

Brandon Nealy
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9 to 5 Your Work Matters I “Designed to Work”

Why Speak on Work?

When I hear the subject of work, it doesn't sound like one of those incredibly fascinating or interesting sermon topics. It's not very hot or spicy, nothing like that. It's work. “Why are we talking about work? I work all week. It is monotonous. It is boring. I want to spend my weekend worshipping. I go to church and have an emotional high. I don't want to talk about work. I want to keep my work on Monday to Friday and keep my church on Sunday morning.” Why do we want to talk about work? Why do we want to talk about the 9 to 5 and changing diapers and running errands and making breakfast? And making lunch and dinner and getting the kids ready and finding their socks and giving them baths. Why do I want to talk about tending to my aged mother and father and working in the lawn? Why do I want to talk about work at church? Why should we talk about this?

And as you'll notice when I say the word work I don't mean job though your job is a part of work. When I say work I mean everything that you do, that you need to do. Amen? Are you with me? Okay.

One Reason to Speak on Work: Unity

Why talk about work? Well, there are many reasons. One is because culturally there is a debate, and it's more than a debate. It's an ugly division in our nation, and it's not even just in our nation. It's in our world. It is a national debate, a national division, an international division over the issue of work. Our nation is at it's own throat. A house divided cannot stand and our nation, our world in fact, is divided over the topic of work, over the topic of economics, over the topic of stewardship, over the topics of for whom do you work, why do you work, to whom does your paycheck belong, who gets to have dibs on your paycheck? This is all about work. And our nation is divided over it. On one hand we have great Americans and they're supporting the values of individual initiative. They're in one corner and then in the other corner we have the progressives and what's best for them its collectivism and the power of the state. We have the individualist versus the collectivist. One group says, “You didn't build that.” And the other group says, “Yes we did.” The nation is at it's own throat. A house divided cannot stand.

And it's not just the nation. It's the church. This is what is really sad. The church is little different. The church is not the lighthouse it is intended to be. The church is just as divided over the issue of work and economics and stewardship and paychecks. The church is supposed to be a city on a hill united and yet the church is divided, It's divided ethnically. And that's unfortunate. That's sad. It's a tragedy and yes it is divided ethnically. By God's grace I will see this church multi-ethnic by the time I die. It's one of my continuous prayers for this church.. We need to be a multi-ethnic church in the deep-south. God would be honored by that.

The church is also divided among blue collar and white collar, rich and poor, educated and uneducated, rural, urban, the church is divided about all sorts of things. But one of the things the church is divided over that you didn't realize is over the issue of work. In one corner of the church are individuals who have confused Benjamin Franklin with the man from Bethlehem. Jesus never said God helps those who help themselves. Benjamin Franklin said that. In the other corner are Christians who believe they hold the biblical view of work but what they're actually holding to is the Enlightenment view of work. They have confused Jesus with Ayn Rand and social Darwinian economic policies. This is not Christian. It is not biblical. It passes for conservatism. It passes for republicanism and it goes off well on Rush Limbaugh but it's not Christian. It's Ayn Rand. It's the enlightenment. It's Benjamin Franklin not the

man from Bethlehem. And then in the other corner you have those who have confused the government with God.

Now the Bible has something to say about work. And when the Bible, which is written by God and it is not from this world, it is from another world, comes crashing into our world I promise you it has something to say to both sides. The Bible has something to say to both individualists and collectivists, to those who hold to enlightenment theories of work, and those who hold to Marxist theories of work. The Bible has something to say to everyone and if the church would understand what the Bible actually says about work, unity could come from it. We could be united in the truth. But you first have got to repent of your confusion. You've got to repent of thinking one thing is true and that what you believe is the Bible when it's not.

And I don't totally blame people in the pew. I also blame people in the pulpits. When was the last time you heard a sermon on work? Raise your hand if you've ever heard of the doctrine of vocation. All right. We have about six Presbyterians. That's good. Most of you have no clue what the doctrine of vocation is. The church is wholesale ignorant over the issue of work. Ignorant doesn't mean they are stupid. It means the church as a whole is lacking information in regards to work. And because the church is lacking information, biblical information, they have confused the enlightenment with Christianity. They've confused Marx with Mother Theresa. The church is confused and it's because the pulpits are silent on the issue of work. And of course you know why the pulpits are silent? Worse case scenario: they're silent because they know everyone's going to get mad at them. But honestly, I really think it's because the pulpits are ignorant too about work. I just think there is a wholesale biblical illiteracy in our nation in the west. Just my opinion but I think that it's the case.

So why preach on work? Because I think it will bring unity to the church. I think it will bring biblical literacy to the church. I think it will cause repentance in the church. I think it's one of the major things that has to happen in Northside Baptist Church in order for us to have a multiethnic church. We've got to get united on what the Bible says about work.

Another Reason to Speak on Work: Guilt

Let me give you another reason. Individually, raise your hand if you've ever felt guilty about work, not working enough or working too much? Look at that. You see we need to talk about it. Is that true guilt or is that false guilt? Should you feel guilty or should you not? Or, should you feel guiltier or less guilty? We have to figure out what the Bible says about work. We struggle with guilt and not just in our 9 to 5 but in the way we tend to our kids, in the way we run errands, in all the work that we have to do, we feel guilty about our work..

Another Reason to Speak on Work: Sin

Not only that, many of us are trapped by the deadly sin of sloth or laziness and many of us are trapped by the sin of workaholism, thinking that we with our work can bring about the kingdom in our own lives..

Another Reason to Speak on Work: Secular Sacred Divide

Many of us have compartmentalized our work. Work is for Monday to Friday and worship is on Sunday. Absolutely confused. The church is not helping out. The church is saying things like "full-time Christian ministry" as though being a pastor and a missionary is the only way to serve God. We've got to get that straight don't we?

In the Beginning God Worked

The puritans, the pilgrims, the reformers knew that if you were going to be a disciple of Jesus Christ you had to be a disciple in the 9 to 5, in your everyday life. If you don't start there you don't even start. So, let's start. I think we should start in the beginning. "In the beginning God", what did he do? "Created

the heavens and the earth”. But then in Genesis 2:1-3 creation is called work. God rested from the work that he had done. So we can say textually, “In the beginning God worked.” You never thought that did you? In the beginning God worked. Wow! But it wasn’t work like you’re used to. It wasn’t toilsome. There was no tilling involved. No sweat of his brow. No futility. He worked, but it was not under the curse that accompanies work. There were no obstacles, which had to be overcome. He didn’t have to wrestle the elements into position. God worked with no obstacles. And what we call that is art. God is the first artist. Michelangelo and Picasso are echoes of our creator God. That’s what that word image means, an echo or shadow or likeness. When Michelangelo performed his masterpiece, *David*, that was just a ripple that extended out from that first splash of creativity in the universe. In the big bang of creativity God worked. And, his canvas was darkness. And, he used the colors of yellow and orange and a whole lot of white. “Let there be light!” And like every good artist he was a master at multiple mediums. He could also work with dirt and clay and he plunged his hands down into the clay and he began to form the clay into mountains and valleys and rivers and seas. And then he said let the trees sprout. And, he began to work with hardwoods: oak, ash, maple. Bob Vila, even with the plaid shirt and the mustache, is an echo of his creator. His creator is a craftsman. God is a craftsman and artisan. God is a worker. He’s a gardener, a landscaper. And then after working with the trees what did he do every single day? At the end of the day after working with color, clay and hardwoods, He would sit back and the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit would visit. There they are together in Genesis . He looks at what he has done and he says, “It is good”. That doesn’t mean that he’s looking at the trees and saying, “Wow look at those trees. They’ve never told a lie.” It doesn’t mean morally good. He’s looking at his work and delighting in the work of his hands. He’s delighting in a job well done. He’s enjoying his artistry.

If you’re like any normal man, I don’t want to be offensive here, but if you’re like a normal man when you cut the grass and you’re done with cutting the grass you look at it and you say, “Man this place looks nice.” Who’s done that? That’s normal. That’s called being a normal man, a southerner maybe, I don’t know. But when I’m finished cutting the grass I just sit out there. The suns going down, it’s getting dark. I just love to look at it. “Look how pretty that looks.” You know I look at what I’ve done, I say, “It is good”. And in doing so I echo my creator. God is a worker. God put in a good days work. “In the beginning God worked.” Psalm 104 says that God is a gardener and he waters his plants. In Psalm 107 He’s a civil servant protecting and serving his citizens. He is a sustainer, a provider, a teacher, a judge, king, jury, executioner. He’s everything. He is a worker. “In the beginning God worked.” And at the end of each day he rested. And in so doing he created for us a rhythm, a rhythm of work and rest that if we get in touch with we can also echo with him. We can also image him..

Don’t take this for granted.

In all the other religions, it’s not like this. Pandora’s box is opened up and out of it comes death and decay and illness, warfare and all of the horrendous things that plague this earth. Do you know what also comes out of Pandora’s box? Work. But work is not a negative in the biblical story. Our story is different. In our story work is in the very beginning before the fall not after the fall. Aristotle taught that the purpose of life is leisure and so for the ancient Greeks the only way to redeem the curse of work was to avoid it. In other ancient mythologies there were different degrees of gods, greater gods and lesser gods. And, the greater gods made the lesser gods work all of the time. And the lesser gods got annoyed with that because they had created the world but it was a whole lot of mess, a whole lot of work. So the lesser gods create man in order to work like slaves. Christianity is not like that. Our God is a worker. And work is good.

This has massive impact on our lives right now. All the blessings that we receive from civilization, especially in western civilization, come from work. Take this building for example. I think about this often because I stand up every Sunday morning and I am blessed by this building, But, I literally did

nothing for it. Can you imagine me standing up here and stomping my foot, “I earned this thing. I earned it.” I didn’t earn anything. “I built this!” I didn’t build anything. I wasn’t even alive when this building was built. Look at this building. The blessings that we receive from other people’s labors, they just come to us freely, freely of God’s grace. You could be the vilest, wickedest sinner in the world and come and sit in this building and God just pours out blessings on you. He protects you from the heat of the summer and from the rain. Now this is just one building. Imagine all the blessings that come to us from civilization. Imagine the bricks on this building. How much work went into that? We receive the benefits from it but there were men who laid those bricks. And before those men there were men who worked at the factory that make the bricks. And, before that there were men who worked in the mineshaft or the quarry. Honestly, I have no idea how bricks are made. But I know that there are many steps in it. If you go back in time, how many men, how many man-hours did it take to develop the technology of the brick? It goes all the way back in time. Here’s the biblical world-view that all of the work we get the blessings from extends back in time to the beginning, the big bang of God’s creative work. “Let there be light.” God is a worker and that changes everything. Don’t take it for granted.

On the Sixth Day

On the sixth day God creates his magnum opus. He’s in the dirt. He’s forming and He’s molding and He molds a man. In the image of God he made a male and a female. He breathed into them the breathe of life. He gave them dominion over the plants of the sea, the birds of the air. Then God takes all of his work, all of the beauty, all that is good and he gives it to man. (Gen 1:28; 2:15) He leverages His power and position for Adam employment. He hands it over to man to work it and to keep it.

“What do you mean, work it?” It’s paradise. How do you work paradise? See, inside of paradise there was infinite, unlimited potential that needed to be tapped into. Man was there to work it. Now it’s not laborious, toilsome and sweat of the brow sort of work. It’s not farming. It’s gardening. It’s landscaping. Man was to tap into the resources that were available in the creation. He was to work it, to cultivate it, to make something of it. He was not to bury his talents in the soil, but to make something out of it. Adam was a priest commissioned to landscape and garden a sacred space where God’s presence dwelt. And he was to keep the enemy at bay. How well did he do? Not too well. We’ll come back to that in a second.

You Were Designed to Work

But, what does all this mean? I’m going to give you one lesson: work is in your DNA. You were designed to work, to do work and to do lots of it, 6 to 1 ratio in fact. You were designed to work. This is one lesson that I want you to take away this morning. Think about paradise for a second. What is in paradise? Friendship is in paradise. Worship is in paradise. Relationships with man and relationships with God are in paradise. Food is in paradise of course. Sex is in paradise. That makes sense. All the things that make us human: sex and food and friendship, God and work, are in paradise. DO you see the point? Just as much as you need sex and food and friends you need work. You don’t work to live. Work is life. Work is in your DNA. You were designed to do it and to do lots of it and there is much meaning to be found in it. When the Bible says that God made man in his image it means that when you work you are echoing, you are shadowing, you are like God. Work is God-like. And when you work you are like God. You could see how we could apply this to your daily chores. You could see how this has huge ramifications for your 8 to 5 life, for your discipleship. What does it mean to be a disciple of Jesus Christ? It starts with your work, imaging your God, following the design, submitting to the lordship of Christ, submitting to the sovereignty of God, being wise and submitting to the design of the universe and the design of what it means to be human.

Various Applications

(1) I've got just a list of applications I'd like to go through and in your community groups I encourage you to talk about these a lot. Here's a few applications for you. "Longing to be free from work is like a dolphin longing to be free from the sea or like a Corvette longing to be free from gasoline." You were designed by a creator. There's an operator manual. Longing to be free from work is foolish and rebellious. Listen up children. This one's for you. Parents you can thank me later with a gift card or something like that. Children, chores are a crucial element in becoming a man or woman of God.

(2) Do you want to know one of the reasons our world denigrates stay-at-home moms so much? It's getting better I think. But it used to really be bad in the 80s and 90s. I think it's getting a little better but you want to know why the world denigrates stay-at-home moms? Because the world doesn't work because we've been designed to work. It's not because they're submitting to the lordship of Christ, to the sovereignty of God. They work for the money and stay-at-home moms don't get paid; therefore, they aren't working. You see how their view of the world affects what they honor and what they shame. You can't blame them. The word of God is not put into their heart by the Holy Spirit yet. But in the church we honor mothers because they're working. Not that we need to prove that or anything. I'm just trying to make an application. Stay-at-home moms, listen, paycheck or no paycheck that's not the point of work. Work existed well before there was ever money. Well before there was a need of paycheck.

(3) Here's another application. Unemployment and layoffs can be dehumanizing and I believe the church should be more considerate and more compassionate of that. Give a man a fish and he eats for a day. Teach him how to fish and make him a man. Are you living a meaningless life? Take note. Listen. Meaning is not only found in family time and in leisure. Meaning can be found in work. And your meaningless life might be because you are embroiled in the sin of sloth or workaholism. As a church when we minister to the needs of the poor and the powerless, we have to look at the poor and the powerless fundamentally not as consumers but as producers. Our relief, our care for the poor and the powerless must not focus in on simply giving people food to eat or money or clothing. Pure relief is necessary for life, but if we want to really help people we must empower them with job skills. We must empower them by bringing them into our own relationships, the place where we find work. We must connect them to the *who we know* and the *guys we've got* for all the different things we need. We've got to bring them into the relational circles to empower them for employment.

Then Why Do I Hate My Job So Much?

"Pastor you say, well look I'm glad you're talking about this and I hear you a little bit but you haven't been to my workplace. Do you know Mike Rowe? My jobs too dirty for him. He wouldn't even come to my place. You don't understand Pastor. If I'm created to work, if work is in my DNA, then why does it stink so bad? Why is it so difficult and toilsome? Why do I hate it so much?" There are a lot of answers to that but let me give you one thing.

There's one fascinating thing we read about in the Genesis account of the Garden: the rivers, the Pishon and the Tigres and the Euphrates and how they flowed out from the Garden of Eden. Did you notice that when we read through the text? The rivers originated in the garden and they flowed out from the garden and they flowed to lands where there was gold and bdellium and onyx. What is that all about? Here's what Christians have said for a couple thousand years. They call this mandate, this command that Adam was supposed to do, the Creation Mandate or the Dominion Mandate or the Cultural Mandate-- lot of things to talk about. But one of the things that I am fairly certain about is the reason we are told about these rivers flowing out from the Garden of Eden. We are told about the rivers because Adam wasn't to just make a bunch of babies and live in a hut forever. He was to build a civilization. You see what we're being blessed by today: these buildings, these bricks. We are being blessed by civilization, by the grace of God through human work over a large scale and over a long time. Adam was not simply just to live in huts and procreate but to build up a civilization so that the graces of God could be multiplied on top of

each other over and over and over again. And this civilization was to flow out from the Garden of Eden through the river valleys following the streams downhill to the lands where there was gold and onyx and bdellium, the ingredients needed to build a beautiful temple. The Bible talks about these ingredients. Lapis lazuli is probably what he's talking about. He's also talking about pearl probably. And he is talking about gold. But here's what I think and I feel fairly certain about this. Adam was called to build a civilization, a garden-city where mankind would be blessed and God would be at the center of it. And the streets would be streets of gold and no evil would be found inside of the city and no sorrow and no tears. But how did Adam do in that mandate? Not too good. He failed almost immediately. The devil came in and destroyed it and Adam was cast out of the garden. The dream of a beautiful civilization with streets of gold and blessings from God seemed to die when Adam sinned. But does that mean that work is now dead? Is work now absolutely and totally useless? Should we even try? Is the cultural mandate is done away with? Well, after man sinned God came and he cursed something. Does anyone know what God cursed? He cursed the ground. This detail is very important. He didn't curse work. He cursed the ground. What he cursed was not work itself but the produce of work, the productivity. So, now when a woman is to be fruitful she must go through labor. And when a man is to be fruitful or a woman is to be fruitful he or she must go through labor. It's not a coincidence that these words are the same. Because to produce any sort of crop, to produce a harvest, to build a civilization, to build a city, to do any good, takes labor and sweat and toil. That's what you're dealing with at work. You're dealing with the curse of the ground. And, that is why at times you hate your work so much.

After the Curse

So, the ground is cursed. Adam failed. Everything now is difficult. So does that mean we're done with making culture. Turn over to Genesis chapter 4 if you would. I promise you you've never heard a sermon on these verses so here's your chance. You probably never will again. You'd better pay attention. Genesis chapter 4, verse 17, "Cain", now remember Cain rejected God, murdered his brother, and was banished. "Cain knew his wife and she conceived and bore Enoch. When he built a city", he's following that civilization mandate. "He called the name of the city after the name of his son, Enoch. To Enoch was born Irad, and Irad fathered Mehujael, and Mehujael fathered Methushael, and Methushael fathered Lamech. And Lamech took two wives." Here you have the beginning of polygamy, the destruction of God's institution of marriage, violation of God's definition of marriage, men violating what is natural. "The name of the one was Adah and the name of the other Zillah. Adah bore Jabal", now follow with me here, "he Jabal was the father of those who dwell in tents and have livestock." Being the father of this means he was the founder of this branch of husbandry or you might know it as 4-H. If you've been in 4-H before and you've ever milked a cow or a goat or bred cows or goats--we won't have a show of hands here-- But you are reaping the benefits that flow all the way back in time to Jabal, the father of all those who have livestock. And then verse 21, "His brother's name was Jubal, he was the father of all those who play the lyre and pipe." We now have the development of instruments. See those resources within the creation are being tapped. It is cursed and it is difficult but things are happening, Civilization is being built up. Verse 22, "Zillah also bore Tubal-cain, he was the forger of all instruments of bronze and iron." Now we have described for us the beginnings of science and technology. But all of their work, if you continue to read, was done out of rebellion and anger and violence. And that work finds it's culmination in the story of The Tower of Babel in Genesis 11. Man was working and building civilization and making culture and tapping the resources in creation all for his own glory, to build up a tower in his own name. And, God then in judgment spreads them all over the world.

The Second Adam and His Civilization

It's not that the cultural mandate is over. It's not that we're supposed to stop working. The ground is cursed, productivity is difficult but here's the main problem with work in this world. It's that we do it for our own glory. We're all trying to build up our own "Towers of Babel". What we need is someone to come down to this world and to fulfill the mandate that Adam failed at. You know who his name is? It's not a coincidence that Jesus comes down and has dominion over fish. They jump into the net whenever

he commands. It's not a coincidence that Jesus goes out to the desert and he's with the wild beasts according to Mark. It's not a coincidence that Jesus comes down and Luke calls him the second Adam, the son of Adam. Jesus is coming to fulfill the cultural mandate that Adam failed. I know this is complex but follow me. Jesus comes and he lives a perfect life. He dies on the cross. He's raised from the dead and he tells his followers, "I'm going to build a place for you." To build what kind of a place? We find out in the Book of Revelation that it's a city. It's a beautiful city with streets of gold, probably some bdellium and onyx as well. And in that city are the trees, trees of life. It's a beautiful garden city that one day Jesus is going to found on this earth. And we know that when he returns the city will come down to earth. Then the curse on productivity will be lifted and once again man will be able to do what he was destined to do from the beginning. We will be able to work the ground and keep it without a curse. And we will be like our God, the worker. If you can get that city, that city of gold, that garden city with God at the center of it--It's in the future--It's the paycheck you really want--It's the house you're trying to build--the house with the picket fence and the family--It's what you're trying for--It's what you're really striving for--If you could reach forward in the future and pull that truth into your heart today do you know what you could do? You could do another thing that God does and that is...rest. You could rest too.

Final Applications

I have so much to say and I don't even know how to say it well but I know this. If you could get what Jesus is going to accomplish, as the ultimate worker, into your heart, then when you're working your job and things aren't going so well, you'd be able to say, "That's okay. I'm living in the time between the times right now. One day I will receive a reward. My labor is not in vain."

And when you work and you work and you work and God is giving you things to steward and someone then comes and steals it, you could have less anxiety over it. And you'd say, "My stuff is really in the future. My heaven is in the future." You can't steal that.

If you could get Christ's work into your heart now, you could also stop trying to build your own Tower of Babel. "I'm working every day, 20 hours a day. I don't have time to sleep. I'm sacrificing my wife and my children on the altar of my god. What am I doing trying to build a "Tower of Babel"? I'm not supposed to be a citizen of Babel. I'm a citizen of the New Jerusalem. No matter how much I work I'm never going to be able to pave my streets with gold. No matter how much I work I'm never going to be able to enter into that rest and say 'Behold it is good.' What I'm looking for is a city which is not yet come." If you could get that city in your heart now, you'd be free from work-a-holism.

You'd also be free from sloth because you realize, "I can still work in the image of my God even if I don't produce as much as I can in a New Jerusalem."

Closing Prayer

Father I pray and I ask that you would unpack this truth to us. Help us to look forward in faith and hope to that New Jerusalem, that paradise, that garden city that your son is currently building for us. The true worker, the quintessential worker who works the work you give him to work, our Adam, our representative, our federal head, our king, our Lord, our Savior. Help us to look at his work instead of our own work. Father I pray for everyone in here that this truth, this truth of your creation, your gospel would change us and transform us. We ask this in Jesus Christ's name. Amen.