

# Contented Work

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Date: 23 June 2013

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[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning everyone. You've done well to come out on a morning like this morning, but it's great to be here and a tremendous amount of encouragement in Christ to be his people together. When Wendy was... I chose the Bible reading, but when she was reading that Isaiah reading, 25 years ago I was a student minister at Currajong and I was in the old church with wooden floors like this and being a student felt like I needed to colour my sermon even more than what the ministers would normally do.

So I brought my axe into church and at the moment when you raise the axe, you know, the king of Assyria is just an instrument in my hand, I put it down on the pulpit, slipped off and went bang on the floor. And I don't think they remember anything else about the sermon except what happened with the axe that morning.

Anyway, let's pray. Thank you, Father, for bringing us together. Father, please warm our hearts, strengthen our hearts from your word this morning.

Grow us in Christ and grow us in a mindset that helps us in thinking who we are as believers, especially in the work that we do. And we pray this in Jesus' name. Amen.

One of our church family spoke to me a few weeks ago about their employment and they told me what life was like in their workplace as a believer.

[ 1 : 27 ] And you'd have to say their work for them is like, is probably like a love-hate relationship with the emphasis being more on hate.

They work with a persecuting boss who has a particular set of prejudices towards Christians. Their boss has been exposed to pretty terrible hypocrisy of churches as their boss has gone about their work.

They've seen it and had to bear with it. And because of that, his boss's attitude towards our brother may well affect his ability to progress in his workplace because they've summed him up and applied their mind to what they think about him in the light of their experience of Christians.

And yet at the same time before his boss became his boss, he had been given great responsibility in his work. He has oversight of a number of people. He told me about two women in particular that were causing grief and dysfunction in the office.

They literally hated one another. He picked his moment. He'd been praying about it. He went to one of the women and he said, I want to ask you to do something that I think you'll find very difficult.

[ 2 : 50 ] You aren't too busy at present. That woman over there, she's quite overloaded. Not now, but later when I'm not looking.

Would you go to her and ask her if there's anything that you can do to help her and ease her load? Short story.

Later on, he saw from a distance her do what he'd asked to go to that woman. They shared the work. A friendship has grown to the point now where they meet each other for coffee and for lunch. Our brother exercised a reconciling influence for good in his workplace. And he wasn't trying to blow his own trumpet.

But for him, that was a moment of deep satisfaction in an otherwise difficult job. And I think it's all there in that story in his workplace, in his experience.

[ 4 : 00 ] Work is toilsome. It is burdensome. It gets distorted. He works hard against trying to make it into an idol. And yet there are moments of triumph and joy and satisfaction which are the consequence of the profound influence of Jesus Christ.

The writer of Ecclesiastes was correct when he said in chapter 5, verse 18, I realised that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labour under the sun during the few days of life that God's given him because that's his lot.

And moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work, this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart. Now the last few weeks while we've been preaching this series, we've seen a number of things about work.

We have seen that work has dignity because it is part of God's creative purposes for us. We've seen that work is different from employment.

[ 5 : 27 ] It may include employment but it certainly includes the work of life such as raising families, nurturing grandchildren, serving our community. It's vocational and when we use the word vocational, we've been saying we are called to work by someone or for someone.

So work is not about us and a means to our own ends. For a believer, work is service of God and also service of the person who calls us to work for them.

We've also seen that work has become toilsome as a direct result of God's judgment in Genesis 3. We've seen that it is easily distorted when we make an idol of it.

The things that we idolise can be good of themselves. We're not saying that wealth is wrong or children are wrong or esteem is wrong or opportunity is wrong. But we're saying that these things become idols when we allow them to displace Jesus Christ as Lord in our life when they become the ultimate purpose of our work.

And so work in a fallen world can look pretty hopeless and what I want to do today is preach about finding contentment in our work. How can we experience work as God's good gift?

[ 7 : 01 ] How do we cope with the difficulty and the toilsome nature of work? How do we work without distorting it into an idol that we give our life to? Tim Keller's book, which is Every Good Endeavour.

We've got a couple more copies there in the foyer. They've been disappearing off the resource stand. There's two there if you want to get one. I want to follow his book this morning in two directions in particular.

I want to look at the world with a gospel set of glasses. And secondly, I want us to see the world as a place where God continually impacts the lives of everyone whether they are a believer or an unbeliever.

Whether we recognise it or not, everybody has a world view, a lens through which we look at the world and make sense of what is happening around us. And most of us are full of logical inconsistencies.

So the scientific naturalist who views the world as a mechanism and sees people as animals, they will argue for and they will marvel at concepts like the survival of the fittest and natural selection where the strong do away with the weak.

[ 8 : 17 ] and then they will be aggrieved when somebody murders the professor in their faculty or their wife or their child. They will be outraged that someone of high value to them is done away with by someone of lower value in terms of their own ethical framework.

their value system is in conflict with their mechanistic understanding of life. And their value system just does not add up.

You see, if there's no moral ultimate accountability then why wouldn't I sleep with your wife, murder you, take your estate, I'd just be, I'd need to be stronger of course, but I'd just be asserting myself as stronger and fitter than you and there would be no moral consequences to my action.

But the Bible has an entirely different lens through which we view life. So when King David slept with Uriah's wife, murdered Uriah, then took Bathsheba to be his own wife, he soon discovered that the God of his forefathers was displeased with what he had done and God brought justice and accountability to bear on David.

So I want to say that the Bible presents a very coherent world view. It's built around the reality that there is a creator God of the universe.

[ 9 : 50 ] Jesus is Lord of the universe. Colossians chapter 1 says that all things were created by him and for him. So even today, this morning in Sydney, Jesus continues his work intervening in his creation as he sees fit.

And that truth echoes to the very core of our being whether we believe in God or not. Psalm 19, where Sam was a little while ago with the kids, declared, Psalm 19 says, the heavens declare the glory of God, the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

This stupendously intricate and marvellous universe points to something even more glorious beyond it, its creator who spoke it into being in the first place.

Romans holds everyone culpable for what we do know about God. Not what we don't know about God, but what we do know about God. So verse 18 says, the wrath of God is being revealed from heaven against all the godlessness and wickedness of men who suppress the truth by their wickedness.

Since what may be known about God is plain to them because God has made it plain to them. For since the creation of the world, God's invisible qualities, his eternal power, his divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood from what has been made so that people are without excuse. [11:21] You get a great example of this when you look at Isaiah 10. The Assyrian emperor thinks that he is king of the world and from the world's point of view he is.

He is the unchallenged superpower of the world 2,500 years ago. He doesn't believe in God. He helps himself to one country after another.

He conquers all before him. And he's a haughty boaster about his work. So verses 13, 14.

By the strength of my hand I've done this. By my wisdom because I have understanding I removed the boundaries of nations.

I plundered their treasures. Like a mighty one I subdued their kings. As one reaches into a nest so my hand reached for the wealth of the nations. As men gather abandoned eggs so I gathered all the countries not one flapped a wing or opened its mouth to church.

[12:20] Isn't he the greatest? He thinks so. So for the king it's all about him his desires his achievements he does a big work as a king and his world view does not include God at all he doesn't believe in him.

And the problem for him and for you and for me is a very inconvenient truth that just because you don't believe in God doesn't mean he tucks his tail between his legs and goes away rejected and shamefaced.

And in Isaiah 10 God answers the king of Assyria's boast and he says woe to him I send him I dispatch him I have purposes for him Verse 15 does the axe raise itself above him who swings it He might be the greatest king with the most modern army but he does not operate outside of God's purposes for his creation the king of Assyria is a tool in God's hands and he had better recognise it. And so a Bible worldview is that it doesn't matter how big or important you are in your life's work or your field of endeavour we are accountable to God and our work our achievements only occur with God's permission and for his pleasure.

A gospel worldview also recognises the lordship of Jesus Christ The apostle puts it very succinctly in 1 Corinthians 15 By this gospel you are saved if you hold firmly to the word I preach to you otherwise you have believed in vain For what I received I passed on to you as of first importance that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures that he was buried that he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and that he appeared to Peter and then to the twelve and on and on it goes so it's a word which is preached we participate in this preached word through belief it's received and then we are able to pass it on so Christ died according to the scriptures he was buried he was raised on the third day according to the scriptures and then he appeared to witnesses including me and we've got this great picture of God taking the initiative we're spectators to what God has done we participate by belief and then becoming part of the process of transmission passing it on but when we believe the gospel we take on this new set of glasses for viewing the world for looking at God's world we begin to see the world through

[15:27] God's eyes and we see our place in his purposes so Philippians chapter 2 therefore God God exalted Jesus to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow in heaven and on earth and under the earth and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father we come to understand that the risen Lord Jesus Christ the risen Jesus Christ is Lord of the universe and everybody is ultimately accountable to him and it matters it does matter how we live and how we go about our life's work Jesus spoke to believers his disciples in the sermon on the mount he said you are the salt of the earth you are the light of the world in my community group the other night one of the group members described standing with dignity and saying nothing when they were ridiculed by a co-worker in front of others in the middle of their workplace for what they believed just stood there and took it another person spoke about how

God began to trust them with very personal confidences because of the way that they went about their work and you've got this picture you've got toil you've got toil trouble distortion and you've also got these glorious moments as well it's not helpful to draw lines between word and deed living under the lordship of Christ will be noticed people will notice when we live lives accountable to Christ people will see us refuse to take ethical shortcuts they observe how we speak about other people they watch how we work under pressure they see what we do when we make mistakes they're affected when they see us take responsibility for things that we do wrong people watch and they test to see if our actions are consistent with our words and that will often lead to opportunities to speak about our faith and your work environment might be very tough for you at present sleepless looking after sick children pressured unfairly in your workplace crushed by people's expectations of your performance or perhaps a real mistake by you has led to very significant consequences gospel glasses help us to see the lordship of Christ transcending every place of work or profession to see our accountability to him to hold on to his promises of providential care for us to understand that we live and breathe under his undeserved grace Timothy Keller gives an example in his book of a gospel glasses change he says this is a quote in higher education in the United States today is the modern idea of meritocracy and the belief that those who get into the best universities deserve to be there because they are the best and the brightest and I suspect that that sort of thinking resonates up and down the north shore of Sydney we don't like acknowledging wealth and privilege we think in terms of what we deserve we rate ourselves or our children or our grandchildren in accordance with UAI's even if we have paid tens of thousands of dollars on schooling and coaching for the result that we want and Keller contrasts that with the thinking of the Protestant forefathers who established the leading universities in the United States the Ivy League universities he says the founders of those universities were strident Protestants who believed that the mark of salvation was not high self-esteem but humbling awareness of one's lowliness in the eyes of God and those whom God favours are granted grace not for any worthiness of their own but because of God's unmerited mercy our profession of faith is Jesus Christ is Lord and it must be accompanied by a humility of heart in the lives of his people humble authenticity is a very high value for us at St. Paul's because it is an absolutely necessary response to the lordship of the risen Lord Jesus Christ but it's a confusing world isn't it not everyone acknowledges the true ultimate reality which is the lordship of Christ the world's not short of unbelievers believers and unbelievers both experience the common grace of Christ rain falls on the farms of both believers and unbelievers when I lived in Weewa trouble didn't discriminate either floods went through the farms of believers and unbelievers it didn't sort of think oh hang on he's been in church and he's really active we'll go that way went straight through and insects don't stay on one property they cross the fence to the neighbour as well they don't have this special sign saying protected by God farming is hard work for some it becomes an idol and then sometimes there are the most enjoyable moments when rain falls at just the right time you get a rest from irrigation you get extra yield in your crop it's good to live out in the bush you see it believers and unbelievers live under the common grace of God in a fallen world and the impacts can look really confusing an unbelieving mother can be a deeply loving and capable carer of her children a believing mother can get postnatal depression and be quite neglectful an unbelieving scientist can use his God given ability and unravel the marvels of DNA the man or the woman who serves you in the coffee shop may be living a notoriously immoral life and they may make the best coffee you get anywhere and in your workplace you do your work to the best of your ability and it's just the truth that many of the unbelievers around you are more capable than you are one of my relatives who wasn't expressing faith in

[ 23 : 38 ] Christ was much quicker at turning the television off than me when something inappropriate was showing you see unbelievers can do good things they can be considerate they can be loving they can be selfless they can make brilliant discoveries they can be blown away by a majestic sunrise they can marvel at the photographs of the universe that the Hubble telescope beams back they can be generous in helping a neighbour with cancer they can mind their children they can make them a meal they can treat you with complete integrity when they ask you out on a date they can excel at HSC and university exams they can be good carpenters and electricians and childcare workers who wouldn't even think to molest a child you see you can be all those good things you can love and serve other people without confessing

Jesus Christ as Lord and it's confusing when I was at Moore College I did a hospital orientation course at Royal Prince Alfred Hospital for a week and one afternoon we as a group were introduced to a lovely man in his 70s a professor of psychiatry an active salvation army officer a very firm Christian and so it was great to ask him one of my many questions and in particular if you need psychiatric help do you look for a Christian one and he instantly replied you look for a good one you need a good one you see believers do not have a monopoly on truth God has given us gospel glasses which help us to make sense of

God's creation when unbelievers discover anything which is true about this world they are discovering God's truth truth they are unravelling a little bit more of his mind and the intricacies of our maker they're not giving him the glory but they are discovering truth and friends I think that leads us to a few places we should be especially guarded against our own arrogance to presume that Christians know more or better about a field of endeavour is arrogant and foolish gospel glasses help us to see the gifts and insights that God has given even to unbelievers and to learn from them we should be quick to express gratitude when gratitude is deserved the man who serves you at

Bunnings and goes out of his way to show you another way to do the job he is worthy of our thanks our cleaners at church aren't just the paid help they work hard to clean up after our mess be grateful thank God that he allows men and women to serve one another with their talents and their gifts and service which ultimately come from his hand I listen to Catherine some of you won't even know what I'm talking about I'll just try I listen to Catherine Jenkins sing with the Mormon Tabernacle Choir on the internet as I prepared this message somebody sent me the link and you know my first question is I'm not sure I want to listen to that I don't like what they teach about Christ but as I listen to the music I have it is stunningly beautiful believers and unbelievers live in

God's world under his ordinary providential care for believers and unbelievers our work is toilsome distorted and occasionally a joy that brings wonderful contentment and when it does it is God's gift we differ in our acknowledgement of God believers humbly confess Jesus Christ as Lord Ecclesiastes 5 again when God gives any person wealth and possessions and enables him to enjoy them to accept his lot and to be happy in his work this is a gift of God he seldom reflects on the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart see believers hold what we have from God's hand with gratitude and contentment and hope grateful to him for what he has given us to do gratitude but also grateful to

[ 29 : 30 ] God for the people around us believers and unbelievers who use their God given gifts and talents to serve us so live like that with gratitude gratitude I actually think if we if we live like that with gratitude to those around us that we will have many opportunities to speak and declare the hope that we have in our wonderful risen Lord Jesus Christ so I want to say this morning go from here full of humble authenticity full of gratitude to God for the work that he has given us and make it a mark of this week to be grateful to God for those who serve you and make sure that you express gratitude to them as well

Amen