

God At Work, Part 1

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[0:00] Now, imagine this is a metaphor. This opening illustration is a metaphor. Imagine walking into your doctor's office, and your doctor, she walks in, and you look at her, and she's wearing her white doctor's lab coat, and you don't think anything of it until she turns around, and she sits down at her computer, and you notice right away that the entire backside of her lab coat has been cut off at the seams.

You have your conversation, and you get in your car, and you start going back, and on your way back, you drive by this car accident, and all these firefighters are there, and they are spraying out the flames, and they're using the jaws of life to rescue a trapped motorist, and you can't help but notice that all of these firefighters have those heavy fire coats on, but when they turn, the backside of their fire coats has been cut off at the seams.

You keep on going through your day. You go to your bank. You have an appointment with your personal banker. You sit down across from him, and he's wearing his banker gray blazer with red tie, and you'll think nothing of it.

You've got to set up an automatic transfer from your checking to your savings, and he gets up to get the paperwork, and when he gets up and turns around, you're shocked because the back of his banker gray blazer is totally cut at the seams.

Something's missing. You start to wonder, hmm, am I seeing something for the first time? So you get home, and you run to your closet, and you open up your closet, and all the coats in your closet, every back has been cut off at the seams.

[2:00] There's something missing. All these examples, all these coats represent the particular work vocations God has called us to.

And in every situation in that little metaphor, something has been cut out. You see, we've got a problem when it comes to our work. And what I mean by work is not just what you get paid for. It's every calling to which you've been called. There's a word that covers this. It's called the word vocation.

It comes from a Latin word meaning to call, as in God calling you to a particular occupation, and every one of us in this room has been called by God to a number of vocations, a number of occupations.

And so just one person in this room, they can be called to be a parent, they can be called to be a child, they can be called to be a church member, they can be called to be a citizen, and they can be called to a particular job.

[3:15] That's a bunch of different hats. In every calling, God has called you to this. In the Bible, the New Testament's use of calling is a very interesting use.

It shows up at least 51 times in your New Testament. In the majority, 46 times, the word calling uses a word described to be called to follow Jesus, to be called to be a Christian.

The vocation of being a disciple of Jesus. And it's this calling that is the calling over all callings. The calling to follow Jesus informs every other calling with which we've been called.

So all of us in this room right now, some of us have similar callings, some of us have different callings, but all of our callings fall under the one great calling of being a follower of Jesus.

But let me get back to the problem. This problem of having all the backs cut out of our occupational coats, here's what it is.

[4:33] Here's the point. Human pride, the sharp edge of human pride has cut God out of our vocations at the seams.

We've got a problem with our work. We forgot something in our work. We've left God at the front door of our work.

We've disconnected God from our vocation. And when you disconnect God from your vocation, do you know what likely is to become your God?

your vocation? So when we talk about this call to work, this is all about worship of God.

And so here's my task for the next three Sundays. Here's how I want to help you all. I want to help you reintegrate with the needle and the thread of God's word.

[5:37] I want to reintegrate God into your vocation. I want to get God back into work and we look to God's word to do that.

And so over the next three weeks, I want to lay out for you a biblically informed, God-centered view or framework of vocation with the desire that having a biblically informed, God-centered view of work will change the way you think about work and change the way you go about your work.

And so over these next three Sundays, we're going to cover four aspects of a God-centered view of vocation. You ready? Number one is this. This morning, we're going to look at the origin of work, creation.

We're going to be spending our time in Genesis chapter one. Next week, we're going to look at the corruption of work, the effect of the fall on our vocations. And then, Labor Day weekend, we're going to be looking at the redemption of our work through the cross of Jesus Christ.

He changes the way we work. And on that Sunday, too, we're going to be anticipating our future work, the new earth work, when He comes back and He makes new the heavens and the earth.

[7:08] So this morning, we're going to focus on this first aspect of a God-centered view of vocation, the origin of work. Your work matters to God.

He's very interested in your work. And so we must reintegrate God into all our vocations, whether that's in our workplace, whether that's in our church, our family, our neighborhood, our country, or our school.

You see, a theology of vocation covers all of life. So would you turn with me now to Genesis chapter one, and we're going to look at the origin of work and when we do, we're going to look at two things. God engaging in His work, His creating work, and then we're going to look at God entrusting His work, His creation mandate.

And so I'm going to read all the way through Genesis one. So if you want to open your Bibles now to Genesis one and read along with me, here is God's Word.

[8:24] In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was without form and void, and darkness was over the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the face of the waters.

And God said, let there be light, and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. And God separated the light from the darkness.

God called the light day, and the darkness He called night, and there was evening, and there was morning the first day. And God said, let there be an expanse in the midst of the waters, and let it separate the waters from the waters.

And God made the expanse and separated the waters that were under the expanse and from the waters that were above the expanse, and it was so. And God called the expanse heaven, and there was evening, and there was morning the second day.

And God said, let the waters under the heavens be gathered together in one place, and let the dry land appear, and it was so. And God called the dry land earth, and the waters that were gathered together He called seas, and God saw that it was good.

[9:34] And God said, let the earth sprout vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind on the earth. And it was so.

The earth brought forth vegetation, plants yielding seed according to their own kinds, and trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind. And God saw that it was good, and there was evening, and there was morning the third day.

And God said, let there be lights in the expanse of the heavens to separate the day from the night, and let them be for signs, and for seasons, and for days, and years, and let them be lights in the expanse of the heavens to give light upon the earth, and it was so.

And God made the two great lights, the greater light to rule the day, and the lesser light to rule the night, and the stars. And God set them in the expanse of the heavens to give light on the earth, to rule over the day and over the night, and to separate the light from the darkness, and God saw that it was good.

And there was evening, and there was morning the fourth day. And God said, let the water swarm with swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the expanse of the heavens.

[10:49] And so God created the great sea creatures, and every living creature that moves with which the waters swarm according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good, and God blessed them, saying, be fruitful and multiply and fill the waters and the seas, and let birds multiply on the earth.

And there was evening, and there was morning the fifth day. And God said, let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds, livestock and creeping things, and beasts of the earth according to their kinds.

And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds, and the livestock according to their kinds, and everything that creeps on the ground according to its kind.

And God saw that it was good. Then God said, let us make man our own 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.

[11:56] So God created man in his own image, and the image of God he created him, male and female he created them, and God blessed them.

And God said to them, be fruitful, and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it, and have dominion over the fish of the seas, and over the birds of the heavens, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.

And God said, behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the face of all the earth, and every tree with seed and its fruit, ye shall have them for food, and to every beast of the earth, and to every bird of the heavens, and to everything that creeps on the earth, everything that has breath of life, I have given every green plant for food, and it was so.

And God saw everything he made, and behold, it was very good. And there was evening, and there was morning, the sixth day.

What an account. Right now, what I'd like to do is let's focus on Genesis 1. I'm going to pull a couple things out.

[13:08] We're going to look at God engaging with his creation, his creation making, and then we're going to turn a quarter, and we're going to look at God entrusting his creation to us in the creation mandate.

And the reason why we're doing this is to begin to restitch in God into our vocations. We would have a God-centered view of vocation.

God engages his work. What we see in Genesis 1, these six days of creation, is God at work in his creation. and he is at work bringing things together, forming things, calling things into existence out of nothing to bless all the inhabitants of the earth.

He wants his earth to be filled. Fullness, life, goodness, blessing. and he's purposely designed this planet for it.

And he wants us to experience the great blessing of having him as our creator. So the first thing I want you to notice is where Genesis 1 begins.

[14:31] In the beginning, God created. And so, in order for us to have a right view of our vocations, every calling with which we've been called, we don't start with our callings.

we start with the one who calls us. In the beginning, God created. We start where the Bible starts. What gives significance to our vocations is God himself. We notice right away, maybe you were sensed this as I was reading through, that the God of the Bible is a God of order.

that as we read through Genesis 1, did you pick up on the rhythm? Did you pick up on the days?

And where there is rhythm, there is order, and where there is order, there is purpose.

God purposefully created this planet in which we occupy for life, for good. And so, throughout Genesis 1, we see God declaring, God saying, let there be, and then we see God doing, and it was

so.

[15:45] And then in the first part, first three days, he's naming things. The day, day, the expanse, heaven. And at the end of every day, there's this closing, and there was evening, and there was morning the first day.

And there was evening, and there was morning the second day. We've got a God of order. And what you need to know about Genesis chapter 1 is that there's a correspondence.

Day 1 corresponds with day 4. Day 2 corresponds with day 5. Day 3 corresponds with day 6. It's like this. Days 1, 2, and 3, God is creating the nest of creation, and days 4, 5, and 6, he's filling the nest with living creatures full of life, full of goodness.

This morning, I have been feeling the weight of something all week. And I believe it's what God wants, at least in part, to impress upon us this morning.

It's his goodness. Did you pick up on that refrain throughout Genesis chapter 1? And God saw that it was good. Verse 4, verse 10, verse 12, verse 18, verse 21, verse 25, climaxing in verse 31.

[17:26] It's good. I think I know what he's talking about. I edge my lawn. Do we have any lawn edgers in the room?

I think, brother, you and me, man. Now, when you hear about a guy edging his lawn, you might be like, what? Let me tell you.

It's about art. It's artwork. After I mow my lawn, I edge it, and you know what I do? I stand at the end of my sidewalk, and I look upon the work of my hands, and I say, it is good.

It is good. Now, nobody else may notice that, but I do, and I have one brother in the room that does, and that's with grass.

God said it is good to creating things out of nothing. God said it is good for working with things on a scale we just have no real sense for how big and how complicated.

[18:41] I mean, on day six, of all the creations he made, he made the platypus. and it was very good. When God creates, he takes delight in what he makes.

He looks upon it, and in that moment, he says, now that's a nice piece of work. And I believe not only is this goodness an in-the-moment goodness, I think it's an anticipated goodness.

Because God knew on day one who he's making this all for. So part of the it is good is anticipating the blessing we would experience in his good creation.

Now here's why I'm saying this. I want you to be thinking God's creation making results in good, blessing, good for all.

and that has bearing not just on his creation making, but on the creation mandate. So we've looked at his creative work, now we're going to focus in on day six, starting in verse 26.

[20:06] This has been classically known as the creation mandate, specifically in verse 28. And he speaks this creation mandate to every human being on the planet.

All 7.6 billion people today are under this creation mandate. There's two things I want you to notice here.

This, who this creation mandate is given to and what this creation mandate involves. So let's look at the who first.

In verse 26, then God says, let us make man in our image after our likeness. Image bearers.

That's who he gives the creation mandate to in verse 28. But I want you to see a little clue here of what an image bearer is. There's a connection you need to see.

[21:08] It's in verse 26. He says, God says, let us make man in our own image after our likeness and let them have dominion. Whatever this image bearing business is, it's connected to having dominion over the earth.

They go together. So let's talk about what it means to be an image bearer. It's an image bearer of God.

So what does that mean? Well, don't be thinking physically because remember Adam was formed, Genesis 2, out of the dust. But notice that whatever this imaging is, both male and female are image bearers of God, verse 27.

So men aren't more of an image bearer of God because they're men and females aren't more or less of an image bearer because they're females. We are image bearers of God, male and female, which means we have intrinsic worth.

We are the same value in God's sight. So don't think physically. think morally. This image bearing has something to do with a moral capacity.

[22:32] Just like God, we are to do good to others, to bless others. That was the whole thrust of God's creation, to bless the inhabitants of the earth.

We are to be a blessing to the inhabitants of the earth. earth. It gets at a moral capability. And so in Genesis chapter 2, when we read about this garden of Eden and God has these two trees in, one of them is the tree of the knowledge of good and evil and God commands Adam and Adam, don't eat of that tree.

There's no other created thing on the face of the planet in which God says, don't eat of that. The reason why is because of our moral capacity. It has to do with our imaging forth of God.

We're like God in that. So think morally and think relationally. God created us in His image with the capacity to have a relationship, not just with one another, but with Him.

It's unique. And we get a taste of that in Genesis 3 verse 8. If you want to turn there real quick, this is after Adam and Eve have sinned and we read about God doing something really interesting.

[23:56] And they, Adam and Eve, heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day. And you know what the impression you get? This is how God rolled every day. He would come to be with Adam and Eve as image bearers, to relate with them, to be with them.

You see, God has created us in His image, which means we have the capacity to have a relationship, a personal relationship, with the living God.

It's unlike any other created thing on the planet. So when you think of imaging God, think morally, think relationally, and think cognitively.

God has uniquely created us with the intellectual capacity to understand who He is and what He's called us to. Unlike any other created thing.

Moral, relational, cognitive, and all of these are essential to representing Him on the planet.

[25:06] to be an image bearer with our moral, relational, and cognitive capacities, it serves the God-given responsibility to represent Him on the earth for the good of others.

So when you hear image bearer, you need to be thinking representative. And not just to mirror God back to God, but to display God to all of creation.

We're to represent Him on earth. And that's the link between being an image bearer and having dominion in 26. So that's who we are.

Now let's look at what He commands us to do. In verse 28, now this is the creation mandate itself. We read God say to Adam and Eve, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth. Now these are the same words He speaks to the swarming animals on day 5 and 22.

[26:13] Hey, He blessed those beasts and said, hey, be fruitful, multiply, fill. Evidently, God wants His creation teeming with life.

And as image bearers, God has commanded us to fill the earth with other image bearers who will represent Him for good.

He wants the planet filled with them. But the next two commands set us apart from every other living thing.

In verse 28, we go on to read, be fruitful, multiply, and fill the earth and subdue it. And then He says, and have dominion over it.

These two commands, to subdue and to have dominion, set us apart from all the other created things as God's representative on earth to do good to the inhabitants of the earth.

[27:21] And this starts informing our understanding of vocation because in your understanding of your work, of your jobs, you are to represent God in whatever you do for the good of those around you.

That's the creation mandate. To subdue means to bring something under subjection. And I don't know about you, but when I think of subdue, I think of rodeos.

I think of cowboys. There's this one move where, you know, how cowboys will ride those broncos and then bull riding and there's this other event at a rodeo in which a little calf will be let out of a pen and it'll start running along and then cowboys will be released from their slot on their horse.

They've got a lasso going, they put it around the calf, they jump off, they put the calf in a headlock, flip it up on its back and they wrap its legs real quick for time. Now, that's the first thing that comes into my mind when I think about subduing, a show of force.

But that's not what's going on here. The kind of subduing that God is calling us, His image bearers, to do is not a show of force. It's to purpose things for goodness.

[28:49] Remember, we are His image bearers and we are to subdue creation for good, His creation for His good purposes. We are to represent God in the way we subdue His creation.

And so when we talk about subdue, it's the Hebrew word kibosh. You've heard it before. You know, to put the kibosh on something. And you're usually in a context of the meeting and your boss is like, yeah, I'm going to put the kibosh on that.

It's done, right? It's not that kind of putting the kibosh on something. The Hebrew way of putting the kibosh on something is to purpose it for good, to bless.

Let me give you a couple examples, both negatively and positively, of human beings putting the kibosh on things, on a large industrial scale.

I was recently doing some reading that touched on the effects of strip mining in West Virginia. Strip mining, if you're not aware of it, is basically where you lop off the top of a mountain in order to access the coal in it.

[30:02] and what study after study has shown for decades following these practices is that it's devastating. It's devastating for the natural environment around these mountains and it's devastating for the human beings living around it too.

This would be an example of putting the kibosh on God's creation in a way that's not pleasing to the Lord because of the effects that it has.

It doesn't bless in the long run. It harms in the long run. But let me give you another example more positively of putting what the Bible really means about putting the kibosh on something.

Let's say there is a lumber company and they intentionally limit the harvest of lumber that they do every year. And as well as limiting the amount of lumber they harvest they replant trees where they harvest from.

And the reason why they do that is to create a kind of sustainable renewable resource that blesses the environment and the people living there and the people living beyond as well.

[31:23] That would be an example of putting the kibosh on something for good. of subduing creation. Here's what happens though.

When you disconnect God from your vocation human beings are still going to want to put the kibosh on things. And when you disconnect God from putting the kibosh on God's creation you end up exploiting things and hurting things.

That's why God has to be reintegrated into everything we do. We end up representing Him and doing good for others.

Subdue. It doesn't mean exploit. It means to bless. Have dominion. If subduing creation is the initial purposing of God's creation having dominion is the ongoing management of creation of what you've already subdued.

It's not dominion apart from God. It's exercising dominion as a representative of God. It is a delegated authority.

[32:41] This planet does not belong to us. It's God's and He has given us to be stewards of it as image bearers.

Here's an example of that recently. I'm not sure if you've been reading the papers but there's been some talk in the papers about the lead piping in our city that provides water to our homes.

And in light of what happened to Flint, Michigan, there's some concern over it, right? Has anybody been reading about this? Ed St. Peter, who is the director of the Kenosha Water Utility, he's a brother in the Lord.

He's a friend of mine. He's a great guy. And what he's doing right now is looking to exercise his image bearing in order for the good of Kenosha to replace the lead pipes at a cost that is reasonable for everybody living in the city.

he's exercising dominion as an image bearer of what's already been subdued for the good of all people in our city.

[33:51] You see how being an image bearer of God shows up in our everyday work? It matters. We represent him. Now, we've talked about God doing creative work in his creation making.

We've turned now and we're talking about this, the who and what of the creation mandate. I want to tackle three objections. Three objections.

Some of you in your pews right now may be saying something like this. Mike, it's all going to burn anyway. It's all going to burn. Does it really matter? Does it really matter?

It's a reference to 2 Peter 3 when the earth will be utterly transformed at the coming of Jesus. But here's the deal. We don't know when Jesus is coming back.

So, we don't know when God is going to recreate the heavens and the earth, which means we don't know how long we need to conserve the present resources of his creation for the good of people.

[35:06] So, we need to wisely steward what he's been entrusted to us. So, the thinking of it's all going to burn anyway, that is a little lazy, my friend.

It's a little irresponsible. It's neglecting the fact of who this planet belongs to. Let me apply it this way.

You wouldn't appreciate me applying this kind of thinking to your car. Let's say after the service, you come out to your car and I'm in your car pulling out the car radio.

And you're like, Mike, what are you doing? I'm like, man, I love Culver's concrete mixers and I would just need this radio. I'm going to sell it on eBay. I'm taking my family out to get some ice cream. But you're like, uh, I need that car.

I'm like, but it's just going to be on a scrap heap in 10 to 15 years. It reveals I don't have an appreciation that this car belongs to you.

[36:19] This planet is not ours and that we own it. It's God. God's and all the resources thereof. And he calls us to be stewards of it.

A God-centered view of vocation understands that God's command to have dominion over all creation, it's a responsibility to steward what's his for the good of all those he's created.

There's another objection. It goes like this. Hey, but there are people exploiting others. for selfish gain. It's an objection of this is not fair.

You want me to represent God and do good to others while at the same time people are exploiting others for selfish gain. they're going to you're right.

It's the way it is. And so in so long as we're followers of Jesus looking to live by faith, we must honor God and steward his resources for the good of others regardless of what other people are doing.

[37:39] in fact, we need to put the kibosh on this other stuff going on for the glory of God. We need to help people who are exploiting others for selfish gain to see what they're doing is grievous in God's sight that they need Jesus to change.

there's a third objection. And it's maybe more than an objection.

It's more like a confession. Maybe you're feeling something in your pew right now and it's going something like this. Hey, I believe the creation mandate is is good.

It's good for others. But why, as I'm hearing this, why is the creation mandate intended for good making me feel bad right now?

The creation mandate exposes our sinful self-centeredness that uses God's resources at the harm of others.

[39:01] It exposes our self-centeredness. And so you can be hearing the creation mandate on one level, you're saying, yeah, that's right, that's right, but this stings a little bit, this stings a little bit, because it's exposing you.

And when God's word exposes us like this, we may need, we need to make a beeline to Jesus. You see, it's Jesus, the creator who became flesh.

We need Jesus for two reasons. Because we've sinned against the creation mandate, we've used God's resources not for good, but for ill, for self-gain.

So we need Jesus to forgive us by his blood, and we need Jesus to help us to be faithful today to the creation mandate which still stands.

We've covered some ground this morning, and what I've wanted to show you is that from Genesis chapter one, and we see God at work creation making, and then we see God entrusting his work to us in the creation mandate, this provides the framework, the foundation for vocation, that we need to reintegrate God into all of our work, and the result will be increasing blessing, goodness, benefit. [40:43] Next week, we're going to look at the fall, and what the fall is going to show us is what we bring to work, and it's going to show us our need for Jesus again.

But this morning, before I close, I just want to point you to one more thing in light of tomorrow morning. Would you look at Genesis 2.19? Genesis 2 is basically a recap of the sixth day of creation.

God brings to Adam every beast of the field and every bird of the heavens, and he brings them to the man to see what he would call them.

tomorrow morning when you walk into your work, you walk into your family room, maybe you're going back to school, the God of the universe is interested in watching of how you're going to go about your work, what you're going to do with what he's entrusted you.

Let's pray. God in heaven, we thank you so much for your word. We pray, God, that you would help us to think your thoughts about the work you've given us to do, that we would be your representatives on this planet for good, your good purposes to all people.

[42:16] We ask this in Jesus' name. Amen.