

Work

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[0 : 00] Well I'd like to thank Colin for leading the first part of the service this evening and just managed to get through the traffic to get here for the sermon which you'll know that it would be highly disappointed about.

But nonetheless, can I just say one thing before we begin in terms of the sermon? The bulletin sheet is wrong. There's not Christiane to explore this coming week.

It's not week four. They're taking a break for one week so Christiane explores not on this coming Wednesday but it will be on the following Wednesdays until the end I think of the course.

So it's not on this Wednesday. But I'd like to turn back to Sam 90 this evening. We're going to start, I mentioned this morning, a nine part broken into three parts series on the Psalms and on the Psalms for today.

There's going to be practical issues. I'm hoping to deal with practical issues through the Psalms and then for the identity, the youth group to then go from here and answer three or four questions or discuss three or four questions that are maybe more practical.

[1 : 16] So I'm going to lay the foundations a little bit and then hopefully the questions will open up more practical discussion for the younger people. There are some copies of the questions at the back if anyone else wants to get together and discuss this and it will be more welcome to do so as well.

But really what I'm going to look at, particularly in the Psalms, is to look at some principles that lie behind some of the practical issues that we have to deal with in our lives and tonight the first one of them is work.

And so I'm going to look at a little bit about the principles of work from the Psalms. The Psalms are written by real people. The Psalms are written by Moses and written by real people and dealing with a real God.

And while this Psalm doesn't spend a great deal of time or go into a great deal of detail about work, there's a lot of other parts of the Bible that do, I think it can be a useful foundation for us to think about it for a few moments this evening.

The key verse, the verse from which this Psalm kind of is bedded is really the middle verse, is verse 12, which says, teach us to number our days are right, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

[2 : 31] It's really a Psalm that speaks a lot about time and its old man Moses looking back on his life and some of the good things, some of the bad things, some of the difficulties that he's faced.

And he really has his prayer at the very core of his Psalm, teach us to number our days are right, that we may gain a heart of wisdom. And I want you to keep in mind that verse at the core of the Psalm, but I also want to look at the last verse and use the last verse as a key for what we're thinking about this evening, which is a prayer, he finishes the Psalm with his prayer, may the favour of the Lord our God rest upon us establish the work of our hands for us, yes, establish the work of our hands.

So from this verse, I'm going to take a broad spiritual strokes at the rest of the Psalm and hopefully bring it around to apply to work in our lives. But by beginning, by looking at a general perspective, that as believers, the Psalmist is encouraging us to have, is that God's beauty should mould the perspective that we have in everything that we do in life.

And that, of course, includes work. He says, teach us to remember, teach us to number our days that we may apply our hearts to wisdom. And of course, so much of our life is about work.

So work's going to come into what we're saying. But God's beauty is what is to mould our perspective. The first half of that verse 17, the last verse, the last prayer says, may the favour or may the beauty, it could be translated beauty, the beauty of the Lord our God rest on us.

[4 : 14] So Moses is kind of looking back at his life, and he's looking back at the life of his people, and he is looking at all kinds of things that have happened in his life. He's looking back at life itself. He's remembering its shortness. He's thinking about sin and the wrath of God and some of the things that have happened. And then he's remembering grace, and he's finding that all on the character of God.

And he's wanting the beauty and the favour of God to be what rests on him and on his people. And it's a great prayer for us in our lives as well.

So can we look back a little bit at the Salmon and remind ourselves of that beauty of the Lord as the foundation for how we think and how we live our lives?

He speaks, he begins the Psalm with this great reminder of the greatness of God. Lord, you've been our dwelling place throughout all generations before the mountains were even born, before you brought forth the earth.

[5 : 12] From everlasting to everlasting, you know, it's a famous verse that we know, from everlasting to everlasting, you're God. And he's setting the Psalm in the character and in the greatness and the beauty and the majesty of God.

And he says, look at your people around you, they sing the Psalm. Look around you, see all these mountains and mountains are things that really last forever, don't they? They're kind of always there. They're very permanent.

I think I've said this before from the pulpit, you could take a picture of St. Columbus 100 years ago, 150 years ago, just even when it's being built. And there are lots of changes, but the castle rocks just the same.

Absolutely the same. You take a photograph of Fort William and everything's changed before. But Ben, then it's just the same. It's always just the same. It doesn't change. 200, 200, 300 years if you could take photographs that far back.

It's just the same. So there's this kind of permanence of the mountains and he says, yeah, before the mountains were even born, from everlasting to everlasting, you're God. And he's bedding what he's going to say in this eternal, infinite, constant, incomparable nature of God.

[6 : 18] And it's a good perspective that we'll go on to think about in the Psalm. Because alongside the greatness of God, he then kind of inverts 3 to 11, and we don't really have time to go into any of the verses very much, but he goes on really to remind his readers and remind ourselves of the brokenness of humanity.

You know, you turn man back to dust, you turn to dust with sons of men a thousand days, and your sight is like a day when it's gone past. You sweep men away in the sleep of death, and so on, we're terrified by anger, consumed by indignation.

And he's reminding himself and ourselves that he is infinite and eternal. We are not. Our lives have been blighted by the fall that we're studying in the previous weeks, the early parts of Genesis.

And I go on to say trouble and sorrow. However long we live, it's 70 or 80 years, maybe if we're lucky, it's invaded by trouble and sorrow. Life is diseased.

There's an impermanence there, and so much is seemingly pointless. And our eyes and our gaze kind of recoils from his purity and from his holy beauty.

[7 : 34] And so there's this kind of sense of... There's a little bit of a sense of bleakness in what he talks about when he talks about life here and the speed with which it passes, and even if we live a long time, there's trouble and sorrow.

And he's just given this real picture of life as it is in many ways. But he then goes on in verses 13 to 14 to speak about his compassion, God's compassion, and our need for God's compassion.

And for his great phrase, he uses, Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love. And that...

Coming round to that is a reminder of a thread that's running through everything in Scripture. It's a hugely significant thread that speaks into the sorrow and the bleakness of our lives.

And sometimes the relentless pursuit of work and the busyness and the hassle and the harassment of that is this amazing reality of God's redeeming and unfailing love.

[8 : 45] And it's the thread that passes all through Scripture. God is so pure, God is so holy, God is so just, God's wrath is so absolute against sin, and yet in his wrath and in his justice, his love is satisfied on the cross.

That mystery of the Trinitarian solution to the seeming emptiness and trouble and fruitlessness of life.

His great love, his great commitment. He says there's great healing, there's great joy, he goes on to speak about, that we may sing when we see, Satisfy us when we see your unfailing love that it can make us glad and joyful all our days, as many as the days have been afflicted.

And so he's kind of turning round to Sam. Quite often the Sam's go like that, though he turns them round to days of sorrow and trouble, yet when we come to know God and his redemption and his power and his unfailing love, his covenant love, his hessed love, his great love, and as we understand it and see it through Jesus Christ, then we can know joy and gladness all our days. When we see this great, glorious God that is depicted at the beginning of Sam, from everlasting to everlasting, when we see this infallible God broken, when we see this King of Kings with a crown of thorns, when we see this glorious giver of life dead and then risen, when he's commitment to us and his grace, then it rests on us like a protective whisper.

[10:33] May the favour, may the grace, may the blessing of God, verse 17, the Lord of God, rest on us. And that's really the whole perspective of the Sam.

Whatever else he goes on to describe, whether he goes on to describe work or whether we're going to describe relationships or marriage or anything you would choose, this is the great foundation for us as believers, is that we have come to recognise and know his unfailing love and it is to be our perspective.

It's to be the perspective that governs our life. Because if we don't have that perspective, if we don't have that trust in his unfailing love as those who have come to faith in Jesus through the cross, then we will find that our perspective on work or anything else will be skewed and will be broken.

So with that recognition of his favour, as he says, lying, resting on us like a gentle whisper, he then goes on to pray, establish the work of our hands for us.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. So we have that recognition of God's beauty. It moulds our perspective, okay? And that takes us to working towards a legacy in our life.

[11:55] Establish the work of our hands. Twice, he says it. Usually when things are said twice in repetition, right one after the other in the Bible, it's because they're important. Either important to the person who says it or important to God for us to know.

And here, Moses is making this prayer twice. And he's saying, establish the work of our hands. Now, the word there, establish, just means make right what we do with our lives.

He says, make significant our lives. Make meaningful our lives. Give us a legacy from our work. May our work not just be meaningless and may not just be a passing of time.

May not just be relentlessly dull and boring, but may it be something that's significant because we're asking for you to help us.

We're asking for you to establish the work of our hands. We're asking for you to come and guide us and direct us and answer our prayers in the work of our lives, whatever that is.

[13:00] And that's the prayer, the foundational prayer that I just want to leave with you this evening, that we are asking God in our lives, whatever we do, and I want to say about my definition of works, we're not just paid employment, but that we, in whatever we do, we have this significant and important prayer that God would establish what we do, that would give us a legacy that would be worthwhile of what we're doing, because we're doing it for His glory and because we're doing it recognizing our need for Him.

So we maintain, in our day-to-day living as people, we maintain that right perspective, which is the prayer at the middle of the Psalm, teaches to number our days are right so that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

So every day we're asking God to teach us to use our day well. Every day, morning by morning, a daily grace, a daily need as we go to Him in our workplace, that we're recognizing that our identity as we begin this day as believers is in Christ.

Our identity is in Him, and that is where our joy and that is where our gladness will come from in our work-a-day living.

Many of us find our identity in other than Jesus Christ. We often will find our identity in our work, in our profession, in our career, in our success, in our wealth creation from that, in our standing in the community because of our qualifications, our degrees, our advancement in the workplace.

[14:56] And you know, that's absolutely, it's kind of hardwired into us to find our identity in what we do.

I guarantee, and I absolutely include myself in this, that within five minutes of meeting a new person, we will ask them, what do you do? Five minutes of someone coming to church, oh, what do you do?

Oh, what do you do? What do you do? And that's what we do, isn't it? I'm not saying that's wrong, that's how we think, but the danger is that we're immediately linking what someone does with their identity, and very often that's what we want to be identified with, what we do, what our career is, how successful we are, and we can place all our energy into following that identity.

And what the psalmist is asking us to do is to keep our identity in Jesus Christ because of eternity and because of the shortness of time and because of what he wants us to do with our lives.

Christ is to be our primary identity, and we are to live in the light of eternity, and we are to find our fulfillment in Christ primarily and not in our careers.

[16:26] Now, we will find our fulfillment in Christ through our careers sometimes, but it is by living for His glory that we will find the right attitude within the workplace.

Remember last week we were looking, or a couple of weeks we were looking at the paralyzed man that Jesus healed? The absolutely presenting need that the paralyzed man had was to be able to walk, wasn't it?

That was why he went there to Jesus. That's why his friends brought him. And yet Jesus reminds him and them and us that his primary need was to have his relationship with God made right through forgiveness of sins.

And that's the same for us. Whatever else happens in our lives, that's our primary identity is to be children of God through Jesus. And that molds then everything else because then we find our security, then we find our forgiveness, we find our fullness, we find our direction, we find our guidance.

We find all that we need. So in maintaining a right perspective, we need to remember to number our days a right that we may gain a heart of wisdom and take Christ into all of our days and into all that we do take Christ into our philosophy of work.

[17:56] As I said before, work here, I'm not keeping it primarily necessarily, it paid employment. It can be studies, your studies as students.

It can be voluntary work if you can't get a job. It can be work in the home, it can be parental work. It can be paid employment. But in all that we do, in the work of our day-to-day living, take Christ as believers into that.

The Bible has lots to say about that, some of which you'll be discussing briefly in the identity later on. But work is very much part of us as being image bearers of God, isn't it?

We've got that in the command that we were looking, well, we weren't really looking at the command this morning, but the fourth command which Jesus interpreted in a right way when we were looking at it this morning, that fourth command speaks about God having created in six days, resting on the seventh, this model of work and rest.

And us being made in His image as image bearers, as workers, as fellow, creative, with creativity and creative people who will provide for one another the stewards of this world.

[19:17] And work was always part of God's intention for us. It wasn't God's intention for us in the beginning, always to lie on a beach. It was to work.

That was where we find fulfillment and image bearing from God. But we also know from our own studies from Genesis that we were doing earlier that sin spoiled that. As sin spoils everything, doesn't it?

And the toil and the struggle and the ugliness and the monotony and the inequality and the boredom and the oppression and the injustice and the unemployment and all these things come because sin has come and broken and disturbed and disrupted everything.

We see that. Sometimes works rubbish, isn't it? Absolute rubbish. Our colleagues, our struggles, the pay, the inequality, the bullying.

Speaking to someone this morning leaving church, saying they've had a miserable week and bullied at work. And it's horrible and it's ugly and it's oppressive and nobody likes these things.

[20:28] But we are asked as believers to take Christ. I'm not saying that's easy, but we take Christ as people into our work situations because Christ is to redeem work for us also.

Redeem our studies. If you ever, student, friend, ever thought of taking Christ into your studies, Megonito says the Greek may it never be, God forbid.

Surely we do. Surely we recognize in our work, however laborious or dull or difficult, Christ is to redeem what we do.

We are to recognize that His Lordship applies in our work. And in all that we do in our work, we're disciples of Christ in our work.

I think sometimes we are practical dualists and that we believe God is only for one part of our life. He's only for the Sunday bit of our life or the bit with other Christian bit of our life.

[21 : 42] We've got umbrella stands outside in the way out of church where you can put your... Well, usually it's where you put your umbrella stands, totally into church, I suppose, because it shouldn't be raining in church.

Okay, if you get that. But there's umbrella stands out there. But I sometimes think we put our Christianities in the umbrella stand on the way out of church. That's over for another week. Doesn't God just save one day in seven? We just put our Christianity into the umbrella stand and we leave it there until we come back the next Sunday. But He says, take Christ as ambassadors of Christ into our workplace, into our attitudes, into study, into our attitudes at home, into our attitudes in all that we do.

It is to permeate who we are because it's our identity. Our identity isn't in the fact that we're postgraduate students, that we're PhD students, that we are climbing in the ladder of success in the field of law or in teaching or great homemakers.

Or we feel a lack of identity because we have no job or difficult that is. We have to find that our identity is in being Christ's and taking Christ into all that.

[23 : 08] And so Christ redeems our work. So you go into the workplace or you consider the choice of your career with your spiritual well-being at the very root of that.

Will this be good for me spiritually? Will the career path that I've chosen be a career path in which I can glorify God? Will the fact that there's absolutely no career path here?

Be a stumbling block to me glorifying God? I don't think so. But what does God think? There's God's guidance. What's He asking me to do?

Well, He's asking me to number my days. He's asking, we're asking that He will hear our prayers, that the work of our hands will be established, that we'll do something that will glorify and honour Him that will be permanent in the sense of being God-glorifying.

So we take Christ into our work and we work for His glory. There's a lot of debate and theological circles about what kind of jobs are a calling or not.

[24 : 16] I think every job's a calling. Every job that we have. Every job that we've done, working in the kitchens in a restaurant in Mull as a teenager, that's a calling for the time you're there because you're called as an ambassador.

You're called as an ambassador for Jesus. Whatever job we're called to, we're called to do it to the very best of our ability. We're to see it as, yes, a duty, but as a privilege.

And we're to ask God to give it a permanent value and establish it because we're doing it for God. Establish the work of our hands.

Whatever that is. However dull and difficult our day-to-day work is. And we know because in the sin-cursed world work is often dull and difficult and problematic, but He says, take me into that and allow me to change that and allow me to redeem that.

So we work for His glory. We work because we've got a better, higher, more glorious employer in high who sees everything we do even when nobody else sees it.

[25 : 31] So we don't want to cheat the way we work because nobody sees us. Oh, it's good the boss isn't in today. I don't need to work very hard.

But God sees us and He's the one that we are accountable to as Christians. And we work to the best of our ability because of who He is.

We work for His glory. We work also because I'm nearly finished. We've got to be very guarded about a statement, but we work because in our work it's a gospel opportunity.

And I don't mean that we use the workplaces up as an opportunity to preach the gospel when we're being paid to work. I don't mean that we abuse our time in the workplace where we should be working and helping in the workplace to establish that workplace as a success.

I'm not saying that we use that opportunity to preach. No, that's an abuse. We shouldn't do that. But what I am saying is that it's a gospel opportunity because it's living. It's our life.

[26 : 42] And as Christians we are to live as salt and light. We're to take the theology of the carpenter into our workplace because remember Jesus was a carpenter and He worked perfectly in that environment and worked to God's glory.

And so we're to take that theology into our own attitudes of work. We're to be part of that society and we're to be working for the good of that society and that working society or that home or that family or that student body that we're around.

We're to work in a way that will benefit others. We're to work and even sometimes to get salary so that we can not only support ourselves and our families and others but that we can further gospel ministry through the good gifts that we give in return to God for what He has given to us.

It's a great gospel opportunity. Your giving's are a great gospel opportunity to further the cause of Christ and the gospel of Jesus Christ. Your work and the way your attitude towards a gospel opportunity.

Why do you do that? Why don't you join in the workplace gossip? Why don't you stand on top of the people down below you in order to get up the career ladder?

[27 : 55] Why don't you act like that? Because Christ is Lord. And lastly within that whole context of giving our work and life to God our work and our attitude to work is governed by Christ's ethics.

The ethics that the Bible is full of. We need to consider them. We need to know them. We need to apply them in our day-to-day living.

What ethics are we talking about? Well, you'll discuss them a little bit more. This isn't being practical. This is kind of being setting foundations. But can I just think of one? Well, 1 Corinthians 13.

You all know that particular ethic, don't you? It's a great ethic. We always read it at weddings. Your love is, you know, all these different things. It doesn't keep any record of wrongs. And all the different characteristics of love will take that ethic and apply it in the workplace.

You apply it with your colleagues. Apply it with your fellow students. Apply it with your lecturers. Recognise what the Bible says about being diligent. About being honest in the work.

[29 : 04] And then your attitude to work. About respect. About valuing what you're doing. And about valuing what others do. About your work.

Leisure balance. Which must also be there. Because hey, we're Protestants. We believe in the Protestant worth ethic. Sometimes we forget that God's giving us leisure.

And that sometimes our work is just because it's our identity. We work so hard. And we can't rest in Christ. Fairness.

A servant spirit. Wholeheartedness. Giving of our best. Our business practice. Not cheating. Doing the best even for people that don't like you. And the boss that's unfair to you. And bullies you. Escapism. I'm not allowing work to become that.

[30 : 06] All these different ethics from God's word apply in the workplace. Don't leave Christ at the front door of your work. Or of your studies.

Or of your parenting. Or your home life. Whatever it is that takes up your time. Take Christ into that. And into your work life also.

And I hope that you'll find the questions which unpack some other verses in the Bible. Which look at some of these issues. Will encourage discussion.

Particularly for the young people who will be doing that together. Whether at this great and important stage of their lives. Whether just on the springboard of a life and a career ahead of them. May they take Christ. And may you take Christ into everything. And may each of us be able to, as Moses encourages us to, number our days a right that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

[31 : 07] We're only here for a short time. We only work for an even shorter time. May we work to God's glory. And may we remember eternity that lies beyond this life for us.

Let's bow our heads in prayer. Jesus we give thanks for your goodness and your grace. We thank you for the privilege of work. We recognize that so much of it is incurred in our own experience. And yet we rejoice that that can be redeemed in Jesus. We know it's not easy. We know sometimes it's by the sweat of our brow. We know that there's opposition and difficulty and struggles.

And they help us to take grace at Christ. And the principles of Christ and the ethics of Christ into all that we do. Bless as we pray and bless the young people as they are just on the cusp of life.

Bless them and may they make their right decisions for Jesus Christ. May they choose employment and work or find employment or work or calling and vacation in which they can glorify God.

[32 : 18] May they consider their spiritual lives in all of this. May they ask for Christ's help. May they pray that prayer, establish Lord the work of our hands.

Yes, establish the work of our hands. May that be our experience here, the church, in each of our lives. And may God be given the glory. And may we therein find freedom and joy and praise. Amen.