

Sermon

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[0 : 0 0] to do, but maybe that's not the scriptural thing. On the other side, there's a lot of us, especially in D.C., who swing the other way and leave corporate America behind in favor of some non-profit or fair trade organization because we want to feel more justified in the work that we do.

Again, Paul would not say that that's wrong, but he would say, in Christ, that's not the point. So tonight, we're going to look at this passage, and the entirety of chapter 3 speaks to it as well. But it's not meant to be a social overhaul. Paul's not trying to change these systems and structures. Rather, he's inviting us, God's people, to be the change we want to see in the world.

The revolutionary truth of the gospel is given to us, and as we learn to live in the hope and fullness of Christ, we come to a point where it transforms not the work itself, but the way we view and carry out that work. That transformation happens in this passage in two primary ways.

In Christ, we have a new attitude about our work, and secondly, we have a new motivation for our work. Let's pray for God to speak through this tonight. Heavenly Father, God, as we come to you, as we come to the foot of the cross, and we say thank you, as we learn to live in gratitude of what you've done for us, God, I ask that you might speak through these words, through this sermon, that we might begin to think about work differently. God, use this time to change our hearts and to speak to us. In your name we pray.

[1 : 4 1] Amen. So the first way that we are changed in Christ is our attitude about work. Paul doesn't encourage a revolt in verse 22. He doesn't say, you know, rise up and march. Let's take it to the hill. He says, obey. The first thing he says to a group of people who say, what now?

What now in the freedom of Christ does that mean for us as slaves, and on the other part of the room, us as masters? He says, obey. He doesn't challenge the systems of the day, but he speaks directly to the Christian heart. Christian employees and employers, through this, we hear our call to be obedient employees, to be the best employees. Not only when the boss is watching, not only when he's peering over your shoulder, but primarily because of Christ. Maybe some of us have found ourselves in that kind of place at work where your work is a little bit unfulfilling, maybe. You're not sure you actually want to be there. And the moment the boss walks around the corner, you find yourself having to look a little bit busier than you actually were. I've been there. For some of us, work can very easily, I think, become our primary identity. If for you, one of the first questions you ask someone when you first meet them is, what do you do? That might be a sign that actually you yourself have become to be identified by your work. Maybe you've started to place a little too much value in your work. It's a common question in our culture and a hard one to avoid, but that right there is what Paul is addressing in our hearts. That heart condition right there is what he wants to talk about. I think for many of us in D.C., the pressure to be successful and career-driven is one of the heaviest weights we can possibly bear.

It's not just climbing the corporate ladder. It's not just the good student who's working for that fourth or fifth degree. Never mind whether or not you're using this first, second, or third.

You're still working to the fourth and fifth. It's not just the weight on those occupations and goals. It also hits home for the stay-at-home parent who developed a career and then has now had to make a tough choice. What does work mean? The pressure to be successful is hard. That's the beauty of what Christ can be, not only in our lives, but to the people around us. There's something different. There's something bigger. I know for myself, one of the biggest challenges that I face with work, and maybe you guys can feel this as well, is the desire to approve, to get everyone else's approval, to impress the people that you work with and work for. It's so easy and not bad either to desire to be needed. The desire to be known is one of the fundamental and core roots of humanity. It's a desire that we all have, and it's not going away. And that is the beauty of life in Christ. We are freed from the need to be known. We are free from the need to be needed. Because of what Christ did at the

cross for us, free grace, he has secured our identity in him. Where before we had to take that identity search to work, work harder, work longer, do more, which often can lead to cynicism when that work doesn't provide any fruit, the cross wipes that need out. It's established you with the king of the universe, which is something that no boss or co-worker could ever provide.

[5 : 44] I think we're shown this type of attitude towards our work in the Old Testament reading we just had a moment ago with Joseph, a man who, if you read his story time and time and time again, he did his very best. And yet time and time and time again, it wasn't enough. He was chastised or thrown out on his ear or imprisoned or undervalued or enslaved.

But I think the key to Joseph's life and his work was at the very end of that passage we read tonight. If you remember, it said, he had success in all he did because he did it for the Lord.

So not only do we need to have a different attitude in that way, we're also called to give our all, to give everything we have at work.

Now there's a road worker, all right? I worked in road construction for a year or so of my life, and I can vouch for this man's sentiment and his desire. And you also can probably reckon with this, having driven by a fair number of construction zones in D.C. yourself. But here's his story.

So he was hired. A couple weeks later, he comes back to the boss and says, listen, there's a problem. And the boss says, yeah, what's going on? He said, well, I've been here for two weeks and I still don't have a shovel.

[7 : 14] And the boss looked at him and he said, well, are you getting paid? The road worker said, well, yeah, of course I'm getting paid. And the boss said, well, yeah, then I guess we do have a problem. You have no way to do the work for which you're getting paid.

The road worker was quick to correct him. He said, no, no, no, the pay is great. That's fine. I don't have a shovel to lean on like everybody else. And maybe you don't have a shovel in your office or at home that you look to lean on.

But I think in some ways this applies to our work life as well. Maybe you find yourself having a bad case of the Mondays or midday Wednesday scrolling Facebook on the clock just to burn a little time.

Or maybe you find yourself filing through your iPhone news feed to get updates on what's going on. While you're supposed to be working. Or maybe, and I'm not going to confess to you that this is my guilt, you're playing Pokemon Go on company time.

Whatever it is, these are all different ways that we actually neglect to give our all. We withhold something in us from our bosses for whatever reason.

[8 : 22] And Paul says that's not okay. He says to both the bondservant and the master, that's not okay. A slave in Paul's day may never receive what he was due. You see. He's never going to climb the corporate ladder.

He's never going to attain upper management for his boss. And yet Paul turns his congregation and us to verse 23. Where he says, whatever you do, work at it as working for the Lord, not for man.

So whatever the situation we're in, because we are known by Christ, because we are one with Christ, we don't need to fight for our boss's approval.

Or withhold our work because our job is unfulfilling. We have a freedom that the world does not have to look beyond that moment.

To look beyond the here and now and realize that we are working in a place and at a time specifically to bring Christ to those we work with and for. In that freedom in Christ, we can be the most obedient and the best employees that our coworkers will ever meet.

[9 : 35] Now just imagine for a minute how our work might change. And how our relationships with our coworkers and employers might change if this is how we choose to work.

And secondly, if we have that attitude change, it comes from what Paul says is a motivational change. A change in motivation about why we work.

So we've talked about we are serving the Lord, not man. But right on the heels of that, Paul says that your primary compensation now comes from the Lord, not from man.

Now friends, I also know how hard it can be. I told you I work road construction. To be undercompensated or undervalued or unfairly treated in the workplace.

Right? The ongoing race and gender inequality in the workplace is a great example of this. And Paul would not discourage us from working towards equality in those ways. But what he does say right here is why those things are important.

[10:36] They're not the main thing anymore. Working where you're at for Christ is. So they are important, but they're not the main thing. He's encouraging us to keep the main thing the main thing.

Now, I wish this mic could move so I could slide across the stage a little bit. But I want to invite you, regardless, preferably to rise up to 35,000 feet with me for a second.

And imagine this stage, side to side, representing all of eternity. Everything that has come before us and has gone after us and will come after us.

The moment in time that your life, more specifically your work, occupies and the impact it makes is no more than the dot on this pen on the line that stretches across this stage.

That's how small, that's how minuscule the time that we have in this life is. However, if you can do one thing, one thing alone with your life to make that impact last from that point and stretch through the rest of eternity, it's the only thing that will provide a return on your investment to work forever.

[11:55] And that is, when we start to view our primary compensation at work as the chance to share Christ with the people around us every day. I'm not just talking about the words that you say.

I'm not trying to raise up a crew of evangelists in the workplace tonight. I'm not trying to tell you how to say the right things or when to say them. No, Paul primarily is saying here, it's not your words. It's how you work. You show Christ in the workplace simply by doing good work. That's what he's called you to.

And if we aren't doing our best, then haven't we sort of lost sight of who and what we're working for? There's a story of a little boy in England years ago.

It's a true story. As the boy was standing on the roadside, King Edward's coach came down the road towards him, approaching the Buckingham Palace, excuse me.

[12:55] The boy scaled a nearby lamppost, climbed all the way to the top. He wanted to see what was going on. And in particular, he was scoping out certain parts of the king's parade, the king's procession.

In his excitement and his joy, the little boy tried to get just a little bit higher to see the procession a little bit better, and he fell off, fell onto his back. About the same time, an old curmudgeonly man walks by and, as one might imagine, says, What are you doing here?

Don't you realize you're just a nuisance? Don't you realize you're just a nuisance? Don't you realize you're just a nuisance? The little boy, smiling from ear to ear, looks up at the old man and he says, Did you see the king's coach? And the old man, still annoyed and upset, said, Of course I did.

The little boy, smiling even brighter, looks back at the old man and he says, Did you see the lampposts on the king's coach? The old man, now visibly angry and visibly annoyed, trying to get on his way, says, Of course I did. How could you not?

And the little boy, now hardly able to contain his joy, looks back up at the old man and, without missing a beat, says, I polished those lamps. You see, it didn't matter to that little boy how menial or small the task was of polishing lamps.

[14:10] What mattered was he was in the king's service. As Christians, friends, whatever our work, whatever the place, whatever the time, we can be assured that we are in the king's business.

So we are called to be the best lamp polishers, the best doctors, the best teachers, the best stay-at-home parents, the best bankers, the best businessmen.

Because, friends, it's true. You are now in the king's service. One man who's committed his life to working in the king's service is a man named Hans Hess.

Maybe you've heard of him. If not, maybe you're familiar with his restaurant, Elevation Burger. If you're not familiar with it, I would encourage you to familiarize yourself with it, because it's wonderful food.

But I don't want to tell you just about Elevation Burger. I want to tell you about Hans Hess real quick. Hans came from California years and years ago to take a job on Capitol Hill working for a congressman.

[15:13] Early on in his time working for this congressman, a sort of epidemic issue rose up. And from sort of out of nowhere, children across the country were no longer receiving the vaccines the way their bodies should.

Their bodies were rejecting the vaccines. It was actually making them sicker than it was helping them. And this congressman challenged Hess, Hans Hess, to figure out why.

So Hans went and he did his research, did his due diligence, and he came back. And he reported to the congressman that the reason that the children were no longer responding to vaccines was because the food they were eating was grown and fed on chemically altered grain.

The cattle themselves were being injected with chemicals to help them grow stronger and faster and bigger so that meat could get to the table. And through this process, children were actually becoming immune to the very things that were supposed to become vaccines for them later on in life.

Hans took this to heart. And it didn't take very long. Him and his wife immediately went to the drawing board. And they said, How can we make this a part of God's business?

[16:25] How can we work in the king's business in this way? And so they committed to making good food at a good price, done well. And they started Elevation Burger, where they now serve organic and locally grown meats and produce.

They fry their french fries in olive oil, which, if I can make a quick pitch, are delicious. But the point being, for Hans, it's not about the fame. It never was. It's not about the money. It never was. It's not about the opportunity to grow economically. For Hans, it was about working in the king's service.

Doing good work. Bringing good food, done well. We're not asked to start societal upheaval or escape the workplace in our culture, but to change the way that we work and the purpose we have in that work.

The primary concern here for Paul and for us is not man's relationship to each other. It's not person to person.

[17:33] His primary concern here in talking about work is our relationship to God. He tackles the issue of work first on the vertical. Because for Paul and for Christ, you can't begin to rightly be oriented to your neighbor or your co-worker unless you're rightly oriented to your Savior, to Jesus Christ.

So Paul says, having been rightly oriented to God in how we work and how we think about work, we can then live in a broken world for Christ and focus on getting our mind and heart and attitude right with God because our work is kingdom work.

Now Paul sent this letter to a church. If we're to be written today, even by one of us, I imagine the church wouldn't be the first location that we might send something about work issues or labor inequality or whatever might have you.

So why did Paul send it to a church? He sent it to a church because he believed that you and me, the church in Colossa, Christians at work in the world are called to make a difference today by how we live and how we work.

The question we asked earlier was coined by one of our own Steve Garber. And I'll say it again. Knowing what you know, what will you do?

[19:00] And brothers and sisters, since you are known by Christ and loved by him, that question now becomes for us, knowing who Christ is, what will we do in the workplace?

We have the freedom to go out into a broken world, to be salt, to be light, to bring the kingdom to the workplace and the neighborhoods that Christ has put us in right now.

My hope and prayer for us through a new attitude and motivation for our work is that we might begin or continue to see our work as good or bad as it seems in the day-to-day at times, as an opportunity to polish just a single lamp in the king's service and to find the joy of that little boy, to share the love of Christ through working hard for an undeserving boss, doing the good and the bad, whatever the task might be, for the good of those around you, and sharing the hope of Christ with the people around you because it's not that we work for a paycheck, it's not that we work for a title or a promotion, but for a God and a king of the universe that has given you his everything.

You see, when Christ comes into the heart of an individual, that person becomes a new man, a new woman, a new employer, a new employee, a new parent, a new child, a new teacher, a new student, because that's the way God planned it.

Friends, if you want to be part of the greatest revolution that this world has ever known, then let's get going. Let's take these things that Paul has taught us tonight and go back to work on Tuesday morning.

[20:51] Take Monday off. It's Labor Day. Go back to work on Tuesday morning and let's serve Christ because now he is our master and the one who has given us the hope and joy that this world needs to see through you and through me.

To close tonight, rather than praying on my own, I want to invite you guys to pray the words from the Collect for Vocation and Daily Work out of the 1549 Book of Common Prayer.

Will you pray with me? Almighty God, our Heavenly Father, you declare your glory and show forth your handiwork in the heavens and in the earth.

Deliver us in our various occupations in service of self alone that we may do the work you give us to do in truth and beauty and for the common good, for the sake of him who came among us as one who serves, your Son, Jesus Christ, our Lord, who lives and reigns with you and the Holy Spirit, one God, forever and ever.

Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

[22 : 09] Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.