

FOUNDATIONS FOR
LAITY RENEWAL

Transforming Daily Life

719 Earl Garrett Street
Kerrville, TX 78028

Three Sermon Outlines on

Work and Faith

**“Thank God It’s Monday:
A Biblical Theology of Work”**

Rev. Corey Widmer

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

Thank God It's Monday: A Biblical Theology of Work

Introduction to the Sermon Series

A seminary professor of mine once suggested an interesting practice that I still follow today. He advised that when meeting a parishioner, try to arrange to meet him or her at their place of work. After doing this a few times, I was surprised and amused by the reactions. Usually the person is initially confused at why I want to meet them at their workplace. After explaining that I like to see where they are called to live out their discipleship in their everyday life, I am usually met with either pleasure (“No one has ever wanted to see my workplace before!”) or embarrassment (“I don’t think this is the sort of place that preachers would like to see.”). But overall, it has cemented my belief in the pervasive presence of the sacred/secular divide among contemporary Christians. The majority of our laypeople have no idea how their faith connects to the substance of their everyday work, and the alarming invasion of their pastor into their place of work exposes that disconnect: religion stays at church, work stays at work. This is not their fault; it’s ours. We have done an adequate job at equipping our people for the private, spiritual parts of their lives, but an abysmal job at equipping them for the public, secular parts of their lives. Of course, it is the latter parts where they spend most of their time.

This set of three sermons is a suggestion for a three-week sermon series that surveys a simple biblical theology of work. It draws from the Old Testament creation narrative, Old Testament wisdom literature, and a New Testament epistle.

Sermon 1: The Goodness of Work

Sermon 2: The Problem of Work

Sermon 3: The Redemption of Work

May God give us all the grace to equip our people to see how the Lordship of Jesus Christ extends to every area of their lives, especially their work!

Grace and peace,
Corey Widmer

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Sermon 3: The Redemption of Work

Text: Ephesians 6:5-9

Dominant Thought: The Lordship of Jesus Christ has enormous implications on our motives for our work and our working relationships.

Introduction

Is your gospel too small? Is your gospel only about having a personal relationship with God and going to heaven when you die? Does your gospel have anything to do with who you are and what you do on a daily basis? If not, then it is not the real gospel.

But thank God that is not the truth, and we know because of passages like this one. In this passage, as in many others, Paul proclaims that Jesus is the LORD of the whole world. He is the King, Master, and Ruler over everything: your money, your life, your work, your job, your everything. It's why Paul uses the word "Messiah" (King) or "Master" or "Lord" to describe Jesus five times in five verses. It's why in this section of Ephesians, Paul spends so much time talking about everyday things like marriage and parenting, relationships and work, what you do and who you are during the week. Because Jesus is the Lord! He is not just your personal Savior, he is the King, the Master, the Lord! And because he is the Lord, there is no part of your life that is sectioned off from his Lordship. Every single part of your life comes under his rule. And that includes your work. Let's look at some of the implications of Jesus' Lordship on your work.

Point 1: Jesus' Lordship Changes our Approach to Work

Paul in here addresses the work of the servants in a household. It would have been very difficult for them to view what they were doing as meaningful to God. They did some of the most menial tasks—pushing brooms, cleaning, scrubbing. Yet Paul says to them: work with all your hearts, as working for the Lord. In verse 8, he says whatever good a person does he will be rewarded, and note that he is not talking about the good work of church work, but the work the servants are doing in the house.

When someone says they are called to do the work of the Lord, what do they mean? They mean that they have decided to stop their normal job and have decided go into missions or the pastoral ministry. But here Paul is blowing that idea up by saying to these servants: you are doing the work of the Lord in your everyday life. Because Jesus is Lord and master, any work you are doing, even the most menial, simple work is work unto the Lord—it is done for him. You have a calling from God. You are serving him.

Many times we operate under what John Stott called a vocational pyramid. At the top of the pyramid are missionaries and pastors. Below them are teachers, nurses, doctors, and social workers. Below them are many blue collar workers and businesspeople. And at the very bottom, right down among the backsliders, are the investment bankers and lawyers. We rank one other and ourselves by this false gradation of vocational holiness.

With this text and others like it, Paul is blowing up that pyramid. He is saying: there is no such thing as small people, there is no such thing as menial work. Whether you are banking or painting or going to school or doctoring or sweeping a broom or changing a diaper or wiping down countertops or fixing a pipe—every job, every arena of work (as long as it's legal!) when done for God, can be a calling—you are serving Jesus who is the Lord over everything.

Let me apply this for us. First, and most basic—we must stop ranking each other. Don't ever look down on someone who is doing menial work or simple work. It is likely you need their work for your daily life.

Second, if you have a job that you don't like, that is boring, or feels meaningless, remember that no work is meaningless. Every area of work and every job can be meaningful when it is done for Jesus Christ. You are doing God's work.

Third, working for the Lord means doing your work with excellence. In verse 6, Paul reminds the servant to not do their work to please their earthly bosses. Do it for your real boss instead. Some of you have good bosses that make you want to work hard, others of you have bad bosses and you aren't doing your best. But Paul is saying that no matter what your earthly boss is like, your real boss is the One behind your earthly boss: Jesus, the Lord. And that Boss always deserves a good day of work. He always deserves the best.

Followers of Jesus should be the very best workers. Followers of Jesus should be those who are contributing the most to the city, because we know secretly that we are actually working for Jesus Christ. So don't just do your job to get noticed or to make money or to get by or to prove yourself—do your work for the King.

Point 2: Jesus' Lordship Changes Our Approach to People at Work

Let's not avoid the difficult aspect of this text. Sometimes we read a text like this and get upset that Paul did not call for the total abolition of the slave economy. The New Testament never condones or says that slavery is okay, but it also never outright rejects it or calls for its abolition.

It is true that Christians have abused texts like this to justify slaveholding in the South. But we must understand that those were not faithful readings of this text, and that Paul is actually laying the groundwork here for a quiet revolution in our worlds of work.

First, it is surprising that Paul addresses the slaves at all. These "Household Code" sections were very common in the ancient world, serving as manuals for the head of the estate for how to relate to his wife, children, servants, and associates. But Paul's household code is remarkable because he doesn't just address the head of the household, he also addresses the servants, who in that society were property without rights. Paul treats them with dignity, as equal partners in the gospel who are fully a part of the Christian community. He gives them a dignity and honor that they did not receive in the world. And he reminds them that they are really serving Jesus, not the guy who happens to be their earthly master.

The other really shocking thing that Paul does here is that when he addresses the estate heads, he reminds them of their true status, that they have a Master themselves. "Do the same to them—that is, treat your servants with the same respect you want from them. And stop your threatening, knowing that who is both their Master and yours is in heaven, and he doesn't honor your privilege and shows no favoritism."

Do you see what Paul is doing here? He's saying: You think you're a Master, but you're really a servant too. You are actually no different whatsoever from the servant in your own home, and until you recognize that you are a slave to Jesus, you can't be a good Master for others. Your power means nothing to the Lord who is ruler over all.

Paul is demonstrating here that Jesus' Lordship has radical social impact in the world of work. Jesus raises up the servants and brings down the masters. He equalizes their relationship, erasing the gap between the power holders and those without power. He is empowering the powerless and disempowering the powerful. The radical grace of Jesus means that previous social divisions of power are meaningless, and that working relationships are forever changed.

How might we apply this? There are some of you who feel powerless in your place in the world or in your place of work. If you are in that position, Paul is saying to you: You are an equal and valuable member of the community. Because you do not have certain things that give you social power, whether that be education or money, power or position, you are of equal value in the community of Jesus, and you have equal voice. You can and must claim that voice and use it in our community for the benefit of everyone. The world may have told you that you are low but Jesus raises you high. He exalts the humble. That's what Jesus loves to do.

Others of you are in the positions of power. Paul is comfortable with naming privilege. It is a simple fact that certain people have more power and privilege than others in society. This text is calling us to not fear such things, but to name that privilege and then to bring it under the Lordship of Jesus. Jesus says to the Masters: what you have is not yours. You are under authority, you are a slave to Christ, and the gap that you think separates you from those beneath you is not really there at all. If you have power in your place of work or in your place in the world, what would happen if you began to take this text seriously? How might the culture of your workplace change? How might you treat your workers differently? How might you share what God has given you?

Summary and Conclusion

Family of God, our gospel is not small. At the center of our gospel is Jesus Christ, who is Lord over all. And because he is Lord, he changes everything. He changes the way we approach our work, and he changes the way we approach the people we encounter at work, whether we find ourselves at the top or the bottom. Jesus changes everything. And he changes everything not just because he is Lord, but because of the sort of Lord he is. Jesus is the Master who became a Servant. "He did not consider equality with God something to be flaunted, but made himself nothing..." Jesus is the only non-oppressive Master in the Universe. He is the ultimate master and he became a slave, so that all of us who are slaves can become free. That is the gospel, and it is huge. He changes everything.