

Faith@Work - 'Part 1 - Laying a foundation'**Julian Doorey - Sermon - Cavy Bap - 14-10-18**

(Matt 5:13-16, Gen 1:1, 1:31, 2:7-8, Col 1:17, Matt 6:33, Rom 8:28, Gen 1:26-28, 1:29, 2:15-20, 3:17-19, 2 Cor 5:17, Col 3:23-24, Matt 25:40) - *refer to texts as we go.*

Prayer**Introduction**

2

Do you see your daily work as being part of God's work (if retired, did you see this)? Many Christians answer 'not really' - and there-in lies a problem. The world of 'work' has often been ignored by the world of 'church'. Some years ago, I read a book by a well-known evangelist / speaker Juan Carlos Ortiz, called Discipleship, hoping to discover 'what it really means to be a disciple of Jesus'. In this book, Juan said that if a Christian works at the Ford Motor Company, the main (only?) purpose is to provide a place to witness to workmates. At that time having just completed civil engineering studies and working in my first job at the Southland Harbour Board, I felt this to be very dismissive of the working life. Some years later, while working at the DCC, I was struggling under a huge workload, trapped in middle-management reporting, and feeling stressed and under-appreciated. When I shared with other Christians about both the value of the job, and the difficulties I experienced, it seemed they didn't care. I really struggled with the church's lack of appreciation and support for working people. Out of that pain, began my journey to discover a Christian theology of work, also known as 'Faith@Work'.

Why are they leaving Church?

3

In our recent 'Finding Faith Today' workshop with Lynne Taylor about why people have come to faith, we learnt that a key desire was to experience a 'faith that relates to life', here and now. This confirms a previous NZ survey which found that the most common reason for people leaving, was that they found church irrelevant to faith and life. Going to church did not connect with their work, family, world concerns or their personal spiritual walk (Alan Jamieson, NZ Baptist Pastor).

Today, I'm exploring the connection (*or lack of*) between church and work, specifically paid secular 'Monday to Friday' work, although it is also relevant to voluntary domestic and community work. The average Christian spends less than 2 percent of their 'awake time' at church (Sunday service), yet the church puts most of its energy and resources into that 2 percent time and very little into the daily world of work (Alistair Mackenzie, NZ Baptist Pastor, www.faithatwork.org.nz). Why is it so hard to integrate our secular work (eg: retail worker, mechanic etc) and Christianity into a 'whole'?

Could this be due to a non-Biblical view of the relationship between church, the kingdom of God and work? For example, one view could be... that the main purpose of life is to grow the church, and people only really go to secular work to witness (as I mentioned before). Does the working life have no significant value to God? If secular workers perceive this and feel disenchanting, they may leave church. On the other hand if the main purpose of life is to seek God's kingdom in all of life, including a raft of activities such as: loving God, loving people, building community, seeking justice, feeding the hungry, caring for creation, working with others, producing goods and services, witnessing and of course building the church - as a sign of God's kingdom, then perhaps secular workers will feel a sense of 'belonging and significance' within the church and stay with both the

church and their work. Discipleship, following Jesus, is concerned with 'all of life' including the church. Jesus wants us to be 'salt and light' in all places, at all times (Matt 5:13-16).

4 **What is your view of work?**

Here are some views which many people have:

- It helps to pass the time.
- Work is a punishment for sin. All drudgery, bitterness and hassle of the workday life are the consequence of humanities rebellion against God.
- It's a necessary evil so we can earn money and then 'really do God's work'.

An historical survey of the Christian view of work has found the following destructive consequences at various times over the centuries:

1. Sunday / Monday gap. The world of the market place is seen as secular and depraved, compared with the world of the church, which is spiritual and divine. These are two unconnected worlds based on Greek dualism. The world, the physical, the now - is dominated by sin. The heavens, the spiritual, the future heaven - is divine. This results in 'Sunday morning Christians' and 'Monday morning atheists'.
2. Paid church ministry and missionary service elevated above secular work. Sometimes 'full-time church workers' working within the confines of church, can have a higher status than 'full-time Christian witness' in the world. This may encourage people to pursue paid Christian work even if they're unsuited.
3. Protestant work ethic vs personal greed. The Protestant work ethic of stewardship, service and thrift has often been corrupted by personal greed, extreme capital gain, worshiping high economic growth, while unemployment and the resulting poverty destroy our communities.

We have a major 'world view' issue about work.

Is there a Biblical view of work?

5 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth (Gen 1:1). God was the original worker. Gen 1 describes in a highly ordered way that God created water, light, darkness, sky, land, vegetation, stars, sun, moon, fish, birds, livestock, wild animals and finally humans in his image. God worked, developed, shaped, fashioned, built, engineered and moulded. Six times in Gen 1 God saw that his physical creation-work was good, in fact very good (Gen 1:31). This is a complete rejection of the Greek idea that the physical material world is somehow evil. There is no dualism between spirit and physical. The physical realm of paid secular work and volunteerism has value.

Gen 2 describes in a narrative the creation again with emphasis on God creating humans, the garden and animals. Adam being formed from the dust has images of pottery. Similarly, the animals were formed from the ground. God is also a gardener - he planted the garden in Eden (Gen 2:7-8).

6 God continues his work today and is not a 'deist' watching the world wind down. Despite our best efforts to wreck the world, he actively and providentially preserves it. Look at the way nature reclaims human habitats (eg: Angkor Wat - Cambodia) and polluted or war-torn areas. Look at how broken people are able to find redemption and restoration in Jesus. We read that 'all things are held together in Christ' (Col 1:17).

7 Jesus says, 'seek first God's kingdom and God will help provide life's necessities - life, food, drink, clothes' (Matt 6:33). Paul says, 'God works together for good, all things for those called to him' (Rom 8:28). God is the original worker and continues to work.

8 **Does human work have value to God? / Does it add value to God's work?**

This is the critical question of today's talk. Humanity is created in the image of God - a privilege and responsibility (Gen 1:26-28). As God's image bearers we are to rule over the fish, birds and animals, be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth, subdue and rule over all of creation. The words 'subdue' and 'rule' have been used by some as an excuse for our work to exploit the earth - rape and pillage. However, more recent interpretations suggest wording such as 'to sustainably use'. The RSV Bible version uses 'dominion' not rule. Our work then is to understand, control (positive sense), develop, protect, use, care for, nurture and sustainably manage the earth for God and ourselves. God supplied plants and fruit trees for our food (vegetarian), so there's work to be done growing, harvesting, transporting and selling food (Gen 1:29). Our work is to partner with God in caring for and utilising the earth. God's plan has us working with his creation, not against it. Being fruitful, increasing in number and filling the earth describes homemaking, human relationships and voluntary domestic work as being valued by God. Part of being human is to work, contributing to society with dignity.

9 'subdue' and 'rule' have been used by some as an excuse for our work to exploit the earth - rape and pillage. However, more recent interpretations suggest wording such as 'to sustainably use'. The RSV Bible version uses 'dominion' not rule. Our work then is to understand, control (positive sense), develop, protect, use, care for, nurture and sustainably manage the earth for God and ourselves. God supplied plants and fruit trees for our food (vegetarian), so there's work to be done growing, harvesting, transporting and selling food (Gen 1:29). Our work is to partner with God in caring for and utilising the earth. God's plan has us working with his creation, not against it. Being fruitful, increasing in number and filling the earth describes homemaking, human relationships and voluntary domestic work as being valued by God. Part of being human is to work, contributing to society with dignity.

In Gen 2, God puts humans in the Garden of Eden to work and take care of it (Gen 2:15-20). We are to garden and produce food (agriculture), and to study and name the animals (science). Our work (paid or unpaid) is clearly significant to God. **Our work is to co-work with God in his world.**

10 **What about the fall from paradise?**

It's true that due to human disobedience to God in the garden, our work has been cursed or marred by sin and changed to toil (Gen 3:17-19). But, that's not the end of the story. God is doing a new work, redeeming people and the world through Jesus. Paul says, 'If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here' (2 Cor 5:17). Surely this includes renewing our attitude to and reclaiming the culture of work. Even within the difficult context of slaves and masters, we are told 'whatever you do, work at it with all your heart for the Lord' (Col 3:23-24). Jesus reminds us that in 'helping or working with a poor friend, we work for God' (Matt 25:40).

11 a new work, redeeming people and the world through Jesus. Paul says, 'If anyone is in Christ, the new creation has come: The old has gone, the new is here' (2 Cor 5:17). Surely this includes renewing our attitude to and reclaiming the culture of work. Even within the difficult context of slaves and masters, we are told 'whatever you do, work at it with all your heart for the Lord' (Col 3:23-24). Jesus reminds us that in 'helping or working with a poor friend, we work for God' (Matt 25:40).

Combining some of these Biblical ideas about work, I think we can say the following:

- 12 • Work is something we do to show the image of God in us. It allows us to continue God's work of creation.
- **Work is co-working with God in his world.** It's one way that the creative side of our nature gives expression to itself.
- Work is an important part of being human and a right for all. When meaningful work is not offered to people they lose their humanity and become powerless.
- Work has been distorted by sin, but Christ is redeeming it through us. When Christ makes us a new creation, He also wants to make the work place part of that new creation. He wants our work to become part of the purpose of His Kingdom.

In summary, being 'the image of God', the highest position in creation, **co-working with God**, having responsibility to use and nurture creation... our work has great value to God.

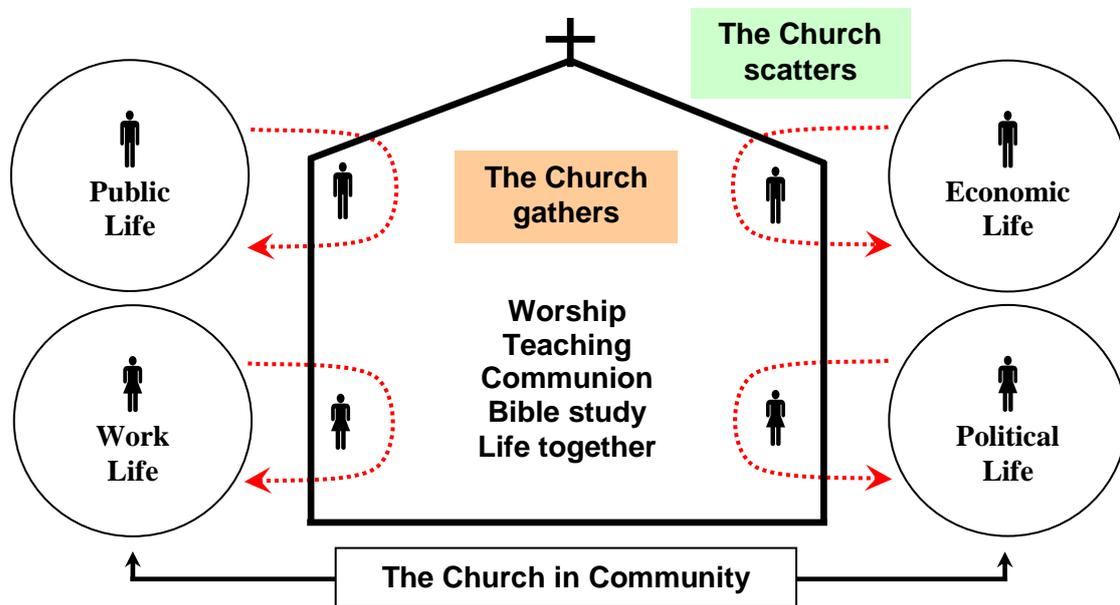
Why the missing link between church and work?

13 How many sermons have you heard on the working life? I suspect not many. Perhaps this is a natural consequence of most preachers (except Brethren) being in church ministry, rather than the secular work force. Preaching and teaching is based on both the Bible and influenced by our

own personal life experience. As a result, sermons on the meaning, value and ethical challenges of the secular working life are less likely to occur. This is not intentional.

- 14 How can we create a church culture where we gain a better understanding of each other's working world (secular and religious) and support each other? Some ideas:
1. Church workers swap jobs with secular workers. (Not very practical, as we become vocationally equipped and experienced in different ways. Plus OSH training hassles...)
 2. Mix of church workers and secular workers on the preaching roster. This allows for a breadth of theology and life experience to come from the pulpit. (This works very well at Cavy Bap where we have a range of clergy and laity preaching. The challenge is to ensure a good quality of preaching.)
 3. 'Walk across the room' to take an interest in other people's lives, asking them about their daily work and activities, offering encouragement and support. Over the last 2 years we've been encouraging people to talk to other people - creating a culture of interest and support.

15 Another approach I find really helpful is the 'Gathered church / Scattered church' idea (Lesslie Newbigin). In this model the church is a key sign of God's kingdom, by what it *says* and *does* both on Sundays and Monday to Saturdays. The 'church gathers' together on Sunday for worship, teaching, communion, Bible study and shared life. This helps equip and challenge Christians to live the whole gospel in the wider community. This includes training, equipping and encouragement in values, morals, ethics, righteousness (right living) and justice (making things right), required for when the 'church scatters' into the world for the other six days per week. In this way the church influences all areas of life (public, working, economic and political). In this way church people 'gathered' on Sundays, are 'scattered' from Monday to Saturday, able to feel appreciated, supported, valued and equipped in their daily working life.



The Gathered Church / Scattered Church

Conclusion

16 This talk today has been very much just 'Part 1 - Laying a foundation' for considering a Christian theology of work, also known as 'Faith@Work'. There're many more practical aspects we can

explore related to the Bible, the church and work, in terms of: (i) Meaningful work, (ii) Opportunities provided by work, and (iii) The future of work. That will be 'Part 2' later.

I started the talk by asking: Do you see your daily work as being part of God's work? My dream is to see you (Cavy Baptist people) 'gathered' on Sundays, and then 'scattered' from Monday to Saturday, **seeing your work as co-working with God**, and **feeling appreciated, supported, valued and equipped in your daily work**. If this isn't your experience, I'd love to encourage and pray for you after the service. Please feel free to come and see me or approach someone else.

17 Tomorrow is Monday morning, the start of another week of work (paid or unpaid) in the real world. After the 'wake up' alarm goes off, say a prayer and **'Thank God it's Monday'**.

Bruce will close our service with a final song. I said to Bruce 'you'll struggle to find worship songs about the daily (secular) work we do'... After searching, Bruce responded, 'This is a tricky one, as nothing on the face of the earth fits the brief of 'Faith@Work'... anyway Bruce has a song for us.

Pray for Bruce beginning as Deputy Principal at St Clair school tomorrow Monday morning.