

The Dignity of Work

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[0:00] We began a series on the topic of work last week, and we are using the book Every Good Endeavor by Timothy Keller. I meant to bring it, but I left it at home. Last week was the design of work. That was the chapter, the design of work. And we saw five things about the design of work.

And the first was that in the beginning, there was work. The Bible describes God's creation as God working. And right from the very beginning, man worked right alongside of God.

And then we saw how God works. He works with delight. He works with care. And then he works with man. And that led us to the topic of the goodness of our work.

The goodness of work. Now, what were some of the ways that we saw that work is good? It's for our good, and it's good in and of itself.

We saw it in a number of ways. Can you remind us of those? Anyone? It's part of paradise. Right from the very beginning, before the curse, there was work.

[1:15] And so that obviously shows that from the very beginning, it wasn't a necessary evil. It was something good. How else do you see that work itself is good?

It came from God. It came from God. Before man worked, God worked. So work is not something without dignity. Work is not something that is evil.

As the image bearers of God, work is as much a part of our humanity as food and rest and friendship and worship. And Tim Keller said it's not simply medicine for our souls. It's food for our souls.

We don't need it just every now and then when we are sick. We need it all the time to live a full life. What else did we see of the goodness of work?

We see it in the dosage of work. What's the correct dosage for work? Well, in the Ten Commandments, it says six days you shall work. One day you shall rest.

[2:23] Work is one of the very few things that we can take in in a large measure and not be harmed by it. Instead, be helped by it. So we saw the goodness of work. Then we saw the freedom of work.

The freedom of work. Work frees us. It's where our humanity experiences freedom. Where we free ourselves to provide for ourselves, for our loved ones.

It's where we grow and thrive. It's where we develop and mature our gifts and our skills. And so six days you shall work and one day you shall rest is not a burden.

Instead, it's an invitation to freedom. It's an invitation to experience the goodness of God. But then we saw, last of all, that work has its limits.

Work cannot be our God. Some people have made work their God. And that's where the command to rest, to Sabbath, shows us that we cannot exalt work over God.

[3:36] Instead, we need to take time to stop, to enjoy God, to enjoy his creation. So that was the design of work.

Now today's lesson is entitled, The Dignity of Work. The Dignity of Work. And we have, I basically have two points this morning. The first is, work as a demeaning necessity.

And that's where we're going to talk about how the worldviews work. So work as a demeaning necessity. And then the second is, work as a mark of human dignity.

And that's where we're going to talk about what the Bible teaches. So first we're going to talk about what the world says about work. Work and dignity. And so we'll cover this.

Work as a demeaning necessity. Now, we're going to start in a strange place. We're going to start with a person who didn't think work was demeaning at all.

[4:35] Her name was Anne Rand. And maybe you've heard of her. She's one of the most widely read philosophers of the last century on work. She wrote novels.

And she exalted work. She didn't demean it at all. In her novel, *The Fountainhead*, she introduces this character named Howard Rourke.

And he is a master architect. So he loves designing buildings. Designing buildings stirs his soul. It fills him up. It fills his imagination. And it shows. And then what he creates. His buildings are beautiful. They're imaginative. They're useful.

And Anne Rand paints this character as a fully realized, a full human being. So the other characters, the other architects that work alongside of this Howard character, they do it for money. [5 : 36] They do it for prestige. But Howard designs as a religion. Now, Rand saw work as man's dignity.

But she took it too far. She took it too far. She made an idol out of work. Listen to a quote in one of her pieces.

Productive work is the central purpose of a rational man's life. The central value that integrates, that brings together all the other parts of his life, that integrates and determines the hierarchy of all his other values.

So work is the central purpose of a rational man's life. And it's the highest. It's the most important of values. Now, she went too far.

What is the central purpose of a rational man's life? Of a man's life? To glorify God. To worship God. To love God.

[6 : 49] We're to love him with all of our hearts and our mind and our soul and our strength. All that we are, all that we can do, all that we can think, all that we can feel is meant to be dominated by the love of God.

But so she went too far. And that's instructive for us because we too have a tendency to see an evil and then jump in the pit on the other side.

And that's what she did. She saw the evils of socialism and she reacted to it. She saw how socialism took the heart out of man.

And so her remedy was to exalt, to elevate work. Now, why start with someone who doesn't demean work but exalts it?

Well, because that's what you will do. That's what I will do if we don't begin with the word of God. Okay? We'll see an evil and we'll jump under the pit on the other side.

[7 : 52] And so you will make something your savior. You'll make something your Lord, your redemption, the way that you have value.

And she made work her savior. She made work her righteousness, her identity. And then she evangelized others to do the same. She wanted others to believe what she believed.

And so she went from one extreme to another. She was reacting against socialism and she's reacting against the normal, I think, the normal Western view of work.

You see, because most people don't view work as dignified. Not really. Most people believe work is demeaning in one way or the other.

They view it as a necessary evil. Now, if we're going to begin talking about the way the world thinks about, the Western world thinks about work, we're going to start back with Aristotle.

[8 : 57] Now, he's probably not somebody you read. He's not somebody I read very often. But this is what he said. That unemployment, unemployment, by which he meant the ability to live without work, unemployment was a primary qualification for living a genuinely worthwhile life.

So he taught this, that if you are really going to live a life that's worth living, you can't work. You have to be unemployed. You have to be independently wealthy.

Well, in that world, then who got to live a genuinely worthwhile life? Well, pretty much only the philosophers, only the people that got paid to sit around and think.

And so everyone else had a job to do, right? Even the kings had to govern and rule. And so how's that for pride?

The only people that are really living a worthwhile life are the people like me. And as I thought about that, the terrible and the incredibly stupid thing about it is that people believed him.

[10 : 12] They believed him even when it said something terrible about themselves. Well, why believe it? Well, in that world, it was a dualistic world.

And what I mean is, spiritual was good, and the fleshly was bad. The body was bad, the soul was good. And so this body, they taught, they thought, kept our souls, our minds, from rising to the heights of what they could rise to.

The body kept the soul from rising to the heights and seeing and understanding wisdom, understanding knowledge. And so what they said is, the more you withdraw from this world and the physicality of it, the better off you are.

So the more you withdraw from this world of dirt. Jim, do you ever haul dirt? I'm sure you do. The more you withdraw from that world of dirt and food and bodies, the more you could really rise above it and really live a life worth living.

And so for them, working made you like an animal. Made you like an animal. It tied you to this world. It tied you to this world of fear and anger and toil and sweat.

[11:33] Tied you to that world. Now, obviously, someone has to work. Because we all can't sit around and think all day. They even knew that. So what they then said was, well, if you have to work, what is going to be the best way to work?

Well, the people who use their minds and use their knowledge is better than people who use their hands. So mind work is noble, less beastly.

And manual labor is for slaves. For people that aren't really even humans at all. Now, you might say, what does that have to do with us?

What does that have to do with our world? That was a long time ago. Well, that whole way of thinking is still alive and well. And it reflects itself in our world today.

Now, that's why most people don't really believe what Ayn Rand taught. Most people think work is a necessary evil.

[12:40] It's demeaning. It takes away me from really living. So I work for the weekend. So I work so I have some money. So on the weekend, then I can finally live.

And then the only good work is work that pays well. It's work that pays well and allows me to pay others to do the menial, the less desirable tasks.

And that's why people then think that having a lower status job, a lower paying job, is somehow an assault on their dignity.

And men, I think you probably know that. When you meet someone, you ask them what they do.

And does it ever cross your mind? Well, that's how much that person makes.

And I make more than them. Or I make less than them. So that's why people choose jobs that they're not suited to at all. They choose careers that pay well, but they're not where their heart is or doesn't fit their gifts.

[13:51] And that's why in our culture, it's being divided more and more between the people who have high paying knowledge jobs and low paying service jobs.

And then there's the pride that goes along with that. Every other religion produces something, some sort of human pride. And this is one of those things.

So people with the knowledge class jobs look down on the handyman, the dry cleaners, the landscapers. They look down on those people. They haven't applied themselves.

They haven't worked hard enough. Well, behind all that is this idea that work is demeaning. Real dignity, real life comes from hitting it big, making a lot of money, and then not having to work anymore.

And that's the allure of the lottery, the allure of making the get-quick-rich schemes. And so if you can't hit it big, then you better just get a job that pays a lot.

[14:58] And then you can pay as many people as possible to do the work that you don't want to do. And so work is demeaning, and the only thing that makes it even something to be desirable is the money that you get from it or the prestige that comes from doing it.

Now that's how the world looks at work. And it's no wonder, then, that people are sad and miserable at their work. And we're going to talk.

In the sin-sick world, work is hard as it is. It could be a miserable business just because we're living in a sin-sick world. But then when you're looking at it with those lens, that doesn't help matters at all, does it?

Well, that's our first point. Work is a demeaning necessity. Now, here's the second point. Work is a mark of human dignity. Work is a mark of human dignity.

And so if you've sort of zoned out a bit, if that kind of lost you on that first point, dial back in, focus back in, and listen to what the biblical view of work is.

[16:06] It's completely different. The Bible teaches that work, all kinds of work, whether you work with your hands or with your mind, is an evidence of your dignity.

It is not demeaning at all. It's actually a sign, an evidence of your dignity. Work isn't God, but our ability to work. And the work that we do reflects the very fact that we are in the image of God as part of our creation.

So please turn in your Bibles to Genesis chapter 1. Genesis chapter 1. And we're going to be in these first few chapters of Genesis for a couple more weeks.

And the reason is, is because it's not until chapter 5 or so that we get to where sin comes in. So we're going to be talking about the original, how work was meant to be from the very beginning, what it is at its core.

And then later we're going to talk about what sin twisted into. So Genesis chapter 1. It's interesting. We'll be looking at verse 26.

[17 : 20] It's interesting. Of all the creatures that God made, man is the only one that gets an office, that gets a position with his creation. So God tells the plants and the animals and the birds and the fish and all of that, he calls them to team and to reproduce, to fill the earth.

But to man, he gives a job. Look at verse 26. Then God said, Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air, over the livestock, over all the earth, and over all the creatures that move along the ground.

So God created man in his own image. In the image of God, he created him. Male and female, he created them. God blessed them and said to them, Be fruitful and increase in number.

Fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over every living creature that moves on the ground. So God gives specific work to do from the very beginning. We're called to rule, to subdue, to have dominion. Now, why do we have that job?

[18 : 46] Why is that our project? It's because of how he's made us. We're made in God's image. Now, what does it mean to be made in God's image?

What does it mean to be made in God's image? And it has everything to do with the work that we're called to do. I think it really helps to understand the ancient world here.

In the ancient Near East, so we're talking about Mesopotamia, the ancient Near East, the rulers of the people, the kings of the people, were said to be the images of the gods.

So Pharaoh was the living image of the sun god of Egypt, Ra. So Ra exerted his authority on earth through Pharaoh.

To be an image bearer was to be a symbol of royalty. It was to be vested with authority to rule.

Now, the kings of the ancient Near East and Mesopotamia and so on, they would put up statues.

[19 : 59] They would put up images. Remember Nebuchadnezzar's 90-foot-tall image. They'd put up these images throughout their kingdoms. And these statues were not just there for decoration.

They were symbols of that king's authority and the authority of their dominion. The image said, so you're walking down the street or you enter into a town and there's the image of that king.

And that image said, that man is king here. He has authority here. His will goes here. And so while the kings were the images of this or that god, they were the living projections of that god's authority, they were also called the sons of those gods.

Pharaoh was both the image of Ra and the son of Ra. The image of a god was the son of a god.

Now, so when you put those two ideas together, and we're just talking about the ancient Near East now here, the ancient world, you see what it meant for the original listeners, or at least the original Gentile listeners, what it meant to be an image of God.

It was to be a royal son. It was to be a son vested with authority to rule on earth. Now, a son resembles his father.

[21 : 18] And so we can talk about how we are like God in some ways. We have a mind and imagination and a will and so forth. We are like our father. We've been given the tools and the equipment to rule.

So a son resembles his father, but a royal son is also destined to rule with his father, or for his father.

Now, that's the ancient context. What does the Bible teach? Well, look at what it says. It's as image bearers that we rule.

Let us make man in our image, in our likeness, and let them rule. So it's out of who we are, what we are, the image of God, that we do our task, that we rule.

So the image of someone was also to be a son. Turn over to Genesis chapter 5. Genesis chapter 5. And would someone please read the first three verses?

[22:25] Just the first three verses. This is a written account of Adam's line. When God created man, he made him in the likeness of God. He created them male and female and blessed them.

And when they were created, he called them man. When Adam had lived 130 years, he had a son in his own likeness, in his own image, and he named himself.

After Seth was born, Adam lived 800 years, and had other sons and daughters. Thank you. So, God made a son, named him Adam.

And then Adam had a son named Seth. And did you see in both situations, both cases, they were in the image, the likeness, of their fathers.

Now, maybe that will help you understand what Paul is saying, when he talks about Christ being the image of God.

[23:23] In Colossians 1 and 2, he says this, For he has rescued us from the dominion of darkness, and brought us into the kingdom of the Son that he loves.

And then a couple of phrases later, he says, He, Christ, is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn over all creation. And in Hebrews, it says, The Son is the radiance of God's glory, and the exact representation of his being.

So, Jesus Christ is the ultimate image of God, the ultimate, the final, the great, royal Son. So, to, well, and that's why, when Jesus Christ came, and he preached the gospel, do you remember what he said?

Repent, for the kingdom of God is near. When I am with you, I bring the kingdom. And now that I'm here, the kingdom of God is now coming to earth.

It is establishing itself on the earth. So, Jesus could say, or Jesus, we could say, is the great and the final image of God. He is coming, he came, and he is coming again, to restore everything that Adam lost.

[24:46] To bring, finally, the kingdom of God to earth. So, to be an image bearer, to be in the image of God, is to be a royal son. It's to be a person vested with divine authority, to rule, to do a job, to work.

And so, then what are we called to do? What are each one of you called to do as image bearers of God? You are called to stand for God, here in this world, and to project his authority, to exercise stewardship, and authority, over this world, as his sons, in a general sense.

And so, we share, we share in his work. So, we do the things that we saw our father doing. God brought order out of chaos.

And so, we organize, and we plan. We organize, and we plan. We tend, and we guard. We creatively build things that are beautiful, and useful.

We care for what we've made. We care for what God has made. That's our job. And all the different kinds of jobs that we do here, as long as they are lawful work, you can do it as a royal son.

[26:08] It's a function of your dignity. It's a function of your dignified status. And so, while the rest of the world looks on work as demeaning, as a necessary evil, the Bible paints work as our dignity.

It's not what makes us like animals. It's what makes us not like animals. It's what makes us like God.

So, work itself is dignified, and all kinds of work, then, is dignified. Including the work that just uses your hands. The knowledge class job is not better, in God's sight, than the manual labor job.

God's own work in Genesis 1, is manual labor. It depicts God, planting a garden. That's manual labor.

And so, before anyone looks down on someone who mows lawns, and does landscaping, and does landscaping, for a living out there in the hot sun, you say, boy, I'm glad I'm not them, or something like that.

[27:24] Remember, God planted a garden. God took the dirt of the earth, and he molded it, and then he breathed the breath of life into it. God worked with his hands.

It's hard for us to realize how mind-blowing that would have been to the ancient world, when the Bible was first written. Philip Jensen puts it this way, if God came into the world, what would he be like?

For the ancient Greeks, he might have been a philosopher king. The ancient Romans might have looked for a just, and a noble statesman. But how does the God of the Hebrews come into this world?

He came to us as a carpenter. So, when God came in the flesh, Emmanuel, he came to us as a construction worker.

And so, in Genesis 1, we see God as a gardener. In the New Testament, we see God in Christ as a carpenter. And, I like that.

[28:32] I like that a lot. Because that takes the pride of men, and just turns it on its head. What is exalted among men? Nothing in God's sight. And what is humble?

I will exalt. And that takes the pride and the expectation of man, and just squashes it completely.

So, God is not going to show favoritism to anyone for what they've done, for their work.

Now, think of what this does for you. Instead of work being a necessary evil, instead of being demeaning, instead of being caught up in envy, and complaining, about, that person makes more than me, or, looking down your nose at them, because I make more than them, or my job is better than their job.

God has exalted all lawful work, to this very great dignity. Work is how you live, as a royal son. And being a royal son isn't just for the kings of the earth, it's for the farmers, it's for the housewives.

And so, tomorrow you can go to work, whatever you do, and know that what you are doing, is princely in God's eyes. So, there's no need to be envious, of what other people have done, or what they're doing.

[29:54] God has been good, to you. Amen. God has been good, to you. And work is a reason, to rejoice. That, now this truth does a couple of other things.

One, now we have the freedom, to work, in ways that suits, our gifts, and our passions. We don't have to measure things, by the world's standards. Now, of course, we have to talk about wisdom. And, if anyone here, thinks you can just do whatever you want, regardless of the pay, well, you're going to have to think twice, and hard about doing things like that. Because we are, work is the way that we provide, and so on.

But we don't have to measure things, by this world's standards. And we certainly don't have to measure, our dignity, by the dignity, that the world puts on, a job.

Or the pay, that we get from this world. God has given us, enough dignity, all on his own. And that sets us free. And so it sets us free, to work as pastors, as housewives, as human resource people, as engineers, as computer programmers, as businessmen, as nurses, as teachers.

[31:06] It sets us free, to do those things, with all of our hearts. We are not getting, our fingers dirty, when we go to work. We're not, lowering ourselves, in some way, when we go to work.

It sets me free, to do these things, with all of my heart. God has been, so good to me. He's given me, this job. He's given me, this place, this work. And that's no little thing, because when I work, I act, as an image bearer, of God.

But that tells me, also, how, I am to work. How I am to work. Now, most people, take their job, and they do whatever, they want with it.

They, they view it, as something, that they've done, and they've created, and so they have the right, to get all of the glory, and the honor. But if you are an image bearer, of God, you have no right, to do that.

Because God has put you there, in that place, as to, extend his kingdom, to represent him, to shine forth, his glory, his goodness, his authority.

[32:19] I, I'm just thinking of, when, the Queen of Sheva, came to seek, King Solomon, and all of his glory, the Queen of Sheva, just could not help, but saying, look how glorious, your kingdom is.

Look how good it is, for your servants, to stand before you. Look how rich. And what she's doing, is saying, you are a wonderful, and awesome, and a great king. When I see all this glory, and all this goodness, and all this splendor, brothers and sisters, that's what God, calls us to do.

To stand, in the place where we work, and show how good God is, and how great he is, and how holy, and kind, and all of his attributes, to this watching world.

And so, work, first, and foremost, is not about me. We must first seek, his kingdom, and his righteousness. And so, what is there for us to do, except to go to work, to do what God has called us to do, to do it with all of our hearts, to do it as unto the Lord, to do it thankfully, to do it for the glory of God.

Because this is the chief end of man, to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever. And praise God, you can go to work tomorrow, and you can do that, even as you work.

[33:35] Well, we are out of time, and we're dismissed. Thank you.