

Work Becomes Selfish

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 27 October 2013

Preacher: Jason Webb

[0:00] Well, I have good news. Today is the last day that we're going to talk about how work has been ruined by sin. Next week, Lord willing, we're going to begin looking at how the gospel changes how we work, how the gospel redeems work, and how it begins, how the gospel begins to set work free from the slavery to sin and the curse.

But that's next week, and today we're going to look at how work becomes selfish. Work becomes selfish. That's the title of our lesson. Now that we have fallen away from God, work becomes primarily about us.

It becomes a self-centered endeavor. We bend it in on ourselves like we bend in everything on ourselves. And we use it as a way to give ourselves glory and as a way for us to save ourselves. So instead of work being about God and others, it becomes about us. And so work becomes selfish. Well, we have a couple of points this morning, and the first point is that work becomes an idol.

Work becomes an idol. And actually, all of our points have to do with idolatry today because selfishness and idolatry go hand in hand. Where you see selfishness, there you see idols.

[1:28] So our first point, work becomes an idol. One reason that work becomes fruitless and pointless, like we've seen the last couple of weeks, is that there's this powerful inclination in the heart of men, in your heart, to make work an idol and what you can get from your work an idol.

So you remember that quote from Calvin. Our hearts are idol factories. They're idol factories. They have great variety of production. They're never done producing idols. And work doesn't escape the machinery of our fallen hearts.

Work no longer becomes a way that we can create, that we can image forth God's glory. glory, it becomes a way that we can bring glory to ourselves.

It doesn't become a way for us to create culture and bless our fellow men. Remember, we've seen all the good things that work was meant to do. It doesn't become about that.

[2:35] It doesn't become the way that we can serve and provide for ourselves and for our neighbors. Instead, work becomes selfish. It becomes about me. It becomes a way for me to distinguish myself, to show how great I am.

To prove that I'm special, that I'm all right, that I'm good. It becomes a way for me to get power over others, to get security, for me to control my destiny.

And if you look at your own heart, if you look at how other people in the world do work, you'll see these powerful motivations going on around you.

So why does that boss enjoy so much bullying other people in his job? Well, because it gives him a sense of security. It gives him a sense of power.

It becomes about him. So work becomes a god. Something terrible has happened to work in our world. It went from joyful cultivation in Genesis 1 and 2, and it has become outright rebellion and idolatry.

[3:49] And that happens very early. By Genesis 11, men are working in order to save themselves. One of the oddest stories in the whole Bible, at least one of the oddest from my perspective, is the Tower of Babel story in Genesis 11.

And that's what we're going to look at today. So if you want, you can turn there to Genesis 11. I think most people think that it's an explanation story.

It explains why there's different human languages, or humans speak all sorts of languages. They think it's sort of a biblical version, a divine version of, you know, those stories like, why does the turtle have a shell?

Or where did the rhinoceros get its skin? Or you've heard stories like that. So this is sort of like a biblical version of that. Why do humans speak all kinds of languages? Let me tell you the story. Well, is that the point? Well, let's look at it and see. Genesis 11. So, let's frame it and put it into its context.

[5:06] As we're reading through Genesis, we read about Noah and the flood, 6 through 9. And that makes sense to us. Then we come to Genesis 10.

And if you just look over on your page, you can see that there's all these names and nations. There's 70 of them. Actually, if you were to count them, there's 70 names, 70 nations. That's a symbolic number. It's 7 times 10. It's all the nations of the world is represented, are represented here. All the peoples of the earth. Now, what do all the peoples of the earth do? Well, that's what we come and we see in Genesis 11. And it's the Tower of Babel story. It's an interesting story. But what it has to do with me, what it has to do with us, how it fits in with the entire biblical story, can be a bit of a mystery.

If it's just about why there's different languages, I think that's interesting. Don't you agree? It's interesting why there are different languages and what happened. But that is of limited spiritual value.

[6:19] So it's a question. What's going on here? And then in Genesis 12, we get to Abraham. And we know how that story makes sense.

So what should we make of this Tower of Babel story? Well, let's read it and see if we can understand it and what it's all about. And since we're here, look for how men work.

The fallen nature of their work. 11, chapter 11. Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. As men moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. They said to each other, come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly. They used brick instead of stone and tar for mortar. Then they said, come, let us build ourselves a city with a tower that reaches to the heavens so that we may make a name for ourselves and not be scattered over the face of the whole earth.

But the Lord came down to see the city and the tower that the people were building. Just to pause there for a second.

[7:25] In the Old Testament, when you see the Lord coming down to look at something, that's an act of judgment. He's coming to examine before he judges. Verse 6.

The Lord said, if as one people speaking the same language they have begun to do this, then nothing they plan to do will be impossible for them. Come, let us go down and confuse their language so that they will not understand each other.

So the Lord scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. That's important. They stopped building the city.

That is why it was called Babel, because there the Lord confused the language of the whole world, and from there the Lord scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

So, let me ask you, why did these people build the city and this tower? What were they trying to do? What's that?

[8:24] They're trying to make a name for themselves. So, this work is about their glory. And that's what we see.

In verse 3, it talks about bricks instead of stone. It seems that they figured out a new way of making a building. So, up until that point, it was probably stone, but now they figured out how to make bricks.

And with bricks, you can build things bigger and stronger and higher and taller. And so, now they're building the city because they can. Human technology has come to the place where now they can really grow and expand their city.

But the deeper reason, lying under that fact, is what verse 4 says. They want to make a name for themselves. And they want to be, don't miss this, they want to be united in one city.

The point is, is that they won't be scattered over the whole earth. Now we can, if we act together, we can protect ourselves, we can get into the city and not be divided, not be separated.

[9:28] Now, I think it will help us if we pause here and think about this. Put it into its wider biblical context.

Because there are themes here in Genesis 11 that we see in other parts of the Bible. Now, first of all, we have to think about what this tower would look like.

Now, if you're me, you probably generally think of a tower as something being narrow, right? Narrow and tall. You think of the Sears Tower going straight up. But that's not how they did things back then. They didn't have the steel in order to support that kind of tall tower. So they didn't have the strength to hold it up. No, when they're talking about a tower, they were thinking of something wide and deep. You need to think of a pyramid or a ziggurat if you've seen those. [10:29] So it would be something wide. It would be more like a mountain than the Sears Tower. Because that's the only way that you can get the height with the strength.

And so around this mountain that they're going to build is their city. So they're building a tower, a mountain, with a city surrounding it. And there in that city, all the peoples of the earth would live. And then they would reach up to heaven and they would make a name for themselves. And they would live forever. Maybe not as individuals, but as a people. So do you have this picture? There's a city with something very much like a mountain reaching up to the heavens in which all the people of the earth live. And there they could live forever. They would have a name that would last forever.

Now does that remind you of anything? Does that remind you of anything? Does that have hints of anything? Echoes of anything that maybe you've read in the Bible before?

[11:34] Well, last week we just read of a few things in Isaiah 66 20. This is what it says. What's the goal of redemption?

What is Christ going to accomplish? It'll be a city with a mountain where all the people on earth dwell in peace forever. Isaiah 56 7. These I will bring to my holy mountain and give them joy in my house of prayer.

Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar. For my house will be called a house of prayer for all the nations. Daniel talks about the kingdom of God being a mountain that fills the earth until the whole earth is this mountain.

And so everyone, the whole earth becomes a place where God and man meet. Isaiah 11 9. They will neither harm nor destroy on all my holy mountain.

For the earth will be full of the knowledge of the Lord as the waters will cover the sea. And that day the root of Jesse will stand as a banner for the peoples. The nations will rally to him and his place of rest will be glorious.

[12:58] And then what do we find in Revelation 21? Talks about the new heavens and the new earth. And what are the new heavens and the new earth? It's a city.

It's Jerusalem. It's the new Jerusalem. And there's no temple there because God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple. And God and man will live together.

And then it says something very interesting. And the glory of the nations will be brought to it. The glory of the peoples of the earth will be brought to it. So how does redemption end?

What are we looking forward to? What we're looking forward to? Being on God's mountain. Holy mountain. Meeting God. With all of the nations. Enjoying eternal life.

So let's go back to that Tower of Babel story. What were the people of Babel trying to do? They were trying to do what God must do.

[14:07] They were trying to save themselves. They were trying to bring in a new city where they could rise up to God. And it ended in division and strife.

So what were they working for? Well, they were working for their own glory, their own power. They were working in order to save themselves. To save this world, in a sense.

And they wanted to do it instead of God. They wanted to make for themselves an everlasting name. They wanted to give themselves immortal life through an everlasting name.

And how will they do it? How are they going to do it? By their work. Work had become their idol. The means of saving themselves.

Of saving humanity. And Derek Kidner, the Old Testament scholar, writes, The elements of the story are timelessly characteristic of the spirit of the world.

[15:08] So what you see in the Tower of Babel is what the spirit of the world is. Even down to this day. They want to make for themselves an everlasting name. The project is typically grandiose.

Men describe it excitedly to one another. As if it were the ultimate achievement. So do you see? Let's do this. This is going to be the ultimate achievement. At the same time, they betray their insecurity.

As they crowd together to preserve their identity and control their fortunes. So the Tower of Babel is man's salvation story.

The Tower of Babel is mankind without God's gospel. It's man working for their salvation. And the contrast between men's work and God's grace is just not a New Testament truth.

It's not just a Paul truth. It's a Bible truth. It's the ongoing tension of the whole Bible. Will men, will you save yourself?

[16 : 13] Will you try to save yourself? Or will God be your savior? Now, that's what we do with our work. We make it a savior. We make it our God. And we worship the things that it can give us.

So their work was going to give them an everlasting name. A name. It was going to give them security. It was going to give them a sense of identity and power. And they were going to be safe. And so we worship the things that it can give us. We bow down to our jobs. And they, in turn, give us identity and food and life and everything else.

Or so we think. So work becomes an idol. Now, let's go further into that. This is our second point. It's all about idolatry.

What is idolatry? In today's world, when people hear the word idol, what do they think of? I think they think of teen idols.

[17 : 14] American idol. So they think of Justin Bieber or whoever else. Or maybe they think of, you know, people bowing down in the jungle somewhere to a statue.

If the word idol gets connected with work, they think of it as someone who's a workaholic. Or as someone who's made money.

Their object of extreme devotion. And of course, those are all legitimate, for the most part, ways of using the word. But the biblical idea is greater than that.

It's fuller than that. What are idols? They're God substitutes. They're God substitutes. Idols are false saviors.

They're false saviors. The first commandment of the Ten Commandments is, You shall have no other gods before me. Idolatry is having a god before God.

[18 : 18] Idolatry are God substitutes. They're counterfeit gods. But they aren't just out there. This is so important. If you've never thought of it this way, Idols are just not out there.

They just aren't physical objects. Most of the idols that we struggle with, And indeed, most people, no matter what their culture struggle with, Or bow down to, Are idols of the heart.

Ezekiel 14. Son of man. Talking about Ezekiel. Son of man. These men have set up idols in their hearts. And he goes on in Ezekiel 14 to say it two or three more times.

What is their problem? They've set up idols in their hearts. Making idols is not so much a physical process. You don't only make an idol when you get gold and you pound it into a statue.

It's a spiritual one. It's a psychological one. It's something that we do with our hearts. It's something that we do with our minds. And so it means imagining and trusting anything to deliver the control, the security, the significance, the satisfaction, the beauty, That only the one real God can give us.

[19 : 41] It means turning a good thing into an ultimate thing. It means turning a fallen thing or a fallen person into a false savior.

And that's so important to understand. We end up worshiping and desiring this or that, whatever it might be, Because we think it can save us in some way.

Our worship follows our salvation. Worship follows salvation. So what we think saves us, we will worship.

We will bow down to. We will hold tightly. We will want it more than anything. We will need it more than anything. We will think that it makes us good and right. It gives us a feeling of hope and confidence.

It gives us a sense of well-being. And so we'll do anything to keep it, to have it. And so if it's friends, If it's friends that will save us and give us security and satisfaction, If it's friends who will tell us, You know, you're a good person.

[20 : 54] Significance. Then we'll worship our friends. If it's the good opinion of others, If they will save us from a sense of inadequacy, A sense of weakness, Then we will worship them.

If it's pornography that makes us feel loved and accepted, Then we will worship it. We worship what we think will save us. We will give our hearts to what we think will rescue us.

And that's what we make work into. Work becomes the way that we give ourselves, That security and the hope and the confidence, The identity. I'm a good person because I do a good job at my

work.

Or I'm important because this is what I do. My work is important. And if it's not work, It's going to be something.

It's going to be something because We all are looking for something that will help us live life With confidence and with hope and with joy, With peace. We're looking for some way to have our sins dealt with.

[22:06] And so we either work, Or we either worship and trust in God, Or we worship and trust idols.

But we will worship what saves us. So if your heart is set on the reality that God is your Savior, He's everything for you.

In Christ you have an identity. In Christ you have security and satisfaction. In Christ, Then you'll worship Jesus. You'll love him. You'll desire him more than anything.

You'll long to meet with him. But if it's work, Then you'll long to go to work. You'll long to satisfy your bosses. This connection between idolatry and salvation Is essential to understand.

Israel worshiped Baal. Why did they worship Baal? Why did they fall into this idolatry? Because they were convinced that Baal would send the rain.

[23:10] Baal would provide for them. Baal would give them what they needed. And so they trusted and worshipped Baal. Israel trusted in other nations Because they thought those other nations Could save them from invasion.

And so you see it all the time in the prophets. They're trusting in Egypt. And God says, Why are you trusting in Egypt? Trust in me. They're trusting in Babylon When the Assyrians come.

They go from one thing to another Because, And they bow down to these things. And they give them what they want. They worship and obey them Because they think they will save them. And so in that situation, Egypt says, Do this.

They do it no matter what it is. Because they think Egypt will save them. Martin Luther put it like this. The first commandment commands, You shall have no other gods.

Which means, Since I alone am God, You shall put all your confidence, Trust, And faith On me alone And on no one else.

[24:15] All those Who do not At all times Trust God And his favor Grace And goodwill But seek his favor In other things Or in themselves Do not keep this commandment And practice Real idolatry.

If we do not believe That God is gracious to us And is pleased with us Or if we have presumptuously Expect to please him Only through And after our works Then it's all Pure deception Outwardly honoring God But inwardly Setting up self As a false God Do you see what Luther is arguing?

When we fail to believe That God accepts us Fully in Christ Or We try to look For some other way To justify ourselves If we look for power And security And confidence And hope And something else We commit Idolatry The only option To idolatry Is full Faith in Jesus Christ Not only to justify us But for everything That we need The only way to Avoid idolatry Idolatry of work And the things that work Can give us Is to live Out of our union With Jesus Christ To live out of Jesus Christ His resources His goodness His glory So Secular people Might look for Favor Grace Goodwill In money Power And pleasure But Religious people

Will trust in their Virtue Or their Devotions Or their Ministry But Either way It's the same Inner Inner Transaction We're still making The same trade In our heart Either way We're giving our Heart We're giving our Faith To a Counterfeit God And none of that Whether it's Religious or Secular Is living Out of Jesus Christ None of them Are living On Christ By faith In Christ So But don't get me Wrong I'm not It's obviously Not wrong To go to work And work hard It's not wrong To have your Devotions Or have a Ministry The point is Is when you Put your Trust in those Things So what Happens Think about This What happens When we When you go To work Trusting in Your work Putting your Confidence And your Hope In your Job And what You do To be Your savior To be Your rescue Well it Ends up Leading to All sorts Of other Kinds of Sins See when You break The first Commandment You end up Breaking all The other Commandments As well When you Give your Heart to An idol And you Worship it And trust It You'll End up Lying You'll End up Stealing You'll End up Hating People So If Fudging On the Details Of a Business Deal Will Give You An Advantage Will Make Your Work Prosper You'll Obscure Some Of The Facts You Won't Tell An Out Lie But You Won't Say Everything Because You'll Count Success As More Important Than God And Obeying God In

other words You'll Lie And You Lie Because Your

[28:02] Idol Requires It That's The thing When we Give our Hearts To Anything Else! Other Than God Those Idols End Up Demanding Us To Sin Underneath The lie Is An Idol Underneath The lie To Fudge The Details To Make It Sound Better Than What It Is Is A False Savior A False Hope It's Trusting In Your Work Rather Than In Jesus And What He Can Do For You Because Only Jesus Can Love You And Protect You Like That Well Maybe You Had Your Hope Set On A Dream Job And Maybe That Dream Job Was Taken Away From You And Now You're Devastated And You Can't Get Over It Because You Keep Saying To Yourself If I Had That Then That Would Fix Everything I Could Life Would Be Good I Can Make A Decent Living

For Myself And My Family But Until Then Until I Have It Until I Have It Back Then Nothing Else Will Do And I So Have You Ever Had That You Don't Know If You're Going To Be Able To Keep Your Job You Don't Know If They're Going To Let You Go Or Not Are You Paralyzed With Fear Does The Idea Of Them Taking It Away From You Make You Burn With Anger Do You Fall Into Despair Do You My God My God Why Have You Forsaken Me Our Idols Will Always Disappoint Us Because They Have Hands They Cannot Save They Have Years They Cannot Hear So When You Put Your Work Up As An Idol You Trust In Your Job Or The Money From The Job Or The Security You Get From Your Job If You Go To Work And You Get Your Sense Of Dignity And And Well Being From Your Job You Inevitably Will Be Disappointed Because There Is Only One Who Can Bear The Way Of Being Divine And It's God Everything Else Will Fall Through And Those Idols Will Always Turn Out To Be Flimsy Reeds That Pierce Your Hands When You Lean On Them Well The Thing Is You Just

Can't Turn Away From The Thing You Trust And Say I Won't Trust Them Anymore You Can't Just Say Drop It Cold Turkey You Can't Just Say I'm Going To Stop Trusting You Can't Do That Until You Have Something Better To Trust In You Can't Stop Worshiping A False God Until The Real God Has Become Real To You And Powerful And Magnificent And Glorious To You See Worship Doesn't Work With Just Saying!

I'm Going To Do This And Not That Worship Has To Be One And When God Sets Out To Win Your Heart And He Wins Your Heart Then You Stop Worshiping The Idols So You Can't Dethrone The Idols Of Your Heart Whether It's Work Or Anything Else Until You Believe In The Goodness And The Glory And The Trustworthiness Of God In Jesus Christ For You The Only Way To Be Done With Idols Is To Believe And Worship And Trust In God Alone In Christ Alone So Thomas Brooks The Old Puritan He Wrote This I Don't Know Why I Said He's The Old Puritan I Don't Think He Was Particularly Old He Was Back A Long Time Ago Everything That A Man Leans Upon But God Will Be A Dart Will Be An Arrow Which Will Certainly Pierce His Heart Through And Through This Is What's So

[32:30] Bad About Idols They Promise To Be Our Savior And They End Up Killing Us He Who Leans Only Upon Christ Lives The Highest The Choicest The Safest And The Sweetest Life See The Bible Everywhere Is Not Just Saying Don't Worship Idols Because They're Wrong It Does Say That But It Says They Can't Save You They Can't Do What They Promise But I Can So Let's Go Back To That Story The Story Of Babel And Think About It Again In It's Context Man Babel Is Man's Salvation Effort By Their Work It's Not Not Just A Story About How Languages Got Separated It Does Explain That But It's Man Getting Together With One Language Putting All Their Hands All Their Minds Together To Create A

New Heavens And A New Earth To Get God Back To Earth To Get Themselves Up To God To Build A City Where They Can Have Security And Where They Can Have Confidence Where They Won't Be Divided And Where They Can Live Forever They Can Have A Name For Themselves And It Fails Miserably God Comes Down And Judges Them And Divides Them And It's Very Interesting Why He Does It What Does It Say Why Does God Do It Look At What The Text Says!

This Is Very Interesting Reason In Verse Six The Lord Said If As One People Speaking The Same Language They Have Begun To Do This Then Nothing They Plan To Do Will Be Impossible For Them Why Does God Separate Their Languages Why Does God Separate Them And Divide Them All Over The Earth Because He Does It To Stop Them From Exalting In Them To Putting More And More Faith In Their Work As Long As They Can Do Things Like This As Long As They Can Get Together And Do Magnificent And Wonderful Things They're Not Going To Trust Him They're Going To Trust Themselves And So He Ruins Their Self Salvation Project He He Shows Their Idols For What They Are But Then Out Of The Ruin Of Their

Self Salvation Project He Begins To Work See Genesis 11 Isn't Just This Weird Little Story Off To The Side It's Part Of Abraham's Story It's Part Part Of Our Story It's Part Of The World History So What Happens Next He Calls Abraham And He Says I Will Make You Into A Great Nation And I Will Bless You And I Will Make Your Name Great What They Wanted God Gives And You Will Be A Blessing And I Will Bless Those Who Bless You And Whoever Curses You I Will Curse And All Peoples On Earth Will Be Blessed Through You All Peoples That's Looking Back To 10 That's Looking Back To 11 Genesis 10 And 11 So God Ruins The Self Salvation Project Of Men But He Doesn't Leave!

And God Ruins That But He Doesn't Leave Him Without Hope He Calls Abram And He Says Through You And Through Your Offspring I Will Bless The Nations And In Genesis 12 God Begins His Salvation Project And It's Not One Of Works It's One Of Grace It's Where Men Don't Work In Order To Get A Name God Gives A Name Men Don't Work To Get A Blessing God Blesses And Blesses Those Who Bless Them It's Not What Men Do With Their Two Hands It's What God Does In Grace Through His Son So He Will Give Man A City He Will Make The Mountain That Fills The Earth He Will Come Down And Live With Men And Make Them To Live Forever!

[37 : 05] So Genesis 12 The Beginning Of Abraham The Beginning Of The Line That Brought For Our Savior Is The Phoenix That Rises From The Ashes Of The Tower Of Babel It's God's Salvation Is The Phoenix That Rises From The Ashes Of Man's Failure God Does What Men With Their Best Work Cannot Do It's A Gospel Story And So It's The Gospel Story That You As A Christian You Get To Do Your Work In Now It's That Context Of Now Work Is Not My Savior God Is My Savior Work Is Not Going To Give Me Ultimate Security God Is Going To Give Me Ultimate Security Work Is Not Going To Give Me My Identity God Will Do

Those For Me And One Day He Will Totally Remove The Curse One Day We Will Work Without Frustrations But As Christians Now The Gospel Gospel Changes How We Work It Changes How We Work Already No It Doesn't Give Us Heaven On Earth Right This Moment But It Does Give Us All Kinds Of Resources To Help Us Now And So In The Next Few Weeks We Are Going To See What Difference The Gospel Makes In Our Work That's Next Time Well Our Time Is Up Thank You For Being Attentive You're Dismissed