

Hard Work

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[0 : 00] We live in very uncertain economic times, perhaps more uncertain than we have known for a long time. Sitting in the coffee shop this week, it's a great place to try and prepare a message and be away from some of the other clutter that impacts you.

But I heard three different conversations. So be careful what you say in a coffee shop because people might be listening. One man had just been sacked and he was arguing the fairness with the person who was obviously responsible.

A woman was talking about how she could rearrange her finances, how she could redraw her loan for the time being after being laid off.

And she was worrying about others in her office. And another man was talking on the phone about needing to ask about a new job next week.

Fear, uncertainty, anxiety. Now, Timothy Keller, you know the book, this is the book that we've been using, lying behind the series that we're just preaching and we've run out of copies at the back.

[1 : 17] We've sold them all. But he writes that just after the GFC, the global financial crisis began in 2008-2009, a columnist in the New York Times wrote about a woman who had just been laid off.

She was known amongst her friends in her workplace to be hardworking, fair, honest, and she had been really generous with her money towards friends and very charitable.

Her work specialty had been parceling up high-risk debt and selling it to investors. She was doing something in her work that played a sinister role in the downfall of the world economy.

She didn't think about it. She was just doing her job, ethical in her personal life, unthinking about this area of ethics in her employment.

And Keller says that these things have happened because the business community had a distorted ethical compass. Their compass said that if the practice is legal and everybody is doing it, the only fundamental question is can money be made?

[2 : 45] The driving ethic? Can money be made? How do I maximise profit? And lying behind the ethic is the question, who am I responsible to?

Now, I reckon most of us operate within the law. We would think of ourselves as law-abiding citizens. We don't cheat on taxes.

We obey most of the road rules. I would have liked to have been a fly on the wall in the community groups this week, those that met, because I think the first discussion question was the statement, if it's legal, it is right.

Discuss. If it's legal, it is right. Discuss. Did anybody go to town on that one? No, Lynn? You did?

What was the answer? Just because it's done doesn't mean it's right. Did anybody come up with a different answer? Well, that's good.

[3 : 50] Because the law permits a lot of things that clash with the view of life driven by the lordship of Jesus Christ. You can legally drive at the speed limit in wet weather, but it might not be safe.

You can visit a brothel or you can work in a brothel and it's legal. A future day may come when you can legally marry a person of the same gender.

At the Nuremberg trials of former Nazis after the Second World War, defendants continually stepped forward and they said, I was only following orders. It's another way of saying I was following my leaders, I was being faithful to my leaders' instructions.

See, it doesn't matter how good a person you think you are, life with Christ is going to bring you into conflict with the world.

And that means in our life's vocations. Throughout this series, we have said that we live in a fallen world, that we've said that work in a fallen world is distorted from God's good creation purposes.

[5 : 02] We have difficulties in our workplaces, we have difficulties in our families, we have difficulties in our schools and our universities.

And sometimes those difficulties are a direct consequence of who we are in Christ and what we believe. Godly parents say no to children sometimes.

Godly employees will not sign off on everything that they are asked to. Jesus said, John 15, If the world hates you, keep in mind that it hated me first.

If you belong to the world, it would love you as its own. As it is, you do not belong to the world, but I have chosen you out of the world and that is why the world hates you.

Faith in Jesus Christ brings us to a very distinctive view of the world. It brings trouble. It brings joy. And sometimes they both come at the same time.

[6 : 08] Last week I think I said that the earth is the Lord's and everything in it, all people, live under the ordinary grace of God whether they believe in God or not. And it's really liberating because it sets us free to be appreciative of the skills and the abilities and the graces that God has given to unbelievers because ultimately their abilities are from God's hand even if they do not acknowledge him.

And it also sets us free because free from feeling like we have to excel at everything. It's absolutely ridiculous to expect our children to be top dog in every endeavour.

We are to be the people that God wants us to be in the place where God has put us and imperfect as I am, I will continue to try to be the man who loves my wife or my children better than any other man on the planet.

I can be distinctive and excellent in the place where God has put me. They know the first bit, imperfect as I am. Just thought I'd better put that in.

Faith in Jesus Christ brings with it a very distinctive work ethic. Whether we are in paid or unpaid employment or whether our vocation is nurturing a family or going to school, being at uni, working hard, whatever it is there, the ethical view that we should drive us comes from the mouth of Jesus himself.

[7 : 52] When he was asked what the greatest commandment in the Bible was, he gave two. Matthew 22. Jesus said, Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind.

This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it, you shall love your neighbour as yourself. all the law and the prophets, all the scriptures hang on these two commandments.

And those commandments say that relationships are at the heart of Christian living. Keller's book tells the story of a woman who left a highly paid job to work in her local church.

She co-wrote this book. And she was going on one day about all her contacts and what she was going to do and the pastor very gently said, In this business, we call them people.

So we're not bums on seats or consumers of products or resources to be redeployed or assets to be let go of.

[9 : 09] In God's sight, we are people. And the creator, God of the universe, loves us enough to invite us into relationship with himself and his love for us insists that we love one another.

So in 1 John chapter 4, this is love, not that we love God, but that he loved us and sent his son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins. Dear friends, since God so loved us, we ought to love one another.

God's love is other person-centred, sacrificial love. In love, Christ gives of himself for us. We are called to a righteousness of life where we serve others.

The word ministry means service. It's about giving without expectation of receiving. It's about asking questions like, what does it mean for me to act in the best interests of my neighbour?

It's part of what it means to live a righteous life. Keller quotes an Old Testament scholar on Proverbs and he says that the very definition of a righteous people is that they disadvantage themselves to advantage others.

[10 : 41] The wicked are willing to disadvantage the community to advantage themselves. front pages of the newspaper for the last several months.

Senior New South Wales leaders and politicians in front of legal proceedings. Their guilt is yet to be determined but one thing is really clear.

They have been looking after themselves. And in Isaiah 58 God confronts us his people over similar issues.

Verse 2 Day after day they seek me out they seem eager to know my ways as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of its God.

They ask me for just decisions and they seem eager for God to come near them. Why have we fasted and you haven't seen it?

[11 : 52] Why have we humbled ourselves and you not even noticed? And yet on the day of your fasting you do as you please and you exploit all your workers.

God's people are going to church they're doing their Bible studies they say that they're eager to know God's ways and at the same time they're exploiting their workers they might have the law on their side but they don't have God's law they're looking after themselves.

And then in 6 and 7 Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen? To loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke to set the oppressed free and to break every yoke?

Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter and when you see the naked to clothe him and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?

See instead of looking after themselves they're exhorted to love their neighbour in some very concrete ways food, clothing, shelter it's a crucial part of their witness they're a bunch of hypocrites I lived in a small rural community and it was really easy to get people to come to evangelistic events can you believe that?

[13 : 09] It was really easy to bring them in off the farms and get them to come to the events that we would run You know how it worked? Because there were some wonderful Christian bosses out there Some of the farm owners brought their workers to the events that's what they did and the workers came in deference to the boss So if your Christian says you better come to this thing in town and there's some wonderful Christian bosses and there were some lousy Christian bosses as well and the workers knew the difference the Christian bosses they all looked the same at church on Sunday they all dressed the same they all bowed and scraped and said the prayers and did everything together in church but the workers saw the way that they went about their work the other six days they experienced what it was like to be driven by their greedy self-interest for the other six days of the week so they were one person in church and they were an unrecognisably different person out there in the community and when

Christians behaved like that they just gave the unbelievers every reason to mock what those people at church are like because God doesn't make a sacred secular distinction all our life is lived before him and how we represent him and how we submit to him every day matters so who do you work for how should you go about your work Colossians chapter 3 verse 17 whatever you do whether in word or deed do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus giving thanks to God the Father through him slaves obey your earthly masters in everything and do it not only when their eyes on you and to win their favour but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord and whatever you do work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord not for men since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward it is the

Lord Christ you are serving anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong and there's no favouritism masters provide your slaves with what is right and fair because you know that you have a master in heaven and that is God's word to us to people living under the lordship of Jesus Christ if you are employed obey those who employ you in everything not just for them but because you know and serve Christ remember our work is vocational it's not about what we get out of it it's something that God calls us to and that we get paid to do as we serve another and so we do it with sincerity of heart and with reverence for the Lord this is tricky stuff because obey those who employ you in everything sorry it's tricky stuff because

I used some examples at the beginning where we could do some terrible things just following orders it could be our job to drop the gas pellets into the Nazi ovens and I'm not sure I want to say something like that is a job that you do to the glory of God and sometimes an employer will demand that you break God's law and that will bring a crisis of conscience because you have to prioritise your masters when Jesus was talking about money in the sermon on the mount he said in Matthew 6 no one can serve two masters either he will hate the one and love the other or he will be devoted to the one and he will despise the other you cannot serve both God and money but in the ordinary course of life and employment this passage is saying go about it with your eyes on

Christ serving him and so when you get up in the night to feed little children or to change bedding for them do it with care for them and do it also because you want to honour the Lord you so want to honour the Lord in the way that you care for your children verse 17 whatever you do word or deed do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus and to those of us who have responsibility for people if you have oversight of other people's employment or work the message is very similar do what is right and fair because you have a master in heaven that you are accountable to so verse 23 whatever you do work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord not for men live for an audience of one live for the

[18 : 42] Lord live knowing that his eyes are on us all the time and that sets us free from all the other sets of eyes that have expectations of us God calls us to exclusive service of him above all 2 Corinthians 5 says we make it our goal to please him but it doesn't mean hard labor he calls us to serve him in whatever it is we do with all our heart Keller says that Jesus is the only boss who will not work you into the ground the only boss who does not need your best performance in order to be satisfied with you because his work for you is finished we rest on the finished work of Christ God gave work dignity in Genesis 2 he finished his creative work and then he rested and now we as believers are able to rest only because

God's redemptive work was finished when Christ cried it is finished on the cross of Calvary and so we are set free to rest because of his work at the beginning of this wonderful book it said we are to express our relationship with God and his grace to us in the way that we speak and work and lead not as perfect exemplars but as pointers to Christ do you hear the comfort of that that we do our work whatever it is in the name of Jesus Christ we make it our goal to please him but we are not the perfect saviour that destroys perfectionism we live and we work to point to our perfect saviour I've just reread Genesis 12 to 15 the lives of the patriarchs

Abraham Isaac Jacob the fathers of God's people in the Old Testament men who God made the greatest of promises to and promises that God kept and that he ultimately fulfilled in Jesus Christ and you go back and you read those chapters and you see that family life for each one of them was dysfunctional and sometimes downright embarrassing cowardly acts liars big problems with their kids and their wives they played favourites there was jealousy there was planned murder there was kidnapping and selling into slavery it was all there and you do not read those chapters for moral example and instruction you read a story of God's faithfulness to people who kept being reminded to trust in his promises they lived their broken lives against the background of God's faithfulness God's protection God's care he made them safe Keller finishes his book telling the story of the movie chariots of fire it's an old one now for any of you who are younger the contrast of two men running in the 1924

Olympic games in Paris Harold Abrahams a Jew intensely wanted to win he was full of insecurity about his efforts he literally ran to justify his existence Eric Liddell a Christian had such deep rest in Christ that he could say no to a likely gold medal he refused to run on the Sunday when his best event was being run Abrahams was desperate to get the medal because he was doing the work beneath the work he was desperate for acknowledgement and affirmation to be on top and it still never gave him the deep rest that he sought Liddell didn't care whether he won Olympic medals or not he was at rest he told his sister that God had simply made him fast and that when I run I feel his pleasure his work was to run with joy and to delight in the one who gave him the gifts to be able to run into your work delighting in the one who gave you the gifts to be able to do what you do do run to him who invites us to rest in his saving work run to

Jesus who said come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls for my yoke is easy and my burden is light amen areonnn born and we in in there is uh to