

Date: September 3-4, 2022

Title: *Labor Day*

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Hello, everybody. It's going to be a good time here today. We're going to look at some good stuff. For some reason, I'm the one who always gets to speak on Labor Day weekend, you know, because everybody's getting their last vacation. And so last year, if you were here, maybe you remember I talked about one aspect of celebrating which is rest. I talked about Leviticus 25 in the year jubilee and the rest that comes from it, what real rest looks like and how we accomplish rest and so forth and so on. I'm going in the other direction today, just in case you're wondering what we're doing. We're talking about work.

Let me begin by reading this. Well, I tumble out of bed and I stumble to the kitchen, pour myself a cup of ambition, yawn, and stretch, and try to come to life. Jump in the shower and the blood starts pumping. Out in the street the traffic starts jumping with folks like me on the job from 9 to 5. Okay, work is a huge part of our lives. A huge, huge part of it. And it doesn't matter who you are, or no matter how old you are. We're all continually working.

This is the question I want you to ask yourself today. Do we work to live or should we live to work? Live to work or work to live? That's the question. Right. And by the way, I searched the important sections of the Internet to get your information about this, you know, and you can't believe the number of songs that there are about work. And most of them are pretty dark. Most of them are not really upbeat songs about work. Most of them are complaining about some aspect of it. And there are particularly a lot of country songs that are negative about work. And I think because somehow, we equate the country singer with the working man and so he can sing about work, you know, and so on.

But I have got to say, this is my favorite and I'm sure you're aware of it. This is my favorite of all the country Western songs about work. It was done by a guy named Johnny Paycheck. Do you know what song I'm talking about? Here it is. Are you ready? e this job and shove it. I ain't working here no more. My woman done left and took all the reason I was working for. You better not try to stand in my way as I'm walking out this door. You could take this job and shove it. I ain't working here no more." It's fairly negative of work, you know, not the most positive thing you probably ever heard. And there are a lot of people who feel that way.

So, I went to TikTok, some blogs, and so forth to see what people are saying about work. And so, here are a couple of things people say. "Nothing ruins a Friday more

than realizing it's Tuesday." "What's the best way to make a small fortune in the stock market? Start off with a large fortune." That's so true. Here's one about work. This kind of talk happens around the Watercooler all the time. "Everybody is putting names on food. I discovered this yesterday when I ate lunch with a sandwich named Mark." Okay, here's another little bit of knowledge about work. If you're ever feeling stressed out at work, make a nice cup of tea and spill it on the lap of somebody who's bugging you.

So, here's the deal. I don't know whether you got this or not, but people don't like their work. A survey in 2019 said over 50% of people are unhappy with the job that they presently have. The most unhappy group is between 18 and 34 years old. A huge number of them say they're not satisfied with their job. 54% said that they would leave their job right now if they could find another job with a raise. By the way, that tells you a little bit about what people think about work. Do they live to work or do they work to live? They work to live. They think it's all about just making money.

As a matter of fact, it's not ever about the work. It's about the leisure that the work might give you the opportunity to experience. That's a crazy Greek dichotomy that's followed us for centuries. Somehow the good life is leisure, and the bad life is work. And so, as a result, we work to live.

52% of people surveyed said they would like to change jobs. Okay. They wouldn't care whether they get a raise or not. 26% said they'd like to leave their job right now. 77% of Americans say overall they're not satisfied with their job for one reason or another.

By the way, I'm giving you a little too much information here about data and surveys about work. But I want you to see this. Why is that? Because here's what people say satisfaction in a job comes from. Recognition is people giving you credit for what you've done. Opportunity is the chance for you to be able to have some mobility in your job. Autonomy is the chance to make some decisions that are purely yours, Salary is the ability to get paid according to what you think you're worth. Meaning is the job actually means something.

So, here's the problem with American jobs to a great degree. We don't see how what we're doing necessarily means anything. Our jobs have been sort of specialized and so forth. I work on an assembly line where I take this piece and I put it here. I don't even know what we're making. I just know that I'm this little cog in the wheel, and so I don't have any connection. I sell this. I don't know what it's for, how good it is, or if it really benefits people. Basically, all I'm really doing is just selling. That's all I do. You can put anything in my hand to make me sell it. It could be just as much one thing

rather than another. I don't have any meaning. I'm not connected to it. I don't see the importance of it. I don't see the way that it speaks to the benefit of the common good of people. But it's important.

The next one has to do with respect. In other words, do I get the respect that I deserve, especially from my coworkers and the people that I work for? And most people feel they don't get hardly any of those. And so, they're very unsatisfied with their work.

You know, one guy said this. He says, as I've gotten older and wiser, I've discovered there are such things that really make me love my job. One is payday. Two, lunchtime. Three, quitting time. Four, vacation time. Five, holidays and weekends. Six, retirement. That has absolutely nothing to do with anything that person does in their work.

There's a guy named Lee Hardy who wrote a book about a Christian view of work. He says, unfortunately, in America, we've experienced what's called devotionalization. That is, our personal connection to the work that we do has somehow been removed. It's not about that anymore. It's not about you discovering what kind of gifts you have and what kind of passions God is giving. It's not about you analyzing the great needs of the world or your own experience and trying to figure out how can I fit in to speak to these things. How can I be creative? No, it's not about that. It's doing something that will get you paid. That's basically what it is. We work for money.

And when I talk to students, when I talk to colleges, unfortunately, here's what I say to them. I say, hey, why did you come to college? And they say, well, I came to college because I want to get a good job. And I say, well, what's a good job? You know what they immediately go to? It's one where you make a lot of money and there's room for advancement. I say, why are those things important? Well, because the higher you get up the ladder, the more money you make, and the sooner you can retire. I say, let me see if I get this right then. So, the reason you're going to college is so you don't have to work. The reason you're getting the job is so that you don't have to work. The work itself means nothing. You don't see any meaning in it. If you saw the way they lived, a lot of times you'd think that was the case. It doesn't mean that much.

But in fact, when you look at the numbers of students that are recruited for various majors, you wonder if God is really hurting for engineers and finance people right now. He must need them desperately because that's a lot of places where the students will go to. Those are a lot of the majors. And you know why? Not because they love the challenges of engineering and the mind creativity that's required of mathematics to be part of it. No. They can make a lot of money and they know if they

do it right and whatever they build doesn't flop, they can basically feel comfortable and safe for the rest of their existence. It's just about that.

Well, I'll tell you what. I'm here today to tell you that is not what it's about, in spite of the fact that that's what our culture tends to say it's all about. Recently, last year, as a matter of fact, there was a conference of 5000 business leaders down in Florida and national motivational speakers were speaking to them about trying to motivate them to do a better job on their work and so forth.

And one of the speakers said this. If you were at home and you found out that a distant relative had died and left you \$10 million, would you go to work tomorrow? And they said the resounding sound of no in the auditorium was so loud that they couldn't believe it. Because you see, it's not about what we do when we work. It's about money. We work to live and we think living is leisurely and not meaningful necessarily unless it's simply us choosing how we're going to spend our time meeting our own needs in more and more indulgent and spectacular ways.

As a matter of fact, here's something that's come up recently in the last couple of months. A lot of talk, particularly from an article that started in The New York Times about what's called "Quiet Quitting." Has anybody heard this phrase? Quiet quitting is a phenomenon that they think is predominantly driven by millennials and Gen Z people, but older folks as well. Okay. And it's the result of what's happened because of the COVID experience and the more recent recession where people ended up going home to do work. They worked remotely.

And so fewer requirements were put on them in terms of having to come to work, how they dressed, how they kept their workspace, or whatever. So, they went home. And then meanwhile what happened was the quiet quitting or another phrase for it is "laying flat." You can imagine how it got its name. It became so that it was like, here's what I'm going to do and this is what it means. I'm going to work only as much as is required for me to continue to get paid. I'll meet the minimum expectation. Do not ask me to work, don't ask me to come early, don't ask me to stay late, and don't ask me to do extra work if I'm not getting paid for it.

So, quiet quitting is sort of where you decide I'm just going to sort of check out and do the minimum requirement. You don't do that because you love your job. You don't do that because you live to work and you think the work is meaningful. You do that because you work to live, and you're looking to get some money and that's basically it.

One of the people in the magazine article said this. "The idea of dream jobs is dead and the only dream is about leisure time and having enough money to have coffee in the morning." Okay. Well, before we run out screaming about our jobs, I want to tell you about some stuff that was in this book that I found by Hugh Whelchel. He teaches at a Christian think tank down in Washington, D.C. A good guy, and a very interesting book. It's called *How Then Should We Work?* And he has a number of things in this book that he suggests that if we understood them better, we would have a different view of work and that different view of work would lead us to a different style of living in our work.

I want to tell you about four of those things. Okay. Here's the first one. The first one is he says, "We need to have a picture of the Bible as a four-chapter book, not a two-chapter book." This is a big deal to him and is a big deal to me. This is one of my hotspots, what I'm teaching. You know, the Bible is a four-chapter book, not a two-chapter book. Here are the four chapters, creation, fall, redemption, and restoration.

Unfortunately, for the majority of Christians in the world, it's a two-chapter book, fall and redemption. It's about coming in an encounter with Christ that because of my sin, I get that sin paid for by his life, death, and resurrection. And as a result, I don't go to hell. It's about sin and redemption. When in fact the Bible is about creation, fall, sin, and redemption. When it's just about sin and redemption, you can have your Christian life be in your personal life exclusively, and your public life doesn't have to be affected by anything in your faith. As long as you got that personal relationship with Jesus, you don't have to worry about anything else. It's sometimes what we call dualism.

Dualism is the unbiblical notion of the separation between the sacred and the secular. God cares about these things. He doesn't care about those things. As long as you take care of the short list of religious obligations the Christians have, going to church, praying, reading the Bible occasionally, sharing your faith, perhaps at the office or anywhere else, and giving some money to the church and the missionaries, as long as you do that, you're good the rest of life. Do it however you want. Align yourself with any group that you want, regardless of how anti-Christian that group oftentimes in terms of its activities might be. Feel free.

The two-chapter story is divided between sacred and secular allowing us to be only concerned with a narrow thing, the thing we're doing, what God has in mind. When in fact, the picture of the Bible starts in the creation, and by the way, it ends in the restoration of the creation as well.

A guy I know wrote a book called *Heaven Is Not Your Home*. It was a disturbing title for a lot of people because they said, what happens if you die? You don't go to heaven? Yeah, if you die, you go to heaven. You know what heaven is like? The Celestial Motel. People check-in, but they never stay there. They eventually go home. Guess where home is? The creation. That's the picture of the Bible. The picture of the Bible starts in a garden and it ends in a city. And that city is on the restored creation. People are going to live the life that was planned for them to live.

Here's a question you ought to ask yourself. What would the world have looked like 10,000 years down the road had the fall not taken place? What would people have done? How would they have lived? What kind of spectacular experience of grace, shalom, peace, beauty, and unbelievable possibilities, what would it have been like? The plan was never about the other world. The plan was always about this world. And the fall takes place in the midst of this world, and the restoration for it takes place in the midst of this world.

So, the first thing he says is we've got to have a different worldview. We've got to work on our worldview. Get to the four-chapter understanding of the Bible, creation, fall, redemption, and restoration. Get out of the dualism or else our work will never mean anything to us. Oh, it might. If you take a job being a pastor or a Bible professor. I have a meaningful life because I'm a Bible professor and I get to speak in church. But if you get some other job, a pitiful businessman of some kind. Sorry. What about a teacher? Well, teachers are a little more satisfied with their work because they can see some of the meaning of it when they're not being beaten up. But, you know, that's where it starts. It starts with the four-chapter picture of the Bible, a new worldview.

Here's the second thing he says. The same thing he says is we have to understand what the real nature of the Kingdom of God is about. Did you ever notice that when we pray the Lord's Prayer, we pray this, thy kingdom come, thy will be done in heaven? No, that is not what we write, is it? We pray, thy Kingdom come on earth as it is in heaven.

The Kingdom of God is not some sort of ethereal special group project that we participate in. The Psalms, over and over again, talk about the Kingdom of God as being the rule of the sovereign God over the creation at large. The famous Dutch theologian, Abraham Kuyper, said it once like this. He says, "There is not one inch of the creation that Jesus, the Sovereign Lord of the universe, does not point to and say, mine." There's no vocation that takes place, no job, activity, whether it's fun or not, and by the way, work can still be fun, or labor that God does not say, mine. And I want to see my sovereign rule over that. That's what I've done. I've entered into a creation.

I started it with a plan, and I wanted to expand it to be beautiful and spectacular and filled with oceans.

And that leads you to the third thing. The third thing he says is this idea of something that comes from that first chapter of the worldview of the Bible called the cultural mandate. I don't know if you know what the cultural mandate is, but let me explain it to you. It's in Genesis one verses 26 to 28, where God basically says, I'm going to make man in my own image. In the image of God, I'm going to make a male and female and he blessed them. And he said to them, be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over the earth. The plan from the beginning, the meaning of human life from the beginning was to rule over the Earth for God.

Now, what did that mean? Well, you get a little hint in Genesis 2:15, when God says he took Adam and he put him in the Garden of Eden. Some translations say to work it and to take care of it. Other translations say to cultivate it and to keep it. But you notice the word work showed up there. You know what God's plan was from the very beginning? It was to live to work. His plan was he created people in his image who then he said to them, I want you to be my representatives in the world to unlock all the unbelievable potential that I put within creation.

And as you do that, here's what will happen. As you trust me, these beautiful, spectacular things begin to develop. You figure out how to play with wood. Next thing you know, you have got a piano. You figure out how to put these different plants together, and next thing you know, you're eating lasagna. You figure out how to make machines, you're making machinery, and then electricity. Oh, my gosh.

God said I'm the one who put this potential within the creation, the lawful order of nature. I am the sovereign one who rules over all things, and I made you to be my representatives in the world. You're to work it, work my kingdom, work my rule, and demonstrate it. And when you do it right, God gets the glory.

You know, the Westminster confession was a confession to the Presbyterian Church. The number one question is this, what is the chief end of man? What's the point of human beings? And the answer is this, to glorify God and to enjoy him forever. Glorify him and enjoy him. Do you know how you do that? By fulfilling the cultural mandate.

As a matter of fact, before the fall, there is only one command given to human beings to explain what it means to be human. Be fruitful, multiply, fill the earth, subdue it, and rule over it. You know what cultivating is? I like the word cultivating because it's a nice, easy metaphor analogy. It's that sort of thing where what you do is you take stuff that's in seed form and you try to figure out what the laws of God for how you put it

together so that when you obey those laws, you unlock their potential and it becomes what it was possibly meant to be. And when that happens, God gets glory and you get blessed.

You know what I mean by cultivating? Have you ever heard the story about the guy who was the farmer who actually wasn't a farmer? He was a businessman who retired to a farm and he decided he had to do something on his farm. So, he says to this guy, say, listen, I was thinking of growing something or doing something. What should I do? The guy says, do something simple, you know, raise some chickens. So, he goes, okay. He's got a truck and the guy puts on about 100 peeps on the back of his truck and takes them out to his farm. Two weeks later, the guy comes back and he says it's not working out with the peeps. The guy says, what do you mean? He goes, I don't know, maybe I planted them too close together.

It's not just a matter of doing the work. It's doing it right. It's about not trusting your own idea of how things ought to go, but trying to discover what the rule, the law of God is, for how to unlock the potential in all of its unbelievable glory so that God can be glorified and you can be blessed.

I use this example a lot in class and I've used it here in the past. I'm using it again because it makes the point very well. You know, it's like this. You can mess it up and you can do it right. You can have your work be about simply making money, looking for leisure, and autonomy, and miss the point of what it means to be human made in the image of God.

I see students at Geneva who take my class. I talk to them about this, the meaning of life, cultivating the creation, and so forth. And I see them later on that day at lunch. There's a guy eating cereal, and all of a sudden, he stops. Then you wonder, why did he stop? Because he saw this woman come in and he thinks ooh, I see that woman, that creature of God, that God has filled with all sorts of multidimensional potential. I want to discover what the laws of God are for properly cultivating a relationship with another person so that I can help her to become everything that she was meant to be. In so doing, God would be glorified, and she and I would be blessed. No, that is not what he's thinking. I'm sorry.

Here's the reality. Here's what he's thinking. Oh, I see some potential. Apparently, that's the kind of potential that you can identify from across the room. Then he's wondering how I can manipulate that woman to rip off some of that potential for my own selfish benefit. Now, he might not be honest enough to say that, but you know what? That's the way our culture goes.

They do the same thing about work. We've misunderstood what work is about. We've worked to live instead of living to work. The cultural mandate is the meaning of human life. It doesn't mean we don't get rest or we shouldn't get rest. I've talked about that before. The point is that we have to figure out how to make our work meaningful in our life.

And so finally, Hugh, in the book here, suggests that Christians ought to have an understanding of what success in work looks like. And so, you know what he turns to immediately? He turns to the gospels, the teaching of Jesus, he turns to one of the parables, it's in Matthew and Luke. It's the parable of the talents.

There was a master who owned a great piece of land, and he was going to go away for a while. And he comes up to a couple of his guys, his servants, the slaves, it depends on which translation you are reading. He says to them, I'll give you five talents. I'll give you two. I'm going to give you one. Take care of them, and I'll be back to see how you do later.

Talents. The ever-popular theologian John Calvin from the Reformation period. He was the first one to realize that the term talent was a metaphor for something bigger than simply a big bag of money. It was about everything that God gave you. There was the possibility of you applying your efforts as an image bearer and cultivating the creation.

It was about your intellect. It was about your passions. It was about your experience. The way that he had shaped you to see things and to know things and to be in certain places. It was about opportunities that he gave you that set you up for certain types of things. It was about desires of your hearts, things that were passions that you said, I love this. You know, this excites me. It was about a heart of sympathy that could say, oh, here's one of the great needs of our world that's not being met.

By the way, let me just say this. Oftentimes the fulfillment of this success is not always in our job because we're called to something bigger than that. We're called to be image bearers. We're called to be kingdom representatives. It's not about jobs, per se. Bless God if he gives you the opportunity to do something in your job to do this.

For most of us, it might have to be something we try to figure out how to maneuver outside our job. Or, we're sneaky, and we figure out how to do it inside our job without them catching us. You know, it's like when Jeremiah wrote the letter to Daniel in Babylon, people were like, they're slaves. They didn't want to participate in this other culture, they were dualists to some degree, and you know, it said in the letter be for the prosperity of the city of Babylon. Be with them, build houses, marry people,

get involved in businesses, and so forth. Because as the city prospers, so will you. I'll bless you in this.

It doesn't have to be outside of the typical works but it doesn't always have to be inside of the typical works either. And so, God gave these people these talents, you know, the master gave them his talents, and he goes away and then he comes back. He says to the guy with the five talents, how'd you do? The guy says, well, you gave me five, and I got ten back. You know what he says, well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the joy of your master.

By the way, the work that you do might not be as spectacular as somebody else's work. It's not a comparison game. It's you doing what God has called you to do with what He's given you. And so, as a result, here's what happens. The second guy says I had two talents, and I have four now. Jesus says to him, well done, good and faithful servant.

This is what it's about. By the way, this parable that Jesus is giving is on the Tuesday before he dies. He brought this parable out on the Tuesday before he dies, basically telling people in the midst of a story about what the future is going to be about. That's our future. That's our experience right now about this, is the master is gone and he's coming back.

And until then, he's left us with these talents and he expects us when he comes back for him to be able to say to us, what did you do, we can be able to say, we live to work. That's what he wants us to say. We live to work. Look what I got. And it was so much fun. It was spectacular. You blessed me. And Jesus said to that guy, well done, good and faithful servant. Enter into the rest and joy of your master.

Then he goes to the last guy. What did you do? The guy says, well, I know you were pretty demanding. In other words, I know you really have an agenda here. By the way, do you know what the agenda was? You're an image bearer that's called to fulfill the cultural mandate and the meaning of life. I want you to be a representative of my kingdom. I gave you everything you needed to be able to do it. And you misunderstood the whole thing. You did the thing wrong. Is that what you were going to tell me? Well, I knew you were serious so what I did was I buried it. You know what Jesus said to him? Take what he's got, give it to the other people, and throw this guy out into the darkness where there's weeping and gnashing of teeth.

In case you missed it, that's not good, right? Weeping and gnashing of teeth. So, Jesus said he is looking for people who live to work. They live to work and they look

at their work as kingdom activity. They see it as the fulfillment of the very humanness that they are made in the image of God as a cultivator of my creation.

I wanted to do it in every area of life. And here's the deal. We are not doing very well. We tend to be very much more interested in working to live. And we say working to live simply means getting a lot of money for ourselves so we can autonomously live a life of leisure the way that we simply want to. And that's not really what life is about.

So, Jesus comes to us and He says one more thing, and this is one more thing you need to hear, it comes from the book of Romans, where Paul says this. This is Romans 12, he says, I beseech you, brothers and sisters, by the mercy of God to present your body as a living sacrifice, this is your true spiritual service of worship. Then he says don't be conformed any longer to the patterns of this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. You know what he's saying there? Get the new world view. Get the four-chapter gospel picture here from the Bible.

You don't have a miserable life. You have the fullest life possible. Jesus said I came so that you might have life and life abundantly, full life, as you work, in your work, in all of your life. So, what I want you to do is based on what I've done for you, the mercy I've shown for you already, I want you to offer your body as a living sacrifice. You know what a living sacrifice does? It dies. It gives itself willingly to death even, offered up to the one that it loves.

There's one last quote I want to read to you. This is John Calvin from his *Institutes of the Christians Religion*. This is Reformation stuff, the 1500s. Here's what he said. "We are not our own. Let not our reason nor our will therefore sway our plans and deeds. We are not our own. Let us therefore not set it as our goal to seek what is expedient for us according to our own flesh. We are not our own, and so far, as we can, let us, therefore, forget ourselves and all that is ours. Conversely, we are God's. Let us, therefore, live for him and die for him. We are God's. Let His wisdom and will therefore rule all our actions. We are God's. Let all the parts of our life accordingly strive toward Him as our only lawful goal." In other words, live to work.

Let's pray. Lord, thanks for this chance to be together to hear things from your word, to be encouraged by the thoughts of folks that have gone before us, and we want to be people who recognize as being yours. We want to respond to the mercy that you've shown us in Christ and make our lives full and meaningful, not for our sake, but for your glory and for the benefit of the world. We want our lives to exhibit what you said was the most important thing, the love of you and the love of our neighbor as we give our lives in service and work. We pray this in Jesus' name. Amen. Good to see you here.