

About In The Work Of The Lord

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 14 November 2021

Preacher: Professor Donald Macleod

[0 : 0 0] we turn again to 1 Corinthians chapter 15 and the words of the verse 30 58 this last verse therefore my beloved brothers and sisters be steadfast immovable also bowing the work of the Lord knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain when we're seeing Paul we must always to go to the polls that force because time and again that word occurs therefore therefore therefore because Paul is always addressing the mind he's always arguing always throwing conclusions by logic from what he said what's gone before and we find that here we have this great therefore he's been speaking of the triumph of the Lord over death and the grave in the resurrection it tells us that death has lost its sting the grave lost its victory and then then he goes on to say therefore this follows about in the work of the Lord and I want for a moment tonight with you to reflect on this great exhortation this imperative that Paul gives us what I should say to ourselves in our time and our place first of all we have this phrase the work of the Lord or the Lord's work or what we have in Jesus and Luke Luke's gospel my father's business and it distinguishes of course between this work and other work because we have our daily work we work to earn our bread and we're to provide for others and Paul isn't in any way uh many imagine the importance uh of our own daily work that work really matters and that work is itself uh a divine uh command the fourth commandment lays that down for us six days shalt thou labor of course the seventh day is holy to the Lord but there are six days in which we have to work by God's own director six days shalt thou labor and do all thy work on a caution paradise

Adam and Eve had to work before man ever fell they had to work even as sinless and holy and perfect creatures they had to work they had to guard the earth they had to serve it they had to to culture the soil and so even in eden there was always work for their hands to do and indeed i believe that we come when we come to glory there will also be work for our hands because we have bodies in glory as well and these bodies won't be useless or redundant in heaven we'll find uh i use for them and so work matters it's god's command it's a we are little bread to have been dependent upon other people it works it matters enormously and it's so of course as well that work occupies a large proportion of our time in this world we spend so much of our lives in the workplace and that's often our real community not our neighbors but our workplace we spend so much of our time there and instead that you and i must shine as lights in the world and bear witness to the lord and do good to our fellow men and women because as i said it is really our community and there's so much talk of community today where is it what is it and really to a large extent it is the workplace and in that workplace we have to serve god and love our neighbor and so there's no disparagement here uh of the workplace or day-to-day labor the way that we earn our bread but there is this other distinct and distinctive form of work that paul calls the work of the lord or the lord's the lord's work and what he's saying to us is this that god has his own project and god wants us to work with him on that project we are god's fellow laborers as paul says elsewhere partners together with god this project that he has to establish the old kingdom in this world to evangelize the world between the gospel to all the nations to redeem men and women to put salvation within their grasp i'm told that coca-cola has a business aspiration or strategy to place a bottle of coke within which of every man woman and child on the planet and we're very successful in doing that but you have a similar strategy to place christian salvation within reach of every man woman and child in the world and what a challenge that is that's god's project and god wants us to be part of that project god's co-workers in this great project of bringing salvation uh to the whole world thomas chalmers who was a great free church founding father spoke of his vision he called it the christian good of scotland god's co-workers in this great school and he said he was a great friend of scotland but it was scotland not a denomination but the whole country that he had in mind he had a vision for scotland in its entirety and embraced of course the gospel but also embraced uh the poor and uh injustice in so many

areas society that was all part of his mission and so here is god's project to establish his own kingdom in this world that's god's work and god says that we are to be involved in that project and in that work that is the lord's work now of course there is also my own work there's my day job there are families to support there are others who need us in different ways with john knox's vision that we should all be school to be able to be useful members of so of our community and that does matter we need engineers we need doctors we need all kinds of the building trades and so on and we need bin men and shipbuilders and surgeons consultants all these things we need for a a functioning society that that matters enormously but beside that we have this we have the lord's work the specific work of the kingdom god's own special project his favorite project which he planned from all eternity and he wants us to be involved with him in that project and so there's what he's saying to us there is paul says the lord's business there's my business there's my business and there's the lord's business they're not strictly uh uh in intention with each other but they are distinct because we can be very much involved in our own work he was believers and yet not involved in the work of the lord at all and policy here being bounding in the work of the lord and then you notice this as well that paul expects every believer to be involved in the work in the work of the lord this episode begins with a greeting uh to the saints in corinth and the whole epistle is addressed to all the saints in corinth every single one of them now in many ways there were a strange bunch and a difficult bunch this is paul's first letter as far as we know and it's the most difficult one paul ever wrote because there were serious difficulty between himself and the church in corinth they disliked him and they found fault with him and they contradicted him and very often they thought he was rubbish i said paul is on to this that they're still saints and all these states have to abound in the work of the lord there are no exceptions every one of us is obligated is commissioned and is gifted for this particular work of the lord whatever age or abilities may be we are all to be involved in the work of of the lord that obviously means uh some who are special functions like the apostles themselves and the prophets and evangelists and so on who were also part of the setting up of the early church those many centuries ago that includes still of course those who are uh preachers and those who are elders or so are deacons again with the stated tasks but there are so many many others on whom this work depends and the need policy into us very very often that if if one component part of this engine malfunctions or this machine malfunctions then the whole part will malfunction and the whole part will suffer and so every component part must be in its proper place and doing its own proper work every single one of us

you'll find this in the early church as well there were people of no great prominence and yet they were key in the matters that affect the church very directly you are for example chloe and the church in her house we know almost anything else about her but she gave her house she was probably a very wealthy woman with a large home and she gave it for the church's use that was part of her work uh for the lord you have others like silas who was paul's amanuensis and to which he puts it down by dictation and that again was he wasn't allowed to put his own thoughts on the paper maybe he thought he could say it better than paul or have some profound ideas that paul had for one dimension but he doesn't accept positive words down word for word because that was the service that was his work for the lord and we find many such cases where humble believers remember when the lord himself went to uh on that last journey to jerusalem he was a company by a woman from galilee who cared for his needs we know the names of some of them but only a few of them but they were obviously very important to him at that particular time and we have the house of edwethery of mary and martha and lazarus again we they would don't hear the names at all in the book of acts and yet they put a haven for the lord that was all an arresting place and of course he sat at his feet and took in his teaching as well they loved him so much but still you see they weren't officials they weren't ordained they weren't trained in some theological seminary but still had their own work to do in the church of christ and every one of us has this opportunity and this obligation i think for example of the early days of the free church not so long ago in fact was here the early days they tried to find finance to provide stipends for 800 ministers from scratch church and that was a huge task and thomas chalmers a man of so so many talents as preacher theologian philosopher writer organizer he had this any of it called the sustentation fund you may remember that some of you i'm sure that fund so important in our childhood for the maintenance of the church's ministry and it was very simple idea there were collectors went round every home belonged to the congregation once a month with a wee book names addresses and they got the names the money and it went into the book every single month and whatever the weather summer winter these collectors went out with their books once a month to collect the sustentation fund there was no great kudos in it they weren't especially gifted people but they were absolutely essential to establishing a church would not to build hundreds of schools and months and churches an astonishing achievement in a very short space of time and at its heart there lay these people people have been working hard probably all day long and yet rain or sunshine storm or snow out they went to collect the money and how much of this principle would be called

the power of the power of littles the accumulation of little things or little talents cooperation what it meant was this a lot of little people collecting little sums of money from little people and that built up and that built up and gave stipends to every minister of the church and until very recently that's the point here it doesn't need to be a great labor that amazes the world and wins us recognition but our own thing remember the widow she did what she could every one of us with our own our witness in the workplace inviting others to church that is such an important point when i was in glosgow a long long time ago as a minister we had some young folk in the congregation and i called them trollers because every sunday night they brought their hall of residence friends to church some converted and some not and some vowed never to come back in case they'd be converted but they were brought to church faithfully that was their contribution and it may seem a small thing but yet it was so so important so you cannot say i have nothing to offer i know talent i've no gift nothing special you have yourself and you ask lord what will thou what will you have me to do tt bonhoeffer the german lutheran martyr who was killed by the natchez in the june 1944 uh june 1944 he used to write home from prison and kept kept on saying are we of any use because he felt so useless and every day one asked that same question and one prays lord make me of some use because retired people aren't very much use are they and yet you know bonhoeffer from prison he wrote letters and today these letters inspire thousands and millions all over the world that inspire you to read them and today he was like paul in prison in rome perhaps feeling useless and yet in that uselessness still speaking to us words of inspiration and encouragement and so i'm not going to tell you what to do i'm saying find for yourself find your niche find your opportunity find your obligation find your moment your own contribution to this great project god's plan for the world and you would part in that plan for the world and so there it is we're all to be involved in this project that god has undertaken we are to abound in the work of the lord and then you see he says to us that we we are to do it abundantly always abounding in the work of the lord it's not just you see the the the specified amount of time

[18:58] you cannot say oh so many hours or so many days or so very very much or just so far i have this strange idea in my mind i heard a definition once of a feast it was a henry tudor definition of a feast and he said a feast he said means more than enough and i thought that's great that's a feast enough is a meal but a feast is more than enough and it's that idea we have here always abounding always more than enough not the century more than the lord deserves but in the sense that it's it's not measured or measurable it's not like i've done my bit i've served long enough i've done my share because we may have done that and still there is another opportunity there is another need arises another moment when god says get up and do abounding in the work of the lord now i'm not saying i abound in the work of the lord i don't but i feel the weight of it and i feel the guilt of omission because paul is speaking in a way that rebukes me abound in the work of the lord not just enough but but more than enough and you know sometimes we say i don't have the gifts but you know paul is saying to us this as well it is your labor that's not in vain in the lord yes we abound in the work but the work is labor and you know sometimes if we have gifts we feel we don't need to labor now these people had gifts you know they're a huge proportion of tongue speakers and prophets and medical workers to the church at corinth and yet paul is saying to them your labor is not in vain and you see paul he spoke of being in labor more abundant because this work yes it will achieve something achieve in fact a great deal but not by some magic wand not without effort but by labor and you know sometimes the more gifted you are the less inclined you are to labor and that's a fatal peril for so many many people i spoke once to a colleague in edinburgh who was telling me that one day they had jesse norman the great opera singer for a graduation at edinburgh in werfley for seeing an honorary degree at edinburgh and deserved it and he would charge escort her in the procession and he said to her in jest we should make you sing for your degree and she said if i had to do that she said i've had to be practicing for for practice for four hours this morning you could think oh she could sing off the drop of a hat but she didn't think so she had this amazing talent the range and reach of her voice its expressiveness its precision but she had to train four hours for a simple performance

that's how she saw it there's a famous comment that one professor passed once on a preacher a student preacher on trial and he made this comment mr so-and-so he said as a famous as a fatal gift of fluency oh you would say that's a great gift fluency but he said no it's a fatal gift because a man with a gift might not want to labor because he could preach from his bath in the water he has such a gift you come back to what is the proverbial sentiment genius is 10 percent inspiration and 90 percent perspiration labor poor adam and eve thrown out of the garden in the garden it was easy to work it was a pleasure but then outside as to me their way their solitary way of to eden after the fall it was a world of thorns and thistles a world for the eternal bread with the sweat of their brow all success comes at a price we have musicians here tonight and how many painful hours have they spent in childhood holding their skills hunder as a child and told spent six hours a day at his piano he was a genius and part of that was a dreamers at problem to to labor to work stilling up and perfecting the gift that god had given him you have gifts i'm not speaking to other gifted i don't see they're gifted i see a congregation where everybody is gifted for you're all charismatics all endowed with god's spirit and yet you are so endowed you must labor and to labor is not in vain why is it not in vain well now a few verses before this paul had said to them if christ has not risen then your faith is vain and our preaching is vain it was vain if christ had not risen but he and the corinthians although they differed on many matters they were assured of one thing christ had risen and because he had risen their labor was not in vain he had risen in that showed that god reigned he had risen because he had risen he had all the authority in heaven and earth and he went with them as they labored he was always with them because he was the risen christ but above all there was this the fact of his resurrection meant the possibility of resurrection for every human being christ of us a man had risen from the dead and that rewrote history

it was possible god could do it and the corinthian skeptics said how do the dead rise and paul said you fool god just needs the one word god and it was in vain because they had this message go and tell the world the resurrection of the body not just the immortality of the soul important for that is the corinthians said the body in contempt though in greeks it didn't matter the body didn't matter but it did matter to paul it mattered to god and he would raise these bodies imperishable and glorious labor is not in vain go and tell the world give the world the poor poor world the world tear that is in her former will just not that person what a tragic is a humanly a man-made tragedy and into that hell on earth scenario we have this Christ was risen death's been conquered the grave has been conquered telling the world that it's not vain because it's been done

Christ was risen and so then I come back to the workplace and when you go back into into your day-to-day community give a reason for the hope that is in you the hope of life beyond death the hope of a glorious resurrection of the body that's your message you will labor to advance that project to disseminate that hope to people who fear the living or they're facing hell on earth tell them Christ as risen tell the dead rise give the world hope therefore my beloved brothers and sisters labor abundantly in the work of the Lord because it's not in vain what enormous potential this gallery represents tonight they each give the Lord a feast full of their labor for our future that's what Paul is asking us to aspire to labor because labor is not in vain may God help us is so to live all all go over us we pray help us to proclaim you and the hope that is in you knowing that the future we promise has itself been confirmed in the past we want Lord a repetition of what you had done before when you raised the one man Jesus and in him gave hope hope and proof and a pledge of a resurrection and glory to glory for all who believe in him help us the Lord to labor a new project for your name's sake amen