

Work To Be Done
2 Thessalonians 3:6-15
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At this time, we'd like to give parents the option for those with children age four to 1st grade to go to a time of children's church. But we want to also encourage, and we want to make this clear that as an intergenerational church, we welcome them to be here as a part of this service. They are an integral part of the body of Jesus Christ. We don't do a separate youth service or a separate children's service except for this time of training our children to understand what it means to worship with us. But we do this because we feel that the body of Christ is not just adults. This is the youth guy speaking, so of course I'm going to say this. But it's all of us here in every stage of life no matter what background you come from. We are here gathered together to worship and praise the Lord together. Amen. So, parents, choose your own adventure. Here we go.

We are in a series in 2 Thessalonians on what it means to be a people of advent today. How do we await the coming of Christ and live in anticipation of His return? Just as every generation of believers from Adam to Abraham to Paul to us, how shall we now live in light of the reality that our Savior is coming? Do we just sit passively, watch the new Avengers movie, fire up some essential oils, live in our bunkers waiting for the new heaven and the new earth, or perhaps is there something better for us to participate in?

For that, we continue right where we left off in chapter 3 of 2 Thessalonians. So, if you have your Bibles, you can turn, tab, explode, whatever, to chapter 3 of 2 Thessalonians. And as PD Mayfield set us up so wonderfully to Paul's conclusion last week in his sermon on prayer is that prayer and reliance on God to run the race, to be delivered from evil, all wonderful news to preach and give to the people of God as we have this amazingly good news. It just so happens that in this next passage, I've been assigned a passage that deals with themes of excommunication and rebuke to the Thessalonian community. And in doing so, I remember that last time I came up here to preach, I was also assigned a passage on eternal judgement and eternal destruction. It seems rather convenient that the pastoral staff keeps on giving me passages to preach like this. But don't worry, I love this text. I love my job. So, here we go.

Our text today deals with answering this question of what it means to live in advent, and it also deals with glimpses of a Paul that's in rebuke of his congregation. Paul longs for the church, for the Christian life, to be done in the normal, in the everyday, in the mundane to capture each and every moment of the Christian life so that while we await His return, we understand that our work plays a huge part in our role in the gospel community.

So, let's read now 2 Thessalonians 3:6-15.

Now we command you, brothers, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that you keep away from any brother who is walking in idleness and not in accord with the tradition that you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to imitate us, because we were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you. It was not because we do not have that right, but to give you in ourselves an example to imitate. For even when we were with you, we would give you this command: If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat. For we hear that some among you walk in idleness, not busy at work, but busybodies. Now such persons we command and encourage in the Lord Jesus Christ to do their work quietly and to earn their own living.

As for you, brothers, do not grow weary in doing good. If anyone does not obey what we say in this letter, take note of that person, and have nothing to do with him, that he may be ashamed. Do not regard him as an enemy, but warn him as a brother. [ESV]

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray together.

Father, you are God of all creation. And you are God who worked, you are God who rested, and you are God who gives us work, who gives us grace for this work each day. And we pray right now that as we rest, as we Sabbath in your word and seek Christ as the source of our salvation that it would compel us to live each and every moment not in idleness but with purpose, to walk justly, to live humbly, and rebuke in love. We pray that this text would enable us to look and imitate Christ and see Christ as our fountain of hope. And in Jesus's name we pray. Amen.

Let me start by proposing a hypothetical to you all. What if tomorrow you found out that your mortgage was paid off, all your debts were erased, college tuition was done, there was no more need at all to make money? That all of your provisional needs were taken care of, and your family's future was finally secure. Sounds great, doesn't it? We're off to a good start this morning. But let me ask you, what would you do upon hearing that news and that information? What would you do with the rest of your day? How would you spend it? What would replace your time spent at the job that you currently have right now?

Now, in just imagining that scenario, I'm sure that there would be a variety of different responses in this room. Some of you would probably treat it like a student on the first day of summer break running out the door with a sense of freedom, you know, singing, "My chains are gone, I've been set free," laughing as you see one of the burdens in your life, one of the big things that weigh us down, just gone forever. Maybe some of you wouldn't do that. Maybe some of you would be more intentional. You would pursue a dream of something that you never thought to entertain before because you had all of these responsibilities and you might pursue something that is creative, you might pursue something that is artistic or academic. And there might actually be in this room a select precious few of you who would actually wake up and do the exact same thing that you've always done every single day.

But wherever you are, knowing that you now have zero obligations, knowing that everything is taken care of, how would that change the way that you live? Or perhaps, maybe this is a more intrusive question, but where would you be prone to laziness, idleness, and sin now that the rhythms of work have gone away? How would you be prone to act in believing that your earthly work is no longer necessary?

You see, for Paul, this is the worry of his church in Thessalonica. He wants them to see that their work – and this is point one in your outline – that work represents their belief in the gospel. Their work represents their belief in Christ. Work in the belief of Christ is what he's exhorting them. You see, in light of what we've learned so far in our series in 2 Thessalonians, this church had been wrongly given a false theology that the day of the Lord has come perhaps from someone professing to be Paul. And so, Paul needs to defend himself in chapter 2 from identity theft. And after exhorting them to pray at the start of chapter 3, now he has to deal with reminders and commands of what he actually taught them of what living in anticipation of the day of the Lord is supposed to look like. Like any loving church leader, any loving church father, he doesn't tell them all butterflies and rainbows about what this anticipation looks like, but rather how waiting for Christ means that there's work to be done. There's work to do.

He begins his exhortation in verse 6 by appealing to his relationship to the church by calling them brothers, the brethren, meaning there's this familiar relationship to the church. And he juxtaposes that with talking about his apostleship, "in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ." He's commanding them with the authority that had been given to him in Jesus. And as he had just finished talking about the steadfastness of Christ in verse 5 from last week, he is now repeating this command not simply from him, Paul, but rather on the authority as an apostle to claim the name of Jesus in his exhortations. So, this is both a familial command but also an apostolic one, tenderness in relationship but authority in position.

This is the way that all rebukes should start, isn't it? Rebukes that are heard are ones that are done with tenderness and love and compassion, not an authoritative, dictatorial, pushed down your throat kind of a will.

And what is he rebuking them about? There's a small group within the church that was living out the implication of this false theology that they had believed from this fake Paul that was writing about the day of the Lord. John Frame calls this that "Theology is always lived out." What you believe about God is always lived out in some way. You know, we tend to do this a lot, we tend to separate theology as a head category and not a heart category. Actually, all of theology is both. And so, your belief about God and doctrine and theology matters because it will play itself out in the life of the church, and that's what Paul's concerned about. And so, he goes and talks to them about keeping "away from any brother who is walking in idleness."

Now, one could see fairly easily how the small group of Thessalonian's would behave in the fact now that they heard that the day of the Lord has come. I mean, if you truly believe that the kingdom of God has been finally inaugurated, heaven itself has come down, Jesus has returned, then it's easy to say, great, I'm done. Why do I need to work? Jesus is here. Let's go.

But you see, Paul here clarifies what the day of the Lord is not meaning. If their belief in the traditions that they receive from Paul was true of the understanding of traditions – that word meaning is sort of an all encompassing meaning "gospel teachings" meaning this idea of how to live, this is Paul showing the church what it means to be the church – they're not called to live passively and aimlessly because that's not what Paul taught them. That's not the tradition that he left behind. But rather, that he longed for that community to influence each other as brothers and sisters made in the image of God to model God's kingdom making. So, he's giving a task for all of us here to subdue the earth and fulfill it. This is the cultural mandate in the beginning of Genesis.

Each and every one of us here has some place to subdue the earth and to fill it. We're not called to be idle. In other words, being an image bearer of God means that there's work to be done. Believing in the gospel means that work is not merely a distraction to pay the bills and to provide for the family and to sort of pass the time, but rather it's an integral part of the way in which God is glorified in us. And that to not work, to remain idle is to sort of say, "That's for somebody else" is to express unbelief in the teachings and traditions of Christ.

This is the reason why Paul calls for the community to keep away from brothers who do not follow in accord with his teaching. It's because those who are walking in idleness were believing in a wrong kind of a god, a god that once arrived comes and takes care of everything and lets them live the good life that they've always wanted for themselves selfishly. I mean, why try now if Christ has redeemed me from my sin? This is a common problem in the church today. Why live as though anything matters because I've already been redeemed? So, if that's the case, then I'm off the hook. This is a term that some theologians call an over realized eschatology. To break that word down, it's just simply a false belief that enjoying God means passive inactivity, that somehow because everything in the kingdom has been inaugurated, that the "not yet" has come and leads us to just sit on our hands.

Nothing could be further from the truth for those who understand the truth of the calling of God for us to work. Resting in Christ's salvation doesn't imply that our lives are idle until Christ's return. Rather, resting in Christ's salvation means that we are raised with Him and in our union with Him we have a purpose in subduing the earth and filling it.

Now, as I say this, I know that everyone in this room to some degree can relate to the Thessalonians who wished to live in idleness because too often we are faced with the futility of our work that challenges our belief in God, doesn't it? Even for those of us who maybe are working at non-profits or in ministry, there are days when even I look at the everyday mundane tasks of data entry, emails, cleaning youth closets, organizing cables and dodgeballs, and eating that millionth slice of pizza, and it just seems futile. It just seems like it will never end, right? There are times where, for myself, I just think

it would be easier to escape into the portal of my phone or whatever mindless, brainless entertainment that just comes to me because it just seems so futile at times.

And I know that for many of us that we feel the same way towards our work here today. But what this means for us, for all of us, is that living in advent means that your work is a demonstration that Jesus is coming back. He has called you brothers and sisters in this room to rule and to reign with Him, that your work right now is kingdom work. That your job, whatever importance society gives to it even if you feel marginalized or underappreciated, your job matters in the light of heaven. Your job matters because your job is a reflection of the gospel itself. Your job isn't just a past time until you die to be reunited with Christ and get a paycheck. But the very act of your work proclaims and heralds that Jesus is coming back.

And this leads us to our second point from verses 7-9 where Paul exhorts them to work in the imitation of Christ by imitating the example that he, Silas, and Timothy displayed while he was living with them. You see, these three missionaries as travelers and teachers of the gospel back then culturally could have quite easily called upon demands of how they should be taken care of and treated. But notice their posture here in these verses. They weren't freeloading off of the bread of the church without paying for it. Instead, they worked night and day to guarantee that there would be no suspicion of the intentions and reasons for why living with them and working alongside them would call into question their teachings.

In this, they're echoing Christ and Paul's description of Him in Philippians 2, "That though he was God, he did not consider equality with God as something to be grasped and took the form of a servant." For these three, they wanted to take the form of a servant so that the people would not be burdened, nor would there be any question to their own motivations or personal integrity. And what's true of Scripture is what's true of any kind of real leadership that we see in the world today, isn't it? Leaders who are respected and loved by their companies and organizations – there have been plenty of studies on this – are those who act in servitude towards their staff and live beyond reproach because the workers know, "You know what? If he's doing that, then I can do that for my other fellow workers." And so, too, with us before Christ and so, too, with us before the community of the church.

So, this should give us pause to the point of our work and even the way that we approach work. If Paul's rebuke to the Thessalonians is indeed to be understood as belief in Christ that we imitate Paul in the sense that we demonstrate a lifestyle that is relieving the burdens of our neighbor in servanthood, then how would this impact the integrity of our work in our everyday spheres of life? What would this look like in the way that we imitate others as they imitate Christ?

For me, when I think of individuals like that in my life who model that for me, I think of my very own mom and dad who are here today. And they did not know I was going to use them as a sermon illustration. So, mom and dad, I'm so sorry.

My mom and dad – if I can brag a little bit – model this example of what it means to imitate Christ in their life not because of the work that they chose in ministry, but rather in every calling that God gave them, they imitated the humility of Christ in their work to try and live above reproach. They immigrated here to America with very little in their bank account, buying a car in southern California that was stolen almost immediately upon their arrival. And there, my dad biked to seminary while my mom worked multiple jobs learning a new language, the English language, being mocked because of their accent, birthing a crazy son who was incredibly rampant and disobedient, faithfully working to try and serve God's people and to serve the church.

They would pursue a church planting call in Columbia, Maryland, and would often wake up at 5:00 a.m. every morning to go to an early morning prayer service Monday through Saturday while my mom worked full time as a nurse while discipling women in the church, opening up their home to hospitality, writing letters of encouragement to those who were broken in the church. They sacrificed time that they wished to spend with us as their kids, time they wished to spend with each other, but in doing so showing us and showing the church what was truly important and invaluable in work. Not for our own needs and rights to be met as Paul is writing here, but rather for the body of Christ and His church to be glorified.

Mom, dad, I'm so sorry I didn't understand. I didn't appreciate at the time what you were trying to do. I failed to see how you were trying to model what it was for us every time we stepped into church in worship, every time you served the church when I thought that you guys should have been more selfish. I pray that I can imitate you as you imitate Christ.

I'm almost going to pull a PD; I can't do that. I got to keep it together. All right. CPC, when we embrace the hard work of doing our part, not demanding our own rights towards one another, but demonstrating and imitating Christ to one another, we demonstrate a culture when we are saying as the church that we long to be the body of Jesus Christ in word and in deed. We long to imitate Christ as the one who takes responsibility. We long to imitate Christ for the one who gives us purpose and meaning because He is the very foundation of our lives, that His cross has covered us and called us to His work. We long to do this in imitation of Christ so that we can show a watching world that we can be the kind of community that serves and gives to one another.

But I ask you, what happens when we allow idleness to continue on? How should this be addressed in our community? Paul gives us some somber words to the church in Thessalonica that should be given to those who being part of a local church body as something that they continue to be a consumer of, but not an active participator in. He reiterates a command that he gave to the church that those who are not willing to work should not eat, verse 10. And in a church culture period in Paul's age where in the Thessalonian church, mutual support for one another included things such as physical needs like food and drink. The very survival of that community was dependent upon the church. We might look at the force of Paul's command and we might say, well, this doesn't really apply to us today. After all, I know where my next meal is coming from. I don't need the church to provide that for me. But still, the principle of this applies in the force of this rebuke that persistent unrepentant idleness is akin to actually being removed from participating in the fruits of the community and the joy of experiencing fellowship with one another. "If anyone is not willing to work, let him not eat."

Now, in this, I want to talk a little bit about this because we have to clarify ways in which these verses have been used inappropriately in the church in the broader culture. Paul's exhortation in these verses is to not allow those who are not willing to work not to eat, it's not a rebuke against those who are in need of work. That would go against what Paul is saying about exhortations to take care of the poor, take care of those who are struggling. In other words, these verses cannot be used as a guilt trip for those who are temporarily unemployed or those who are caught up in difficult surroundings that make work or finding a job a tremendous hinderance, but rather this is directed at those who refuse to engage in work persistently.

As articulated in verse 11, that they become "busybodies." And so, Paul's calling them to work in the virtue of Christ here. Now, when we look at this word "busybodies," what does it mean? This is a case where the original language brings out more of the force of the text here and what we're seeing. The wordplay that Paul is presenting is not busy at work, but busybodies. It's literally translated that word "busybodies" as "working around." So, they're not busy at work, but they're working around it. They're meddling with other people's work instead of being busy at work. Instead of focusing on their own task, they blame the task of others for their inactivity and their own lack of personal responsibility. These are the people in companies that sort of blame everyone else why the job's not getting done, the people who comment on the jobs that others are doing and yet don't actually take any participatory role themselves. These are individuals who quietly disrupt other people's work and meddle around tasks and things that they are not a part of the role that they are to play.

So, in Paul's exhortation that they should not eat, it's a call to virtue. It's a call to reorient the nature of our work as image bearers of God and as members of the body of Christ to do our work quietly, as he says in verse 12, to take responsibility for the lot that God has placed to each and every single one of us, to earn the fruit of that reward in a way that can benefit and give and breathe life to others.

So, here's a real practical way for us as a church as to how we can embody this. Use your gifts here to bear fruit in this body. We have many needs here at this church. We have many of our covenant children in need of an adult to volunteer and be involved, to be engaged in the fruit and life of our church. We have many ministries in our youth. We have many events that need volunteers and planning. We have a place for you to get involved in. We have ministries of the church to meet the needs of the poor here, the immigrant in our ESL program, the broken in our counseling, moms, dads, brother, sister, high school, middle school, discipleship, education, worship, technology. We need your gifts, godly men and women who will stand for the call to come in any engage ourselves in the body of Christ. Because if we are a church that stands in idleness even within our own congregation, there are sobering words here that these are things that should actually be casting these people away from the community. We forget the words of Christ who reminds us in the last days in Matthew that the people who do not take care of the needs of their brothers stand in judgement and are cast away. We are reminded that those who are negligent of the charge and the call of God's people to be the body of Christ will face rebuke.

So, what drives this kind of work both in the church and outside it? It's our last point here. It is work in the love of Christ. Look at verse 13 with me. We are commanded in this verse to "not grow weary in doing good." I don't know about you, and perhaps you all are more virtuous and more godly than me, but does anyone here find it difficult to be weary in doing the right thing? Anyone here come in exhausted because you've tried to do good and finish the race strong? And when you read this verse, it seems like an easy throw away for us, doesn't it? Because the enormity of the command overwhelms us. We might just think about this and go, that's easy for you to say Paul, apostle. You can perform miracles. You were already an accomplished guy before you converted to Christ. Of course, that's easy for you to say. Do not grow weary in doing good, what do you mean here?

Paul here is not trying to tell the Thessalonian church to white knuckle good. He's calling them to understand that as brothers being in the family of God, they are to persevere because they are doing this work in the Lord Jesus Christ. Our union with Christ means that doing good is only possible on the foundation of Christ's love which covers the extremes of selfish pride in doing good – because that's one extreme of what happens when we do good. We say, oh, I've done it. I'm better. I've got it. But it also prevents us from the other extreme, burned out in doing good, the futility of work, the futility of trying to do a good job.

He's not saying that doing good won't come with difficulty or that it won't affect us. He's exhorting us to persevere in the midst of work that might seem mundane, futile, and discouraging. He's saying here that in the ordinary rhythms of your 9 to 5, in the ordinary means of grace on a Sunday morning here at church when you're just exhausted and you need relief and you want to quit serving and quit doing whatever it is that's dragging you down, that Christ is there to uphold you. Just like we sing, "Dear refuge of my weary soul on thee when sorrows rise, on thee when waves of trouble roll, my fainting hope relies."

Working in the love of Christ means embracing the hard work of doing good. What this means for us is to see that the love of Christ is richer and fuller for all of us here because He is fulfilling His persevering work in us today. He is sustaining our faithful works because He is faithful to do that good work in us. He gives us the strength to wake up in the early morning and press on towards doing what is right when the world seeks to make you idle. This is the power of doing good.

But work in the love of Christ is not merely just a statement of encouragement, but also for Paul admonishment. And this is verse 14. Paul talks about here that church discipline in the distancing of community for the person who's rejecting the teaching of the church is to bring about a godly shame. Now, when we use the word "shame," sometimes we say in the church, "Your guilt and shame have been removed," we're not talking about godly shame; we're talking about perpetual shame. We're talking about a condemnation-giving shame.

But we're talking about a godly shame here, one that's not perpetual or self-righteous, but it's shame in the context of restoring a family member back home. Paul's use of the word "brother" here in

verse 15 reminds that the community of familiar love that they are to display to one another even in rebuke. So, in other words, this is not – as the church has sometimes done – this are not verses that justify the use of quick, oppressive church discipline to those who sin. This is not even talking necessarily about excommunication as some have used these verses for because they're still calling them a brother and a sister in Christ. This is to be used in such a way to seek restoration of a family member who is lost and needs to be found. There's a tenderness here.

So, for those who are members of the flock who are persisting in actions in idleness that will lead to their destruction, this is a way to help them to see through separation what their sin is doing to them. And we don't long for anyone to be led astray. But sometimes, we have to give them a choice. We cannot continue on in the way that you're going. Come back to us. We love you. This is the kind of shame that is a restorative shame, a shame that recognizes sin for what it is and drives us back to Christ, not away from Him.

So, what does all of this look like, then, as we look at the force of all these commands and we think about work and the value of our work? How does this all play out? I'll end this sermon with a story. Or, I should say I'll end this sermon with a meal.

Netflix has a new series that's called *Street Food*. And one of the episodes deals with street food close to my heritage, close to my Korean American heart. And forgive me if you're not Korean American in this room. It's a soup dish called kalguksu. Now, some of you might not be familiar with this dish, so let me set the scene here. Kalguksu is knife-cut noodles freshly made by hand, perfectly cooked, served in a marinated shrimp broth. There are slices of carrots sometimes and a side of kimchi. And the cost of this meal is actually less than anything that you would get at a fast food place of Chipotle, and you get unlimited refills on the noodles in some places served at the end of a long work day.

Why do I bring this up? On an episode of *Street Food*, the best kalguksu is to be found on the busy streets of Gwangjang in Seoul, South Korea. And there is a lady who serves the ultimate best version of this, looking for some comfort, Seoul food if you can forgive the obvious pun. What makes her kalguksu so special is the story that's behind this meal.

Now, if you're simply walking by the busy food street market, you'll see what she was doing is nothing particularly special, nothing particularly over dignified over anything else that was happening there because there's hundreds of street food markets. Gwangjang market is the most competitive street food area in South Korea. It's a place known for its cutthroat culture. For her, though, this stand represented a work that saved her family. Her husband's business had failed, brought the family into crippling debt with a son to raise. And so, to earn a living, she took an incredible risk in starting a stand there. And as she began to endure the difficult hard work of doing good, doing it in the belief of what she was going, she suddenly realized she needed to stop selling the blood sausages that she hated the smell of and instead began imitating her own family's recipe of kalguksu of these knife-cut noodles that she loved so much.

And as her stand grew and after serving bowl after bowl of these very ordinary noodles, not prepared in some ornate chef's culinary institute but just an ordinary noodle dish in an ordinary stand in an ordinary street in a crowded city, she began to bring life to herself and to her family with purpose and meaning despite the number of back-breaking hours of work, the taunting of competitors literally standing feet away from her. She carried the sorrow and the pain of her work to endure, to make dishes that carried flavor profiles of virtue and love believing in the traditions of the recipe that before her.

Do you see? This is just an illustrative example of one woman in one stand in one city. But this illustration could be all of us here, couldn't it? In our work here in this life, our call to the gospel is a reminder that everything that we do, whether it be in word or deed, magnifies the glory of God in such a way that even in the most simple of tasks, simple of dishes, the tasks on our to-do list, the mail in our email box, we have an opportunity to reflect the goodness and grace and the love of Christ in every single one of these interactions. That living in the advent of Christ isn't an exercise in creating busy work until

Jesus comes, but treating every moment and detail as a way to live in the hope and anticipation of Christ's return for ourselves, for others, and ultimately for the glory of God.

Let's pray together.

Father, may we take this charge from the word of God to seek Christ's death and resurrection for our sins as not a measure to idleness but a measure in a calling and a motivation to persevere. And no matter what stage of life we're in, no matter what we are enduring right now, Father, that you would help us to see the dignity of our work by looking and gazing at Christ. Thank you so much for giving us your word here today. In Jesus's name we pray. Amen.