

**Christ Presbyterian Church  
Edina, Minnesota  
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John Crosby  
God at Work: The Reward of Work  
Genesis 11; Colossians 3**

We began the new year with a series on faith, on God at work. If it seems like it's been a long time, this is the fourth week. The temperature has not been above zero since we started! How sad is this. I am driving in, click on the car and the temperature reads minus 7 and I think, that's not so bad. How sick is that? You are brave to be here and I think God will reward you for showing up.

Last week Rich Phenow talked about work as God's calling. God calls us to work. *Vocare* means to call. That's where we get the word *vocation*. We get work out of God calling us to help others and Rich showed how that blesses all of us. Two weeks ago Steph Spencer got up and talked about the tension of using our gifts at work but also about being at home. How do you balance that? She said, "Why do I feel like my work and my identity are tied to my performance at work? Something is wrong." She tried to show a better way. I started the series on work with the new year, literally at the beginning, Genesis 1. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." We talked about how the God who works created us. We were created in the image of God, the worker. That is, we are made, we are built, to be workers, to be creators, to create beauty so when we work, that should bring us to life. Work should be what makes us spring up out of bed in the morning. I get to go to work. Work is meant to unleash creativity. It is about building life-giving relationships where people affirm the good work that you are doing. It's about doing something that makes a difference instead of just moving the dial. Work is intended by God not just to provide for your needs but to fulfill your dreams. God intends that our work would complete the work He started at the beginning so that the earth is filled with life and beauty.

Are you looking forward to going to work tomorrow or does work feel different from that? Work doesn't feel like that all the time, sometimes not at all. Whether you are going back to school or you're thinking "Yet another load of diapers" or you wonder how you can make sense out of tomorrow when there is no paycheck or you have to go to the marketplace, work feels different from that. Tim Keller talks about that and goes right for the jugular. He says, "Do you find the two great tasks in life—love and work—to be excruciatingly hard?" Is it hard to love other people? Is it hard to work meaningfully? Genesis 3 explains what went wrong. God says that the fall exposes our desire to run the universe on our own and Genesis 3 shows the effects of the curse that this brings on us, the brokenness of our lives and of work. It says, "And God said, 'So you the man will have ground that you work that is filled with thorns and you the woman will have a man who lords it over you and you will have pain with children.'" So relationships are broken and work is broken. Then God says, "From dust you were made, to dust you will return,"

and death became something to be afraid of. Work is changed. Relationships are changed. Life itself is changed.

Genesis 3 is ancient but it could not be more relevant today. God ties together love and work and uses childbearing in both. He says both childbearing and work are now painful labor. We call having a baby labor and pain. Companies assemble teams that work furiously for months or even years to give birth to new products which usually die a quick death in the marketplace.

Today is the day of the Super Bowl. I guarantee you'll hear two things talked about, well, one thing for sure. You'll hear somebody use the phrase of Vince Lombardi, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." Exactly! Work has turned into a win/lose proposition, zero-sum game. The other thing that you may not hear as much about on Super Bowl Sunday, as you watch these incredible athletes, is how star football players suffer the effect of injuries that last their entire lives and how that life is shortened. In work, brilliant entrepreneurs like Steven Jobs get thrown out of the companies that they founded when times get tough. God said weeds would grow where we work. Sometimes those weeds look like computer viruses and other times, the weeds look like scandals in business and they keep coming back with a vengeance. Even the creativity in us seems to go wrong. Research into the atom becomes the basis for the atomic bomb. In other words, even when work bears fruit, it is always painful, often miscarries, and sometimes it kills us. People say, "This work is killing me." Christians give up on the hope that work will fulfill us. Work is not itself a curse but it now is under the power of sin.

Christians are not Pollyannas. We know we live in a broken world and all our work is subject to the curse, but that is not the end of the story for us. You want to see what work looks like when it goes really wrong? You start in Genesis 1, you go to Genesis 3, and then you end up on the Plain of Shinar. Probably not many of you remember the Plain of Shinar but it's found in Genesis, chapter 11.

**1** Now the whole world had one language and a common speech. **2** As people moved eastward, they found a plain in Shinar and settled there. **3** They said to each other, "Come, let's make bricks and bake them thoroughly." They used brick instead of stone, and tar for mortar.

It was a revolution in building technique that allowed great height.

**4** 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." **5** But the LORD came down to see the city and the tower they were building. **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.

God has not threatened them. He *knows* what will happen.

**7** Come, let us go down and confuse their language so they will not understand each other." **8** So the LORD scattered them from there over all the earth, and they stopped building the city. **9** That is why it was called Babel--because there the LORD confused the language of the whole world. From there the LORD scattered them over the face of the whole earth.

In Babble's workplace, everybody speaks a different language. It's a world of *Mad Men* where throats are cut or *The Office*, the TV show, where petty and silly rule, or Homer Simpson where work loses dignity and purpose in ways that are either hysterical or heart-breaking or both at the same time. Babble's workplace is a world filled with multimillion dollar bonuses and unexpected collapses side by side, where Green Cards battle against Union Cards and harassment is side by side with beauty and inspiration, mindless work and planned obsolescence, and petty squabbling and world-class innovation. In Babble's workplace those of you who would follow God need to learn a common language. You need to become bilingual and learn God's language of work again. That's what Paul talked about to a bunch of God-followers in Romans 6.

<sup>6-11</sup> Could it be any clearer? Our old way of life was nailed to the cross with Christ, a decisive end to that sin-miserable life—no longer at sin's every beck and call!

If you don't remember anything else, what a great line! We are no longer at sin's beck and call. When Jesus died, He took sin down with him, but alive He brings God down to us. Then, here is the part about language. From now on, think of it this way. Sin speaks a dead language that means nothing to you. That's the language of Babble. God speaks your mother tongue and you hang on every word. You need to learn your mother tongue. The language of God is not about public religion. It's a new language about everything. It's a new language about work. Paul wants to teach the followers of Jesus in Colossae how to work and he teaches them a new way to look at work. He says in chapter 3,

**17** And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.

So thank God for work. Then Paul goes to wives and husbands, to children and parents, even to slaves, and gives them instructions about work. He says,

**23** Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, **24** since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. **25** Those who do wrong will be repaid for their wrongs, and there is no favoritism.

I want to give you three steps to leaving the Tower of Babel behind at work, three steps toward working in the Kingdom. I think it probably would be best not to start with a lecture but by giving you an example, so I want to give you a two-minute example of what work *could* look like.

[Video shown.]

- The satisfaction and the joy that I often get from work is, first of all, being able to help clients. Thinking back on my skill list, I still have my skill set. It kind of helps with seeing myself a better teacher. I'm a very detail-oriented person and my job is a good fit for that, so I do feel like I'm using my gifts in a positive way.
- I really enjoy watching people take care of people.

- I see the reductive side of work when I do a good job and I know I've done a good job and I see a good result. I feel really good.
- For me, one of the most gainful ways in which my faith surfaces at work is through interpersonal relationships.
- Where I've been most fulfilled and felt most at peace and felt most like I'm really where I should be right now and that I'm doing what God called me to do. It had very little to do with how the company was performing or what my last review was or what my current W-2 was. It always had to do with how many people I felt I was impacting, either professionally or spiritually, how many situations had arisen that allowed me to share my faith. It's interesting how if you stay attentive, how many God-moments there are that happen throughout the day.
- Brother Lawrence talked about working for God throughout your day in the little acts that you do and how God is ever-present if you're looking for God. What I've also found is, if I'm focusing on me and what I want to accomplish and where I want to get to and not focusing on what's going on around me in life with the people, I'll never be effective in a workplace ministry.

[Video ends.]

Do you know what I love most about that? There's not a pastor in sight! What I love about that is that it's not about celebrities. It's about you. It's about us, learning the language of God that makes work a holy place. Babble's workplace was marked with pride and with fear. It says in the text, "Let us make a tower that reaches the heavens and make a name for ourselves." That means they were not content with the name that God gave them. They wanted to be called what *they* wanted to be. Their identity was apart from God and it was also marked by fear. "Let's make this tower or else we will be scattered all over the face of the earth." When fear drives you, you are like Cain. They are saying, "We will be scattered over the face of the earth." Anybody remember Cain and Abel? The first brother is Cain. He kills Abel. The curse on Cain is that he will be a wanderer over all the earth. He says, "They'll try to kill me. I'm a dead man." To combat the curse, they want to build a safe place. "There is no safe place for people like us."

The language of Babble's workplace is filled with pride and so is our work. The language of work is filled with fear. So if you are going to learn a new language, it's not about pride, it's about humility. It's not about fear, it's about security. People who work for the King can afford to be humble. They don't have to pretend.

I was at a board meeting of World Vision, a \$3 billion corporation. The president was the head of a Fortune 500 company who left millions of dollars on the table to go to work for World Vision. He is an incredible leader. I learn from him all the time. We were doing a fundraiser down in Florida last month and he did a good job in a lot of ways. But in another way, he blew it, so I wrote him a note here over the weekend and I said, "I've got to tell you, you did this great and this great but, man, you've got to stop doing this. Your staff will not tell you because they are afraid of you. Only your friends will tell you." Within two hours I got a note back from him that said, "It's worse than you think. I asked two of my staff and they said it was worse than you said."

I want to do better at that. I want you to help me do better at that. Children's lives are at stake." I believe in this guy more than ever because he was humble.

**Three steps to leaving Babble behind** and learning the language of work in heaven:

Step 1) We saw in the video, **serve God out there**. It's easy to serve God in here, but we need to serve God *out there*. We need to settle in our minds when we wake up Monday morning, not Sunday morning, who's really the boss. There's a great story about Bill Moyers, a person who started his career helping President Lyndon Johnson. In those days the culture was a little different and meetings in the government were often started with prayer. Imagine that! They were starting a Cabinet meeting and the President goes, "Bill, give us a little prayer." Bill starts to pray and Lyndon Johnson being Lyndon Johnson says, "Bill, I can't hear you." And Bill says, "That's because I'm not talking to you, Mr. President. I'm talking to the boss." It's usually not like that. It's usually not saying, "I'm a Christian and you're not," but it starts with taking our God *out there*.

Mark Batterson has a new book called *All In [All In: You Are One Decision Away From a Totally Different Life]* and he says exactly what somebody in the video said. He says,

Your workplace is your mission field. Your job is your sermon. Your colleagues are your congregation . . . . No matter what tool you use in your trade—a hammer, a keyboard, a mop, a football, a spreadsheet, a microphone, or an espresso machine—using it is an act of obedience. It's the mechanism whereby you worship God.

That's how you worship God in work. Serve the King out there.

Step 2) To leave Babble behind, work that's just more babble, **work like you're working for God**. Not like you're working for your boss, not like you're working for your shareholders, not even like you're working for your children. Work like you're working for God. Often you'll see me muttering just before I get up to preach. Sometimes it's, "Oh, God, what do I say? I've got no idea." But usually as I prepare to preach, I walk up and I say to myself, remember, audience of one. It's not like I don't care what you think, but I serve an audience of one when I'm working my best. I work for the King from whom I will inherit great rewards, just as you will.

So if we work like we're working for God, how does that change our work? Well, in Colossians it says God is the judge of your work and your worth. Don't give that power away to anybody else. Don't let anybody else tell you what you're worth. Don't give that power away to customers or coworkers or teachers or bosses or pink slips or promotions or rejection letters or bonuses. You're worth far more than that. Work like it! Learn how to work God's way. God's way is different. The apostle Paul says, if God shows no favorites, neither should you at work. If God calls slaves to work hard even when their master is not around, so should you. If God says, "I'll repay wrongdoers, you and I don't need to work like we are in the pay-back business. Learn to work like the King's kids. Work like you are working for God. Dr. Martin Luther King nailed it 50 years ago:

If it falls your lot to be a street sweeper, sweep streets like Michelangelo painted pictures, sweep streets like Beethoven composed music . . . Sweep streets like Shakespeare wrote poetry. Sweep streets so well that all the hosts of heaven and earth will have to pause and say: Here lived a great street sweeper who swept his job well.

Work like you're working for the God who is with you.

Step 3) The third way we move away from Babble also came from our friends in the video. As we work, **look for Divine appointments**. Look for ways that God has put us in this place on this day for this reason, and it is usually about the people that we relate to. In Paul's day, it was husbands, slaves, masters, children, parents, how they relate to each other differently. For you and me, to work differently is about how we look at clients, how we treat our bosses when they are not around. It's about kids and other students and competitors and neighbors. They are divine appointments. I've got to tell you, here is the place where I think you and I need the most help because we are still working out of pride and fear. We need to work out of *love* and see what God might do with the people who cross our paths. I need help for that. I bet you do, too.

Once a month, we have a gathering of people here at the church, CPC's Business Network Group. It's a group of 70 to 100 folks who gather together, not just to look for jobs but to ask, how do we do our work the way the King wants? They have a meeting this Tuesday night. If you are not totally satisfied with the way you work, show up. Recognize Divine appointments.

So we leave Babble behind when we serve God out there and decide who is boss, when we work like we're working for God, and when we look for Divine appointments. I believe that you will work for God regardless of your paycheck only when you are involved in the rescue mission of the Kingdom of Heaven. I want part of your life to be involved in the rescue work of the Kingdom of Heaven. That is your deepest work. That's where you will come alive. Again, I would like to show you what that looks like.

[Video shown.]

- My name is Tony Zosel.
- I am Lisa Fesse Burns.
- I am David Carroll.
- Hi, I'm Lauren Withers.
- Ross Robinson.
- David Schwandt.
- Suzi Goan.
- I'm Sallie March.
- Barb Olson.
- Hi, I'm Bob Haberkorn.
- My name is Cole Polyak.
- My name is George West. My wife Ann and myself have been members of CPC for 14 years, I believe.
- (Tony) I'm a member here at CPC.
- (David C) I've been at CPC for about 9 years now.
- (Lisa) Since I was 6 years old.
- (Lauren) I've been going to CPC my whole life.
- (Ross) I've been a member since 1994.
- (Suzie) I'm a member here at CPC.
- (David S) For 12 years, my wife and I have been members.
- (Sallie) For 25 years.

- (Barb) My husband and I were married here 26 years ago.
- I think one of the most exciting things is to watch people spend the day serving and at the end of the day realize that we were the ones who were blessed.
- Right now I'm involved with Serving Saturday.
- Life Rebuilders is a Christian-based organization that helps people in transition in their lives.
- Calvery [Baptist Church] is a partner of CPC. That is another church here in the Twin Cities.
- Families Moving Forward is an organization that finds housing for families that are really homeless.
- Opportunity International is a company that gives out microloans to people in third-world countries.
- TreeHouse serves suburban youth in eight locations in the metro area.
- Team World Vision is an international organization that has local fundraising and a variety of events. It helps to sponsor children in Africa.
- Banyan Community has been a long-time mission partner of Christ Presbyterian Church.
- My wife had heard about the Zambia trip. Habitat for Humanity has an opportunity that we're taking advantage of this year in El Salvador.
- At Urban Homeworks, we destroy things and build them back up again. We tear them apart, remodel, rebuild or repair.
- It's just such a wonderful congregation to be part of because in so many ways, we're looking beyond the walls and reaching out for Jesus.
- Through my life, I've tended to be extremely selfish. I've never really cared much about doing anything for anybody else and when I came to CPC, one of the great things was, I felt that they encouraged me to get out and get off my butt and do something for somebody else. They make it so easy for you to do it.
- You know, it started out as a selfish thing to get myself to the next place, but really what it turned into is, I found that as I needed to lean into God, I realized that God took that lean-in and multiplied it and did amazing things.
- It's so nerve-racking calling up someone I never met and going, "Hey, can I help you with Young Life?" and going to north Minneapolis where you're, like, "Where am I?" and, like, you're so out of place...it's uncomfortable...being with people who are different from you. But, it's also what makes you grow.
- When we only focus on ourselves and learning, whether it is in Bible studies and all, I think we can learn a lot, but I think when we put our faith in action, it comes alive.
- One of the most indelible things for me is just the level of need that is in this city and I think oftentimes when people think about a missions effort and think about getting involved in something, it's easy to think that you may need to take a big trip or that you need to go around the world.
- So one can say, I really can't go to the Middle East or wherever. How about five miles away?
- I've been blessed way more than what I've ever given to the Banyan. Just being involved in people's lives and trying to make a difference. I feel called by the Lord, that we are all called to give our time and our resources to others, and in doing so though, I get way more back.
- I think part of our responsibility as a Christian is to get out of our comfort zones and to serve others. It is a great opportunity to get out.

- You give of yourself and then you get back something that is far more than you ever gave.
- It is a *cliché* that I get more than I have to give, but it's true. The people I work with, the group of volunteers and the staff of Urban Homeworks, are the most faith-filled people I have ever had a privilege to be involved with.
- What do you have to lose in the sense that you have so much more to gain and so would everyone else?
- I think you find God at work and places you never would have thought He was at work. I think that would be a challenge - something that you could take back to the situation that you find yourself in.
- I think I'm just realizing in the deepest way the importance of showing up.
- So the reality is that God asks us only to put one foot in front of the other.
- Give it a try. You'll find out that it's really a rewarding experience.
- It's really simple. The most rewarding thing in the world is to be using my gifts to better the Kingdom.

[Video ends.]

So whatever you do in word or deed, do it all in the Name of the Lord Jesus. It is Christ you are serving and you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as your reward. I'd like you to close a little differently today. Instead of singing our closing hymn, I'd like you to walk it! Take out the insert that is in your bulletin, please. Everybody should have one of these inserts. We have set up the Great Room so that all of our local partners where you can get involved are right there. See if there is not a place *out there* for you to do the work of the King. If you feel like you would like to explore a trip where you can serve, those opportunities are in the Fireside Room. Go right through the Great Room into the Fireside Room. Parents can stop for a minute on the way to picking up their kids but, really, for God's sake and for your sake, just go to work tomorrow and work for the King.

Lord Jesus, I thank You for the reminder that I have only one boss. I serve an audience of one, so my pride need not get in the way and I don't have to be afraid. I thank You for my sisters and brothers here, who teach me that it is not about religious words. It is about working in whatever place You have put us to bring the Kingdom of love and hope. In the Name of Jesus Christ, who came from heaven to earth, in the Name of the Father and the Son and the Spirit, we pray. Amen.

*The nature of oral presentations makes them less precise than written materials; any lack of attribution is unintentional, and we wish to credit all those who have contributed to this sermon. Soli Deo Gloria.*