

WELCOME

We're continuing our series through the book of Ephesians.

- This morning I'll be reading and teaching from the New Living Translation
- The title of today's sermon is **THE GOSPEL AT WORK**

EPHESIANS 6:5-9 (NLT)

⁵ Slaves, obey your earthly masters with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ. ⁶ Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. ⁷ Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. ⁸ Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. ⁹ Masters, treat your slaves in the same way. Don't threaten them; remember, you both have the same Master in heaven, and he has no favorites.

PRAY

I want to start by revealing what this passage is NOT about.

- This passage is NOT about the INSTITUTION of SLAVERY.
- As Americans, we often equate the idea of slavery to the race-based slave trade of African men and women.

But the Greco-roman slavery that Paul is addressing in our passage looked much different than the slavery that we read about in our American history books.

- First, Greco-Roman slavery was largely based on finance, not on race.
 - No CH 11 Bankruptcy
 - Only option to survive was to sell yourself and/or your family into slavery.
- Second, Greco-Roman slavery was largely voluntary.
 - Criminals, and captured soldiers were often forced into slave roles
 - but the majority of slaves in the Greco-Roman world functioned more like indentured servants than slaves.
 - The word *doulos* that Paul uses for "slave" in the text invokes this kind of voluntary servitude.

This kind of slavery was not rooted in a false paradigm of racial superiority or the kidnapping and imprisonment of innocent people.

- It's important that we get this.

Because we can easily dismiss this verse by thinking that it somehow condones slavery (as we understand it), or by thinking that this verse doesn't apply to us we think because slavery is extinct.

- ▶ Neither of those things are true!
- ▶ The Christian perspective on slavery = liberating and emancipating
 - ▶ The teachings of Jesus and the early church gave slaves and servants an unprecedented level of status within the church family.
 - ▶ The very fact that Paul is addressing BOTH slaves and masters in the same breath indicates that BOTH GROUPS were included as an equal part of the church.
- ▶ Paul is writing TO slaves and masters, but this passage is about MUCH more than a philosophical commentary on slavery...

What Paul is doing in this part of Ephesians: he's laying out kingdom principles.

- ▶ Principles that inform the most important and essential aspects of the Christian life...specifically the relational ones.

REMEMBER: The first half of Ephesians is all about Gospel identity (who we *are* in light of what Christ has *done*). The second half is all about Gospel implications (what we *do* in light of who Christ *is* and who we are in Christ).

- ▶ This is by design. Not a coincidence that Paul sets it up like this.
- ▶ Paul is showing us how our Gospel identity informs the most vital aspects of our humanity.
 - ▶ The places and spaces where our relationships (and what we do with them) have the greatest impact...
 - ▶ Where they can do the greatest GOOD or the greatest HARM.
- ▶ Three KEY areas of relationship that Paul addresses in this section:
 - ▶ Marriage relationships (Dom & Em) – "Wives submit to your husbands / Husbands serve your wives"
 - ▶ Family relationships (Billy) – "Children obey your parents / Parents raise your kids in the instruction of the Lord"

And this morning Paul addresses a third arena of Gospel living. The workplace.

- ▶ Contextually speaking, the common "workplace" of Paul's time was an environment where slaves held a wide variety of responsibilities, both publicly and privately.
 - ▶ Everything from mining and agriculture to hairdressing, teaching, and even accounting jobs.
 - ▶ Some slaves were secretaries and even nurses!
 - ▶ Certain slaves actually earned a wage, and some slaves were more wealthy than poorer, free citizens.

- ▶ So in one sense, the vocational life of a roman slave actually might look a lot closer to our modern work climate than we realize...
 - ▶ Instead of "slaves" we have employees.
 - ▶ Instead of "masters" we have bosses, managers, executives.

When we talk about work and the workplace, there's never a shortage of opinions and emotions about our jobs.

- ▶ This might be a sensitive issue for some of us right now...COVID has wreaked havoc on the job market, and there are probably some of us here who have lost our jobs due to COVID.
- ▶ But likely...you will be working again at some point.

For some of us, work does feel like slavery!

- ▶ Great vocational philosopher Dolly Parton beautifully captured this sentiment when she wrote the chorus of what is arguably her most famous song:
 - ▶ "Working 9 to 5, what a way to make a living / Barely getting by, it's all taking and no giving / They just use your mind and they never give you credit / It's enough to drive you crazy if you let it / 'Cause it's 9 to 5, for service and devotion / You would think that I deserve a fat promotion / I want to move ahead but the boss won't seem to let me / I swear sometimes that man is out to get me."
- ▶ Some of us despise our jobs.
- ▶ Our job is nothing more than a purposeless means to a paycheck and two days off a week.
 - ▶ An endless cycle of meaningless toil and strife that keeps us from defaulting on the mortgage.
- ▶ Our job is mere drudgery.
- ▶ And we wonder if there is something greater. Something more important and meaningful. Is there something more purposeful? And the Gospel says, yes. There is.

For others, work feels nothing like slavery at all.

- ▶ We love our job! Our work gives us purpose and meaning and a feeling of value and importance and influence.
- ▶ Or perhaps the paycheck that we earn affords us the lifestyle that we want:
 - ▶ dream home. Or our dream car.
 - ▶ private education
 - ▶ nice vacations.
- ▶ Our job is everything!
- ▶ And so we work long hours in service to the next project, aiming for the next promotion, trying to prove to ourselves and others that we are worthy of the job that we so love.
- ▶ We worship our work.

- ▶ For those of us who fall into a pattern work-worship, we wonder if there could EVER be anything greater or more important or meaningful than our work? And the Gospel says yes, there is.

Because whether you LOVE your job or you LOATHE your job, you will spend the majority of your lifetime doing it.

- ▶ If you live the average American lifespan, you will spend 90,000 hours of your life at work.
- ▶ Almost SEVENTY-FIVE PERCENT of your waking hours!

And the Gospel says that what you do with those 90,000 hours matters.

- ▶ Whether you're a CEO in the corner office...or whether you're a cashier in the corner market...
- ▶ The Gospel says that what you do with THREE-QUARTERS of your life matters!

The Gospel gives us a purpose in work that is greater than the paycheck that we get from work.

- ▶ There are some of us who need to hear that today...
- ▶ Your spiritual purpose in life doesn't exist in the space between your 9 to 5.
- ▶ Your ministry is not confined to a Sunday gathering.
- ▶ The Gospel is just as potent and powerful on Monday morning as it is on Sunday morning.
- ▶ The Gospel gives us purpose that infiltrates every aspect of our lives...
- ▶ And that most certainly includes our 9 to 5...

What is that purpose?

- ▶ To answer that, we need to go all the way back to the beginning...to the creation story.
- ▶ For five days God is hard at work, creating and filling the earth with water and land and every kind of plant and animal.
- ▶ And in the middle of all of it, God makes a beautiful garden and he calls it *Eden*, which means "delight" in Hebrew.
- ▶ And on the sixth day God creates man and woman in His image (Gen 1:26)...and then look what he says RIGHT after that:

▶ **GENESIS 1:28**

28 Then God blessed them and said, "Be fruitful and multiply. Fill the earth and govern it. Reign over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky, and all the animals that scurry along the ground."

- ▶ What is God talking about here? He's talking about WORK.
 - ▶ "Be fruitful" – bring forth fruit from the ground
 - ▶ "Multiply" – create, expand, develop, grow

- ▶ "Govern" – to bring order to the world.
- ▶ This is vocational language that God is using!
- ▶ He's giving Adam and Eve a JOB DESCRIPTION.

And notice that it's actually a blessing!

- ▶ God BLESSED them and said..."go and work"
- ▶ We need to understand that work is fundamentally a GOOD and GOD-PLEASING GIFT.
- ▶ God gave this job description to Adam and Eve BEFORE the fall!
- ▶ John Mark Comer describes it perfectly in his book *Garden City*.
- ▶ "Here's what you have to understand: the Garden was *dynamic*, not *static*. Put another way, creation was a *project*, not a *product*. The Garden was designed to go somewhere. God's vision was for the order and artistry and beauty of Eden to spread out over the whole earth—and human was the one entrusted with that job, 'to fill the earth' with the Garden's reality." – John Mark Comer, *Garden City*
- ▶ God's holy work-plan was for Adam and Eve to imitate God by bringing the beauty of the Garden into all the Earth. To take the raw materials of Eden and build a world.

But instead of Eden entering into the world, the world entered into Eden.

- ▶ Sin, with its deceit and corruption and emptiness came into Adam and Eve, forcing them out of the Garden into to a land that was harsh, difficult, and dead.
- ▶ And what was once good, godly work became tiresome, tedious toil.
- ▶ God says to Adam in Genesis 3...

▶ **GENESIS 3:17-19**

17...The ground is cursed because of you. All your life you will struggle to scratch a living from it. 18 It will grow thorns and thistles for you, though you will eat of its grains. 19 By the sweat of your brow will you have food to eat until you return to the ground from which you were made. For you were made from dust, and to dust you will return."

So if your job sucks—if your job feels like meaningless, fruitless toil—if your work feels purposeless—the Gospel says that sin is the reason.

But the Gospel also says your work has been redeemed!

- ▶ The Gospel says that Jesus has restored the purpose of your work!
- ▶ Through his death on the cross and resurrection from the dead, Jesus has restored all things unto himself...and that includes the 90,000 hours of your life that you spend at work.
- ▶ He has given you a new nature! A new life!
- ▶ Paul would tell the Galatians

▶ **GALATIANS 2:20**

- ▶ **It is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me. So I live in this earthly body by trusting in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me.**
- ▶ If you have put your faith in Jesus, you are no longer child of Adam.
- ▶ Jesus, the BETTER ADAM, has taken up RESIDENCE IN YOU so that you would no longer live under the curse of Adam.

What this means is that your work (whatever it is) has a divine purpose that has been redeemed by Jesus! This is Gospel-centered work!

- ▶ To imitate God (and bear his image) in the work that we do.
- ▶ To allow the divine within us to motivate how we handle the work before us.
- ▶ To reveal through our work that there is a Garden at hand—a Garden full of life and beauty and wonder and redemption and hope and salvation.
- ▶ To image the divine in that thing that we spend the majority of our lives doing.

But I'm just a carpenter, an accountant, I'm a barista at Starbucks. How does that bear the image of the living God?

- ▶ What does a carpenter do? He takes the raw materials of the earth (wood, concrete, metal) and creates a pleasant space for others to live and work in.
 - ▶ Or he builds a piece of furniture that is beautiful to the eye and comfortable to sit in.
- ▶ What does an accountant do? She takes the CHAOS of transactions and exchanges of goods and services, and she brings ORDER and RECONCILIATION and BALANCE to them.
- ▶ What does a barista do? A barista takes the coffee bean which has been harvested from the earth and he grinds it up and he strains water through it and he combines it with milk (which has also been harvested from the earth), and he combines the two together to make a delicious and pleasing latte...

In fact, the next time you order a cup of coffee, think about everything that had to happen in order for that cup to get in your hand.

- ▶ Someone had to: PLANT, WATER, EXTRACT
- ▶ And then someone had to: TRANSPORT, DELIVER, ROAST (on equipment)
- ▶ And then ANOTHER person had to: GRIND, STRAIN
- ▶ All so that you could have your morning coffee...
- ▶ There is EDEN in your cup of Joe...There is Godly vocational delight in your pour over.

We need to understand that All work is spiritual work.

- ▶ Unless your work is exploitative of other human beings, then your work is actually spiritual work. There is actually a divine, ancient purpose in the work that you do...

We make a grave mistake when we assume that spiritual work is reserved for vocational ministers and missionaries and evangelists.

- ▶ Sadly this is a paradigm that is so present in our modern Church culture
- ▶ Pastor, worship leader, global worker, non-profit work...those are the spiritual jobs...and my job is not. My job is secular.
- ▶ That is NOT THE GOSPEL. That is actually a lie from the pit of hell.
- ▶ YOUR JOB IS SPIRITUAL!

We also error when we think that the only way our job *can* be spiritual is if we treat our job like a mission field and preach the Gospel and make disciples.

- ▶ There's nothing wrong with preaching the Gospel and making disciples at work. We are called to make disciples of all nations...
- ▶ Disciple making is a call of the Christian life.

We fulfill our spiritual calling in work by doing the best work that we could possibly do in our job.

- ▶ By making the best cup of coffee
- ▶ By building the best table
- ▶ By doing the best IT work
- ▶ By being the best manager...or the best boss.

And that is what Paul is getting at in our text today. He is giving us a Gospel-centered approach to our work life and our workplace.

- ▶ He's arguing that more important than WHAT WE DO for work, is HOW WE DO our work.
- ▶ There are three ideas that Paul presents...three HOW statements about how the Christian is to conduct his or her work.
- ▶ Although Paul predominantly addresses the employee (the slave), these truths apply equally to the boss (masters).
- ▶ REMEMBER: In verse 9 Paul says: "⁹ Masters, treat your slaves in the same way."
- ▶ So no matter where you sit on the totem-pole of work, these words are for you.

Gospel-centered work is done with respect and sincerity.

- ▶ I'm going to change the language a bit for context.
- ▶ ⁵ [Employees], obey your earthly [bosses] with deep respect and fear. Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ (v5).
- ▶ "...with deep respect and fear."
- ▶ Certain translations use the phrase "fear and trembling"
- ▶ But it's not a cowering kind of fear.

- ▶ In the Bible, "fear and trembling" is used to describe Fear and trembling: the anxiety of one who distrusts his ability to meet all requirements, but religiously does his utmost to fulfill his duty.
- ▶ In fact, Paul exhorts the church in Philippi to "work out [their] salvation with fear and trembling"
- ▶ What does that mean?
- ▶ We are called to bring the same reverential heart to the workplace that we experience in the worship service.
- ▶ IN OTHER WORDS: You can't stand before God in reverential fear and wonder on Sunday, and then stand before your boss in bitterness and entitlement on Monday. That is NOT the Gospel.

"But you don't understand my Boss! They're a total Jerk! They micromanage everything! They're so self-absorbed!"

If you think your boss is bad, consider for a moment the bosses of the Bible.

- ▶ Joseph had Pharaoh as his boss! Not really the most understanding guy.
 - ▶ After all, the Egyptians eventually enslaved the Jews for generations.
 - ▶ And yet, Joseph continually acted respectfully toward Pharaoh!
 - ▶ Not because he was angling for a promotion, but because he loved the Lord!
- ▶ What about Daniel's boss? King Nebuchadnezzar...maybe the most vain boss in all of history?
 - ▶ Daniel respected him...without compromising what he believed.
- ▶ Think about David's boss! King Saul. He was a maniac! Plotted to kill David!
 - ▶ Your boss might be bad...but I doubt they've actively plotted to have you murdered.
 - ▶ And what did David do when he FINALLY had the upper hand on Saul? He showed him mercy...which is a form of respect.

As believers we are to respect our bosses not because of whether or not they have treated us well, but because Jesus has treated us well.

- ▶ This is why Paul says at the end of verse 5:
- ▶ Serve them sincerely as you would serve Christ.
- ▶ Your boss might not deserve it, but Jesus deserves our sincerest and most honest work.
- ▶ Because even though your boss might not have given you that new promotion in the office, Jesus sealed your position in the kingdom of heaven.
- ▶ Because even though you might not get that much-needed time off, Jesus gives you ultimate rest.

- ▶ Because even though you might not get the raise or bonus that you deserve, Jesus has given you extravagant love.

Gospel-centered work is done with integrity.

- ▶ **6 Try to please them all the time, not just when they are watching you. As slaves of Christ, do the will of God with all your heart. (v6)**

In 2006, During the NCAA *March Madness* tournament, the developers of the streaming video player added a new feature...the BOSS BUTTON.

- ▶ It was in the upper right corner of the screen
- ▶ It was added so that you could watch the tournament games while on the job...
- ▶ And if your boss rolled around, you could just click the button and it would instantly switch your screen to something that looked like ACTUAL WORK...A spreadsheet or a flow chart or a powerpoint.

This is funny (and a little brilliant), but this is exactly what Paul is talking about!

- ▶ We are called to the same quality of work, even when the boss' eyeballs aren't on us. Why?
- ▶ Because we know that the Lord's eyes are always on us.
- ▶ Look at verse 8:
- ▶ **8 Remember that the Lord will reward each one of us for the good we do, whether we are slaves or free. (V8)**

God sees the work that you do.

- ▶ And this should serve as both a comfort and a conviction for the Christian.
- ▶ It's a comfort because of the assurance that God sees the little, seemingly insignificant moments in our job.
 - ▶ Perhaps in your job you feel that your work goes unnoticed.
 - ▶ The things that you do rarely get recognized, or appreciated, or even seen at all.
 - ▶ God sees them. God sees you. Even when no one else does.
- ▶ And it's a conviction because of the fact that God also sees the moments when we cut corners, slack off, vent to our co-workers, fudge the timecard a little bit, take that "bathroom break".

C.S. Lewis said that Integrity is doing the right thing, even when no one is watching. -

C.S. Lewis

- ▶ Our integrity at work (doing the right thing) is not motivated by the elevation of self or the advancement of career. It is motivated simply by what Jesus has done for us on the Cross.
- ▶ And that matters whether anyone is looking at you or not.

Gospel-centered work is done with enthusiasm.

- ▶ ⁷ Work with enthusiasm, as though you were working for the Lord rather than for people. (V7)

This command in verse 7 is not a call to HARDER work but rather a call to HIGHER work.

- ▶ It's a call to remember who we REALLY work for.
- ▶ The word *enthusiasm* comes from the greek phrase *enthous'* or *En theos*
- ▶ *Enthous'* = "Possessed by God"

Although you might work for a company, and get paid by a company, or manage a company, you are not possessed by a company. You are the possession of God. Your boss doesn't own you. You are God's special possession.

- ▶ So work like it.
- ▶ Do your job with excellence, and joy, and passion, and commitment, and dedication
- ▶ Because You belong to God.
- ▶ That's what it means to work with enthusiasm.

Respect. Sincerity. Integrity. Enthusiasm. Why do these matter so much? Because these are the character traits of Jesus.

- ▶ Jesus, the Imago Dei – the image of the invisible God.
- ▶ Jesus, the one who **Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to. ⁷ Instead, he gave up his privileges; he took the position of a slave and was born as a human being humbling himself in obedience to God even to the point of death on a Cross.**

And if our calling is to image and imitate God in the space that takes up 90,000 hours of our life, the way that we work should be a response to what Jesus has done for us.

- ▶ What we do in our jobs should be an overflow of the kindness, grace, mercy, humility, dedication and sacrifice that Jesus has shown to us.

I want end this morning with a story that illuminates this in a way that my words could never articulate.

- ▶ A man from our church worked for a prominent company here in Ventura, and managed a team of two other people.
- ▶ He was good at his job and he loved his job and he loved his team.
- ▶ His job provided for his family and gave him purpose.
- ▶ It was a great job.

- ▶ And then after COVID hit upper management announced that many of the company's employees would be placed on a three-month furlough without any guarantee that they would be rehired.
- ▶ And it just so happened one of these employees was on this man's team.
- ▶ And so he prayed, and he sought the lord, and through great fear and uncertainty he decided that HE would take the furlough and give up his salary in order to save the position of his co-worker...IN THE MIDDLE OF A GLOBAL PANDEMIC
 - ▶ He decided to sacrifice his means of providing for his family so that some one else (someone below him on the org chart) could provide for theirs.

That is the Gospel at work.

- ▶ I don't know if there's a more powerful way to image Jesus in the workplace than that.
- ▶ This man said "because Jesus was willing to lay down his life for me...I am going to willingly lay down my job for another."
 - ▶ In a culture of self-promotion, and survival of the fittest, he said "I'm going to give up my livelihood for the livelihood of someone else."

Fortunately, by the grace of God, after a few months he was rehired by the same company with an expanded team.

- ▶ But the point of the story is not that God worked everything out for this man and his family.
- ▶ The point is that the Gospel compelled him to sacrifice his job in the same way that Christ sacrificed His life.

Not all of us will find ourselves in this situation.

- ▶ But I have to be honest, when I first heard this story, it convicted me on a deep level.
- ▶ Because it forced me to reckon with the question:
 - ▶ Would I be willing to do that?
 - ▶ Is the Gospel important enough to me that I would even be willing to entertain the thought of imaging Jesus by surrendering my job for someone else?

Wherever you are, whatever you do for a living, there is a tremendous opportunity to display Jesus during the three quarters of your life called work.

- ▶ If you find yourself worn out in work, lacking purpose, or even hating your work—consider the Gospel. A reminder of the work that Jesus did on your behalf to restore you, and your purpose.
- ▶ If you find yourself worshiping your work, striving to prove yourself worthy in the workplace—consider the Gospel which says that you are already worthy because of the work that Jesus did on your behalf.