

Making Good Work

Introduction

- We are continuing in our Fruitfulness on the Frontline series

Slide 1: Making Good Work

- This's week's topic is on work
- I think Pastor Jonathan's asked me to preach on this topic because
 - He thinks I have a lot of work experience, or
 - He thinks I am a good worker with a good reputation, or
 - He thinks I must have something really wise and insightful to say on this topic
- It is probably true that I have a lot of work experience
 - I've been working for almost 30 years as a software and systems engineer, building products for the Department of Defense
- It is also probably true that I have a good reputation at work
 - I've been at my current company for over 20 years
 - My company puts me on their most difficult projects, because they think I will make a positive difference
 - I have to admit that I have a really nice job:
 - My work is interesting
 - I get paid more than enough
 - It is safe and secure
 - I'm pretty cheery at work as you can see here from some photos I sneaked out of work a couple of months ago

Slide 2: Anthony Happy At Work

- But I'm not sure that I have something wise and insightful to say about work

Slide 3: Blank

- But because I've put my faith in Jesus Christ, because I am a Christian, I think that God's Word, the Bible, has something really wise and insightful to say about work
- And as I prepared to give this week's message, I found that what the Bible says about work is incredibly rich and transforming
 - I've got a lot to learn about work, especially as I think about my career moving forward
- So this sermon is as much for me as I hope it is for you
- Let's go to God in prayer and ask Him to open up the scriptures to us
- **PRAY**

I. Biblical Theology of Work

- I want us to start with a basic Biblical understanding of work, or the rest of today's message won't make much sense.
- As a review, back on May 22, Pastor Jonathan preached on "Why is Everything Broken", and there he explained from Genesis, the first book of the Bible, what God planned for work
- We won't have time to turn to each Bible verse as I summarize what we learned from that sermon, so feel free to just listen along
 - If you are interested in following up later, you can go to our website, CornerstoneWestford.com, and download Jonathan's sermon or today's sermon notes

I.1 Work is...Good and Part of God's Character

Slide 4: Work is good and part of God's character

- Genesis 1:1: In the beginning God **created** the heavens and the earth.
- Genesis 1:31a: God saw all that **he had made, and it was very good.**
- Genesis 2:1b-3: By the seventh day God had finished the **work** he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his **work**. Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the **work** of creating that he had done.
- We see that God's hard work, creating everything out of nothing, was very good
- We know hard work has goodness in it.
 - We say things like "good job!"

I.2 Work is...One of God's Good Gifts to Man

Slide 5: Work is one of God's good gifts to man

- Man's work was to be noble, royal, and strong:
 - Genesis 1:28: ²⁸ God blessed them and said to them, "Be fruitful and increase in number; **fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.**"
- Man's work was to be aesthetic, fulfilling, and nurturing:
 - Genesis 2:15: The LORD God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden **to work it and take care of it.**
- Man's work was to be interesting and creative:
 - Genesis 2:19: Now the LORD God had formed out of the ground all the wild animals and all the birds in the sky. He brought them to the man **to see what he would name them;** and whatever the man called each living creature, that was its name.
- We see that man was made for good meaningful interesting work

- We feel good when we accomplish something, especially if it was difficult, and took a lot of effort or creativity

I.3 Work was...Made More Difficult Because of Sin

Slide 6: Work made more difficult because of sin

- When Adam sinned in the Garden of Eden, when he obeyed the sinful suggestion of the serpent, of Satan, one of the consequences was a curse on work
 - Genesis 3:17-19 To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ **“Cursed is the ground** because of you; through **painful toil** you will eat food from it all the days of your life. It will produce **thorns and thistles** for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the **sweat of your brow** you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”
- So work was made difficult as a consequence of disobedience

I.4 The Work of Jesus was...To Rescue Us from Sin

Slide 7: The work of Jesus was to rescue us from sin

- Even in the midst of the curse, God made a promise to Adam and Eve that through their descendants, there would be one who would come to defeat Satan
 - Someone who by his work would defeat sin, and in the process receive what looked like a fatal blow
 - That promise was made true in Jesus Christ, when He came, lived a perfect sinless life, died on the cross for sins he didn’t commit, and then rose from the grave
- Jesus had a lot to say about work, and he talked about the work he himself was doing:
 - Mark 10:45: For even the Son of Man (what Jesus called himself) did not come to be served, but **to serve**, and to **give his life as a ransom for many**.
- Jesus’ work was to save us. And he was successful in this work.

II. Work Has a God-Centered Meaning for Christian Believers

- All that was background
- We are now going to dive deeper and look at the meaning of work, especially for Christian believers
- The point of this section is that **work has a God-centered meaning for Christian believers**

II.1 Work Is God's Way of Blessing The World

Slide 8: Work is God's way of blessing the world

- I'm borrowing some ideas from Martin Luther's commentaries on the scriptures, so I can't take credit for this, but let's first consider how God blesses us through work
 - Psalm 145:15: The eyes of all look to you, and you give them their food at the proper time.
 - When Luther read this verse he was thinking about the question: 'How does God give us food at the proper time? How do we get our food? Where does it come from?'
 - Luther's answer to that question, for how it would apply to us in Westford and the surrounding towns, goes something like this:
 - Farmer -> Grain -> Truck -> Mill -> Flour -> Baker -> Bread -> Market Basket or Whole Foods-> Toaster -> Breakfast
 - There is a chain of connection used for God to deliver us food
 - Psalm 147:13-14: He strengthens the bars of your gates and blesses your people within you. ¹⁴He grants peace to your borders and satisfies you with the finest of wheat.
 - Again, reading these verses, Martin Luther was thinking about questions such as: 'How do we have peace, safety, and order in our house? In our community? In our town?'
 - For us in Westford, the answer goes like:
 - Elected officials -> City councils -> laws and ordinances and budgets -> police & fire fighters -> safe neighborhoods
 - Employers -> employees/taxpayers -> government -> contractors -> roads,
 - -> air traffic control systems -> safe air flight
 - Do you see how every job, every service or product, is part of a big chain that leads to your breakfast, or leads to your comfort and safety?
 - Luther saw this connection, and he realized that everyone's work, every job, was really a "calling" or what he called a "vocation" that was part of God's big design of blessing
 - Tim Keller is the pastor Redeemer Presbyterian in NYC and he also founded the Center for Faith and Work (CFW) (<http://www.faithandwork.com/about/1-what-why>)
 - Pastor Keller explains this idea in an article called "Your Work Matters", saying

Slide 9: Masks of God

- “And so we see what Luther meant by God’s vocation. Not only are the most modest jobs — like plowing a field or digging a ditch — the “masks” through which God cares for us, but so are the most basic social roles and tasks, such as voting, participating in public institutions, and being a father or mother.”

Slide 10: God milks the cows through the vocation of the milk maids

- “These are all God’s callings, all ways of doing God’s work in the world, all ways through which God distributes his gifts to us. Even the humblest farm girl is fulfilling God’s calling. As Luther preached, ‘God milks the cows through the vocation of the milk maids.’”
(<http://goodnewsmag.org/2013/09/your-work-matters/>)
- Did you hear that reference to “masks”? This was Luther’s idea that everyone’s vocation, our day to day jobs, are all masks that God chooses to hide behind in the world, as He is behind the scenes sending His blessings to us
 - He could of given you food and shelter by having it just appear in front of you
 - Instead, He uses people, and their jobs to provide these things to you, and to bless you through it
 - God is hiding behind those jobs, those masks, but He is there, blessing you, through people and their work
- This is a radically different way to view work – as God’s way to use others to bless us
- So I want to pause for a moment and let this point sink in

Slide 11: Work matters to God, because through it He is blessing the world

- God is using work, and the people who do it, as his instrument for blessing
- You may think you are getting your daily bread at Whole Foods Market, but God is the one who is at work to get it to you
 - And He is using a long chain of people and their work to deliver that blessing to you
- So, how does this view impact the way we should view our work, how we should do it, how we should think of it?

II.2 Christians Should Work Well, As For The Lord (In Order to Bless and Love Others)

- We finally get to today’s text. (That was a super long background and introduction)

Slide 12: Christians should work well as for the Lord

- The Apostle Paul is speaking to the Christians at Colossae, in Asia Minor, what is now modern-day Turkey, and he says this:
- Colossians 3:22: Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything...
- Let me stop and acknowledge the first objection we might have with today's text
 - This is a bit of a side-point, but we have to address it now or we'll miss the rest of the message
- It says "Slaves..."
 - Some people take a passage like this and say "see, the Bible condones slavery; it is a bad book"
 - I don't have time to get into it completely today, but if you research the slavery of Paul's day, if you look up Greco-Roman slavery, you'll see that it was evil of course, but quite different from what we think of today
 - Wasn't based on race
 - Wasn't permanent
 - Wasn't based on kidnapping
 - Slaves had rights
 - Not as brutal as what it became during the time of the African slave trade
 - If you look in context of this letter, Paul was speaking to entire households here:
 - Wives, husbands, children, fathers, slaves, masters
 - He point wasn't to talk about or condone slavery; rather he was speaking to the entire household, how were they to live as Christians in their daily lives
 - In fact, Paul addresses the slaves before talking to the masters
 - With dignity
 - This is quite unlike other writers of the time who never talked to the slaves when writing about how households should behave
- So with this objection about slavery out of the way, let's get back to the main point.
- It says, "Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord."
- Paul is teaching that the hardest of workers, the bondservants or slaves, should work even when no one is looking, and should do it with sincerity, revering God
- Now I said I have a pretty good job, and one of the reasons is that I often work with and for people who I respect
- But not everyone is in this situation
- You might have a terrible abusive boss
- Your work and your circumstances might really make you feel like you are a literal slave, with no choices, with no options

- If so, this passage is speaking to you.
- It says to obey your earthly master, and work with sincerity of heart in reverence for the Lord
- The passage continues:
 - Vs 23-24: Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, ²⁴since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.
- Paul says we should do our work well, sincerely because we are doing it for the Lord.
 - Our work is for God, because, as we said earlier, it is His way of blessing others.
 - He is our boss, because He has a purpose for our work, to bless others.
- So of course we should do it with excellence. With “sincerity of heart”. With “all our heart.”
- If we do our work well, we will be fulfilling the command to love our neighbors.
- But it is so easy to cut corners, to do work halfway because we think no one is watching, or that we won’t get caught.
- I want to share one example about this that happened to me this year
 - Many of you know that Andrew and I went on a hiking adventure in Siberia this summer
 - Andrew and I prepared carefully, and we really had a great time, seeing God’s work, His creation in a remote part of the world
 - I want to show you some pictures, as this was so beautiful to me

Slide 13, 14, 15, 16: Hiking in Siberia

- Now as part of a long multi-day hike in the forest we were scheduled to reach the shore of Lake Baikal on a certain day
 - We were supposed to be picked up by boat at that time so that we could go to our next destination
- I was a little worried about this boat. Would it show up? Or would we be stranded on the beach, out of contact with the rest of the world, waiting for rescue?

Slide 17: The boat arrives

- Amazingly, the boat, with its official flag flying, arrived exactly on time, and picked us up
- This was going to be an example of excellent work and a blessing, right?
- Unfortunately, no.

Slide 18: The captain

- When it came time to pay, our captain charged us one price, but gave us a receipt for a lower price
 - My friend Misha, our guide, quietly explained to us that this was probably so that the captain and his crew could pocket the difference as extra pay
- This boat ride was supposed to be a blessing to us. We got picked up on time and we got delivered to exactly where we needed to go
 - But all I can think about is the extra money that went into the captain's pockets, that it seemed to be done dishonestly
 - It ruins my memory of this boat ride.
 - It was supposed to be a positive experience, but for me it is a negative
- Now lest we get too proud, I think you and I, like that captain, also cut corners all the time
- More than we would ever admit:
 - We take stuff from work when the boss isn't looking
 - We come in late and leave early
 - We don't give our best work
 - We grumble and complain
- And even though we don't see it, when we do these things, we are robbing someone else of the blessing that our work was supposed to do
 - Just like I felt like that captain robbed me of my good experience on the boat
 - We fail to love our neighbor when we don't work as for the Lord
- So let's sum up this important point by focusing on the positive

Slide 19: God matters to your work, and you should do it excellently, in order to love your neighbors

II.3 All Work, All Jobs, Are Part of God's Blessing

- So let's finish out today's passage

Slide 20: All work, all jobs, are part of God's blessing

- Since work is part of God's way of blessing us and others, and as we do it we are really actually loving our neighbors, it turns out there is no distinction between jobs in God's Kingdom
 - 3:25: ²⁵Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.
- It says that anyone who does wrong will be repaid for it
 - That means that there are consequences when we don't do our work well
- It also says there is no favoritism with God

- So it doesn't matter whether you are powerful or weak, there is a price to be paid if you do your work poorly
- 4:1: Masters, provide your slaves with what is right and fair, because you know that you also have a Master in heaven.
 - It says that not just slaves, but Masters are also to do their work fairly, including providing for their workers, their slaves, because ultimately everyone has a Master in heaven
- No matter what your job, whether you're the boss and someone else is the worker, or whether you're the worker and someone else is the boss, God wants you to do your work fairly, honestly, well, and with excellence.
- No matter whether your job is prestigious in the eyes of the world or not, God wants to use it to bless others, and through that, help you fulfill your call to love your neighbor
 - Don't ever think that your well-paying job makes you better than the janitor who makes minimum wage
 - This is a message to me
 - Don't ever think that your "ordinary" job (in the world's eyes) is going to be used by less by God than someone else's high-profile position
 - God says there is no favoritism
- The same is true in the church
 - Don't let anyone tell you that "church" work is more of a calling than so-called "ordinary" work
 - During the Protestant Reformation, Martin Luther, John Calvin, and other reformers were at the forefront of trying to change the attitude that certain work like being a priest or a monk or a missionary was "sacred" or "holy" or "spiritual", while all other work was "secular"
- The Reformers realized that the Bible taught differently:
 - 1 Peter 2:9 But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, God's special possession, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light.
- We quote this verse a lot in our church leadership meetings
 - It says every believer is a priest, every believer is royal or kingly, every believer is like a prophet, placed in their particular job or circumstance to declare truth about God in the world
- So even if you are not 100% happy in your job, regardless of whether you are a church worker or some other type of worker, God has you there, for a holy purpose, to declare His praises
- Sure, God might call you to be a missionary in Haiti
 - But He just as likely might call you to stay in your current job as a carpenter, a nurse, a child care worker, whatever
- Our Fruitfulness on the Frontline book puts it this way:
 - "The most mundane action can carry the fragrance of Christ." (p. 94)

Slide 21: Granny

- I will share one more example from this summer where I saw in action this principle of all jobs being able to be a source of blessing
 - This is Nina, the granny of my Russian friend Misha
 - Andrew and I met her as part of our trip to Siberia
 - Even though Nina is very old, and has lost a leg to diabetes, and lives in a house with no running water or toilet, she somehow has the ability to make a cherry jam that to me is just out of this world
 - She gave Andrew and I each a full liter jar of jam to bring back to America with us.
 - Have you ever seen a liter of jam? It is extravagant.

Slide 22: Granny and jam

- Here is a picture of the jam in my fridge. It's almost all gone in this picture.
- I felt God's good blessing with every spoonful of jam from that jar
 - This jam was made with excellence.
- Granny may not have realized it at the time, but her making jam, what the world might see as just ordinary work, has been part of a daily blessing to me for the last 10 weeks. 10 weeks of blessings!
 - It is such a blessing to me, that I want to share it with you today, so that she will be recognized, half a world away
 - Patt and I put the last of the cherry jam in some yogurt parfait snacks for you
 - Don't leave without having at least a little taste
 - They'll be next to the welcome center in the back
 - Taste God's blessings!
- The point is, that any job, even making jam, can be used by God to distribute His blessings
- Which means we should do our job tomorrow or on Monday just like Granny did hers
 - With excellence.
 - To love our neighbors.
 - We should say at our jobs: "Today I serve the Lord"

III. But How Can We Work For The Lord?

- Well this new Biblical perspective on work is great, realizing that
 - Work is God's way of blessing the world
 - Christians should work well, to love our neighbors
 - All work, all jobs, are part of God's blessing
- But how do we do it?
- I'm going to give you three quick things that I think will help.

Slide 23: God prepared us to do good work

III.1 Realize that... God Prepared Us To Do Good Work

- In the letter to the Ephesians, Paul speaks as if working this way, working for the Lord, with sincerity of heart, is our destiny

Slide 24: Ephesians 2:10

- Ephesians 2:10
 - For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which **God prepared in advance for us to do.**
- Your good works that you should do are waiting for you. They have been prepared by your Heavenly Father, specifically for you. What you are doing is not random. It is part of a giant tapestry of blessings.

III.2 We can put on a New Attitude Toward Work

Slide 25: We can put on a new attitude

- To do our work as for the Lord, with sincerity of heart, might seem to be beyond what we can do in our sinful human flesh
- It requires a new attitude
- Which is why Paul says in:

Slide 26: Ephesians 4:22-24

- Ephesians 4:22-24
 - You were taught, with regard to your former way of life, to put off your old self, which is being corrupted by its deceitful desires; ²³ to be made new in the attitude of your minds; ²⁴ and to **put on the new self, created to be like God in true righteousness and holiness.**
- Our natural desire is to cut corners. To slack off. To not do our best to bless others
- But the Bible says there is a new self in Christ, that we can put on, and it changes our attitude. It makes us truly righteous, truly holy.
- How do we get this new self? What is it about?

III.3 The New Self Is Possible Because Jesus Did the Ultimate Work For Us

Slide 27: Jesus did the ultimate work for us

- It is Christ's righteousness, claimed by faith in the Gospel
- In God's eyes, we already are God's good workers, holy, righteous, because of Christ

Slide 28: Colossians 1:22

- Colossians 1:22
 - But now he has reconciled you by Christ's physical body through death **to present you holy in his sight**, without blemish and free from accusation.

Slide 29: Christians do good work because Jesus did the greatest work

Conclusion

- The cross changes everything
- If we think that we can work hard so that God will bless us, then we have missed the gospel
- Christ did the work for us, on the cross at Calvary
- We are holy in God's eyes because when God looks at believers, he sees Jesus' perfect life
- You don't need to struggle to work hard, out of guilt, out of obligation, or because someone is watching you
- Jesus already did all the work for you
- You're free.
- Your loving Heavenly Father has given you the best gift ever: eternal salvation, with all the joys of heaven waiting for you
- So respond to God's love, and His hard work for you:
 - In freedom
 - In joy
 - In thankfulness
 - And yes, in hard work, for the Lord.
 - We can put on the new attitude of work because for us believers, there is a new life inside us that is slowly but surely making us into the workers we ought to be

Christians do good work because Jesus did the greatest work

- If you know Jesus, but you've forgotten about this new life inside you, invite Jesus Christ into your work this week.
 - Ask Jesus to give you strength and love for your neighbor to really turn your work into a blessing.
- If you want this new perspective on work, but you don't know Jesus Christ, you can start today.
 - You can ask Jesus into your life, and he'll bring you into the adventure of a lifetime. Better than an adventure in Siberia.
 - Talk to Pastor Jonathan or me after the service if you want to know more.
 - Don't let today pass you buy.

IV. Concluding Prayer

- Thanks for
 - God's Word
 - Jesus
 - The work God has given us
 - The work that is yet to come
- Holy Spirit, we invite you into our hearts and minds and lives to make today's message come alive in our work
- Blessing on the offering
- **Stay seated**
- **Joe and Jenny are going to come up to help us close in song**

Benediction

- A benediction is blessing as we leave
- I want to commission you as you go out on your work this week
 - Just like we commission, missionaries and pastors, and elders, and ministry team leads
- Please stand as I call your profession:
 - Engineers
 - Lawyers
 - People who are in Building Trades:
 - Plumbers
 - Electricians
 - Carpenters
 - Business people
 - Project managers
 - Lab technicians
 - Production line employees
 - Janitors
 - Students
 - Parents
 - Social workers
 - Healthcare professionals
 - Teachers
 - Pastors
 - Theologians
 - Stay-at-home spouses
 - Church workers
 - Missionaries
 - Retirees
 - Accountants
 - Retailers
 - Clerks
 - Food service employees

- Baristas
- Sales associates
- Project Managers
- Volunteers
- Birth Coaches
- Massage Therapists
- Quality Control Specialists
- Any professions I missed!
- You, and the work you do, are the masks behind which God is hiding, pouring out his blessings on the world
 - Ephesians 2:10 For you are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for you to do.
- Go now and love your neighbor through your work, in the blessing of the Lord Jesus Christ.
- Amen
- **Get some jam!**