

Monday Morning

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[0:00] Tonight we're going to begin a new study that's just going to be a short wee series through the month of February. The title of the series is Christians from Monday to Friday.

Now I should maybe emphasize that Monday to Friday is kind of a metaphor, not saying that we're not Christians on Saturday, but what we are focusing on is how our Christian faith applies to what we do from Monday to Friday.

For many of us that will be our jobs, but for some it will be our responsibilities at home, for others it may be involvement in the community or connections that we have with people who live near us. Basically we just want to think about the fact that Christianity is not just for Sundays, it's something that we must apply and live out from Monday to Friday.

I want to start by asking a question. You're here tonight at church, which is brilliant.

[1:11] If your colleagues walked into this room right now and if they observed you from before the service, during the service and after the service, would they see the same person that they see at work?

Are we sometimes a wee bit different from Monday to Friday as we might be on a Sunday? I remember hearing one of the most inspiring and challenging stories that I ever heard.

It's just very, very brief, but it was in reference to a minister who was one of the most well-known and hugely respected preachers of the 20th century.

I don't know if you're meant to rate preachers, but he's high. It's not me, it's not Derek either. But this person, somebody told me that they met this person's daughter and they commented on how outstanding his preaching was and how much they admired him as a person.

The daughter said, yes, but one of the amazing things was that everything he was in the pulpit he was at home.

[2:33] I thought that was an amazing statement because it's easy to be on your best behavior when you stand up here. It's more challenging during the week.

I heard another story which is kind of the opposite of that. Somebody, I'm hearing somebody speak of the fact. This was somebody who worked in a public sector job and they had involvement in dealing with the clients who would come in.

The two clients that caused the most difficulty in this organization were church leaders.

What we are from Monday to Friday really matters. It's really important. I want us to think about that together over the next few weeks. We're going to look at it in general tonight.

Then we're going to look at maybe some specific examples of individuals. Next week, all being well, we'll have a look at Priscilla and Aquila who are really interesting examples of workers in the New Testament.

[3:49] Then as we go through February, we'll look at more of the issues that arise from working. But tonight I want us to think just in more in general terms of faith and our work.

The title of the sermon tonight is Monday morning because for many of us, Monday morning means one thing, going back to work. When I say going back to work, I include that.

I mean work in the general sense. If that's school or uni or college or even back to your responsibilities at home or as part of your wider family or to the things that you're involved in, as those who are maybe retired, we're all doing stuff tomorrow morning, all of us.

Or maybe not that inclined to jump out a bed on Monday morning thinking, yes, it's Monday morning. Sometimes Monday mornings can be a bit tough.

What's the Bible got to say about that for us? Well, let's look at these verses together, verses 11 to 16. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul, keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

[5:09] We'll pick up some of the rest of the verses as we go on. First thing I want to say is something that I think that we're all aware of and it's something that we've mentioned several times, I think over the years, is that work is hard.

Now, there are so many reasons why work is a wonderful thing and it's a huge blessing to be employed or to be involved in your community or to have a home to look after.

And that's part of what God made us to do. The Catechism we looked at this morning that's in your bulletin speaks about how the fact that we're made in God's image, we're made to know Him, to love Him, to live with Him and to glorify Him.

And part of that glorifying Him is to be what He intended us to be. And if you go all the way back to the beginning of the Bible, you'll see that when God placed Adam in the Garden of Eden, He gave him a task to work at it and to keep it.

So that's a key biblical principle that work itself is not a sin, work itself is not a problem. And actually, part of paradise we're all created to be workers.

[6:20] And of course, that makes perfect sense of the fact that being unemployed is tough. And you know, people think to yourselves, you know, ah, wouldn't it be brilliant to not have to work every day?

Actually it's rubbish if you've got no work to do every day. To be unemployed is incredibly hard because we are made to work as part of what God intends for us.

So there's many ways in which work is brilliant. But the Bible also teaches us in Genesis 3 that sin brought a curse into the world. Part of that effect was to turn work into toil, ruined work.

You can see that there. God responds to Adam's sin by saying, because you listen to the voice of your wife and eating of the tree of which I told you not to eat, cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat the plants of the field by the sweat of your face. You shall eat bread till you return to the ground.

[7:27] For out of it you were taken, for you are dust and to dust you shall return. Ever since then sin has had a devastating effect on work.

So we can strive to accomplish something only for it to come to nothing. You work and work and work and work. It comes to nothing.

We can face hostility, criticism and animosity from colleagues. Sometimes the people you work with can be the people who are most horrible to you. You can face disappointments and discouragements.

So you think, oh, this is going to be a really good day and then you just get blow after blow. We can constantly be crippled by the stress and pressure of our workplace.

Or you can have the opposite problem where you struggle with boredom or a lack of satisfaction and fulfillment. And all of these reasons mean that work can be hard and that's why Monday mornings can sometimes be a bit rubbish.

[8:29] And I just remember that God knows that and that Jesus cares for the burden. He says, to come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, we can lean on Him and know that He understands that work is hard.

I've probably said this before, but one of the best prayers you can pray is just two words long. That's the prayer you know.

And on Monday morning, if you're struggling to go to work, you can say, Lord, you know. And He understands. All of this reminds us that the Bible gives us a very coherent explanation, a very logical explanation why work on a Monday morning is hard.

However, the great goal of the Bible is to undo that. That's the great story of the Bible, to undo the curse of sin. God wants to put everything right, and so that includes work.

And so part of the transforming effect of the work of Jesus Christ, part of the fact that the age to come has been inaugurated now, is that work changes for the better when you follow Jesus.

[9:48] And so for that reason, we have been reminded in 1 Peter 2 that if we truly understand God's word, now here's a challenge for you. If we truly understand God's word, then work on a Monday morning is exciting.

Very exciting. And Peter gives us two key reasons why that's the case. We'll look at them together briefly. Number one, your work, and again as I say, when I say work, I mean whatever you're doing, so if you're at home, going to school, school run, classes, whatever it is, your work is an opportunity for Christian conduct.

Look at verse 11 and 12. I urge you as soul-generated exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

There's three vital words at the start of verse 12. Among the Gentiles, Peter's writing to people who are spread all across Asia Minor, which is what we would call Turkey nowadays.

If you read at the very start of the book, you get all the different places named by Peter. He describes these believers as the dispersion.

[11:11] The Greek word is diaspora, just means those who are scattered all over the ancient world. The situation was that the Christians, they weren't all huddled together in one place in this lovely kind of Christian town.

They were scattered everywhere. That meant that these Christians were not living in a Christian nation. They were not living in a Christian community. They were living in a predominantly non-Christian society, which is why Peter describes them as soul-journeys and exiles.

They're in a place where they don't really belong. They were living in a world that was becoming increasingly hostile to the Christian faith. As Christians, they were not at home, and in many ways they did not fit in.

Which is just like you and me, isn't it, today? What's Peter going to say to them to do? You think to yourself, well, you'd maybe expect Peter to say, well, you guys should cut yourselves off from the world around you.

Loads of bad influences there. There are loads of potential problems. You should flee from that society, and you should isolate yourselves from any unhealthy influences.

[12:29] Throughout history, a lot of Christians have done that. They've created communities, buildings, or whatever, where they've done their very best to cut themselves off.

They've even done it in our Scottish culture. Maybe it's something that you see more in the Highlands and Islands, where I come from. You can see very, very, very definite lines being drawn, where people will go, where they won't go, and there's quite big barriers put up.

Peter's going to tell them to cut themselves off. You see, no, he tells them to do the complete opposites. And he's highlighting a vital point.

He's telling us that Christians must be among the Gentiles, among the people of the world. And indeed, that's what the whole chapter is about in many ways.

It's about the Christians' place in society. It talks all about honoring the emperors, serving masters, all that kind of stuff. It's all about living in the world. We are to honor those in authority.

[13:40] We're to be subject to human institutions. We're to respectfully serve our employers. Peter is saying, God wants you among the Gentiles.

He wants you among unbelievers. Jesus said exactly the same thing in the Sermon of the Mount. He spoke about us being soft and light, so we can make a real difference to the world.

We can be a light that brightens a dark world. We can be a salt that helps to flavor and preserve a world from corruption.

But he says, there's no use if you hide yourself. You don't light a light to put it under a basket. You put it on a stand so that it can be visible.

And so both Peter and Jesus are saying we need to be among the Gentiles. And they both use the same phrase to explain why this is important.

[14:36] And so I'm going to put both verses up there. So look at those two verses. Same phrase appears in both. Can you find it? This is the explanation as to why we need to be among the Gentiles.

I'm sure you've all seen it. It's so they can see you.

So God wants you out there so people will look at you and see your good deeds. God wants you to be in society.

Jesus was the outstanding example of this. He worked with people. He walked with people. He spoke to them. Town, streets, public areas, even the people who the rest of society wanted to shun, Jesus would go and talk to them.

It's all a reminder that your job, whatever you're doing tomorrow morning, is an amazing opportunity for Christian contact with the society in which we live. And whatever you're going to be doing tomorrow, you're going to be making contact with people who are not Christians.

[15:43] And as you make that contact, you are a key participant in God's purposes. This is where we have to think through our theology logically.

So one of the key things that lies in our theology is the fact that God is sovereign. God is big. God is in control. Part of that is the fact that God is the creator of everything.

Yes, absolutely. But also, coupled to that, is the fact that we believe in God's providence. So God doesn't just create the world and then leave it to do its own thing. God creates the world and He orders it according to His providence, according to His plan so that everything is placed where He wants it to be.

So that means in application to your job, what you're doing tomorrow morning is exactly where God wants you to be and where He needs you to be because there's tons of Gentiles who need to see your good works.

It all fits together perfectly in God's plan. That's why God has given you the job that you currently have. It doesn't mean you'll always have that job. He might give you another job.

[16:51] But tomorrow morning, He's got work for you to do. As Christians, on the first day of every week, we come together. We worship, we eat, we laugh, we catch up, we see one another, we encourage one another.

Then, pshh, we scatter. And God puts you in Edinburgh University or Napier or the offices where you work or the school run or the nursery or the local community that you volunteer in or whatever it is because people need to see you.

And that's why you have to remember that whatever your job is, whether you're the boss at the top or the new guy at the bottom, your role is of the utmost importance because God wants you among unbelievers.

And have you ever stopped to think about that, how much your colleagues need you among them? So we live in a world that is full of greed. So there's brutal selfishness.

It's a world of dog eat dogs, especially anyone here who's in the private sector. No mercy. No mercy at all. Google and Amazon aren't going to sort of be nice to you.

[18:08] They'll do whatever they can to make themselves bigger and make other people smaller. We live in a world of market forces, so for one to get stronger, someone else has to get weaker, it's just the way it works.

We live in a world that's saturated with a blame culture, so people are constantly looking over their shoulder because if something goes wrong, everyone wants to just pounce and blame someone.

We live in a world where the workplace will often be full of malice, deceit, hypocrisy, envy, slander, and your colleagues are grinding out their lives in that world.

And they desperately need you there. They desperately need you among them. Our society needs Christians everywhere.

That's what makes your job so exciting because you are there as a Christian. You are among them. And God is giving you a wonderful opportunity for contact with a world that desperately needs to see the light that is within you.

[19:16] So tomorrow morning is an opportunity for Christian contact. We need to be among the Gentiles. However, being among the Gentiles does not mean behaving like them.

And that brings us to our second point. Your job is an opportunity for Christian contact. Your job is also an opportunity for Christian conduct.

Look again at verse 11. Beloved, I urge you as sojourners and exiles to abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul.

Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable. Peter's telling us what we should do when we are among the Gentiles. We are to keep our conduct honorable.

Now, that word conduct is really interesting. It literally means to go about in a place. So turning about in a place. And it just conveys the idea, a broad picture of your conduct, your way of life, how you act.

[20:25] We would maybe use the phrase, how you go about yourself. Have you seen how he goes about himself? Maybe you don't use that phrase here. We use it in Lewis anyway. And just refers to someone's behavior.

It's a broad term. It's encapsulating our whole lives, our attitudes, our actions, our speech, our habits, our reactions, our day-to-day conduct.

It's a word, therefore, that applies to the normal routine of Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, and Friday. It's not unique.

It's not for special occasions. It's for your day-to-day life. God wants it to be the case that my day-to-day routine and your day-to-day routine as Christians is outstanding in its quality of behavior. That's how we should be. The word honorable there basically means good. It can also be translated noble, beautiful, excellent, right.

[21:30] It's telling us that God wants our daily routine to be a model of excellent behavior. And that inevitably involves avoiding certain habits.

Peter says that there, right there, you can see, abstain from the passions of the flesh, which wage war against your soul. So there's certain stuff we have to avoid and not do.

A little later on, Peter gives more examples of that in chapter four. You can see it there. For the time that has passed, suffices for doing what the Gentiles want to do, living in sensuality, passions, drunkenness, orgies, drinking parties, and lawless idolatry.

With respect to this, they are surprised when you do not join them in the same flood of debauchery and the malign you know. This is a really, really interesting section of scripture because you read that and you think, boy, how depraved these Gentiles of Asia Minor were.

And yet, think about the workplaces of today. Graham spoke about that. Some workplaces are really tough environments.

[22:42] So in the workplace today, how often will people talk with little or no restraint about sexual matters? That sensuality.

How often do we encounter people who have the deepest cravings for worldly possessions? They want more status, more power, more riches.

That's the passions that Peter is referring to. How often do we encounter people at work who are just living for Friday and Saturday night where they can drink to excess, party without restraint, go crazy, drunkenness, orgies, and drinking parties?

How often do we come across people who've got no thought of God and instead they're living life for idols of their own making? Peter's describing Monday morning for loads of people.

And he uses a really vivid phrase there at the end of verse four to describe it. He describes it all as a flood of debauchery. And I don't want to sound kind of all old fashioned and cranky, but I think that's a phrase that really does describe so many aspects of society today.

[24:02] You look at our newspapers, you look at our TV programs, you look at our films. There's a flood of debauchery and all of that stuff.

Not saying it's all bad, but there's a heck of a lot that's not good. And this way of life where people have abandoned themselves to reckless and moral behavior, it is seen as cool and it's seen as impressive.

And that's why people will think that you are crazy for not joining in. And God knows that, which is why Peter says they're going to be surprised when you don't join in.

They're going to speak badly of you. They'll malign you because you won't join in. And that's a reality you may have faced in the past week and that you might face this week.

You might face it at Friday lunchtime where they say, we're all going out to do whatever. Why won't you come? And you say, well, I don't want to come. And they're like, eh? You might face that.

[25:13] We want to be ready. And if we do face that, we have to ask the question, what is the correct response to this kind of situation? How do we respond to that kind of behavior?

Well, first and foremost, we don't join in. Peter said to us, abstain, you remember that. But we ask ourselves, well, what should we do?

And you think to yourself, well, maybe we should just avoid these people and keep away from them. And people might say that to you. They might say, have nothing to do with people. Don't go near them. Don't talk to them.

But I don't think that that's really the biblical instruction for us because, as Peter says, we need to be among the Gentiles. We need to be there. Another option is to condemn these people.

And sometimes, sometimes as Christians, we can do that. And so we respond to the conduct of the world around us by expressing a firm judgment over the people whose behavior we disapprove of.

[26:11] So sometimes we kind of think we're a wee bit of a moral police force, and we can be pretty critical of what others are doing.

Then I'm not convinced that that's what the New Testament tells us to do. So what should we do? What should you do at work this week if all around you you're facing a flood of debauchery?

Well the answer is actually really simple, really simple, really important. And it's back in verse 11, we are to show our good works.

I'm not going to read all of that. I'm just going to read the first four lines or so. I urge you as sojourners and exiles abstain from the passions of the flesh which wage war against your soul. Keep your conduct among the Gentiles honorable so that when they speak against you as evildoers, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day of visitation.

We are to respond to the worldly behavior around us, to the challenges that we face at work. We are to respond to that with a standard of daily conduct that is excellent.

[27:28] And as Peter expands, we are to be faithful at work as part of a society. We are to be respectful towards all those that we work with and that we work for, and we are to be an influence for good in our workplaces.

And God is reminding us all that when you go to work on Monday morning and you're surrounded by all of this stuff, you have an amazing, amazing opportunity to be different.

And through that, you can transform your workplace and you can do so much good for those who work alongside you. So you might be surrounded by people who are miserable on Monday morning tomorrow.

You can go to work and you can bring joy and enthusiasm to your office. You might be surrounded by people who feel frustrated and weary, who've maybe had a horrible weekend.

You can encourage them and show them that you care. You might be dealing with customers who are difficult and demanding. You can be patient at all times.

[28:33] You might be surrounded by colleagues who are selfish or harsh. You can be kind. You might be in an office that's full of gossip or criticism or complaining.

You can be self-controlled. And all of that is an immensely powerful witness because ultimately nobody can argue with consistent Christian conduct because by doing good, as verse 15 tells us, by doing good, you'll see in there about four lines from the bottom, by doing good, you should put to silence the ignorance of foolish people.

God wants you in the workplace so that you can be a brilliant model of Christian conduct. And at times, that may involve suffering.

That may be tough, and that was the reality for Peter's readers. But we read towards the end of the chapter words that we should hold onto when we face that situation.

And I'm not really going to comment on them. I'm just going to read them and let them just speak for themselves. For this is a gracious thing when mindful of God, one endures sorrows while suffering unjustly.

[29:58] For what credit is it if when you sin and are beaten for it, you endure? Now, think of being in the office just now or wherever you work.

But if when you do good and suffer for it, you endure, this is a gracious thing in the sight of God. For to this you have been called because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example so that you might follow in his steps.

He committed no sin. Peter was deceit found in his mouth when he was reviled. He did not revile and return when he suffered. He did not threaten, but continued in trusting himself to him who

judges justly.

He himself bore our sins in his body on the tree that we might die to sin and live to righteousness by his wounds. You have been healed for you were like sheep.

You are staying like sheep, but have now returned to the shepherd and overseer of your souls. So, yes, Monday morning can be a bit grim sometimes.

[31:01] But as a Christian, your work is such an incredibly precious thing. It's an opportunity for Christian contact and how desperately the workplaces of Edinburgh need that.

And it's an opportunity for Christian contact. And that really is the foundation of our witness that people would see you spewing so good to them that it will lead them to give glory to God.

And if you're maybe not yet a Christian, I really hope that all of this shows you that following Jesus makes an amazing difference in your life.

Not just on a Sunday, but Monday to Friday as well. So when you guys go to work tomorrow morning or wherever you're going, may God bless you, encourage you, uphold you and use you. And 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.

[32:15] You are serving the Lord Christ. Amen. Let's pray. Dear God, our Father, we thank you for the privilege of work.

And we pray that for us all in the duties that we have in the week to come, whether that's employment or responsibilities at home or in education or in the other activities that we may be engaged in in our lives, where we are in contact with other people.

We pray, oh God, that in all of these situations, our conduct would be honourable to you and that it would be a means of building up contact with people who desperately need to hear the Gospel.

Please also help those who are unemployed or who for health reasons are unable to work. It's a heavy burden to carry and we pray that you would sustain those in that situation.

And we want to commit our lives to you. We want to commit our working lives to you, praying that in everything that we do, we'd remember that we're doing it for you.

[33:32] Amen.