

## **WORK MATTERS: JESUS REDEEMS OUR WORK**

(GEN. 3:1-21, ECCL. 2:17-18)

### Community groups and Gospel Project Overview/Video

Alright, well we've taken a bit of a break from our series in the book of Acts, and now we're in our second week talking about the topic of work. And what we've seen is that the Bible gives us this rich, deep framework for how we see our work and how God sees our work.

The big idea that we looked at was that work is an integral part of God's purposes in creation. It's not an afterthought to God. Work isn't the result of Satan and sin in the world. Work is at the heart of who God is and the purpose he has given to humans. And we unpacked that thought through Genesis 1&2 by seeing that God is a God who works, who created us to reflect him in our work by stewarding and cultivating his good creation that through our work we would offer worship to our Creator. And this is true whether we're running a multi-national company or raising toddlers, our work ought to be full of meaning as we image and worship the God who works.

We come this morning to Genesis Ch. 3 where there is a huge intrusion into the perfect story of how and why God created work.

Most of you know that Eli and I were missionaries in China for several years. I first arrived in China in 2003, and one of the first things that you have to do when you get to China is buy a bike. And so I went down with a couple of guys down to what we called "bike street", which was several city blocks of just bike stores. At the time, I was still single, I had just met Eli actually, and I didn't have a lot of money. So I ended up in one of the cheaper bike stores. After looking over all the bikes there was one that stood out to me. The brand was "Flying Pigeon". There was just something in that name that captured me and filled me with a sense of confidence. So for about \$30 USD I rode out of the store on my trusty new form of transport. Well, the flying pigeon ended up having a broken wing. After about a week I was riding along and I started to feel something was going a bit wonky in the movement angle of my pedal... and within about 10 minutes the pedal and crank arm under my left foot just completely fell off.

So.... rather sheepishly I got off my bike and began pushing it to find one of these street side bike repair guys that who are about as ubiquitous as a Starbucks in downtown seattle. So, I find one of these guys and show him the problem. He looks it over, goes over to the scrap pile that apparently is his toolbox, pulls out a hammer, puts the crank arm back on the bottom bracket and starts pounding away. After several hits he picks up the bike, passes it to me and for 10 cents I'm on my way again. Well.... of course it wasn't but a couple more days and I went through the same routine all over again. I think in the 3 months or so that I had that bike every bike repair stand within 3 miles of my apartment had used their hammer on that crank arm.

Like my "Flying Pigeon", In Gen. 3 because of sin this world is broken. As Yeats said, "things fall apart, the center cannot hold." And because the world is broken our work is broken too. No longer is work something that is always rewarding, fruitful and a means to glorify God. Work is full of toil and challenges on multiple levels. But often the way that we tend to deal with this brokenness is like those bike repairmen. We sort of settle for the fact that work is broken and we find patch up fixes for the problems we face. Maybe there is a coworker we regularly have tension with and so we decide to avoid them. Rather than looking at what's at the heart of the issue it's easier just to not see them. Our kid is screaming at the store and so we hand them a candy and never deal with the issue when we get home. We feel a discontent in our job, but we're only a year away from that full retirement package and so we hang on for dear life.

But God's response to sin and brokenness is never to take a hammer and bang things into place so they work. In the gospel, we see God decisively dealing with sin and brokenness through the cross and bringing a redemption that extends to every area of life into this broken world.

This morning I want to walk through Genesis 3 together looking at the brokenness that sin brings through the lens of our work, then we'll look at how Jesus comes to redeem each of these areas and through the gospel transforms how we operate day to day in our work.

1. Jesus redeems our work by redeeming our own brokenness.
2. Jesus redeems our work by redeeming our relational brokenness.
3. Jesus redeems our work by redeeming our world's brokenness.

1. Jesus redeems our work by redeeming our own brokenness.

Turn with me in Genesis 3 to verse 6 and we're going to read from there. *Read.*

Sin brings brokenness in our own hearts. Think about Adam and Eve for a moment. They had walked in the garden with God, in perfect communion, in perfect relationship with him. Who they were had been completely defined by their relationship to God. They were image-bearers who would reflect him, they were stewards of HIS creation, vice-regents of HIS kingdom, worshippers of HIS majesty. Their identity was completely wrapped up in who they were under God. But suddenly when sin enters the picture what does v. 7 say? "Their eyes were opened, and they knew that they were naked." Their eyes go from looking at God and receiving their whole identity from him, to looking at themselves and creating their own identity.

All of us are bent this way. We all have this tendency to make something more central to who we are than an identity defined by God. We look for our value, self-worth and significance outside of God. From the first time we're asked "What do you want to be when you grow up?", we're tempted to be defined by what we do. Martyn Lloyd-Jones, who was a medical doctor in London before becoming the pastor of one of London's churches was addressing a group of medical students and doctors one day and spoke directly to this issue of identity. He said of the medical profession: "There are many whom I have had the privilege of meeting whose tombstones might well bear the grim epitaph: 'born a man, died a doctor.'"

I know for Eli and I, leaving China was a real struggle for this very reason. We had defined who we were apart from God - by who we were as missionaries. So without that definition on our life we felt like we were losing our value and significance. The way to test this for yourself is to ask yourself the question: If something were to happen that you couldn't do what you do anymore - and I want all of you to think this, if you are a stay-at-home mom or retired, whatever your vocation is - if you weren't able to do that thing anymore, would you feel uncertain what gave your life value and significance? If you think it's possible you'd answer yes to that question, then your identity is probably, at least in some way, being defined by your work.

For others of us this definition of identity isn't so much a problem with regard to our work, but it's more subtle, in that the role they play at their work place, or the tasks we do becomes how we define ourselves. Even good things that we do in our vocations can become things outside of God that we define ourselves by. Maybe we find our value and worth from the quality of work we do, or that we're always honest, or that we're so helpful to others. These are good things, but when they become ultimate things that we see our value and worth coming from they are **dangerous**. Let me show you why:

I have a tendency around our house to define myself by being the most domesticated husband around. I mean, I clean and tidy the house, I do the dishes every night, I change dirty diapers, I am the definition of servanthood - at least in my own mind. Now if my wife ever brings to light a truth that might challenge the core of my identity as house husband par excellence do you know what happens? Suddenly I go from ultimate servant to angry, defensive and offended . Why is this? Whatever our identity is in, wherever it is that we are drawing our sense of self-worth and value from, if that core identity is challenged, brought into question, or if in some way that foundation we've built on starts to see some cracks (and it will at some point) depending on our makeup we'll always react in anger and bitterness, or withdraw in despondency. This is what happens when we form an identity outside of God.

Alright, let's get back to Adam and Eve's personal brokenness. So Adam and Eve go from having their eyes fully fixed on God to forming this new identity. Now look with me again at v. 6. *Read*. Even though, up til now, they've been completely satisfied in God, they look at this fruit and what it offers them and they think it can give them something that God can't, or at least that God won't. And when things don't quite work our the way they'd hoped, instead of turning back to God they tried to find a way to rescue themselves. They grab some leaves, tie them together and try to cover up their shame.

We are just like Adam and Eve. We so often look to other things, especially to our work, to bring us what only God can give. Work becomes a subtle way that we look to rescue ourselves. And we do this whether we love work or not. On both edges of

that spectrum, from workaholic to someone who can't stand their job, work can be where we seek redemption. Let me show you how.

If we don't like work, it often becomes a means to something else. The money we make gives us the ability to buy that house or take that vacation or use our free time in certain ways. What we are really looking for isn't found in work itself, but the things work allows us to do or have. These things become our functional saviors, the things we think will bring us meaning, fulfillment, and joy - and work becomes the means to getting them.

The other side of the spectrum is those that love work and have a tendency to be workaholics.

I read a story recently about a young doctor at a hospital in New York. She was friends with another doctor a few years older than her who was pregnant with her second child. The two had a conversation one day and the older said to the younger: "Do you know what I love most about being pregnant? I love being pregnant because it's the only time where I feel productive all the time. Even when I'm sleeping, I'm doing something!" The younger doctor saw that her friend based her self regard so much on productivity that she seemed relieved to finally have something she could do all the time. She said this, "For many of us, being productive and doing becomes an attempt at redemption. That is, through our work, we try to build our worth security and meaning."

But just like leaves were a pretty bad solution for covering Adam and Eve's nakedness, and pounding a crank arm onto a bottom bracket with a hammer only lasts so long, looking for salvation outside of God is a hopeless pursuit. We'll never advance high enough in our careers, or be approved enough by our bosses, or have enough toys, or enough money. It's never enough to fill our hearts because our hearts were made for something greater. Augustine said it so well in his famous words toward God - "you have made us for yourself and our heart is restless until it rests in you." Work, or the things that work provide, can never give our hearts that rest.

But the good news is that Jesus came to redeem us from our own brokenness. Jump down to the end of our text for today in Gen. 3:21. We've seen that Adam and Eve have made this attempt to create an identity for themselves, to redeem

themselves by using leaves to cover up. Then, in v. 21, we see the grace of God. *Read.* God covers them with something permanent, something lasting. Something that is actually going to make it through the next rain storm. And, of course, this points us to Jesus, the lamb slain to cover *our* sin and *our* shame.

Gal. 2:20 says that when we trust in Jesus we die to ourselves and live to God. 2 Cor. uses the language of creation saying that we are "new creations". The New Testament is constantly reminding Christians of this new identity that they have "in Christ." What they mean when they say "in Christ" is what we see here in Genesis. Jesus has clothed us with himself in a way that give us a brand new identity wrapped up in him, defined by him, we are brought into union with him.

What bearing does all of this have on how Jesus redeems our work by redeeming our own brokenness? Think about how being given a new identity defined fully by Jesus transforms how we work. If our sense of value and worth comes in Christ then there is a sudden freedom in our work because we're no longer depending on our work to give us what it can't. Instead of having to prove ourselves and secure our identity through work, we know we are already proven and secure in Christ. If our identities are wrapped up in our performance then success will make us arrogant and proud while failure will make us bitter or despondent. But if our identity is secure in Christ, neither success or failure in work will shake us off our foundation. We become people that are incredibly confident and bold yet extremely humble. We'll stop looking for acceptance and approval from our bosses and coworkers and rest in the acceptance and approval we receive from God that isn't based on our performance, but on Jesus finished work on the cross. When we receive our value, worth and significance from our new identity in union with Christ and our hearts trust that he truly is our rescuer and our highest joy, work is free to serve a purpose higher than ourselves.

Tim Keller: "If we can be free from the need to earn our salvation through our work, we will have a deep reservoir of refreshment that continually rejuvenates us, restores our perspective, and renews our passion."

*Alright, that was the longest of the points.... they get shorter from here.*

## 2. Jesus redeems our work by redeeming our relational brokenness.

Part of the curse of sin is brokenness in community. Look at the end of v. 16 and God's words to Eve. *Read.* Now could talk about what this means in marriage and male/female relations, but we're talking about work today. And what we see in Adam and Eve's relationship is the world's first human community, a reflection of the community we see in the Trinity. And because of sin, instead of this perfect fellowship that God experiences and intended for humans to experience, from here on out we see discord and disunity in relationship.

It isn't hard to look around in our workplaces and see this. Unless our work involves no other people, every one of us could probably look back on the past month and list several situations of conflict, of the brokenness with others that results from sin. Jealousy, pride, the quest for power and influence, all contribute to relational issues in our work.

As Christians, the gospel gives us an incredible strength for dealing with the relationships we experience in our workplaces.

First of all, the gospel completely transforms our view of power, influence and authority. Jesus teaching was a constant work of flipping upside down and inside out any human understanding of these words. Power comes in weakness, authority through humility, influence through servanthood. Ultimately Jesus demonstrated this at the cross where life came through death and victory through what appeared to be defeat. This whole understanding should completely change the way we work. As Christians we operate with an upside down set of values and principles.

Secondly, the new identity we have in Christ gives us a security and objectivity that keeps us from getting wrapped up in the petty workplace struggles we see. We become outside-insiders as we can see and understand what's going on without any of our own quest for worth, security and significance contributing to the mess.

Third, the gospel ought to inform how we treat everyone around us. Tim Keller, in his book *Every Good Endeavor*, shares a wonderful story about this. There was a young woman who he noticed had been visiting the church and one week he was able to catch her for a conversation. She told him she was exploring Christianity. She didn't believe yet, but there was a lot she found interesting. He asked her how she had found

their church, and she told me him this story. She worked for a company in Manhattan, and not long after starting there she made a big mistake that she thought would cost her the job, but her boss went in to his superior and took complete responsibility for what she had done. As a result, he lost some of his reputation and ability to maneuver within the organization. She was amazed at what he had done and went in to thank him. She told him that she had often seen supervisors take credit for what she had accomplished, but she had never seen a supervisor take the blame for something she had done wrong. She wanted to know what made him different. He was very modest and deflected her questions, but she kept insisting. Finally he told her, "I am a Christian. That means among other things that God accepts me because Jesus Christ took the blame for things that I have done wrong. He did that on the cross. That is why I have the desire and sometimes the ability to take the blame for others." She stared at him for a long moment and asked, "Where do you go to church?"

As we allow ourselves to be saturated and transformed by the gospel it begins to spill out of us at our workplaces. Not just in sappy one liners about God's love, but in deep actions that reflect hearts redeemed by Jesus.

### 3. Jesus redeems our work by redeeming the world.

The words of the curse are pretty strong. Look at God's words to Adam starting in v. 17. *Read.* If we end with those words, things look pretty bleak. If that's the way things are going to be from now until Jesus comes back, we might as well just hold on and make the best of it.

But we miss that Jesus arrival in a small town in the backwoods of Israel marked the inauguration of God's kingdom on earth. Jesus death on the cross marked the beginning of God's restoration of this world. Paul says in Romans that creation "was subjected to futility.... in hope that the creation itself would be set free from its bondage to decay." We are moving toward a day when creation will be set free and God will make a new heavens and new earth that will both be radically different from this world and yet have many elements of our world that are healed and restored.

Tom Nelson, in his book "Work Matters" calls this type of thinking "Lifeboat theology." "Lifeboat theology," he says, "views this world as if it were the Titanic.



God's good world has hit the iceberg of sin and is irrevocably doomed. There is nothing much left for us to do. It is time to abandon ship and get as many people in the lifeboats as we can. However noble and well-meaning our efforts here on this earth are, at the end of the day, our work here on this doomed earth really amounts only to rearranging deck chairs on the Titanic."

But we know that our work in this world is not merely a rearranging of deck chairs. Because we see that Jesus kingdom has arrived, has penetrated this dark and sinful age, and is steadily increasing and one day he will return to fully implement his kingdom rule there is incredible hope for our work. D-day...

Admiral James Stockdale spent several years as a POW in Vietnam in the Hanoi Hilton. When he was asked what the difference was between those prisoners of war who lost hope and gave up, and those who endured such a torturous existence, Admiral Stockdale was quick to reply. The difference, he pointed out, was a kind of hopeful realism. The idealistic prisoners who convinced themselves they would be home by Christmas, simply caved in when Christmas after Christmas came and went. But those prisoners who prepared themselves for the likelihood of a long and difficult captivity, yet believed they would eventually triumph and make it back home, were the ones who survived.

Because Jesus kingdom has arrived, his reign has started and he has begun reversing the curse in our own hearts, there is incredible hope for our work. Because of sin, tempered realism. Not shiny optimism that denies reality nor cynical pessimism....

Tie in to ACTS.