

The Continuity and Dignity of the Ordinary

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[0 : 00] Well, today we continue our study of what I'm calling everyday theology. Obviously, most of life is not lived in corporate gatherings of the church, meeting for worship, Bible study, prayer, and so on.

Most of life is not lived on mission trips. Most of life is lived in the completely ordinary, getting up in the morning, eating breakfast, going to work, raising kids, doing household chores, even sleeping. So what does the Bible say about these things? If most of the Christian life is lived in the ordinary, what does the Bible say about the ordinary? Well, so far, I've attempted to lay some foundation for our study.

Looking at the book of Ecclesiastes and the wisdom of Solomon, I tried to show that the right perspective on anything, anything in this life, starts with God.

And that makes sense, doesn't it? After all, life itself begins with God. He is our creator. He is the creator of all things. So if we are going to properly understand anything, God must be at the center of our study.

[1 : 19] And that's precisely what Solomon encourages in the book of Ecclesiastes. Remember your creator, he says. But even more than that, Solomon wants us to know that our creator is not a distant, passive figure.

He is sovereign over the affairs of men. And he is actively, providentially guiding all of life, every season, every event, every circumstance is according to his good and wise design.

But not only that, Solomon also wants us to keep eternity in view. It's pretty easy to get trapped in what I call the fog of time.

We see the days ahead. We see maybe the week ahead, maybe the year ahead. But Solomon says there's a whole eternity ahead of us.

And this matters for at least two reasons. First, we realize that this life, as we know it right here, right now, is only temporary.

[2 : 26] And that discourages us from investing too heavily in perishable things, things that won't last, things that ultimately have little significance.

And second, it reminds us that life doesn't suddenly come to an abrupt end where nothing comes after that.

Even at death, there is more to come. And that is why the narrator of Ecclesiastes offers the conclusion he does. He says, fear God and keep his commandments.

You see, our lives and the choices we make in this life have eternal significance. So fear God and do what he, our creator, commands us to do.

In fact, the narrator goes on to say, for God will bring every deed into judgment with every secret thing, whether good or evil. This life has consequences.

[3 : 27] Not only now, but also in the future. In other words, what we do here truly matters. It will matter in eternity. And that leads us to another facet of eternity I want us to consider, which is the continuity of eternal life.

The continuity. Turn in your Bible to 1 Corinthians 3, if you will. 1 Corinthians chapter 3. Now, while you make your way there, I'll read a verse from 2 Corinthians 5.

This is 2 Corinthians 5.10. Paul writes, For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, so that each one may receive what is due for what he has done in the body, whether good or evil.

Now, perhaps you wonder why Christians would need to appear before Christ's judgment seat.

Hasn't God already declared us not guilty?

Hasn't Christ already justified us? Why will believers be judged? Well, on the one hand, God will judge us on the merits of Christ.

[4 : 43] Those in Christ are not guilty. But there is a secondary judgment, for lack of a better term, that we will undergo.

Notice what Paul says here in 1 Corinthians 3, starting at verse 10. According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation, and someone else is building upon it. Let each one take care how he builds upon it. For no one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now, if anyone builds on the foundation, with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each one's work will become manifest, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. So, Paul is talking specifically about Christian ministry, Christian service, and he says we're all building something upon the foundation of ultimately Christ, but also the apostles and maybe those who have gone before us.

[6 : 09] Now, we're not all building with the same materials, though. We're not all building with the same skill or with the same care. Some are building with gold, while others are building with straw. Clearly, some materials are better than others.

And he says there is coming a day when each one's work will become manifest. It will be revealed. In other words, if it isn't clear now what we're building with, it will become clear eventually.

And this will happen on what Paul calls the day. And that would be the day of Christ, the day he returns, the day he comes, and we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ.

So, even his redeemed, his justified people will be judged, and we will receive what is due for what we have done in the body, whether good or evil.

Here, Paul says we will either receive a reward or suffer loss. And he clarifies that this would not be the loss of eternal life. Notice verse 15 again.

[7 : 20] If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved.

Evidently, there's a kind of reward system in heaven, which I'm sure we'd all love to know more about, but I won't be much help to you this morning.

I trust that whatever we receive in heaven, we will be completely satisfied because we will be far from sin, and we will be with God our Savior.

I've said before that if the Lord wants to make me a janitor scrubbing toilets on the new earth, I will happily scrub those toilets in his presence. And that's kind of the point I'm coming to, but before I get there, let me read a quote from Randy Alcorn in his book Heaven.

He writes, We have the assurance of Scripture that all believers will survive the fire of testing and be raised. But it is not only ourselves that will outlast this world and be carried over to the new one. It is what we do with our lives. Our righteous works will follow us to heaven. Revelation 14, 13. Not only will some things that God has made survive his judgment, but so will some things we have done.

[8 : 48] Products of faithful lives will endure. They will be purified and laid bare so their beauty will be forever seen. God's fire will not destroy the whole earth.

It will destroy all that displeases him. But there is so much that pleases him. And these things will endure the fire to be reconstituted after the final resurrection of the dead.

Not only will acts of obedience and spiritual sacrifices be carried over from one world to the next, but everything else good will also last forever.

You see, when we think about heaven, or we think about eternal life, we're prone to think of it as something utterly different than the lives we live now.

Now, it will certainly be different. It will certainly be better. But I don't believe it will be entirely foreign to us. Remember that God originally designed humanity to live on this earth with plants and trees and animals.

[9 : 53] He gave us bodies to walk around him. He gave us companionship with other human beings. He gave us the ability to talk to one another, to touch one another.

He gave us work to do. He told Adam to work and keep the garden. He gave us food and drink. I mean, if this was God's original design for humanity, and we're told he will give us a new heaven and a new earth when Christ returns, what makes us think that there won't be a significant amount of continuity between this life and the next?

In Psalm 90, Moses prays, let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us and establish the work of our hands. That word establish could be translated make permanent.

Moses was asking God to give permanence to their good works. And while he might have simply meant in this life, the context of the entire psalm suggests to me that he is referring to this life and beyond.

Establish our work now and forever, Lord. And we can turn to many places in Scripture to see this kind of continuity from this life on the present earth to the life we'll live on the new earth.

[11 : 20] The Bible shows that the new earth will have plants and animals just like this one. We will have physical bodies which Christ will raise from their graves and reunite with their souls.

There is eating and drinking on the new earth. Presumably, there's working, since that is in part what God created us for in the beginning. Revelation 22 talks about serving on the new earth.

In Isaiah chapter 2, we're promised a day when the Lord will beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks. Now, obviously, that has more to do with the end of wars and fighting, but God simply, He's not simply destroying the weapons, He's turning them into farming tools.

Why? Well, it's probably because we'll be working, you know, gardening, farming, growing food on the new earth. Recently, I was reading about Thomas Aquinas who lived in the 13th century, and he believed that heaven is not so much a physical place with people living and moving.

Instead, he thought of it as an altogether spiritual place where the only part of us that is really active is our minds. We just contemplate God for all eternity.

[12 : 43] Well, a Catholic priest by the name of Boudreaux wrote a book in the 18th century to argue against Aquinas, and here's what he said. We are active by nature.

Action, therefore, both of mind and body, is a law of our being which cannot be changed without radically changing or rather destroying our whole nature.

Instead of destroying it, it follows that in heaven we shall be far more active than we can possibly be here below. The soul of Jesus Christ enjoyed the beatific vision.

Even while he was here on earth in mortal flesh, was he, on that account, prevented from doing anything except contemplating the divine essence? He certainly was not.

He labored and preached. He also drank and slept. He visited his friends and did a thousand other things. And by the way, I might add that he did many of these things even after his resurrection.

[13 : 46] But we'll come back to the example of Jesus. So, we have a lot of reasons to believe in a continuity between this life and the life to come.

Now, life on the new earth will be radically better, but I'm not sure it'll be radically different. I think it'll be very familiar to us in many respects.

And if you want to study this further, I do recommend Randy Alcorn's book, Heaven. It is very well done, quite exhaustive. It's a great resource. But why does this continuity matter?

Why do we need to see this? Well, if we view life from a purely secular worldview and we take that worldview to its most obvious and logical conclusion, everything we do in this life is ultimately meaningless.

And that was Solomon's point, right? This kind of under-the-sun thinking necessarily means our daily activities have no significance beyond this life.

[14 : 59] There is no eternity according to the secular worldview. There is nothing after death. So, once we die, that's it. Everything we've ever done gets buried with us.

The end. But, if there is an eternity, and more to the point, if there is an eternity with continuity between this life and the life to come, then everything matters, including the most seemingly mundane aspects of life.

We eat and drink in this life. So what? Well, we eat and drink in the next. We sleep in this life. Now, I don't know whether we'll sleep in the next, but we will rest, if nothing else.

We work in this life. It seems we will work in the next. So, everything we do actually carries over to eternity, for the most part. There are exceptions. And, of course, every consequence of sin will be removed in the life to come.

So, think of it like this. And I'm talking specifically about believers, by the way. Our lives now are just a taste of what's to come.

[16 : 17] And we can probably relate to this best when we think about our Sunday morning worship. The singing. The praising. The encouragement we receive from it.

We've all had that feeling at times where we think, this is what heaven must be like. Now, we know this isn't heaven. We know it's still a place severely corrupted by sin, but we have these little moments where God seems to grant to us just a glimpse into paradise.

You know what I'm talking about? Well, believe it or not, we can get these glimpses Monday through Saturday.

How do I know? Well, just as we sing praises to God in heaven, we will also eat there. And we will rest. And we will work in heaven.

Just as we enjoy the presence of God in heaven, we can enjoy the presence of God even now. That's how we get these little glimpses into paradise. And of course, we can feel His presence whether we are worshiping with the church on Sunday or washing the dishes on Tuesday.

[17:27] I have a book at home full of prayers and liturgies for the ordinary moments of life. And as I was reading it this week, I read this prayer for washing windows.

Listen. As we labor to cleanse glass panes, of grime smeared and blurring, call us to consider, O Lord of light, the same work of Your Word and of Your Spirit.

Every cleansing of our hearts, our inclinations, our habits, of such stain as would block the passage of Your light through our lives. Meet us now, O Lord, in the washing of windows.

In this small toil, call us to contemplate how the glass is not set in the window frame in order to be seen, but to be seen through.

Then show us how our lives also have been fitted to their various frames and times and places of Your choosing that Your glory might in those places be evidenced.

[18:35] Meet us now, O Lord, in the washing of windows. Your children are the windows through which the world sees You best. Ever cleanse and sanctify us, therefore, not that we might be noticed for our virtues, but that Your light through us might be ever more clearly witnessed, Your radiance and Your beauty unclouded by our sin.

Meet us now, O Lord, in the washing of windows. Meet us and make us more fitting casements for the coursings of Your eternal light. Amen.

Now, I read this prayer because it beautifully illustrates an important point. Our worship of God is not limited to corporate worship with the church on Sunday.

We can worship God any day of the week. And we can worship God even when we're doing something as seemingly secular as washing windows.

In fact, we can not only worship God while we're washing windows, but we can actually worship God by washing windows. Yes, washing windows can be an act of worship.

[19:53] What did Paul say? Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God. wash windows to the glory of God.

But we might ask, how can we worship God by washing windows? Even unbelievers wash windows. That's true. But think about the prayer I just read.

The author of that prayer has God at the center of his window washing, right? In fact, God is his motivation for washing windows. And as he's doing the work, he's meditating on God and on his truth.

He's finding these beautiful parallels between the work he's currently doing and the work that God and Christ and his spirit are currently doing.

He's recognizing the fact that he's imaging God, our creator, as he does something as seemingly mundane and ordinary as washing windows.

[21:00] And perhaps best of all, he's aware of God's presence as he works. He even invites God into his window washing. Meet us now, O Lord, in the washing of windows.

So yes, we can enjoy the presence of God in the ordinary. We can get a glimpse of heaven itself even when we're washing windows.

Granted, everything, including our worship on Sunday, is tainted by sin and by our fallen nature and the fallen nature of this world, but it can still be beautiful.

As Solomon says, it can still be enjoyed. I perceive that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live, also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil.

this is God's gift to man. Now, I've implied as much, but this might be a good time to clarify that unless we are in Christ, that unless we have been reconciled to God through Christ, we will not discover the kind of joy and pleasure Solomon is talking about.

[22 : 17] we might find a reason to get out of bed every morning. We might even enjoy some of the mundane tasks of life, but apart from Christ, we cannot find deep, lasting fulfillment because if nothing else, we will always see our expiration date looming.

We won't see the continuity between this life and the next. We'll keep pushing that boulder up the hill over and over again until this life comes to an end. And whatever meaning we thought it had will be no more.

The unbeliever will stand before the judgment seat without the protection, without the security of Christ's atoning work on the cross and will enter into permanent despair.

You know, this is true for unbelievers and believers. If the Lord is not at the heart of what we are doing, then we will not find meaning. We will not find satisfaction.

We will not find joy in it. So obviously, an unbeliever who remains separated from God will not find true meaning or satisfaction or joy. But even a believer who perhaps mistakenly separates the sacred from the secular and isn't mindful of the Lord when he or she is washing windows, well, he or she may too forfeit these blessings.

[23 : 45] Going back to what Paul said in 1 Corinthians 3, he or she may find that some of their work is burned up and suffer loss when Christ returns because they fail to treat their so-called secular work as sacred, which it truly is or should be.

Colossians 3, 23, whatever you do, whatever you do, work heartily as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward.

You are serving the Lord Christ. Now, last time, I made the comment that Christ dignified the ordinary and I want to explain what I meant by that.

I pointed out that Jesus lived most of his life not doing miracles, at least not in public. The Apostle John says the first of his signs was when he turned water into wine at the wedding in Cana.

That's in John 2. So, for approximately 30 years of his, say, 33-year life, he was not performing miracles, he was not in public ministry, he was not doing missionary work, he was not doing any of the extraordinary, supernatural things we typically think of when we think about Christ on this earth.

[25 : 16] For three decades, he was doing what? Well, I think we're led to believe he was living a completely ordinary life.

In fact, Luke records one of the most stunning details about Jesus' life at the end of Luke 2. This is when Jesus is 12 years old and his parents can't find him after leaving Jerusalem so they return to the city and they find him sitting in the temple with the teachers.

And Luke concludes the story with this, and Jesus increased in wisdom and in stature and in favor with God and man.

Now the reason I find that stunning is because it is so easy to forget the Lord's humanity. We know he is fully human.

He's not half human. He's fully human. But we have a tendency to forget that when we're reading the Gospels and we're seeing the miracles and the Lord's transfiguration and so on and this little detail in Luke for me anyway shocks me back to reality.

[26 : 32] As a human Jesus had to grow up. He was once a baby who had his diaper changed. He probably played in the yard as a kid.

Eventually he grew up and he had to work for a living. In other words at least prior to his public ministry he led a perfectly ordinary life.

Now I got to thinking about this a few weeks ago and I began to wonder what do you suppose a typical day for Jesus looked like? Now after he started his public ministry I'm not sure whether he ever had a so-called ordinary day but I'm thinking about his life before that.

I'm thinking about his life before he went into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and be tempted by the devil. Before he went to John the Baptist to be baptized. What did a typical day for Jesus look like?

You know I've read a lot of productivity books. I read one called The Miracle Morning. That's a grandiose promise. And the premise was that if you follow this particular morning routine you will be far more productive in your life.

[27 : 47] It will be so much better you'll be happier and successful and all of that. Well there are a lot of so-called experts who promote the idea of following a particular routine or schedule.

If you do it this way everything will work out great. But as a Christian, as a follower, a disciple, student of Christ, I was curious to know what kind of daily routines Jesus might have kept.

Obviously we can't know with any kind of certainty. The Bible doesn't tell us what Jesus was doing prior to his ministry but I made what I believe are some logical deductions anyway.

So Paul tells us that he was born under the law and we know that he kept the law perfectly. This means he followed God's law and he kept the commandments and it most likely means that he fell right into the ordinary rhythms of Jewish life in the first century.

So he probably started his day pretty early in the morning around sunrise. That was customary. He would have probably washed up, prayed, recited the Shema of Deuteronomy 6 and given thanks to God.

[29 : 04] Even after the start of his ministry we know that he frequently went off by himself very early in the morning to pray. Luke 5 verse 16 says he would withdraw to desolate places and pray.

And I suspect that was true even before his public ministry. So we might say he started his day with private devotion. From there we know he was a carpenter, right?

In Mark 6 the people asked, is this not the carpenter? Prior to his ministry that's how people in Nazareth knew him. He was a local carpenter.

We also know that his adopted father Joseph was a carpenter so maybe he learned his craft from Joseph, maybe they worked together until Joseph died. So it's kind of interesting to think that Jesus was not locked away in a study somewhere, reading the Bible all day long or on his knees praying all day long.

He was out working with his hands most of the day. He was building or fixing tables, doors, plows, and so on.

[30 : 17] He probably did a lot of his work in his shop but as I understand it, first century carpenters frequently went out and did the work on site. Hey, I've got a plow broken down, will you come over and fix it? So he would frequently go to different places to work and of course this was the means by which he supported himself and possibly his mother after Joseph died.

So he's exchanging money like we all do. He's saving money, he's spending money, he's buying groceries and so on. Now around noon he likely went home to have lunch with his family.

Typical meal would have been something like bread, olives, vegetables, maybe some dried fish and then after the meal was over he'd go back to work. Of course he also had household chores that he likely had to do throughout the day, possibly run errands, draw water.

If they had any animals he had to take care of the animals. Might have to get fuel for cooking and for light. In the evening as the sun set he probably returned home for another meal with his family.

This time would then include more prayer, more reading or at least reciting of scripture. And you can probably imagine the scene, the house being very dimly lit because all they're working with are oil lamps.

[31 : 44] Of course when you rely on oil to light your home you can't burn your lamps all night so chances are Jesus was in bed a couple of hours after sunset. Probably would have rolled out his wool or fiber mat that was maybe stuffed with straw for some extra padding and slept right on the floor.

So that's more or less what a typical day for Jesus might have looked like. Would have been relatively simple, relatively humble. He might have had busier days than others but I suspect it was fairly routine and at least from an outsider's perspective altogether ordinary.

Then again I wonder whether ordinary is even an appropriate word to use. I mean we are talking about the life of the word who became flesh and dwelt among us.

This is the same word who in the beginning was with God and was God. All things were made through him and without him was not anything made that was made.

So we are talking about God the creator becoming a human being. And when he became a human being he spent the majority of his life just like the rest of us.

[33 : 10] He was born, he grew up, he worked for a living, he had household chores, and he certainly did not disdain the mundane aspects of life.

By virtue of who he was, God in the flesh, he dignified the so called ordinary. We might even say he sanctified the ordinary. Do you remember when it was popular for Christians to wear t-shirts and bracelets that said WWJD, the question mark?

That was the acronym for what would Jesus do? Well, Jesus would go to work. Jesus would take care of his family.

Jesus would draw water from the well. He would feed the animals. He would eat meals. He would do all of the routine, ordinary things we all do. And he would do these things even though, first of all, he was God the creator.

And second, he would do these things even though his primary mission, his primary mission for being here was much greater than washing dishes or taking out the trash.

[34 : 25] Matthew 121, he came to save his people from their sins. And yet, he did not as creator and savior disdain or even avoid the ordinary.

In the end, we're told, we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but one who in every respect has been tempted as we are, yet without sin. Maybe Jesus was tempted to complain or to avoid his responsibilities, but he didn't. Even in the ordinary, he submitted himself to God the Father and did everything to the glory of God the Father. Jesus didn't compartmentalize his life. He didn't think in terms of sacred or secular. He did everything in obedience to his Father.

He did everything for the glory of his Father. Whether he was praying or attending a synagogue or eating a meal or fixing a table, he did everything in devotion to his heavenly Father.

[35 : 40] And because of who he is, he shows us that every moment of life actually matters. Every moment of life can be something sacred.

We should resist the temptation to think that only spiritual activities are significant. Worshiping with the church, praying, studying the Bible, making disciples, these things are good and necessary. But if we limit our view of the Christian life to only these things, we miss so much of the richness and depth of God's design.

We miss out on the joys of seeing God's hand at work even in the smallest details of our lives.

Think again about Jesus' life before his public ministry.

every nail driven, every piece of wood he shaped, every meal eaten, every moment spent with his family and friends, every ordinary moment was part of that perfect righteousness Jesus accomplished for our sake so that we might be clothed in his righteousness through faith.

[37 : 00] Now those earlier years may not be recorded for us in scripture, but they are part of that perfect life that brought us salvation. Remember that his death would have been meaningless if not for his life.

And most of that life was lived in the ordinary. So when we consider these two things, the continuity between this life and the life to come and the fact that Jesus himself spent so much of his time doing the ordinary, we should realize that all of life has eternal significance.

As Paul says, in the Lord your labor is not in vain. It may be hard now. It may be frustrating in many ways.

For the time being, we're still groaning in a fallen world where struggles and temptations abound, but it won't be like this forever. When Christ returns, we may still have chores to do.

We may still have seemingly mundane routines to accomplish, but everything, everything unpleasant about those tasks will be removed. And more to the point, even now, we can find joy in them.

[38 : 23] Even now, we can get a glimpse of heaven while we're doing them. After all, we're talking about what God created us to do.

We're talking about what Christ himself did. And we're talking about what God redeemed us to do for eternity.

Let's pray. Father, we thank you for this time in your word. You are the Lord of all our days, both the extraordinary and the ordinary, and we are grateful that you care for every detail of our lives.

Help us, Lord, to live each moment with you at the center. Teach us to see your hand in our daily tasks, and Lord, grant us hearts that worship you in all we do, whether great or small.

May we remember that our work, our rest, and even the simplest routines are sanctified by your presence. Strengthen us to glorify you with our hands and our hearts, knowing that our labor in you is never in vain.

[39 : 44] Help us to fix our eyes on eternity, that we may find joy and purpose in this life that you have given us, confident that one day we will dwell with you forever.

We pray all of this through Jesus Christ, our Savior. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.