

# Part 1

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, good morning, church. Am I too loud? I feel like I'm too loud.

! We'll survive. As Jordan said, we are not going to be in Matthew today.! We are changing things up just a little bit this weekend.

I invite you to turn with me to Matthew chapter... Nope, not Matthew. Again, I said not Matthew. Colossians chapter 3. If you don't have a Bible, we would very much love to give you one. They're on the back table there. They are already bookmarked to today's passage. And I got to thinking as we were contemplating this short series on vocation or work or career.

A time when, before I became... Before I came to Shoreline, when I served six years in the Coast Guard, I remember that Aaron and I once had another Coast Guard family over for dinner.

[ 1 : 04 ] Now, at this point, we knew that I was planning to leave the Coast Guard, go to seminary, enter into a career in ministry. And our friend, who was hoping to become a stay-at-home mom, she had not yet had a child, but she was hoping to become a stay-at-home mom, she said, oh man, it must be so cool that you are going to have a job that God likes.

And I got to thinking, well, did her hopes to do the work of a stay-at-home mom not matter to God? Did her husband's work as a Coast Guard officer not matter to the Lord?

What about your career? If you don't do ministry stuff all week long, does that not matter to God as a student or a parent or a teacher or an engineer or a nurse or a doctor?

Does that not matter to God? And what if your job is one that our culture calls menial, you know, like pushing a broom around? Things that go unnoticed and unacknowledged and are thought to be relatively unimportant.

Does God not think that that's cool? Does that not make him happy? And this is an important question. As Jordan just said, we spend a lot of our lives in the workplace, whether the workplace is our home or the workplace is a business or a military base.

[ 2 : 30 ] We spend a huge amount of time in our work. And it's actually, I mean, it's how we introduce ourselves, isn't it? We say, you know, when we meet someone new, what do you do?

What's your name and what do you do? That's how we introduce ourselves. And so, especially in our culture, it has become almost a part of our identity. And so we're taking this two-week break from our sermon series in the Gospel of Matthew to ask this question.

Does God care about your job? And what would Jesus say about your job? What would he say to you in your work? And I'm not just asking, does God care that you work and earn money to feed your family?

He does care about that. But that's not the question we're going to ask today. And I'm not just asking, does God care that you work so that you can give generously? He does care about that. But that's not the question we're asking today.

And I'm not just asking, does God care that you work and then contribute financially to the mission of his church? He does. But that's not what we're talking about today. He cares about all of those things.

[ 3 : 33 ] The thing I want to ask today, and I think our passage will help us answer today, is does God care about the work itself? The thing that you do when you go to work?

The butt that you wipe when you're a stay-at-home mom? The widget you make at work? The students you instruct? Does God care about the work itself? I want you to value your work the way God does.

And he does value your work, I think. The work itself. And so we're going to turn today to Colossians chapter 3, starting in verse 22.

And our short text today will launch us into a journey, I hope, that will help you see with Christ's eyes the work you do.

Bond servants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord.

[ 4 : 42 ] Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.

This is God's holy, inerrant, inspired, and sufficient word for his people. Let's pray. Father, in these next moments, will you open our eyes so that we are not conformed to the way the world looks at our work.

But Lord, will you transform us by the renewal of our minds so that we can see that our work is valuable in your sight, and the Lord will that impact the way we work and the heart with which we do it.

We pray these things in Christ's name. Amen. Now, our text begins today. The very first word is bond servant, or some of your translations may say slave.

And we probably can't really even start our conversation today without dealing with that just a little bit. You know, the first thing to note is Paul is not pro-slavery here.

[ 6 : 00 ] Elsewhere in the Bible, he encourages slaves to try to peacefully win their freedom. And his letter to Philemon, one of the books of the Bible, is his request to a slave owner to free a slave on Christ's behalf.

And so Paul is not here affirming slavery. What he's doing instead is acknowledging its reality. In the Greco-Roman world, there were slaves and bond servants, and Jesus is for them too.

And so the reason we're looking at this passage today is that bond servants actually made up the vast majority of the labor force in the ancient Rome, and specifically the cities like Colossae.

Paul is showing workers, like you and me, how to live spirit-filled, God-honoring lives in their present circumstances. And so he says in verse 23, whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, not for men.

And I think there's probably some confusion about that. What does that actually mean? Work as for the Lord, and not for men. Should we just pretend that our work, our boss has disappeared, and that Jesus is the one giving us our work assignments?

[ 7 : 18 ] Is that what this means? Or does this mean that we should pretend that our boss is Jesus, our boss, you know, him or herself, that person is Jesus? Should we treat their word as absolute?

Treat them as somehow divine? And this gets really complicated then, you know, what if you're self-employed? Does this mean that you should pretend you are Jesus? Or maybe because we serve the customer, and the customer is always right, we should treat it like, this gets confusing, like what are we doing?

What does this mean? When Paul says work heartily, as for the Lord, he isn't talking about pretending here. At the end of verse 24, he doesn't say, it is as if you serve Jesus.

He says, you are serving the Lord Christ. And that means that our work, the work itself, is for God. It matters to God. We work before his gaze, and we work for him in some sense.

So how do we? What does that mean? What does it mean for us to work heartily for the Lord and serve Christ in our work, even a slave's work? The answer is found all the way back at the beginning.

[ 8 : 31 ] Before there was sin, before there was slavery, before there was separation from God, we're going to look at two scenes in Genesis today. And then explain this idea of working for God before returning here to Colossians when we conclude this morning.

And so we're going to turn all the way back to Genesis chapter 2. In the beginning, probably the very first page of the story in your Bible, God created the heavens and the earth, and everything he made was good, including men and women.

And how did he make us, and what did he make us for? Well, Genesis chapter 2, God gave Adam a job. The Lord took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to, one, work it, and two, keep it. Friends, before sin entered the world, before this world was broken, we were made to honor God with our work. It's part of God's design for us.

God commissioned our first parents to work and to keep, that is to cultivate and to develop the world he made. And so the first way we serve the Lord Christ, answering that question from Colossians 3, the first way we serve the Lord Christ in our daily work is fulfilling his design for us.

[10:05] He made us to work and keep this world. And when we engage in legitimate work from medicine to music, from parenting to plumbing, we honor God by fulfilling his design for what a human being is.

Engaging in work itself is an act of obedience to our Lord. And obedience, if I could put it this way, is one of God's love languages.

Paul says that even though our work may be for those who are our earthly masters, it happens within a bigger context. We were created in part for work.

And we honor that creator when we walk in his purposes. That's the first way we serve Christ in our work. When we work, we fulfill his design for us through obedience.

But it goes deeper than that. When we work, we're not just checking off a box of obedience. Our obedience, it has a shape to it.

[11:16] Your work has a content. You are doing something fruitful and productive in your work. And it says something, which goes back even further.

Turn back with me. Maybe one page. Maybe it's even on the same page in Genesis chapter 1. Here in the very, very beginning, we see how our work connects to something even deeper.

The Lord explains sort of what's going through his head when he made us. In Genesis 1, starting in verse 26, then God said, let us make man in our 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.

So, God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. So, we've backed the story up just a little bit.

And we're seeing here not just what we're for, but it tells us what we are. We are made in God's image. What does that mean?

[12:33] You could fill a library with the books that theologians have written on just that one phrase. But, for my money, the best explanation of this comes from one of my favorite children's Bibles.

We are, when the Bible says we are made in God's image, we are little mirrors designed to reflect his glory. I love that definition.

It has a simple beauty to it that I think really captures what God is after here in this text. That's what we are, little mirrors. And mirrors reflect something.

Here we see God's glory because we're made in his image. And he's actually told us part of what that means and what that looks like in that text.

Because here in Genesis 1, verse 26, he ties our image bearing to the idea that we should have dominion over the earth. And that's what we just saw in chapter 2 to work and keep this earth.

[13:38] That actually makes perfect sense. The creation narrative is all about God's work. At the end, he rests from his work. And so, of course, his image bearers who reflect his glory will mirror his work.

And their work, working and keeping, developing, preserving, match his work. And this becomes the heart of the sermon. This is the point.

This is what I want to drive home to you today. That our work matches and mirrors and attests to his work. Our work honors God not only because it is obedience and fulfills what humanity is for, but our work because every legitimate human enterprise mirrors the character of his work.

Right? God is the creator and has called us to work and create and develop this world. And he is the sustainer and has called us to keep, you see, work and keep, to keep and guard and preserve. And your work does one or more of those things. And so, the work you do reflects and points to and honors God and who he is.

[15:04] The actual things you do when you work matter to God because they are the same kinds of things he does. God has embedded his priorities into the very fabric of our work.

And if you see that, you'll look at your daily work with new eyes. you'll approach your work with a different heart and while you may not whistle while you work, you will worship while you work.

Now, that might sound good in theory. But what does it mean really? Like, tomorrow morning if you go to work, what does that mean tomorrow morning for you?

How can the work we do, the work itself, honor God by reflecting the character of his work? Well, God created the world and sustains it.

And he entrusted Adam with those same roles, those same jobs to work and to keep. Working is developmental and creative and keeping is sustaining and preserving.

[16:14] Let's look at each of these in turn. first, to work, to create and to develop. The first words of the Bible are in the beginning.

God created the heavens and the earth. God is a creator, a fountain that overflows and he makes Adam in his image to mirror that. The first reason Adam is in the garden in Genesis 2.15 is to work it.

That is to develop it, to cultivate it, to do creative work there. And if your work involves developmental and creative work, you mirror your creator in this way.

And so, for stay-at-home parents and for those who give care to disabled family members, I mean, first, caring for people the Lord created in his own image matters to God.

Caring for people that Jesus shed his blood for matters to Jesus. But there is also this aspect of creativity and developmental work to it that also reflects our creator God.

[17:27] Because bringing new life into the world is a creative act. Teaching children to wipe their own butts is a developmental act. That is what Adam is called to and it reflects our great God and Father who shepherds us.

when we bring our children up in the discipline and instruction of the Lord. That honors the Lord who creates and develops. And your role as a parent has a distinct echo of heaven.

Our Lord in heaven reveals himself in many ways. The all-powerful one. The eternal one. The just one. But prior to all those titles and undergirding all those titles he reveals himself chiefly as Father. That is how our God chiefly views himself. How does he view your calling as a parent?

Stay-at-home parents your work is valuable to the Lord because it echoes the work he does and it echoes who he is.

Now Adam was placed in a garden to work and keep it. We're still talking about that first word here work the garden to what about other workers the developers the creators what about engineers and artists and construction workers and business people people who make and create.

[18:56] It seems to me that if you create or produce especially creative and artistic work a list of reasons that your work matters to God might not help you so much as if I tried to show you.

The Magician's Nephew is chronologically the first book in C.S. Lewis' Chronicles of Narnia and I'm seeing some smiles already. This series of books is C.S. Lewis'!

C.S. Lewis' allegory of the Christian world view. The Magician's Nephew follows the journey of two children Polly and Diggory who are having quite the day.

They are stumbling between worlds and they are tripping over ancient magics they don't want to be bringing back with them and at one point they tumble into a dark unformed place along with Diggory's uncle a cab driver and a witch and there they witness the creation this is how this ties right to our work they witness the creation of Narnia.

Polly said oughtn't we to be nearly there now? We do seem to be somewhere said Diggory at least I'm standing on something solid why so am I now that I come to think of it said Polly why is it so dark say do you think we got into the wrong pool?

[20:23] Perhaps this is charn said Diggory only we've got back in the middle of the night this is not charn came the witch's voice this is an empty world this is nothing and really it was uncommonly like nothing there were no stars it was so dark that they couldn't see one another at all and it made no difference whether you kept your eyes shut or open and next the group argues until hush said the cabbie they all listened in the darkness something was happening at last a voice had begun to sing it was very far away and Diggory found it hard to decide from what direction it was coming sometimes it seemed to come from all directions at once sometimes he almost thought it was coming out of the earth beneath them its lower notes were deep enough to be the voice of the earth herself there were no words there was hardly even a tune but it was beyond comparison the most beautiful noise he had ever heard it was so beautiful he could hardly bear it god said the cabbie ain't it lovely then two wonders happened at the same moment one was that the voice was suddenly joined by other voices more voices than you could possibly count they were in harmony with it but far higher up the scales cold tingling silvery voices the second wonder was that the blackness overhead all at once was blazing with stars they didn't come out gently one by one moment there had been nothing but darkness next moment a thousand points of light leaped out single stars constellations and planets brighter and brighter than any in our world the new stars and the new voices began at exactly the same time if you had seen and heard it as diggery did you have

felt quite certain that it was the stars themselves who were singing and that it was this first voice the deep one which had made them appear and made them sing the voice on earth was now louder and more triumphant and now something else was happening far away and down near the horizon the sky grew slowly and steadily paler you could see shapes of hills standing up dark against it all the time the voice went on singing there was soon light enough for them to see another's faces the cabbie and the two children had open mouths and shining eyes they were drinking in the sound and they looked as if it reminded them of something but the witch looked as if in a way she understood the music better than any of them her mouth was shut her lips were pressed together and her fists were clenched ever ever since the song began she had felt that this whole world was filled with a magic different from hers and stronger she hated it she would have smashed that whole world or all worlds to pieces if it would only stop the singing the eastern sky changed from white to pink and from pink to gold the voice rose and rose till all the air was shaking with it and just as it swelled to the mightiest and most glorious sound it had yet produced the sun arose diggory had never seen such a sun you could imagine that it laughed for joy as it came up and as its beams shot across the land the travelers could see for the first time what sort of place they were in was a valley through which a broad swift river wound its way the they were fresh hot and vivid they made you feel excited until you saw the singer himself and then you forgot everything

else it was a lion friends if you labor in creating things designs buildings processes art can you see how your work might bring a smile to that singer to that creator lips might make that lion's mane bristle with pride as if he were saying I made your voice to sing I pray you have eyes to see it Adam was called to work and keep the garden and so far we've been talking about the creative and productive things under that first word to work before we think about the second call to keep or guard this world I want to touch on one other facet of the call to work and that is the work of development if you teach or cultivate plants on a farm or a nursery or people's lawns if you develop software or raise animals or work on process improvement your work is development you cultivate steward and give structure to the people and the planet around you just like those stars you unmask and unmute and unleash the voices embedded in the world that Aslan made and students your preparatory developmental work that honors

God in this way too so Adam was called to work and to keep all legitimate human enterprise fits into one of those two categories up to this point we've been looking at the creative developmental aspect of his call to work now let's consider how keeping honors the Lord the word that is here translated work is the Hebrew word shamar it means to keep or to guard I remember actually when I was learning Hebrew the way I remember this word is to show more shamar show more guards that's how I did it in the vocab test this is a protective kind of a word but it also has a watching over sort of a sense and almost an obedience sort of sense depending on the context it's used and that means that it has a lot of application to the various contexts in which we work ourselves this means that things as simple as cleaning so custodial staff and janitors and housekeeping services that the world often doesn't esteem do work that God esteems they keep our living spaces livable they guard our food preparation and medical spaces from harmful pathogens this is the work of keeping and preserving and this work itself honors the

Lord because these are his priorities he's not only the creator God he is the sustaining and rescuing God shamar also means to guard makes me think of our navy families and our electric boat families now whatever you think about mutually assured destruction the Lord has given the power of the sword to the government and in his providence one sword that this government utilizes are the submarines that you design and operate they might be history's most significant deterrent to warfare at the scale of nation versus nation and so your work guards the world from global warfare in a project so complex your contribution to the whole is much smaller than a parent's impact on raising a child but it is not less important this also means that people in preventative medicine routine checkups dental cleanings blood work are serving in this capacity they are shamar in that's bad

Hebrew people who work in finance and insurance and help people preserve assets that God has entrusted to them they are doing this thing and it honors their creator shamar also has a it has a productive and preservative quality to it but it also talks about rescue which means that people who work in an emergency room who are doing something restorative are honoring God in their work and people in the Coast Guard I'm going to resist the temptation to tell you a bunch of search and rescue sea stories from my days at a command center it means that first responders police

paramedics firefighters are doing this work it means that not just the flashy stuff like I've got a uniform on and I'm here to rescue you but things like an auto mechanic and a carpenter who are fixing and restoring the world are honoring

[ 30 : 00 ] God in the work that they do because the thing that they do reflects and honors and speaks to his priorities because he is after all as we heard so clearly last week on Easter he is the God who rescues friends we were lost and dead in sin and trespass and wanted nothing to do with God and he then sent his son for us to die on a cross to restore us to himself to bear the weight of the guilt of our sin and their extinguish salvation not only that but to rise from the grave on the third day to pave a road to heaven for all who would repent and believe and turn to him and find in him their hope and life friends this is the God who redeems and restores and rescues and so if our work involves keeping and guarding and sustaining and restoring with every act we declare two things first my God made a good world and it is worth protecting it is worth sustaining and it honors him in that way and also the content of your work reflects the God who also keeps and guards sustains restores and rescues it honors the character of his work and his very character so that's what I want for you today to be transformed here by the renewal of your mind to value your work the way God does to see it with his eyes it fulfills his purpose for humanity we were made to work and the work itself mirrors his priorities and before we conclude

I want to talk to two groups of people who might feel this sermon isn't quite for them first if you're out of work through a tight job market or disability or some other reason you might not find too much encouragement in today's sermon I want you to know that your heavenly father who rescues and restores sees you and cares for you I can't tell you why you are where you are but I can tell you that he cares he cares so much that he sent his son to die for you your search for employment actually honors him because that's you striving to fulfill his design for you and next Sunday I aim to discuss a little bit more how God reaches in and touches your circumstance and second you're retired this might not seem very relevant to you your work is done I hope first that this has encouraged you to look back on your life's work with new and fresh eyes

I hope you have a refreshed sense of having served the Lord throughout your life and I hope that you've seen today that work is part of God's design for humanity which means that since you are still human your work is not yet complete don't let America's vision of retirement lie to you saying it's all about you now that's actually saying you're not human that's saying you're God no don't buy that but your work it might look different in terms of location in terms of compensation duration intensity but don't let it stop and in particular I'd encourage you to throw yourself into the life of the church find a need and fill it grab a younger person and invest in her find someone and encourage him to get involved in ministry himself don't waste this season of life on yourself and last I would like to talk to the person who does not yet have a relationship with this

God because this whole discussion comes in the context of someone who has been reconciled to their father in heaven and I want to ask the question does the non-believer the person who has not yet trusted in Christ does that person please God with their work in the same way and in the same sense working well and even having eyes to see that your work mirrors the God of the Bible doesn't please him unless you have been reconciled to him first the Bible says that without faith it is impossible to please God and second if you have eyes to see this truth but you have not yet been reconciled to God it's kind of like a parent walking into a child's room and seeing that the room is clean I should make the parent happy right but I find a note on the bed that says this room is going to stay clean because I've left that parent is not happy that the room is clean and friends our work honors the Lord so far as we are in relationship with him and if we are apart from him dead in trespass and sin our work does not honor him because we do not honor him and we've talked about the reconciling redemptive work of God today your work your highest priority your main vocation your job description you do not yet know Christ is to confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead so that you might be saved then your work matters but until that happens your work is to be is to run after Jesus and cry for mercy and now as we close I'll just ask the question again did God care about that mother's work of mothering did God care about her husband's work as a

Coast Guard officer does he care about your work the work itself yes God cares about your work it fulfills his design for your humanity and it mirrors the character of his creative and productive and redemptive work work work heartily Paul says as for the Lord and not for men knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward you are serving the Lord Christ he says

knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward which means that if well it means that you're not working solely for a paycheck if your work doesn't pay well rest assured that the payment you receive from Christ on the last day it's worth more than all the treasures this world could offer you he says you are serving the Lord Christ and you are not working simply and solely for your employer so if your work isn't as interesting and satisfying as you would like it to be remember that it's actually not as hard to do menial tasks for the people you love to pick up a prescription for a loved one that doesn't feel as burdensome doesn't to tie a child's shoes doesn't feel as burdensome even if those tasks would leave you unfulfilled doing them for anyone else which means that if you love God and your work is for him even the menial things you can do work that doesn't inspire you and yet still find joy in it because you're doing it for someone you love Martin Luther gave this advice to people who thought that the the only way to please God with your work was to go and be a priest or a monk he says I advise no one to enter any religious order or the priesthood indeed I advise everyone against it unless he is forearmed with this knowledge and understands that the works of monks and priests however holy and arduous they may be do not differ one bit in the sight of God from the works of a rustic laborer in the field or the woman going about her household tasks but that all works are measured before God by faith alone let's pray father in heaven will you renew our minds to have eyes to see the way you do to view and to look and to understand that our work the work itself honors you as we fulfill your plan for humanity and as we mirror your creative and redemptive and preserving and protecting work father will that change the way we walk into work and interact with the people we work with and for Lord will you be glorified and

[ 39 : 51 ] Lord I pray that you would restore some joy to people's work I pray that in the name of Jesus Christ who worked for us on his cross the work we could not do we pray that in his name amen God bless you God bless you