

WORKING WITH ALL OUR HEART

DATE: SUNDAY, 17TH OF OCTOBER 2021 | GOD AT WORK SERIES: PART 2

COLOSSIANS 3:22-24

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.

MATTHEW 25:21

'His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"

NOTES FOR LEADERS:

A reminder that 'work' is much more than doing something for money. It is any kind of productive activity that we are engaging in.

START TALKING

1. What one thing from Sunday's message is playing over and over in your mind?
2. What did you think of the story of Chen Min Lin - the Chinese pastor whose story is below in the notes?
3. What is your dream job?

START THINKING

1. Read Colossians 3:22-24. This Scripture must have been very challenging for the slaves in the Roman Empire who were owned by their masters and had no rights. In what ways does this Scripture challenge you?
2. Can you think of somebody from the Bible who showed great dedication/faithfulness/excellence in their work? If so, who? And what do you learn from them?

START SHARING

1. What is your least favourite part of your job/work/productive activity? What about it makes it challenging? Imagine yourself doing that least favourite part of your job as if Jesus was your 'boss'. How might it look different?
2. Read Matthew 25:21. How does the thought of getting affirmation, reward and eternal joy from Jesus impact how you do your work (productive activity) in this life?

START PRAYING

Lord, we offer up our minds, hearts, eyes, mouths, hands, thoughts and energy afresh to You. Give us the grace we need to work as if we're working for you.

START DOING

This week, book some time in your diary to meditate on these questions:

1. Why do I work?
2. For whom am I working?
3. Am I working with all my heart?
4. Is it worth it?

Pray and ask God to examine your heart and point out any area in your work life where you are not seeing Him as your Master/Boss.

SUMMARY

OF SUNDAY'S MESSAGE

Two weeks ago, we started a new series, God at Work. We looked at what it meant to work on purpose and learned that:

1. Work is not punishment but part of our purpose.
2. Work is Worship
3. Work is Ministry

We also defined work as 'productive activity' (i.e. not necessarily linked to income).

This Sunday, Steve explored the topic, Working With All Our Heart.

There is a very challenging verse in Colossians 3:22-24 that was originally written to slaves: *Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to curry their favour, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters, since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*

What was it like to be a slave in the Roman Empire?

"All slaves and their families were the property of their owners, who could sell them or rent them out at any time. Their lives were harsh. Slaves were often whipped, branded or cruelly mistreated. Their owners could kill them for any reason and would face no punishment." ([SOURCE](#))

It's into this context that Paul is writing, and he's speaking about attitude - even if you are a slave, work at it with all your heart as if the Lord is your Master.

We looked at three words from this passage on Sunday: Master, Heart & Reward.

1. Master

We don't get the full weight of this text in English. The word for Lord and masters is the exact same word (Kurios) - so if you were reading in Greek it reads more like this: *Slaves, obey your earthly **masters** in everything; ... with sincerity of heart and reverence for the **Master**. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the **Master**, not for human **masters**.* ... Colossians 3:22-23

The implication is that we belong to God and He can do with us whatever He wants. Thankfully He is good! So whatever kind of work we are doing, God is our ultimate Master/Boss.

No matter how good or bad the humans we work for/with are, our ultimate Master is God in heaven. The One Who died for us, rescued us and gave us a new hope and a future. The One Who loves us, cares for us, and provides for us. He is worth every ounce of energy we have and infinitely more.

Human masters are not always looking at what we do, but our Master/Lord in heaven is always watching. e.g. perhaps we're being asked to do something without integrity or to take a bribe.

Our Master in heaven is not a slave-driver, but He does NOT tolerate laziness. Even if you own the business: *Masters ... you know that you also have a Master in heaven.* Colossians 4:1. (Paul speaking to the slave owners - treat your employees carefully).

He is our Ultimate Master, and we work for Him.

2. Heart

Colossians 3:23 says, *"Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord ..."* Whole-heartedly vs with a hole in your heart.

"Whatever you do..." That is a high bar! But because He is our Ultimate Master, we should work with all our hearts.

What's the worst job you can imagine? It couldn't get much worse than this: Pastor Chen spent 18 years in a prison work camp in China. Because he came from a background of moderate wealth and opportunity, the guards at the camp worked hard to break his spirit and indoctrinate him. He was so hungry at times that he was tempted to eat toothpaste. He was separated from his wife and his young church.

While he was in prison, his wife died.

One of his greatest hardships was that he had no privacy to worship, pray, read, or memorize the Scripture. He was under constant surveillance. Frequently, he prayed that God would allow him a place of privacy so he could enjoy fellowship with God. Soon the prison officials gave him a new assignment. In order to break his spirit and indoctrinate him further they gave him the most difficult work assignment in the camp. They assigned him to the camp cesspool.

The sewer pit where he worked served 60,000 prisoners. His assignment was to scoop out human waste to be used for fertilizer. No one else wanted the job because it was lonely and repulsive and they feared deadly diseases.

His heart was broken when he went to work on his new assignment. Day after day working in the foul pit he wondered if his prayers were heard. To withstand the hardship, he would sing, pray, and quote Scripture aloud. One day it occurred to him that his assignment was a specific answer to prayer.

Because he worked in such a foul hole, none of the guards would get anywhere near him. He worked completely alone. He could pray, sing, and quote Scripture as loud as he wanted! He began to thank God and rejoice. There was no one there to hear him but his faithful God. His cesspool assignment lasted six years, and miraculously he never contracted a disease from it.

When he was released, the church for which he had laboured and prayed had exploded in growth and vitality. He travelled to poor villages where he saw the hand of God at work. He represented the cause of the suffering church in China around the world.

Speaking before a huge conference years later, he told the story of God's faithfulness to him in prison. With bright eyes, he spoke of the fellowship that he enjoyed with the Lord in the prison cesspool. Standing before the huge crowd, the small Chinese pastor began to sing the song that he used to sing in the prison sewer:

I come to the garden alone

While the dew is still on the roses ...

And He walks with me and he talks with me

And He tells me I am His own

And the joy we share as we tarry there

None other has ever known.

Pastor Chen had learned that the secret to rejoicing is not perfect circumstances but a consciousness of the presence of the Lord Jesus. "... *In his presence there is fullness of joy ...*" Psalm 16:11.

The worst kind of job any one of us can have is the one where we forget that we are working for Him and so work with a careless selfishness.

3. Reward

Colossians 3:24 tells us that *...since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward.*

On an earthly level, we get some reward for doing good work: Internal satisfaction, gratitude from others, respect, academic or sporting results, financial remuneration etc. How much of that were slaves in the Roman Empire getting? Possibly only internal satisfaction and occasional gratitude. To them, and us, Paul says: remember that your ULTIMATE reward comes from the Lord.

A whole lot in this life, but I think he is primarily thinking of the life beyond the grave: *'His master replied, "Well done, good and faithful servant! You have been faithful with a few things; I will put you in charge of many things. Come and share your master's happiness!"* Matthew 25:21.

Whatever your primary 'work' is, it's important. God is watching us. More than that, He is with us. Our faith, attitude and approach to our work in this life impact the next one.

Our ultimate reward for a job well done is praise from the Master, future heavenly promotion (we are not told too many details!), and overwhelming eternal joy. This should stir us to work with our whole heart, regardless of whether we're working in a human cesspit or living out all our earthly dreams.