

Lord of Our Work

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[0 : 0 0] Great to have you guys with us. My name is Jesse. I'm one of the pastors here. Other pastor, Alan and his wife Shelly, they're actually out visiting a church we're related to out in Hickory, North Carolina. Some friends of ours that are there, their daughter's getting married, so they got to be there and they're sticking around and enjoying Sunday with them and worshipping with them. They'll be back next week, so obviously we miss having them around with us.

But for those of you who are here, thank you for being here. If you are listening to this later on the week, you're listening to this online maybe. Glad you guys are staying up to date with us in this Colossians series. As always, can't wait for you to be back in the house with us. There's nothing like being able to see one another, enjoy one another, speak to one another, and encourage one another in Christ. All right. We have two weeks left in this Colossians series, so it's this sermon and then next Sunday is the final sermon. We'll be wrapping it up. It's been a wonderful book to be in looking at Jesus, looking who he is, like the revelation of who he is. Man, this wonderful Savior of ours who came and put on flesh, but yet there's so much mystery to him that it just loses us in wonder of looking to him and seeing him and all that. And so we got to see just the practicals of the truth and the faith we believe in and also how we live that out. We've been in kind of the last few weeks. How do we live out our faith? What does that look like? And hopefully it's been helpful for you. And today we're continuing in some of the practicals of how we live out our faith in Jesus Christ because he is Lord of our lives. And I think you'll particularly like this morning because it's addressing something that we all do. Some of us really like doing it. Some of us not so much. And of course, I'm talking about work. All right. And let's jump into the passage. We'll be in Colossians 3 verse 22. It says this, bond servants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye service as people pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. 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. You are serving the Lord Christ. For the wrongdoer will be paid back for the wrong he has done and there is no partiality. Masters, treat your bond servants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a master in heaven. Work, what this passage is saying is that work is central to being human. I hear crickets. I don't know why I'm hearing crickets. This is like the preacher's worst nightmare. Okay. Okay. It wasn't me. I was just like, wow.

It was like, you guys really missed a really big amen moment or something. And there's just like crickets in the room. Like literally what's going on? All right. All right. Reset. Let's start again. Okay. This passage is about work. Work is central to what it means to be human, right? We see from the beginning, God made us like him. Our nature, our very nature at the very core of who we are is to work, right? We look at God. He created, he worked six days on the seventh day. He rested from his work, it says. And then he gave us work to do. He gave us good, rewarding work, man. He said, go, fill the earth, subdue it, multiply, all those things. And that's what we were called to do from the beginning, man. We get to cultivate and continue what God had started. And in Adam's day, before there was sin, there was no stress, no deadlines, no anxiety, no snags. There was no slackers around, no cruel bosses, no big blowups that were ruining the work. But then of course, we know the rest of the story, sin came into play. They disobeyed God, sin came into play. And this is what happened. The environment for our work was cursed, right? There was thorns and there was thistles. It was too hot or it was too cold. It made things difficult to do. The harmony between people for the work was cursed, right? We couldn't get along in the work that we were doing. Clash of wills, domination, selfish ambition, all those things began to play into the work that we do.

[4 : 2 2] And then the actual ability to do the work well was cursed. And so what we see is sin brought this curse on our work. Now it doesn't make work impossible, but it does make work harder

and less rewarding. Let's be honest. And we see that in Genesis 3, 17 and 19, God says to Adam, because you listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it. 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.

For out of it you were taken, for you are dust, and to dust you shall return. So we see very clearly because of sin, we don't get the return on our sweat equity that we should. That's what happens with our work. A few weeks ago, me and Hales were out weeding a little planter in front of our house, a garden. It was like full of weeds, really bad. It was bad. It was two hours of us like toiling in that ground, fingers getting dirty, sweat. By the end, my shirt was just drenched. And man, we looked at that, and at the end, I was like, yes, weed dominated those weeds. I mean, all the weeds were gone, the ground was fresh. It was looking good. And then a week later, man, I'll tell you what, I was ready to curse Adam just for fresh and new again. I was like, dude, there was weeds all over that place again. I was like, thanks, Adam. That's because of you. Now we look at that, and we think like, man, you know, Jesus, he came to redeem. What happened to all of that? I'm a Christian. Can't I live this life without weeds anymore? Funny story, when I was a young Christian in my 20s and like growing theologically, and we would have all these fun debates, and a friend of mine was saying how he heard some ladies talking about, man, if you just had enough faith in God's redemption, like, man, you just have to believe that and live in the reality of like the curse being lifted because of his redemption. And you know, it's like, you know, these ladies are saying, you could even like have childbirth without any pain. I was like, huh, okay. Well, that's a nice thought. You know, that could be really cool. But it's really unrealistic as well. I mean, the reality is we live in a fallen world. Sin's power is broken by Jesus, but sin's presence still remains. And it's going to remain with us. We're going to experience that until we go to heaven or when Jesus brings heaven down here to earth. And that's why we long for that day. Like we join with the spirit and the bride that say, come Lord Jesus, we want to see your kingdom come. Man, no more fighting with weeds. How amazing would that be? Now I realize that it sounds like a very shallow reason to want Jesus to return. But hey, it's a good side benefit, right? And the Bible makes it clear until Jesus comes, we get to heaven, man, because of sin, our work will be done with difficulty. That's the reality of it. In verse 22, the first part of it, it says, bond servants obey in everything those who are your earthly masters. So I enjoy the New Testament honesty here. Paul doesn't pretend that work is going to radically change for the Christians in his day, right? What he's referring to here is a very suboptimal work environment. That's what he's talking about here. He's talking about bond servants to their masters. Some Christians in his day were bond servants. And while that may sound like a really cool title, like you want to say like, I am, I am a bond servant. It's actually the opposite of anything cool. Being a bond servant was not a good thing. In some translations, it's slaves or it's servants. The idea here is that of someone who is the property belonging to someone else, the property of somebody is their master. And so these people, these bond servants had very little rights, if any, they weren't even allowed to have their own personal property in that day. And the relationship, the bond servant to the master was that in return for their work, they were given food and living quarters by their masters. I mean, if you throw in a uniform, that's called being a Marine, right? I mean, that's pretty close to where some of you enlisted guys are at, right? So why doesn't Paul tell them to run away and get their freedom? That sounds a lot better. [8 : 50] That sounds way more radical. That sounds way more Christian, like fighting against that injustice. But if he would have done that in that day, that would have been a reckless and dangerous thing to do to people. Because in that day, man, runaway bond servants were punished severely, even unto death.

So we don't see what Paul isn't saying here is like, oh, you know what, we're going to like, just, we're going to support this cultural norm. No, he's not supporting or defending the cultural norms of the day. It's not, we're not supposed to read into this that Christianity was ever pro-slavery. Actually, Paul is recognizing that the systems of his day stood in opposition to the tenets of Christianity. There was a reality of that. But that doesn't mean he wasn't working to change things. See, in fact, we see that in the letter to Philemon, this guy who was a master, who had a bond servant. And Paul, what we see is he's appealing to this Christian master whose runaway slave, Onesimus, became a Christian. Paul knew him. He found the cell. So imagine being this guy, this master name, this guy named Philemon, master, and he received this letter. And it's from this guy,

Paul, that he knew, an apostle, leader in the church. And this is what Paul is writing to him, all right? Accordingly, verse 8 of Philemon, accordingly though, I am bold enough in Christ to command you to do what is required, yet for love's sake, I prefer to appeal to you. I, Paul, an old man, and now a prisoner also for Christ Jesus, I appeal to you for my child Onesimus, whose father I became in my imprisonment. Formerly he was useless to you, but now he is indeed useful to you and to me. I am sending him back to you, sending my very heart. I would have been glad to keep him with me in order that he might serve me on your behalf during my imprisonment for the gospel.

But I prefer to do nothing without your consent in order that your goodness might not be by compulsion, but of your own accord. For this perhaps is why he has parted from you for a while, and that you might have him back forever. No longer as a bondservant, but more than a bondservant.

[10:52] As a beloved brother, especially to me, but how much more to you, both in the flesh and in the Lord. So if you consider me your partner, receive him as you would receive me. If he has wronged you at all, or owes you anything, charge that to my account. I, Paul, write this with my own hand. I will repay it to say nothing of your owing me even your own self. Yes, brother, Philemon, brother, I want some benefit from you in the Lord. Refresh my heart in Christ. Confident of your obedience, I write to you knowing that you will do even more than I say. See, what Paul is writing, what he is suggesting, and coming close to commanding Philemon to do as a Christian, is to not live by the social structures of his day. He is suggesting a quiet, subversive economic restructure for that time.

See that the economy of that day, well, it was, it was, it was ran on, largely on this master-slave dynamic. Which is why when we get back to the Colossians context, Paul isn't just speaking to slaves, right? He talks to the bondservants, bondservants, obey, obey your masters in everything. But then he doesn't just leave it on them. He actually, at the end of his address, in Colossians 4.1, he kind of drops the mic with the masters. He says, okay, I'm going to address you masters, and then I'm walking off stage. Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing you also have a master in heaven. And this is the example of what Christianity does. It shows no partiality. It doesn't look at people as bondservants versus masters and say, ooh, these people aren't important, but these people are. It shows no partiality except to righteousness, the righteousness and justice of God. And that's how it brings about social change. It brings about social change, just reforms, by living out prophetically what Christianity calls us to do. Which is, if you think about living prophetically, it's living where God wants us to be. It's living today where God wants us to be. Christian social change is subversive, not coercive. It's the power of the gospel, not the point of the sword. But that brings about radical change. Now, I want to draw a distinction of how it brings about radical change, right? The way that works. It may be a little bit slower, but in the end, man, it does. It brings about amazing stuff, beautiful things. Now, think about that in contrast to the radical changes we've seen throughout history that come through revolutions, right? Oftentimes, that comes where the lower class spills the blood of the upper class, or the oppressed class spills the blood of the oppressing class. Now, that can bring about radical social change, but at serious great cost.

But in the gospel, we don't see that. The gospel doesn't give preference to what class you are in. It calls all to come to the table and to live in justice and righteousness, no matter where you're at. And so when you study church history, what you see is you see Christians more often than not pioneering the great social reforms, right? Where we're at today, man, in our society and in our culture, man, so much of that has been informed and influenced and powered forward by Christians, which is an amazing thing. We have an amazing heritage to look back on and be proud of.

[14:23] But how did that happen? How did that happen? Why does that happen? How did that happen in the past? Because Christians refuse to compartmentalize their faith. Meaning this, their faith permeated every facet of their life, even in work. And when that happens, when we allow faith to come into our work, when we bring it into our work and lead us in our work, work becomes something greater than just achieving power and profit and the praise of men. Faith changes our work back into something meaningful.

It says this in Colossians 3.23, 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. You are serving the Lord Christ. Doesn't matter who you are, corporal or colonel, private or pilot, employee, employer, it doesn't matter. Bring your faith to work with you. Let it guide you in your work. Don't leave it at

home.

Okay? So let's get into some practicals. How do we do that? He gives us, verse 23, again, it says, work heartily as for the Lord. That little phrase, work heartily, it simply means this, means put all you are into it. Put your whole life into your work. Everything you are, you show up and you give your best. I knew a guy that would always say this, man, I don't need the work, I just need the money. I was like, that was a little clever catchphrase, but you know what? His work ethic kind of reflected that. Always late, except for break time, always early to break time. He wasn't trustworthy. His attitude towards his work and towards his bosses reflected that. He always kind of pitched an attitude to anybody who gave him orders. But for him, work was a way to just get money.

There wasn't any greater meaning for his work than that. It was just a means to get money. So work was this kind of necessary imposition to getting what he needed to pursue pleasure. That's what he was ultimately after. And it worked out in his life as just being lazy and untrustworthy, and not being able to keep a job. He kind of bounced around from job to job because nobody kept him around for very long. And for many of us, that might be our attitude toward work. And it's just meaningless, except to pay for life's pleasures. But maybe that's not you, right? Maybe for some of us, the problem is work is the meaning. We find our ultimate meaning in our work. Man, we think of work profile, position, power. Work can be the source where we find our greatest identity, right? We use work to somehow validate our existence. But those who live this way, man, they never find ultimate meaning in the work that they do. And that's true because people that are this way, they're always restless and they're never satisfied. Rockefeller was asked, how much is enough? And his answer was more. The richest guy in his day could never be satisfied with what he had accomplished.

[17:40] Why? Because what he did was his identity. Work was his identity. And for some, this validation pursuit never ends until the day that they die. They're just always pursuing, always working harder, never satisfying, reaching a goal than then having to get to another one. And for others, they just become disheartened and implode. But for the Christian, we put our life into our work because our work is worship.

Your work is an act of worship. See, my friend used work to worship pleasure. Workaholics use work to worship themselves. But the Christian who understands redemption, they use their work to worship their Lord Jesus. The end of verse 24, it says this, you are serving the Lord. Why do you work heartily as to the Lord and not for men? Man, because your work, you work serving the Lord. Ultimately, that's what you're working for, service to the Lord. How is this worship? Well, the Hebrew understanding of worship, it's like think of two sides of the same coin, right? On one side of the coin of worship is this idea of bowing oneself low, recognizing that God is so much greater, and so I'm humbling myself in recognition that he is greater and I'm exalting him and glorifying him. But then the other side of the coin of worship that goes along with that is serving, it's service. And you don't get to separate the two. It's not, man, is it bowing low or is it service? It's yes to both. That's what the full scope of worship is. And so we can, worship and work are things that are married together.

The Christian worships in his work. Worship isn't just singing our God is greater or some song like that, or worship is more than just kneeling in prayer. It is serving Christ our King. And this is why we put all of ourselves into our work, because God is worthy of our worship, right? Think about this, like bringing the best into our work. Like Israel, when they were worshipping, God called them, in your worship, you brought your best lamb. Not your worst lamb, not the spotted one, not the lame one that you were going to just like kind of throw away anyways. No, it says you bring your unspotted, unblemished lamb. You bring the best from your flock. You bring the best from your grain, and you bring it to the Lord to worship him. And so that's how we worship. We don't bring our least, we bring our best. What we bring to the proverbial altar of our worship reflects how much we value the object of our worship. Let me say that again. What we bring to the proverbial altar of our worship reflects how much we value the object of our worship. Now think about that. Maybe for some of us, that sounds really tiring and demanding. It's like, man, surely God's just going to be happy with me, just kind of like halfway doing it, like halfway into my work, or you're thinking, man, that's tough. But really, man, what's in it for me? What do I get back from that? Because we all work for a payday, right? We work for money. We work to get paid. But the gospel doesn't say that should be, that shouldn't be our motivation. Our motivation shouldn't be to try to earn your reward. It doesn't say work hard to get a raise or a promotion. Because, see, before the gospel, we were kind of like that horse running after that dangling carrot. Never quite getting there, but almost there, almost getting

what we want. Our motivation in the gospel isn't to earn. It's actually rooted in the assurance that we already have the reward. In verse 24, it says, knowing that from the Lord, you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You will, knowing you will receive the inheritance. This is like, this payday is assured. It's not, man, I wonder if I'm working hard enough to get it. I wonder if I'm doing enough.

Our payday is assured. It's not by our work, but Jesus's work. And this payout that we're working for, it's not a raise. It's not a promotion. Man, it's so much better than that. It's like, it's so much better than that. It's knowing and experiencing the fullness of God's love and pleasure. That's what we're assured of. That's what we know that we are going to receive the inheritance of one day. Now, some of us in the room might be thinking, man, big deal. That really doesn't seem worth all of that. And if you've never experienced God's pleasure, I totally understand why you would think that. But here's the thing. Once you do, once you experience God's pleasure and delight over you, man, it changes the game. It becomes the prize you live for. Faith fuels our work because it promises a better payday. The movie Chariots of Fire, it's this movie I love. It's about two runners. It's based on the true story of the Olympic sprinter's Harold Abrahams, looks at his life, and also another Olympic sprinter, Eric Liddell. But these two men, while they were both Olympic sprinters, kind of after the same prize, they ran for very different reasons. Abraham's the gold, he needed the gold medal to validate his existence on earth. In one scene, he says this, and now in one hour's time, I will be out there again. I will raise my eyes and look down that corridor four feet wide with 10 lonely seconds to justify my whole existence. But will I?

Can you just feel that? That like need to earn, that need to validate? Imagine the anxiety that comes with that, the stress that comes with that, that man, I got to perform. If our running for the prize is anything but God's pleasure, it's going to end up like this man. I got to somehow validate my existence. I got to somehow find significance in my life. Will I succeed or fail? It's up to me.

[24 : 13] Now, Eric Liddell, he was a man of faith, a man who actually went to the mission field and died as a martyr for the gospel. But before he did that, he did get to run in the Olympics. But the reason he ran was very different. He said this, I believe God made me for a purpose. But he also made me fast.

And when I run, I feel his pleasure. What a different reason to live. What a different reason these two men had. And one running to try to justify why he was sucking up another bit of oxygen on earth. But one just realizing, living in the freedom, man, God, you've made me a certain way. And I'm going to use my life. I'm going to go all in.

I'm going to leverage everything I got. I'm going to work wholeheartedly. Why? Because when I do it, when I use the gifts and the talents that you've given me, I feel your pleasure.

One day, guys, we're going to feel that in full. It's going to be an unbroken reality in heaven. We're going to feel the pleasure of God. But I want to say, man, we don't have to wait till then. We get to know his pleasure over us today. So I want to ask you guys this question. As I call it the band, why do you work? Do you work to validate your existence? Do you work to pay for a life of pleasure and leisure? Or do you work all in? Man, are you working heartily for the Lord? Because there is this amazing assurance, this sure reward waiting for you in heaven, this unending payday of God's pleasure. And you know what, guys? You know how we are assured that that reward is true?

Because the Bible promises that we get a down payment of it now in the Holy Spirit. We don't get to wonder about that and what that experience is going to be like. We get to experience that now. We get a foretaste of what is to come through the presence and the ministry of the Holy Spirit in our lives. So you pray with me. Father, I want to pray for those in the room who have never known your pleasure. I'm going to pray you would open their hearts right now to receive that.

[26 : 53] Friends, if that's you and you're feeling that sense of God's pleasure for the first time, your response to that is faith. It's surrendering to that, surrendering to Jesus, trusting in him as Lord and Savior. Now, Father, I want to pray for those who maybe it's been a long time since they've experienced your pleasure. Maybe they've forgotten what it's been like to be in your presence and feel your delight over them. Can you remind us right now? Holy Spirit, I just ask that you would please come and make that real. We don't just want to know that. We want to experience it. Amen.