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Three Sermons on

*Work and Faith*

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***My Work, Christ's Home!***

Dr. George Cladis

***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*

# ***My Work, Christ's Home!***

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## ***Introduction to the Series***

Faith and work are often separated in the minds of those who hear us preach Sunday after Sunday. What has faith to do with work beyond desperate prayers to find a job or help a business make it through a stormy season? Can they exist together under the same roof? Having been a pastor, preacher, business owner, and business executive, I can attest to a subtle thought in the minds of business owners and managers that faith might put the brakes on a successful business, because reflection on ethical questions will cost the business time and money and otherwise make a business less competitive.

This three-part sermon series outline enables you, the preacher, to address this important issue for today: can faith and work coexist and thrive in today's fast-paced business environment?

In the mid-20<sup>th</sup> century, Presbyterian minister Robert Boyd Munger wrote an inspiring little book called *My Heart—Christ's Home* (reprinted by Intervarsity Press in 2001). Munger's book was essentially an extended metaphor of the Lord who knocks on the door of one's heart and is invited in. Over time, the Lord is allowed into more and more rooms of the heart that are like rooms in a house. Eventually, the Lord is not only allowed into all the rooms, but the deed to the home is turned over to Jesus, symbolizing a life fully surrendered to the Lord by a faithful follower.

This three-part sermon series on Faith and Work, in part, applies Dr. Munger's metaphor to the workplace. The first sermon is about the Lord applying for a job at a believer's business—the desire of the Lord to be present in the workplace. The second sermon is about the Lord wanting to give suggestions to the same person at work—the desire of the Lord to be not only a presence in the workplace but a guide. The third sermon is about the Lord desiring now to own the labor of the believer—the desire of the Lord to be Lord of our work.

There is a need for preachers to help congregants find ways to experience God in the workplace and infuse offices with spiritual meaning lest they become a secular wasteland. This sermon series seeks to bring together God's Kingdom culture with our work environments in hopes of making our work a vital offering to the Lord. God bless you as you make these sermon outlines come alive for your parishioners, infused with your own life experiences and with your own theological convictions woven throughout.

Lastly, I encourage the preacher to look for ways to make these sermons applicable to everyone from business owner to hourly wage earner. Management, essentially, is an enterprise we all engage in, whether for a billion-dollar corporation, a small company, our homes, relationships, or our own personal lives.

The course of our journey in the proclaimed Word:

**Sermon 1 Jesus Applies for a Job**

**Sermon 2 Jesus: Working Beside You**

**Sermon 3 Jesus: Your Lord and Ultimate Manager**

*all quite inspiring. But I would like to suggest we meet regularly to discuss your work and how together we can make a difference here. Your boss is a tyrant, I know, but I also know what he is struggling with at home—did you know his young son has leukemia? He’s keeping it a secret, but he’s worried sick about it, and it is affecting how he manages. I want to help you look deeper and not be afraid to care about people here, even the most difficult ones. I want to bring out all of your gifts, not only the ones that make you such a good worker, but the gifts of listening and compassion and patience. I know, together, we can make a difference here if you will let me. Let’s meet for a few minutes every day and see how we can together bring my peace to this place.*

The point is to help the congregant include the Lord more and more in his or her work life in order to bring Kingdom hope and meaning to troubled places.

**Conclusion:** The preacher may want to conclude the sermon with Jesus in the office of the worker offering to meet regularly to help resolve some of the traumatic workplace issues. Perhaps the ending could be something like: Jesus wants more of you in the workplace. Are you willing to open up more of your life to the Lord at work? Never before has this so badly been needed!

Other preachers might want to end with an illustration such as:

**Illustration:** *James Kouzes and Barry Posner wrote a widely acclaimed book on organizational leadership called The Leadership Challenge (Jossey-Bass, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, 2008). The authors note the importance of building trust to create a productive workplace. The absence of trust results in suspicion, sabotage, internal conflict, and loss of productivity. Trust building results in the opposite climate: collaboration, helpful information sharing, encouragement, heightened morale, and greater effort. One of the best ways to create the trust environment is for all parties involved to show vulnerability and a listening spirit. These business authors essentially note that by bringing what we value in faith into the workplace—open sharing, helpfulness, a trusting spirit, and a desire to collaborate—we can have a huge impact on the workplace.*

## **Sermon 3: Jesus: Your Lord and Ultimate Manager**

Text: Luke 5:

<sup>1</sup> One day as Jesus was standing by the Lake of Gennesaret, with the people crowding around him and listening to the word of God, <sup>2</sup> he saw at the water’s edge two boats, left there by the fishermen, who were washing their nets.

<sup>3</sup> He got into one of the boats, the one belonging to Simon, and asked him to put out a little from shore. Then he sat down and taught the people from the boat.

<sup>4</sup> When he had finished speaking, he said to Simon, “Put out into deep water, and let down the nets for a catch.”

<sup>5</sup> Simon answered, “Master, we’ve worked hard all night and haven’t caught anything. But because you say so, I will let down the nets.”

<sup>6</sup> When they had done so, they caught such a large number of fish that their nets began to break. <sup>7</sup> So they signaled their partners in the other boat to come and help them, and they came and filled both boats so full that they began to sink.

<sup>8</sup> When Simon Peter saw this, he fell at Jesus’ knees and said, “Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!” <sup>9</sup> For he and all his companions were astonished at the catch of fish they had taken, <sup>10</sup> and so were James and John, the sons of Zebedee, Simon’s partners.

Then Jesus said to Simon, “Don’t be afraid; from now on you will catch men.” <sup>11</sup> So they pulled their boats up on shore, left everything and followed him.

**Theological Point:** Jesus is Lord of creation and work. Contrary to the natural rhythms and business sense of how and when fish are best caught, Jesus commands fishermen to act contrary to their normal business practices, resulting in a huge catch. The miracle story is related to evangelism: these same fishermen would follow the will of the Master to reach out to a lost and hurting humanity with a Message that brings people together (netted) into a fellowship that, ironically, gives life rather than takes it.

**Hermeneutical Connection:** Our offices and workplaces can be transformed when we view our labor under the Lordship and direction of Jesus Christ. Our work, however humble, can influence a workplace toward grace and better working relationships. Our labor extends God's reign at work!

**Introduction:** The preacher will want to remind the congregation that this is the third in a three-part sermon series on faith and work. These three sermons on work and faith hinge on each other, resembling the theme of Dr. Munger's book *My Heart—Christ's Home*. The first is about Jesus as job applicant—Jesus gives us the opportunity to include him in our work. The second is about Jesus as work colleague—Jesus is not only present with us at work, but serves as a guide to us in the workplace. The third is about Jesus as Lord of our work who not only guides and instructs us in our work relationships and activities but becomes Lord of them. We, essentially, view Jesus as our Boss above all bosses at work. He is Lord of lords.

- A. Describing the Scene.** I suggest the preacher describe the scene in this passage. Be vivid. Allow your congregants to feel the narrative. People were hungry for the Word from Jesus. Crowds were pouring in to listen to this simple itinerant preacher talk about God. That same hunger exists today: a Word of hope, of grace, and of challenge.

Note for your congregants that Jesus was not teaching in a synagogue or temple but out in the open, along the banks of the Sea of Galilee, which provided a natural amphitheater for the Message. In addition, Jesus was in Galilee: the Jewish region considered second class to Judea and populated with predominantly “working class” people. Note also that Jesus was teaching in a workplace (the Sea) and in a kind of “office” or “factory” (a fishing boat). God incarnate takes the Message into the workplace!

Describe that Jesus was perhaps noticing the fishermen off to the side cleaning their nets while he was teaching from the boat. Cleaning nets would be the equivalent of mopping the restaurant floor at the end of the day or shutting down your computer and cleaning up your desk before you go home at night. These weathered fishermen were perhaps mocking the teacher (“What can anyone learn about God from a Nazarean?!”) but still keeping an ear cocked to the Master's Word.

After the teaching, Jesus boldly tells Simon (Peter) to go back out and fish: against the normal fishing tradition of that region and after a long night of fishing with no results! Probably because something about Jesus' teaching seemed so compelling, Simon finally agrees. (Give inflection to Simon's response suggesting he *really didn't want to do it!*) They go out and drop their nets and reap an astonishing catch, requiring the help of their partners, James and John, to pull in the fish.

Paint a picture of this scene and describe its wonder.

- B. Relate the Scripture to the Workplace.** The Scripture portrays the hunger of people for God. The standard answers and empty worship of the religious authorities were apparently insufficient. The people were searching for the God who came to them in Jesus. Here, the preacher may want to wax incarnationally about the Lord who is present wherever we go, wherever we are. St. Patrick's “Breastplate” Prayer (Google it for the whole prayer) is helpful, particularly this segment:

*Christ with me, Christ before me, Christ behind me,  
Christ in me, Christ beneath me, Christ above me,  
Christ on my right, Christ on my left,  
Christ when I lie down, Christ when I sit down, Christ when I arise.*

Some churches sing this portion of the prayer as a benediction, which could be a nice addition on the occasion of this sermon if this prayer is used in the sermon. Other church choirs sing the whole prayer as an anthem. Various performance versions of the prayer can be found by typing in “St. Patrick’s Breastplate” in the YouTube search engine.

Now the preacher may want to focus on exactly *where* Jesus was teaching: on a work boat in a work environment speaking to a crowd that was predominantly working class. The preacher will want to avoid any “classism” but at the same time note that the Son of God came not just for the theologian and sophisticate (the high-dollar contributor!) but for all people.

Not only is he *present* in the work environment (sermon 1 of this series), and also offering helpful advice to improve the work environment (sermon 2 of this series), but now we see how the presence and work of God in our midst opens our eyes to his Lordship. Because we offer our work to God, even in a circumstance that might seem ridiculous and tiresome (*go out and fish AGAIN??*), we experience the wonderment of God at work and recognize him now as Lord and humbly bow before him.

Furthermore, the preacher may want to note that the response of the fishermen to Jesus is precisely the response God loves from us: not, *Thank you, Lord, for the invitation to follow you undoubtedly because you know of my good works and faith in you.* Rather, our response to a holy God who shows us wonder at work is, *Depart from me for I am sinful and broken!* It is precisely when we throw our dependence upon God and need the Lord the most that we are able to hear the call to faith and service and depend on the Lord’s resources (not our own!) to do the Lord’s work at work.

*Illustration.* The preacher will want to find an illustration out of his or her experience that illustrates faith at work that is dependent on God. Here is an example of such an illustration from C. S. Lewis that fits well our meta-image of Jesus in the workplace (and one that Munger might have read before writing his book *My Heart—Christ’s Home*): *I think that many of us, when Christ has enabled us to overcome one or two sins that were an obvious nuisance, are inclined to feel (though we do not put it into words) that we are now good enough. He has done all we wanted him to do, and we should be obliged if he would leave us alone. But the question is not what we intended ourselves to be, but what he intended us to be when he made us . . .*

*Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what he is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on. You knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised.*

*But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is he up to? The explanation is that he is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards.*

*You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage, but he is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it himself. (C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*. London: William Collins, 1970, p. 172.)*

- C. Jesus as Lord of Your Work.** The preacher here may want to continue the meta-image of Jesus as, first, job applicant and new hire and, second, as coworker and adviser, to now Lord of one’s labor. In the second sermon, the worker agreed to meet with Jesus regularly to discuss issues of the workplace (an analogy to daily prayer about work). One such morning meeting might have gone something like this.

*“I am glad for our morning meetings,” said the Lord. “I feel closer to you.”*

*“So true!” exclaimed the worker. “Working together, you helped me achieve significant success and admiration among my coworkers. I owe it all to you. You’ve enabled me to accomplish all my short-term goals and even a few of my medium-range goals well in advance. Thanks so much for your advice! I can see why they say at church that you really can be a help in troubled times! Good thing I arranged for these morning meetings when I did!*

*“Well, I’m glad things have gone well for you and you’ve begun to learn how to work with others in a way that brings clarity and collaboration. Now, it’s time to go to the next place.*

*“Oh, goodie! I was hoping you’d say that. I’m ready, Lord! What shall it be? CEO? Director of International Operations? I’m ready to go!”*

*“Those things may or may not come to you in time. That’s not exactly what I mean.”*

*The worker frowned and appeared confused. “What is it, Lord?”*

*“It’s about your happiness.”*

*“Yes, Lord! A new car, a house in an upscale neighborhood—I hear ya!”*

*“Er, that’s not what I mean by happiness,” said Jesus. “Real happiness, real joy, won’t come to you until you’ve adopted my goals and not your own. This isn’t first of all about your success; it’s about the success of my Mission and Message.”*

*The worker looked a bit embarrassed; then, his eyes deepened with acknowledgement.*

*“I guess this has been more about you helping me to succeed than me helping you to succeed.”*

*“Exactly,” said the Lord, looking at him with eyes of deep love. “And the irony is, when you surrender your goals to me, you’re more likely to achieve them, or at least ones like them. You’re more likely to find the source of a deeper joy and a more meaningful success. You will find yourself brimming with meaning and significance because you are, first of all, working for me.”*

*Suddenly, so many things seemed to make sense. So many words of Jesus from other daily meetings, from the Scriptures and from church came together like puzzle pieces. It was a moment of awakening for the worker. “I want that. Forgive me for making it all about me. I want that deeper joy, that fuller meaning. I’m just wondering if I have what it takes to be your worker. As you know, I don’t do it all the right way. I find myself thinking about new cars or flirting too much with a coworker or avoiding a hurting person when I should be compassionate. I don’t think I have the skills, abilities, or credentials to work for you, Lord. In fact, I know I don’t!”*

*“Now I know you’re ready,” said the Lord. “I’m not looking for perfection; I’m looking for your passion and commitment to my Mission. I need you, but not when you think you have all that it takes to get the job done. I need you to depend on me to work through you. Are you ready?”*

*“No . . . but then, I don’t think I’ll ever feel ready or prepared. What I feel now is ready to say yes to joy and meaningfulness. I’m ready to work for you, Lord. Take my labor here at the office and show me how it can serve you best!”*

**Conclusion:** I suggest the preacher now pause and look out at the congregation with deep eyes of affection and pastoral love, and say: *Isn’t it time for you to take the next step from viewing Jesus as your personal Guide and Helper alone to now declaring him Lord of your work and your life?*

To God be the glory! Amen.

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These sermons are by Dr. George Cladis. He is Executive Pastor of Liberty Churches in the western suburbs of Boston. He also serves as the Chief Operating Officer of the New England Dream Center, a faith-based social service agency created by Liberty Churches in Worcester, Massachusetts. Cladis authored *Leading the Team-Based Church: How Pastors and Church Staffs Can Grow Together into a Powerful Fellowship of Leaders* (Jossey-Bass, 1999), and he is adjunct Assistant Professor in the Fuller Theological Seminary Doctor of Ministry program teaching church leadership and team-based management. George and his wife Martie live in Shrewsbury, Massachusetts, with their rescue dog, Emily.