

A New Story for Work

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Date: 03 November 2013

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[0:00] Our lesson is entitled, A New Story for Work. A New Story for Work. And today I have four points.

And the first is about stories. And I think you're going to see what I mean when I say stories as we go along. I'm talking about worldviews, the way that you look upon life.

What do you think the story, the plot of what is going on in our world today? And then we're going to talk about the gospel story. And then we're going to talk about two ways that that gospel story informs our work.

The first is in business. So we're going to talk about gospel, the gospel in business. And then the gospel in medicine. And then we're going to look at the very end at some questions that we can ask ourselves as we think about how the gospel story influences and shapes our particular jobs.

I understand that not all of you are in medicine or in business. Those are merely for our example and for our instruction. I find one of the hardest things about thinking about the gospel in work, the Bible in work, is that all of our jobs are very different.

[1:23] It's not always the easiest thing to understand how the gospel and the Bible instructs us particularly how to work. And so we need a lot of wisdom for this area where we can apply biblical principles to ourselves.

And so hopefully these examples will help us to see what the Bible says about our job in particular. So first we're going to talk about stories, about worldviews.

Imagine that you're standing at a bus stop. And maybe you're in a big city, you're standing at a bus stop, and a young man that you don't know comes up to you and says, the name of the common wild duck is Historonicus, Historonicus, Historonicus.

Okay? Now you understand those words. You understand that sentence. But his action doesn't make any sense.

Why is he telling you that? How do you make sense of that sentence? What does he mean? And so the only way to make sense of him telling you that the name of the common wild duck is Historonicus, Historonicus, Historonicus, is to understand a bigger story.

[2:47] To understand how that, him telling you, fits into something bigger. Now, the story that you put that sentence into determines how you react to that young man, or what you think of what is going on in this situation.

So perhaps that young man is mentally ill. And that would explain it. So these are the ravings of someone who is ill.

And if you thought that is what was going on, then you would think and feel about what he's doing in one way. You would treat him a certain way.

You would probably have sympathy. Or you would say, oh, I see. Thank you very much. And you would just let him go on his way. And maybe you later would tell your friends or your family, there is some person.

It's the weirdest thing to me this morning. I was at the bus stop. So perhaps that's the story that that fits in. Maybe it doesn't belong to that story. Perhaps yesterday, someone of your gender, someone of your age, your height, your appearance, had approached that young man in the library and asked, what is the scientific name for the common wild duck?

[4:11] And he went to work and he found the answer. And now he sees you. And he says, well, the name of the common wild duck, you were asking for it.

It's Hysteronicus, Hysteronicus, Hysteronicus. And if that is the story, if that's the bigger thing that's going on, then he's not crazy after all, is he?

He's not insane. He's just mistaken. And it's just a case of mistaken identity. And if you thought that was what was going on, so he came to you and he said that, and you think, oh, he's just mistaken me for someone, you might say, oh, I'm sorry.

I don't think I'm the person that you're after. I don't think you've got the right man. Maybe that's how it fits. Or perhaps the young man is a spy.

And now there he is. He's been waiting for his contact, and his contact looks like you. And he's been waiting at this bus stop to have a prearranged rendezvous.

[5:16] And this strange sentence is the sentence that was chosen to identify him to his contact. Well, if you thought that was what was going on, then now all of a sudden you find yourself not talking to a person who's mentally ill or talking to someone with a mistaken identity.

Now you've been caught up in an international drama. This is how a good movie would start. Or maybe a really cheesy movie would start.

I don't know. So it depends on the story that you find yourself, that you put on the sentence. The first story is sad.

This poor, insane man. The second is comical. Oh, you've got the wrong guy. You're talking to the wrong person. And the third is dramatic. It would set your heart racing to be found that you're talking to an international spy.

The point is, is what story you think you are part of shapes how you feel, how you think, how you act, how you react to what happens to you.

[6:27] Now, obviously, that is a rather ridiculous example. But it illustrates a broader principle.

So we all look at what's going on around us. We're here. The world is here. I'm working. We look on what's going on, and we tell a story about it.

We explain it. We try to understand it. And the story that we put on our world determines how we react to it. So the story that we put on our work determines how we go to work, what we think about our work, what we do at work.

Last week, we went through the story of the Tower of Babel, and we saw something of its broader, how it fits into the broader biblical theme, of how it fits into the broader biblical context.

So the Tower of Babel is man working. It's using his creative skills. It's him going hard at work and collaborating with people, and them having this grand idea and this grand vision to do something, to give himself meaning and destiny, to save himself, to give himself community and fellowship.

[7:53] Remember, that was one thing they were very concerned with. If we do this work well, then we won't be separated. We won't be divided. We'll be able to be in the city. And it was their way of having dealings with God.

We will build this tower up to the heavens, and then we'll have a name for ourselves. We'll, in some sense, be immortal.

And we saw that's the world's story of work and salvation. And it's idolatrous. It's self-centered. It's the story of how the world looks at himself, looks at his work, looks at what needs to be done.

It's the story of man at work apart from God. So man sees their work as part of that big story, that I can, I must save myself.

I can save myself by my work. And that salvation story shapes and influences how they go to work and what they do with their work.

[9:01] So a person who is looking at work with that story in mind goes to work and he says, I have to do this and I have to do it well in order that I might get paid because I need to protect myself.

I don't have anyone to defend myself except for me. And work is the way that I have friends and collaborate. There are people that have no other friends except for the people that they work with. And their relationships are purely for work purpose. So the salvation story of man at work shapes and influences how they do their work.

And we saw that God doesn't leave us, though, there. Because after the Tower of Babel, after God spreading the people throughout the world and confusing their languages, he begins with Abraham to prepare a salvation for man.

The Bible, then, is about this good news. The Bible is this story about what God is doing for man to save man, to give man meaning and destiny and security and community, all the things that man were looking for, to give them a righteousness, to give them himself.

[10:20] And so the gospel is good news. It's about what God is doing for man. Now, how you do your work, which story do you find yourself in?

In the story of Babel, the Tower of Babel story, or in the gospel story? Now, every story has three parts. There's three basic parts.

First, something happens to knock life off balance. Things are going well, and then something happens. It interrupts and causes a problem.

And then the story progresses. The plot thickens. And the actors in the story struggle to get back to some balance.

And meanwhile, there's antagonistic forces or antagonistic people trying to stop them, trying to block them. And then finally, the story ends as the struggle results in either balance, things go back to the way they should be, or failure.

[11 : 31] So for a story to be a story, there has to be a problem. There has to be a problem that makes life not as it ought to be.

And so, if we were to say, Little Red Riding Hood took some food to her grandmother's house, and they all ate it together, would that be a story? No, it would be some facts.

Or we could say, Little Red Riding Hood took some food to grandma's, and a wolf broke in and ate both of them. Again, that's a different set of facts, but it's not really a story.

A story has to have an account of how life should be, an explanation of how it got off kilter, and then how to get it back again. Now, the point here is, all of us understand life in that way to some degree. We think life should be a certain way, and we have different answers for how life should be. So, if you're an atheist, or a communist, a Marxist, or if you're a naturalist, if you're something like that, then you think life should be this way.

[12 : 41] Now, there's problems. Obviously, there's problems, and so, what are the problems? And different people say different things. This is the problem. So, if you're a Marxist, a communist, you would say, well, the major problem is people, the rich have all the ways of making money, and the poor have nothing.

The problem is economic. So, they look at life through that story. We should have equality. There's not equality. So, what do we need to do to fix that?

Well, we need to take the, we need to socialize everything. We need to take the money from the rich and distribute it to everyone. That's the answer. But see, that's their story.

So, it has to have an account of how life should be, an explanation of how it got off kilter, and then how to get it back again. Now, so we're all living in some sort of story. We do this naturally.

We think of ourselves as, what should things be? What's the problem? How do I fix it? So, if someone says, the name for the common wild duck is *Histrionicus*, *Histrionicus*, *Histrionicus*, we naturally try to figure out what's going on.

[13 : 53] Why is he telling me that? Where is this going? We try to explain it. Now, so, the point is, is that we all do that.

Now, secondly, our second point, what is the gospel story? What's the gospel worldview? What does the gospel say about what's wrong? What happened?

What are things supposed to be like? How is it going to get fixed? And this is our second point.

What is the gospel story? Now, let me ask you a couple of questions. This is for you to participate.

And as we do, we'll come to understand that gospel story. The first question is, how are things supposed to be? How are things supposed to be? What is life supposed to be like?

What does the Bible teach? Where does the Bible explain what life is meant to be or it was supposed to be? Anyone? Eden.

[14 : 55] Okay. Go on. Paradise. Perfect fellowship with God. Okay. With one another. Perfect fellowship with God, with one another. What else?

What about the created order? What about nature? What can we say about those things? Anyone? Yeah.

So, the Bible teaches that men have dominion. Or, we were supposed to have dominion. And, and, there was originally no curse.

And so, we were supposed to work the land and, and to eat and enjoy the rewards from our work.

And, was creation good or, was it bad at the beginning?

It was good at the beginning. It was, it was all good. Remember, after everything, God said, it is good, it is good. And then, when the whole thing was done, he said, it is very good.

[15 : 59] So, how is life supposed to be? Well, the whole world is, was supposed to be good. good. And, it was. And, God made the world and everything in it, good.

And, there were no intrinsically evil parts about it. Nothing is evil at its origin. Nothing was evil as God made it.

Even Satan himself, was an angel at the beginning. All things were good at the beginning. Now, the second question.

So, that's, that's the first part of the story. Life is as it's supposed to be. We were supposed to live with each other. We were meant to live in fellowship with God. I mean, just think of that.

In the cool of the evening, God would come and walk with man in the garden. That's the way it was supposed to be. Second question. What's the main problem?

[17:00] What's happened? What's the main problem? Dad. Our sin. What else? I mean, go in.

what, what are the ramifications? What happens because of our sin? Yeah. Yeah. So, now everything is, is bent and twisted and crooked.

And nothing, no, no relationships are what they should be. There's no, and then what happened to creation? It was cursed.

God cursed creation because of man's sin. And now there's no aspect of creation of this world that's unaffected by the fall.

So, for example, emotion, we can't say emotions are untrustworthy, but reason is infallible. We can't say that the physical is bad and the spiritual is good.

[18:06] We can't say that day-to-day life is profane, but religious observances, that's good. No.

Every part of our creation, every part of our work, everything that we do, everything that we are, has participated, has experienced the fall.

So, none of those things are true, that emotions are bad and reason is good. They're both equally fallen. All is fallen, and so all is less than it should be.

Now, third, so, do you see how this is a story? Things are not supposed to, they're supposed to be one way, something's happened, and now it's not what it's supposed to be.

What is the solution? Someone? The gospel. So, the gospel.

The gospel of Jesus Christ. And so, the Bible says, the fundamental problem is relational. The fundamental problem is that God and man, because of their sin, are separated.

[19:20] And so, the fundamental solution has to be relational as well. And that's why the gospel doesn't say, well, what we need to do is equalize wealth.

Make economies equal, so there's no more poor. Because that's not the biggest problem. That is a result of sin. That is a result of the broken relationship between God and man.

And so now man is idolatrous, and they do abusive things with their money. And so to make everything equal financially would not solve the problem, because the fundamental problem is relational.

Every single person was meant, was created to live as God's friend, God's son, God's servant. We were meant to walk with God in the garden in that sense, but we lost our relationship with God.

And the only way to get it back now is for God to come and to rescue us. It's through his salvation, through his son, and through his grace.

[20:30] Now, the whole world participates in that redemption. The whole world participates in that redemption.

Just as the whole world was cursed, the whole world also looks forward to the day when the curse will be removed. And so, what I mean is that body and spirit, we are looking for the redemption of our bodies.

Body and spirit, reason and emotions, people and nature. There's no part of creation that is hopeless, that is beyond redemption, except for the fallen angels.

For surely it is not angels that God helps, but Abraham's descendants. So, Christ did not become an angel. He became a man. He joined himself to humanity in order to rescue humanity.

Now, what is the point of all this? It's just this, that this is the gospel story. This is the true story that we have to see our work as part of.

[21:44] So, instead of putting our work into the Tower of Babel story, instead of putting our work into a story of how we have to save ourselves, and by our work, we can save ourselves, we need to put our story, our work, into the story of what God has done, and what God is doing.

Work was created good, but it suffered a fall, suffered a curse, and it will be redeemed. So, everything that you work on, and we all have different things that we work on.

Some of us work on nature, and we work with physical materials, and some of us work on people, and so we teach, and we instruct.

Some work on emotions, and reason, and physical, and spiritual. All of that was created good. You can't say that what I have to work with is intrinsically, by itself, bad.

No, sin has happened to it, and so it was created good, it suffered in the fall, but now there's hope. God is not just saving our souls, he's saving our bodies, and God is not just saving us, he's saving the entire created order, and so that he will bring new heavens, and a new earth, and then salvation will be complete.

[23:06] Now, so God hasn't left any part of our work, any part of our world, without hope. And so, God's mercy, and God's grace, and God's justice, is going to happen to our work, to what we work on, and so, that has to form, and shape everything we do at work.

Now, what essentially is the gospel? It's just this, that God is saving, by his son, for his glory. God is saving, by his son, for his own glory.

And so, there's hope, and at the center of that hope, is Jesus Christ, and God's glory. At the center of our hope, and our expectation, is Jesus Christ, and his glory.

And so, whatever we do, whether we eat, or drink, or drive a truck, or plant seeds, or raise children, or sell merchandise, or help customers, or heal, or teach, or whatever we do, we can do, with this ultimate expectation, that God one day, will rescue the fallen world.

And, we need to do our work, with our eyes fixed upon Jesus. Because at the center of the story, at the center of what, where everything is going, is Jesus Christ.

[24:34] And it's going towards God's glory. And so, we need to get our work, plugged into that story. We need to see how our work, is part of that story.

And how that story then, affects, what I do with my work. Now, we're going to go through, these two examples, of business, and medicine.

And we're going to put, these certain fields, into the gospel story, and see how the gospel, shapes, and informs, what we do, and how we do it, and why we do it. So first, let's talk about gospel, and business.

And we'll begin with a true story. And again, this is the hard thing. It would be really, wonderful if we could say, this is the exact reasons, five ways that the gospel, informs business.

It's not that simple. It's not that easy. So we need real wisdom here. And so we're going to start, with a true story. And I hope God will, teach us, what, what we need to learn.

[25:37] So, dawn flow. That's a real man. He owns and operates, an automotive dealership. Now let me ask you, what's the normal way, that an automotive dealership works?

What's the main goal? What's the main way, of doing business? Selling cars. Selling cars. What's the main goal? Not just to sell cars.

I mean, that's the end, the means to the end. What's the end? Make money. How much money? As much money as you can. That's not necessarily bad, but, the main goal, for most automotive dealerships, is to sell the cars, at as high of a price, as they can.

Isn't that true? Now, what, is the normal way, of doing that then? And I'm not, painting, I'm not, including everyone, I'm just talking, normally.

Pressure. Pressure. What do you mean, Scott? Well, pressure to buy, do whatever, they can, that emotionally, gets you to buy that vehicle.

[26:46] Yeah. There's a, there's a, almost adversarial relationship, isn't there? So, if you're buying a car, what do you do?

You steal yourself, you prepare yourself, because they're going to try to work you over, and do a number on you. And so, you, you know, unless you're incredibly naive, that they're really not on your side, are they?

Um, well, so, salesmen, they can seem to be really friendly, but, and they can seem to be on your side, but their goal, normally, is to get as much as possible, out of each car.

And, now, that's how Don, ran his business. He was a Christian. He ran his business that way, because, well, that's sort of, just the way you do it.

He was just not thinking about it. Well, then he, he looked over his information, and his data, and he discovered a problem. Discovered a problem, not just in his dealership, but in dealerships across, just in general.

[27:57] And that is that women, and minorities, were paying more for their cars, than white men. And the reason is, is white males are just more comfortable, negotiating.

Because they're more comfortable negotiating, they're able to negotiate better, and get better prices. In other words, white males consistently bought their cars cheaper, because, they were better at negotiating, they were better at arguing, they were better at this adversarial relationship, that was the norm for dealerships.

Now, he saw that problem. And what he did, was maybe not the only solution, but it seems to be, a gospel informed solution.

Now, in order to bring some equality, and parity, in order to provide, service, quality service, to all of his customers, customers, not preferring some to others, he decided, that he's just going to sell his cars, at a flat rate.

There's no negotiation, flat rate. Now, why did he do it? What was he thinking? Why did he make those decisions?

[29:17] It was primarily, because he wanted to serve, his customers, better. Not just a certain subset, of his customers, but all of his customers, to be served.

He wanted to run a business, that everyone, could equally prosper from. Now, do people need to buy cars? Yes. So, do people need to sell cars?

Yes. But you can do that in a way, that is not necessarily adversarial, but everyone can prosper.

Now, do you think that changed, the way that his salesmen, did their work?

Probably. Probably. I mean, you know that favorite trick, that they do, of, well, I got to go back, to see my manager, and to see what he'll sell it to you for, but I'm on your side, and, who knows what they talk about, maybe some salesmen, can tell me.

Pretending to be on your side, but in reality, it's most of the time, it's just a gimmick. Well, that wasn't happening anymore, because there was no negotiation, and it made his workers, more honest.

[30:24] And more forthright, more objective. Can you afford this car? Or not? So why did he do that?

Why did he make his decision, to run his business that way? Because he was thinking, about the gospel, and its implications. So first think about it. All men, and women, are created in God's image. Minorities, women, and white men, are all created in God's image. They're of equal dignity, because God made them. And so, they are all deserving of respect, because of their creation.

They're not to be tricked, or lied to. They are not to be manipulated, or fooled. They are not to be taken advantage of, because of who they are.

They're image bearers of God. God. They have eternal souls, and that demands care, even as you do business with them.

[31:28] But then, something dreadful has happened, hasn't it? See, the gospel isn't just the creation. The gospel recognizes that something dreadful has happened, with society, and with people.

The world has fallen. Society has broken down. And now, there's not just personal problems, but as an expression of our corporate, all of our personal problems, there's deep, systemic problems.

There's deep problems, with just the way that we, as sinners, do work, and create society. So, racism, and injustice, doesn't just occur on a personal level.

It occurs, on a social level. It exists systemically. So, it's not just you and me are fallen, but as we do culture, as we do society, those things are fallen.

It's sin sick. It's unjust. So, minorities pay more for cars. Minorities don't get the same kind of job interviews, that white people get.

[32:37] There was a study done, that took identical resumes, and the only difference between the resumes, were the names, on the front. And the first name, the, the, on one set, it was a, a traditional white person sounding name.

And, on the others, it seemed like a more traditional black sounding name. And the resumes were sent out. Exactly the same, except for the names were different. And, the names with the white, the resumes with the white sounding names, got twice as many callbacks, as the black sounding names.

For exactly the same resumes. Now, that's not just one or two people. That's, a whole bunch of people. And that wasn't done in the 1950s.

This was a couple of years ago that this, this study was done. So, there's the systemic injustice, systemic racism, that exists across wide parts of our society.

Now, Don saw those things. that there's just unjust, injustice in the world. And, he saw it in his own business.

[33 : 49] And so, he decided in order to bring some parity and some justice, he sacrificed his possible profits for justice.

He thought more highly of others than himself. He didn't just look out for his own interest. He looked out for the interest of others. He ran his business like Christ lived and died.

Now, again, was, is that like the only possible solution? Is that the only possible way that the gospel would work itself out in a business? No.

It's just one way. It's one way of saying, okay, as I do my business, I want to imitate Christ. I want to do things the way Jesus would do them.

I want to do them in the ways that embrace the hope and the expectation that Jesus is going to work and save and redeem the fallen men.

[34 : 48] Now, so what does that look like overall? Well, first of all, you have to say that money is not the ultimate good.

and we, and that's normally how things are. So we do business as fallen men, and we think money is of ultimate importance.

And if you're going to do the, if you're going to do business in a gospel informed way, you have to say that people, not money, are eternal. that there's something dreadfully wrong with individuals and society.

And the problem is with people. Now, and then you seek to serve them in their fallen condition, because that's what Jesus did. He didn't wait until we were better to serve us.

In our fallen condition, he came. Now, a business then, it can't exist for the ultimate purpose of gaining money and not serving people.

[35 : 56] That's what was going on in the financial markets. I mean, it was obviously too complicated with our last huge financial recession. Banks were lending money irresponsibly.

They weren't doing it for people's good, but to make money. And they did it irresponsibly and things fell apart. And so to be a Christian in business, it means more than just being honest and not living sexual and moral lives in the workplace.

It's not just being an evangelist at work. It's recognizing that this world has fallen and that it is being redeemed by Jesus Christ. And then it's giving yourself to be a part of that story.

So you see yourself as, I need to be saved. So you don't step into the workplace saying, I'm going to save myself, but I need to be saved by Jesus Christ.

And then giving yourself to God to be his instrument. In the hands of his redeemer, Jesus. Now, one last thing, and I don't want to be mistaken.

[37 : 06] One last thing before we move on. Is profit still important? Yes. Obviously. Yes.

Without profit, you can't stay in business. Without profit, you can't serve people. You have to make money in order to serve people in the world of business. So is profit still important?

Yes. But so are a lot of other things. Ultimately, there's a lot of things that are the bottom line. That as a Christian, you can look at your business, and not just look at the P&L; statement, the profit and loss statement, and say, this was a good year, this was a bad year, based just upon a number.

There's a lot of bottom lines that you can look at. Are you offering a unique service? The way you do business, do you do it in order to help people and serve people?

Or do you do it adversarially? Like you're trying to get as much out of them as possible, with no concern for how it treats them in that relationship.

[38 : 08] Is there a strong emphasis on excellence, and product quality, and ethical environment, where you do business honestly, and fairly, and justly, and you do it well, because God does things well?

In a business that's informed by the gospel, profit is one of the important bottom lines. It's not the only one. It's one among many things, that you as a businessman, can look at your company, look at your part of the company, and say, we are doing well, or in these areas, we need to do better.

Now, we are completely out of time. So we'll skip gospel and medicine, and I just want to leave you with some questions.

Some way, I understand that you're not all businessmen, you're not all doctors or nurses or anything, but what are some questions that we can ask ourselves, as we think about how the gospel applies to my work?

And we're going to go through this quickly. So first, what is the main story that professionals in my field tell themselves?

[39:25] What's the story that they tell themselves about their jobs, and what they're doing, their place? What's the story that culture tells about people in my field? Does culture say, I'm no good?

That's a low job. What's the story? Or I'm really good, I'm really great, because I have this and that job. What's the story that the culture tells about the people in my job? What are the idols in my profession?

People that are in my job, what are some of the common idols that they have, that might be unique to us? What are their hopes?

What are their fears? What gets them excited? What terrifies them? What parts of that worldview is biblical? See, because there's always some part of the truth in every worldview.

So almost all worldviews, almost all stories have some agreement with the Bible. What areas does the Bible and the common worldview agree with? Where can I stand with my fellow professionals?

[40:33] What part of that worldview clashes with Christianity? Where must I say, I have to challenge that? I can't go the way they're going. I can't think the way they're thinking. Where is my work?

Idolatrous, selfish, cynical, delusional? How does Christ, and the facts about the resurrection, the ascension, his death, his reign, how does that, how does the facts about Jesus Christ challenge the work culture that I'm in?

So as you look at the people doing your job, where can you say, you know what, that doesn't line up with what Jesus did for us, did for me. Doesn't line up with the gospel. Then a couple other questions.

What opportunities are there for me to serve people? To serve not only individuals, but society at large. What opportunities are there to do good work?

To do good work with excellence and competence. We have a glorious king. We have a great savior. And we have resources.

[41:45] And hopes. That this world can't even imagine. This world is a bankrupt place. They're poor.

So. That means if anyone should do their job, well, it should be us. It should be us. Our work should be to the glory of God. Well, we're out of time.

We're dismissed. Thank you.