

“Where’s God on a Monday?”
– A Theology of Work Part 3
Redeeming Work
Genesis 3:1 – 19
Luke 3:7 – 14; 19:1 – 10.

Prior to our 150th celebration we’ve been asking the question, “Where’s God on a Monday?”

Two week ago we looked at the “Vocational Ladder” – that ladder that looms larger in our minds that says that some work more valuable than others. What we saw though is that all work has value and is equally valued by God. The reason for this is *not* because of what we do but *because of whom we’re ultimately serving*.

For those who follow Jesus our occupation is valued because it is an expression of our love and devotion to Christ.

Prior to that and to begin with we defined work as “purposeful activity, whether manual or mental, or both, in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God.”

Therefore it encompasses the workplace, the home, the community and beyond. It is not necessarily connected to our careers or paid employment. So when I refer to work, this is the definition I’m using.

We saw that work is good – God works and work is part of the created order.

So ***the whole world is good*** – including our work.

God made everything and everything was good. There were no intrinsically evil parts of the world. Nothing is evil in its origin.

This includes work.

Humans were given work as a gift.

Jesus in his incarnation, in his earthly ministry, was a carpenter. He was in the family business.¹

He told parables and stories that often revolved around work.

Luke was a doctor, a physician.²

¹ Matthew 13:55; Mark 6:3.

² Colossians 4:14

Paul was a tentmaker.³

So the whole world, including our work, is good.

But we know this isn't the whole story.

Why is that we love the weekends but when Monday comes around, or we have another work day ahead or a volunteer position is scheduled, we often groan?

The whole world is fallen – including work.

A moment of willful disobedience was in fact an event of catastrophic significance for all of creation.

Sin is all encompassing. It runs through every heart. It affects everything we do.

We experience alienation from God, disconnection from each other and disjointedness from our world.

In Christian theology we call this event the Fall.

Sin is so pervasive that every form of work is affected in some way.

So work took on another new, very ordinary but very discouraging dimension.

It's found here in Genesis 3, especially verses 17 – 19.

Adam (and Eve) are told what about work: they'll face "painful toil".

Not many of us face "painful toil" today in the same way as ancient agricultural farmers.

But I think there is an equivalent.

You know what the equivalent of 'painful toil' is today?

The mundaneness of work. You know when your occupation is so humdrum. The tediousness. The monotony of work. Day after day it's the same things. Some days are drudgery.

Then what else? "Thorns and thistles".

What we try to do and the plans we make are oftentimes frustrated.

We think we're sowing corn and we get gorse.

Interruptions that stymie and thwart our work.

Frustrations come in all forms.

³ Acts 18:1 – 3.

Who had to sort through a technology issue in the last week?
Who had a mechanical problem to deal with?
Who had some kind of physical illness that inhibited your work?
The list could go on.

Thorns and thistles – frustrations – still continue to affect us today.

And the “sweat of your brow”.

Work is often grueling. It’s taxing and demanding. It’s a grind. The amount of exertion necessary to complete our work can sometimes seem too much to bear.

I vividly remember several years ago when Kay and the kids were constantly sick over winter. Kay was pregnant with Pippa at the time and was feeling exhausted anyway. But she would get a cold and then one of the other children would get sick and just as she recovered from the first bout, the next lot would hit. It seemed like an unending cycle. It made the work of parenthood, and especially motherhood, a grind.

So now work is often mundane or frustrating or a grueling, and sometimes all three at once.

So that’s one dimension the sin has brought to work.

Another is not all work is in the service of others, which brings fulfillment to the worker, benefit to the community, and glory to God.

Some work *is* destructive and we should not be doing it.

In every age the church has had its list of prohibitive occupations: the military if it involved killing, gladiators, the Puritans banned fashion designers (because of leading to vanity and excess) and Luther ruled out the role of being a monk or nun.

In the Bible witchcraft is forbidden in the Old Testament, and prostitution in the New.

There are areas where followers of Jesus need to honestly reflect on whether they can be involved or not.

Take for example the tobacco industry. Worldwide there are 1.5 million people a day who die from smoking related deaths. Would it be right for a believer to be involved in such work?

The production of landmines. 2,000 people are involved in landmine accidents every month - one victim every 20 minutes. Around 800 of these will die, the rest will be maimed. ⁴ A large number of those injured or killed are children.

The thing is these occupations are currently legal. However, an occupation may be legal, but it may not be ethical. As followers of Jesus we are always called to make that differentiation.

With that in mind here's a question

What present day occupations – that are legal– have poor reputations?

- Real Estate
- Advertising
- Closer to home, often in the poorer suburbs of New Zealand, is the issue of easy loan companies.

Would it be right to be involved in a business that charges 29.95% interest on their loans (which is far more than any bank or credit card) to some of societies most vulnerable people?

- Car sales

What's our response to be then?

Well, the story does not end with the Fall.

We who follow Jesus are called to live out of a different story.

The whole world is going to be redeemed – including work.

Through Jesus God has redeemed the world at great cost to himself so that one day everything will be made new – including our work.

But until then we are not simply passing time.

In Titus we read that Jesus “gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, *eager to do what is good.*”

⁴ <http://www.newint.org/features/1997/09/05/facts/>

Redemption is not reserved for a couple of hours on a Sunday morning.

We are partnering in God's great work of redemption especially in our places of work.

Acting Justly, Ethically and Redemptively

The call then is to act justly, ethically and redemptively in our places of work.

When John the Baptist arrived on the scene preparing the way for Jesus, people asked "What should we do?", how their work and lives should be done differently.

John's response?

"John answered, "Anyone who has two shirts should share with the one who has none, and anyone who has food should do the same."

Even tax collectors came to be baptized. "Teacher," they asked, "what should we do?"

"Don't collect any more than you are required to," he told them.

Then some soldiers asked him, "And what should we do?"

He replied, "Don't extort money and don't accuse people falsely—be content with your pay."

John didn't say to the tax collectors and soldiers "Give up your jobs and pursue a more 'holy' calling!"

He was in affect saying let your daily life be lived differently, even in a difficult profession.

In particular, act ethically and justly in two professions well known for their corruption.

We have the story of Zacchaeus

A short man with terrible reputation.

The Luke Illustrated Gospel Project captures this well:

As chief tax collector for the city he had 'done a deal with the devil'; reclining at the Roman overlord's table, betraying his own people and making a hefty profit in the process. His gang of thugs collected a crooked kind of GST and kept a side plate of unfair gains for themselves.

Yet a change takes place Zacchaeus when Jesus drops by for lunch.

Zacchaeus was lost but is now part of God's family; he is saved.

Yet Zacchaeus salvation was more than a personal experience of Jesus; it was more than His personal relationship with God.

It had massive work and economic ramifications:

In Zacchaeus' own words:

“Look, Lord! Here and now I give half of my possessions to the poor, and if I have ripped anyone off, I will pay back four times the amount.”

There is no record of Zacchaeus leaving his work but there is no doubt that his life and work were transformed.

Acting ethically and justly are ways in which Jesus wants to redeem our work.

Now, we may not be involved in activities that are particularly prone towards corruption and unethical behaviour.

Yet we can still seek to see our daily work through the lens of God's desire for the good of all human beings.

Recently I read about a car salesman by the name of Don.

The typical idea for a car salesman is to sell each car for the highest price you can, and so sales people are rewarded for identifying and persuading the highest paying customers. But Don had a different vision: the value of a good vehicle to each and every customer.

But he discovered a problem: women and minorities were paying more for their cars than the more negotiation-savvy white males.

So Don decided that the best way to approach this was by setting a flat rate on all cars – no negotiating – to effect equal opportunity pricing.

How this looks in our respective work can be in a myriad of ways.

In all our roles and tasks we need to be prayerfully discerning.

How can we (among other things)...

- Steward resources well
- Serve others with joy
- Employ God-given creativity
- Witness to God's truth
- Tell the truth and encourage such habits as honesty and integrity
- Bring healing, understanding and reconciliation

- Build community, and promote peace and harmony
- Preserve and conserve
- Work for justice and peace-making
- Nurture and encourage others' gifts and character development?⁵

When you look at this list, is there anything that stands out to you?

And what about work that is often mundane or frustrating or a grueling, and sometimes all three at once?

Sometimes we have to weather that season with God's help and the Spirit's wisdom and guidance.

Sometimes the Spirit empowers us and gives new meaning to our work.

Sometimes what is needed is a change in career and retraining in something else.

We need the wisdom to know what is the right choice in the season we are in and whether we have adopted patterns that are not good for us or others.

For example, we stay too long in a position and all the signs are that it's time to move on. However the thought of the new is too frightening. That fear needs to be taken to Jesus.

Or we may be constantly changing where we work. It's not unusual today to have 3 or 4 places of employment and careers over a lifetime. However when it is continuous we have again ask why. Sometime the constant need for the new is at odds with the God's call to be faithful – to stick it out.

And when family life is involved we simply can't bail...

One practice though is though we all need is the Sabbath.

A lot more could be said but to Sabbath is to rest and enjoy that rest because of our labours.

It is also an act of trust. It is a way of reminding yourself that you are not the one who keeps world running, that everything is dependent on you and will fall apart completely if you don't keep going.

The Sabbath reminds us that the mundane, frustrating or a grueling is not all there is that our Christian brothers and sisters can help us through.

⁵ Alistair Mackenzie, *Where is God on a Monday*, 26.