resource the pastor with these sermons but also address the pastor in them. That is, the person I would specifically like to both encourage and challenge is the one receiving these sermons. As a pastor myself, I often feel that I read resources with the intent to share them with others before I internalize them myself. My hope is that these sermons would first minister to the original reader before they are ever considered for ministry to a congregation. Now, knowing that I am addressing an audience of pastors, I do not expect to share anything groundbreaking that you all have not heard before. My desire is to encourage each of you and maybe eventually your congregations to join me in remembering our call to what Nouwen describes as “downward mobility.” He writes, “Everything in me wants to move upward. Downward mobility with Jesus goes radically against my inclinations, against the advice of the world surrounding me, and against the culture of which I am a part.”

I will not pretend to be qualified enough to speak for all persons, but I am qualified to speak for myself—I think. I feel the tension that Nouwen describes. I struggle with being an humble pastor. I can feel myself desiring upward mobility, desiring power and recognition, desiring reputation, etc. In all honesty, I desire glory. I might be on an island by myself with this one, and if that is the case, then these few sermons have at least served a purpose in bringing my heart back to a place where the gospel is the center of all life and purpose for me as a pastor; a place where grace abounds and humility comes not in my effort to become humble but in proper recognition and response to who Jesus is and what he came to do. But, if I am not alone in this struggle then maybe these few sermons can help bring you and your people back to that place as well, if necessary.

## *The Three Sermon Outlines Presented Are:*

*Jeremiah 18:1-6 – Refusing God's Hands*

*Matthew 15:21-28 – Desperate Dogs*

*John 3:25-30 – More of Him*

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You don't love enough. Are you constantly anxious, insecure, and unstable about where you stand with God? Never really quite sure if you are fulfilling God's purposes. You think you are . . . but you have to look around first. Remember what the gospel says over you. Contrary to what people think about us, we do not have a relationship with God BECAUSE we live up to his standards. We have not done this well and NEVER will. We have a relationship with God because of the gospel—because of grace. Can we stop trying to be so religious for people and just be obedient—not out of fear of rejection (from both God and our congregations) but in response to the grace that is and has always been there for us?

I have heard it said in Christianity, "You are broken and in Christ. You are not only accepted despite your brokenness, but also because you were willing to admit it." We may be broken. Stubborn. Ruined clay. But, we are all of these things in his hands, and his hands are good.

Hear the words of Paul:

*Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here! All this is from God, who reconciled us to himself through Christ and gave us the ministry of reconciliation: that God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ, not counting people's sins against them. And he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us. We implore you on Christ's behalf: Be reconciled to God. God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God. 2 Corinthians 5:17-21 ESV*

It is not just our church members who are on the potter's wheel. We are on the wheel with them. Remember what the gospel says over you. Rest in it. By your Hands and by your grace, God, make us new.

## **Sermon 2: Matthew 15:21-28—Desperate Dogs**

*The Main Text:*

*Leaving that place, Jesus withdrew to the region of Tyre and Sidon. A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly." Jesus did not answer a word. So his disciples came to him and urged him, "Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us." He answered, "I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel." The woman came and knelt before him. "Lord, help me!" she said. He replied, "It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs." "Yes, it is, Lord," she said. "Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table." Then Jesus said to her, "Woman, you have great faith! Your request is granted." And her daughter was healed at that moment. Matthew 15:21-18 ESV*

*The Big Idea:*

God did not save us for ourselves. He wants the whole world to be made new. In the gospels, we see the beginnings of a family portrait. And, what does it take to be in the picture? Desperation.

*The Major Movements:*

*Where Is Jesus Coming From?*

*The Canaanite Woman*

*The Conflict*

*Desperate Words From a Desperate Dog*

So, the last sermon's "big idea" was refusing God's hands. The root of why. The fruit of why. And the remedy. We all desire glory. In our chaotic attempt to grab at it, we all refuse God's hands . . . the hands that make us new. The remedy we talked about for all of our refusals is the gospel of Jesus Christ—the gospel of grace. We cannot be afraid to tell the truth about ourselves. We are marred. Stubborn. We are broken, but we are broken in God's hands.

Those of us on the wheel must not pretend life is clean and neat, because we are all living examples that life is messy. The potter's hands are covered in clay! In his book *Messy Spirituality*, Mike Yaconelli said, "We often learn about following Jesus in the desperation of life. It is a myth, or if you choose an outright lie that we have to fix ourselves in order to meet God. God

meets us right where we are.” So many in our churches (maybe even so many of us) act and think that the gospel is Christianity 101, meaning we get past it. Learn bigger and better things. Things deeper. But there is nothing else outside of it. We never get past the gospel. We never get past needing it. Our people need to know this truth. As Christians, we are never NOT desperate for the gospel because we are never NOT desperate. We are all desperate all the time. Desperation outside of the gospel causes us to look to created things—other people, possessions, you name it. Desperation in the gospel causes us to look to God in our desperation.

So far, the discussion has been around each of us as individuals being in God’s hands. In our natures, we like things that are about us. Social media has only helped us all to become more addicted to focusing on ourselves.

If the last sermon was a self-portrait point of view of being made new—a “selfie” if you will\*—then this sermon is to help us remember that the goal for God is not individuals.<sup>1</sup> The goal for God is the family portrait.

### *Introduction:*

This passage for this sermon is like *Mona Lisa* in the gospels—you might be thinking that I have lost my mind. But seriously though, I look at the Mona Lisa and think, “Hmmm. Goofy looking woman. Creepy smile. Sinister eyes like they follow me wherever I go. What is it about the Mona Lisa that is so special?” This thing is at the Louvre. The Louvre is for masterpieces! Not Mona Lisa! She has no business being in there. Something like the Kardashians\*—she is just famous for being famous! To me, that is. The Louvre would disagree. Mona Lisa is showcased for a reason and if you sit with her long enough—you notice things about her that make her a masterpiece. Or at least the experts seem to think so. This passage in Matthew, many of us would say, does not belong in the Bible. It makes us feel funny. Jesus sounds like a jerk, and Jesus isn’t supposed to be a jerk. Why is it there?

I asked my students how many of them knew about this passage. Some. I also asked how many of them had ever heard it talked about. Fewer. I was not surprised. It is ignored. But, it is a beautiful passage. You just have to sit with it for a while to recognize its beauty . . . like Mona Lisa.

So, let’s unpack this. Because when we do, we will see that the thing most pleasing to God is desperate faith, no matter where it comes from. It takes desperate faith. It takes desperation to be in the family portrait.

### *MVMT 1: Where Is Jesus Coming From?*

The story starts by saying Jesus left that place. What place is he leaving? Where is he coming from? What just happened? Let’s look to find out.

Jesus has just left Gennesaret where he walked by the disciples . . . who were in a boat. Peter wants to go out to him on the water. Jesus says come on. A storm comes. The certainty of the storm becomes greater than the certainty of who Jesus is to Peter, and he sinks. Jesus says, “You of little faith, why did you doubt?” Next in Gennesaret, some Pharisees go out of their way from Jerusalem to see Jesus. Jesus says about them, “They honor God with their speech, but their hearts are far from God.” The Pharisees are offended. The disciples say, “Jesus, don’t you know that you offended them by what you said about them?”

Jesus replies, “Their actions, their heart, that’s not from my Father. And every plant not from the Father is going to be dug up. Let them be offended. I don’t care. They are blind guides. If the blind lead the blind, they both fall into the pit.”

Peter says, “What? Jesus, you aren’t making sense . . . Can you explain?”

Jesus says, “Really, Peter? They are upset about food. Food is food. It all comes out eventually. But, what comes out of our mouths come from the heart. This condemns a person. The things that come out—not the thing that goes in. So, watch what you say, Peter.”

This is fascinating because what we witness next has everything to do with words—the truth in a statement. Words coming from the heart. Desperate Words.

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- Sorry for the “selfie” reference. As a student pastor, many of the people I spend my time with are addicted to taking pictures of himself or herself.
  - I apologize for the Kardashian reference as well. I promise the awful pop culture mentions will stop.

## MVMT 2: The Canaanite Woman

The story goes that Jesus left “that place” which was Gennesaret and some pretty remarkable things have just happened. Jesus left that place and came to Tyre and Sidon. Jesus has now crossed over into “pagan” territory. Tyre and Sidon is code for foreign land.

Verse 22 - 23 reads, *A Canaanite woman from that vicinity came to him, crying out, “Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me! My daughter is demon-possessed and suffering terribly.” 23 Jesus did not answer a word.*

Jesus has come across a woman whose daughter is possessed by a demon and is in great anguish. Who is this woman? A Canaanite. Note here that this isn’t just any foreigner. This is a Canaanite woman. This would have been like nails on a chalkboard to the Hebrew listener of this story.

They would say, “Hold on now, narrator—let’s take a time out before anyone gets hurt. This foreign woman has no manners.” The word choice for “cried out” in this passage implies that she did so very loudly. But what is it that comes out of her mouth so obnoxiously loud? *“Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me!”* If we were all Jewish 2,000 years ago, we would be a bit confused right about now.

She calls Jesus, “Lord?” “Lord” was a Gentile word predominately. The Romans and anyone under Roman rule would have to swear allegiance to Caesar by saying, “Caesar is Lord.” “Okay,” we’d say, “we will give her that one, but what else does she say?” “Lord, *Son of David.*” That was Jesus’ messianic title. She is not only calling him Lord but she is also calling him the Christ! Is she acknowledging who Jesus is and what he came to do while the overwhelming majority of God’s people haven’t got a clue? She is saying . . . Lord Jesus Messiah!! That is incredible!! Confusing as ANYTHING but definitely incredible.

So, what does Jesus say in return? Nothing. Do you find that strange? What is going on with Jesus? What is he up to?

## MVMT 3: The Conflict

I don’t know. What I do know is that the disciples have a tendency to get a bit bodyguard-ish with Jesus. Reminds me of parents bringing their kids to Jesus for blessings only to have the disciples shoo them away. They do the same thing here. *His disciples came to him and urged him, “Send her away, for she keeps crying out after us.”*

“Get her out of here, Jesus! Send her away! Tell her to go home! We want some peace and quiet!”

There is a kid who just started coming to our church. He is a kid from an area around our church that we (church body and staff) have been covering in prayer for about a year now. We have a prayer initiative to reach this area. Around 100 people are praying, like 15 people or so—7 days a week. My day is Tuesday. We have been praying for this area and (no joke) this kid walks past the church a few weeks ago and approaches us while we were setting up for a church picnic and says, “Hey, what are you guys setting up for?” “A picnic. You can come back at 6:30 if you want.” He did. The next week he walked to Sunday School and worship. I thought, “Sweet!” The next day, however, I get a hug around my neck and I hear, “What’s up, man?” I turn around and it’s him. You know what my first thought was? “Dude, but it’s Monday.” Jesus teaches me better than that. He taught the disciples better than that. At first glance, this passage doesn’t seem to say so.

Jesus says, *“I was sent only to the lost sheep of Israel.”* Who is he talking to? His disciples? The woman? I read one commentator wondering if he says it to himself—thinking out loud. I don’t know. But, at this point, one might begin to think that up until now, faith in Jesus has led to divine action. Even for the Gentile centurion. But things are not looking good for this woman. He is saying that his mission is to call the nation of Israel back to God.

The woman, however, is now kneeling before Jesus. “Lord, help me.” We have moved beyond just conversation. This is a posture of submission—a posture of worship. “Lord, help me.” I think Jesus meant what he said here. He knows what is to come and this is the best way to accomplish it. He didn’t say this haphazardly. Why he said it, I have no clue. I don’t think it was a test, but I don’t have any better ideas. I just don’t.

He responds to her second request, with the infamous words, *“It is not right to take the children’s bread and toss it to the dogs.”*

Now, put yourself in the place of the woman. Can you feel the pain of your daughter? Can you see the crowd? Do you see the man? Jesus. The man you have heard about from far away lands. You have heard he could be the savior of his people. Surely,

he is powerful enough. Do you remember the stories you have heard? Stories that give you hope. How he can restore sight to the blind. How he can help the lame walk. You have even heard that this man Jesus . . . can cast out evil spirits. Are you nervous about asking this man to help you? Do you feel the adrenaline take over? The tug of war going on inside you . . . it's now or never! You cry out at the top of your lungs, "Lord, Son of David, have mercy on me." It was almost impulsive, but now you can't stop screaming for him. Do you hear the mockery you receive as a Gentile AND as a woman? Do you hear the jeers for your ridiculous cry to a foreigner . . . a Jewish rabbi!

But this man does not respond. Are you shaken by his silence? Confused by his comment about being sent only for the sheep of Israel? He is your only shot. You are desperate. You kneel before him in a posture of submission. You ask for help. To which he says, "*It is not right to take the children's bread and toss it to the dogs.*"

What do YOU do?

#### *MVMT 4: Desperate Words From a Dog*

Me? I would be destroyed. Angry. Defeated, crying, "Then what are you even doing here, Jesus? If you only came for Israel, what are you doing in my hometown? You aren't in Israel! Are you lost? You aren't the Lord! You aren't the Christ! You are no Son of David! You are just another Jewish rabbi!" And I am sure that I would say it all with expletives that I would not regret. What would you do?

We know what she does. She holds on to Jesus for dear life and replies with all that she knows to say at this point. Some would see this as her challenging Jesus or others as her even teaching Jesus—like a rebuke. I read it and hear these words coming from as close to the ground as they possibly could be. I hear a face in the dirt. I hear desperation. "*Yes, it is, Lord,*" she said. "*Even the dogs eat the crumbs that fall from their master's table.*"

Do you notice here that this woman lets Jesus be who she knows him full well to be? She lets him be Lord. She lets him be the Messiah. She doesn't dispute that she is a dog, but she does dispute what Jesus seems to be saying. It sounds like he is saying, "I didn't come here for you." She says, "Yes, you did." These are desperate words from a dog. Now, let me be clear. I am not saying that to encourage or support misogyny. In the context of this passage . . . If she is a dog, then I am a dog. We are all dogs! We are all in her position.

Jesus replies, "Woman, great is your faith" The Greek is "*MEGALE* *sou e' pistis.*" She has *mega* faith. Jesus says, "Your request is granted. Your daughter is healed this instant." Up against the things that happened in Gennesaret, this is a beautiful and powerful moment.

*Conclusion:*

#### *Desperation Is Key*

What is our takeaway? What the heck does this have to do with being a pastor? Desperation—this woman was desperate. It begs me to ask when was the last time I was that desperate for Jesus? For him to be Lord? Desperate for him to be Christ in my life? Clinging to him like he was all that there was for me. What about you? Because in truth, he is all that there is for us. He is it. When was the last time we begged for grace and mercy? This story is about the wrong person, of the wrong culture, in the wrong place asking Jesus for things that no one thought she had the right to ask.

All that there was for her was the possibility for mercy, the possibility for grace, and the knowledge that this man Jesus is the one to seek out for it. And in the end, because of her great and desperate faith, it proved to be there for her. With desperate faith, grace and mercy prove to be there for us, too. We have to be desperate for God, though. We need grace and mercy all the time, not just when we think we need it. As a pastor, I routinely forget this. Psalm 63 starts by saying "O God, You are my God; I shall seek you earnestly." I shall seek you with everything I've got. My soul thirsts for you in a dry and weary land where there is no water. In a land where there is nothing to drink, I do not want water! I want God! When was the last time I was desperate for God when I didn't have to be?

Note also that those desperate outside of the gospel will be consumed with thoughts for themselves, but those desperate for God will be consumed with thoughts of him—and others. Consider the Canaanite woman. She said, "Have mercy on *me*." But it is her daughter that is ill. She thought so much of her daughter's pain and suffering that it became her pain and suffering.

This is a beautiful thought, knowing that the goal for God is not individuals. God is not a "selfie" kind of God. We were saved so others might be saved as well. Anyone desperate for God who calls on the name of Jesus is welcomed into the family

portrait. This is something greater than you and me. We are all dogs, yet in Christ, we find help and hope. Think about it—God has grafted the dogs into his family and in Christ; we are no longer called dogs, but beloved children of God—his sons and daughters. This is the beginning, NOT of a self-portrait, but of a family portrait full of desperate dogs grafted into the family as sons and daughters.

## **Sermon 3: John 3:25-30—More of Him**

### *The Main Text:*

*Now a discussion arose between some of John's disciples and a Jew over purification. And they came to John and said to him, "Rabbi, he who was with you across the Jordan, to whom you bore witness—look, he is baptizing, and all are going to him." John answered, "A person cannot receive even one thing unless it is given him from heaven. You yourselves bear me witness, that I said, 'I am not the Christ, but I have been sent before him.' The one who has the bride is the bridegroom. The friend of the bridegroom, who stands and hears him, rejoices greatly at the bridegroom's voice. Therefore this joy of mine is now complete. He must increase, but I must decrease." John 3:25-30 ESV*

### *The Big Idea:*

Our lives, our ministry, must point to Jesus . . . and Jesus only. He must increase. We must decrease.

### *The Major Movements:*

*Verses 25-26—John the Baptizer Being Out Baptizer'ed?*

*Verse 27—The Source of His Calling*

*Verses 28-29a—The Substance of His Calling*

*Verses 29b-30—The Result of Being Obedient to His Calling*

The first sermon reminds me that we are all on the Potter's wheel, we are all stubborn, and we all refuse the Potter's hands. The gospel is the only remedy for our refusal. The second sermon gives me a peek into what life was to be like on this side of the Cross—the mercy that is shown us. We are all dogs grafted into the family of God through desperate faith. This sermon is intended to help us remember our role in Kingdom work—we are not the Christ. We do not do the saving. Our job is and always will be to point to the Messiah. He must increase. We must decrease.

### *Introduction:*

My Christian hero has for the longest time been Dietrich Bonhoeffer. In his book *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer writes on the tragedy of success, "In a world where success is the measure and justification of all things, the figure of him who was sentenced and crucified remains a stranger." Christ will always be an outsider in a world where success is the standard. So, we ask, "What does successful ministry look like?" Whether or not Jesus remains a stranger in our world, in our ministry, depends upon our answer to this question. Answer the question the way most of the watching world might and "the figure of him who was sentenced and crucified remains a stranger." John the Baptist had an interesting response to the question; a response which made John the figure and made Jesus the center of all things. Our lives, our ministry, must point to Jesus . . . and Jesus only.

### *MVMT 1: Verses 25-26—John the Baptizer Being Out Baptizer'ed?*

The few verses preceding John's conversation with his disciples tell of a conversation between the disciples and a certain unnamed Jew about purification. Different sources have different opinions about what was said concerning purification. Who really knows? The purpose of the story is that the conversation probably ended with some confrontation. Whose baptism is most effective? Is it the baptizer's baptism? Or, is it Jesus' baptism? A straw poll would suggest that most people were choosing Jesus. Jesus' popularity was growing and John the Baptist was fading into obscurity. John's disciples wanted an answer. And they will soon have it.