

Heavenly Father may these spoken words be faithful to the written word and lead us to the living Word, Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

Let me begin with a couple of questions for you? Have you ever wondered if what you're doing at work is really worthwhile? Have you wanted to do something significant for God—to make your life really count?

At about 10am/12 noon after the final song has been sung and Ian has said a blessing we walk out of church into the rest of our lives. But do we see the connection between Sunday worship and Monday work—which of course is where we spend the bulk of our waking hours. For example it's tempting to think that we have to change our job in order to serve God in some significant way and make our life really count for Him?

Well from our reading this morning I think the Apostle Paul would advise us in this way, "In seeking to serve God and making our lives really count for him it does not necessarily mean changing our jobs; but sometimes it could be about changing our heart and attitude to the way we live out our jobs." In our reading this morning, Paul helps us reframe what it means to follow Jesus between Sundays. This passage proclaims three simple, but critical, adjustments that will potentially transform our daily work into significant work for God's kingdom. They are:

1. An attitude of service
2. An attitude of worship
3. An attitude of expectation

But before we begin to examine these in more detail lets remind ourselves of what we mean by our 'work'. On 9th November 2008 Ian preached on this very same passage and I am now going to plagiarize a bit of it! Ian said this: Today I wonder what comes to mind when I mention the word work? Some will imagine the office, hospital, school etc others, the home. Some may say I don't work any more because I'm retired or I don't work because I'm a mother. In that way we define work as something we are paid for. However, work is far more than that for which we are paid. Mark Greene in his excellent book, 'Thank God it's Monday,' writes "work might be defined as the activities you are principally engaged in during the week, whether in or out of the home, 'employed' or 'unemployed'."

Well today in the context of this passage we are looking at 'Giving our all at work'. But what does that mean? We've already heard from Maurice Ballard and later I'll share what another couple of people from this congregation have also very helpfully and generously being willing to disclose about their work situation. But initially as we think about 'work' this morning let us get it clear in our minds that this is something God has ordained for us and which is part of our being made in his image, it is good. With that in mind what I'd like you to do now is to repeat something that Ian asked you to do when he preached on this passage two years ago.

Work out what is your work –If you are comfortable please have a quick chat with one or two people next to you and describe what you do (*if you don't want to that fine – just talk about the weather instead*) However, if you are able to briefly discuss 'what you do' there is one rule. No one is allowed to say "I am **only** this or that" – the word **only** is off the agenda! Because remember your work – in other words what ever it is that you do most of the time is something that God has ordained for you.

So let's now move to our first point: An attitude of service

So often in the world today it's all about striving to gain power, to be the top dog, to be in-charge and have others running around after you. It's as if we have to have power to be successful.

But is this what God is saying? Is our work – what we do most of the time – about getting people to serve us, about lording it over them or is it about serving others and through that serving God. You see what Paul seems to be saying here is this is not about gaining power but rather we are called to empower others, we are not to serve ourselves but we are to seek to serve others. We can do that whether we are the boss or the subordinate because according to Paul, whether we're giving or taking orders, we are to take the lead in seeking the welfare and success of others.

Whether I am an employee or an employer, whether I'm retired or a house-husband or house-wife or even (as Maurice has explained) unemployed - we go to work or whatever we do most of the time not primarily for ourselves, but for others. We are to treat the people we work for fairly, giving to them the work they expect of us. As for those who work for us, we are to treat them justly and empower them to do their work.

So let's move on to our second point:

2. An attitude of worship

Apart from power the world also seems to be saying we must have prestige to be successful - to make a name for ourselves. It's easy in our work to have as a main priority – "I must make a name for myself. I want people to notice me and see how good I am at my job". Let's be honest with ourselves – we all do it. Part of my job involves working with churches helping them with their Christian Giving. Recently I was so pleased to be asked to come and present to the Church Council here about a potential giving programme. I have to admit there was a bit of me that thought – yes – I can show them what I know about this subject. I can have the prestige of being Mr knowledgeable! I prayed before the meeting "Lord may whatever comes out of this meeting be for your glory" but deep down let me be honest - I wanted the glory to be all mine!

But as we look at this passage and scripture in general note the contrast: God says we go to work to make a name for God. Paul makes it clear that, at its core, work is a means of worship—a way we ascribe worth to God. Paul says whatever you do can be and should be done for the Lord. It's hard to escape the fact that Paul sees all kinds of work as meaningful and God-honoring.

Look at the first part of verse 23: "whatever you do". Paul's words obliterate the idea that God's work and one's daily work are separate departments. Work is what we were created to do, and when we do our work well, as an act of love and worship—"as working for the Lord," - our work glorifies the God we serve. That, of course, means that we should do quality work and put our whole heart into it, because this is what God deserves.

Look at verse 23 because it is the key to this passage: "**Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord**".

So now we move to our third and final point

3. An attitude of expectation.

We live in a materialistic world constantly bombarded with images that say we must have money and wealth and possessions to be successful. So often work can be seen as simply a way of enabling us to get as much stuff as possible. The world says we must have possessions to be successful. It's all about the money!

As you think about your work, those activities you are principally engaged in during the week, whether in or out of the home, 'employed' or 'unemployed', what is your expectation do you see your work as your service of God or as a means of earning money, or something you just have to do, or a drudge or what? You see God's expectation is different. He says go to work, those activities you are principally engaged in during the week not principally to earn money but to earn an eternal reward. Think about it: Your daily work—as a teacher, banker, plumber, a doctor, a housewife, someone who looks after others - whatever it might be - **it counts for eternity**. Paul clearly teaches that God will hold us accountable as stewards for what we do in our daily work.

Don't get me wrong – this is not intended as an attack upon - for example - our desire to profit from our work rather its about remembering that the ultimate reward for good labour is to stand before God and hear, "Well done good and faithful servant."

So having considered our attitude to service, worship and expectation within our work and before I begin to sum up lets take a look at a couple of real (and actually what I believe are rather inspirational) examples of work situations from our own congregation. Bear in mind that both these people are really modest, they are the type who just 'get on with it' – so I'm hugely grateful that they have given me permission to share this information.

Let me tell you about Eve. Eve is in her 90's and is retired. Her work 'what she does most of the time' is encourage the people around her. She lives in sheltered accommodation in Binefield's Close. Her job as she sees it is to pray for people she knows who are struggling because as she puts it she has time to do that. She also sees her work as one who witnesses to the other elderly folk who are her neighbours. She encourages them to come along to the luncheon club and fellowship group. She sees it as being crucial that she attend's regular Sunday worship – it is very much integral to what she does. She also describes her work as being 'positive'. I talked to my wife Ruth about Eve and she independently confirmed how Eve always gives her all. As Ruth puts it "Whenever I meet Eve she always encourages me"

Now let me describe another lady in our congregation. Kay is a Mum and a wife and tries to be encouraging and set a good example. Kay is also refreshingly honest and realistic about her work. As she puts it "she try's but does always succeed"! She also has that nagging feeling that many of us will relate to – of feeling that we could always "do better and try harder". Kay is also a School dinner lady. It is important for her to be punctual, good natured and trustworthy. She tries **not** to get involved in gossip and instead be a positive force in the playground. Others know she goes to church and sometimes ask her about it. She tries to answer any question honestly but without being too heavy. Her work also includes praying for the school and its staff. You may know Kay in her role as leading our puppet ministry team, but what you may not know is that another big part of what she does during the week is working as the volunteer administrator for the Basingstoke Town Centre Chaplaincy and she's also a regular volunteer in the Christ Church office. Kay says: 'Work is varied, occasionally challenging and I have to trust God that I am where he wants me and he'll help me get it done. Other tasks are quite mundane but I try to do it with good grace because it needs to be done and deserves to be done to the best of my ability'. Part of her personal work ethic is to try to do the right thing even when she knows she won't get anything back or it won't be noticed.

My huge thanks to Maurice, Eve and Kay for sharing part of their lives with us.

So let's begin to sum this up. One day each of us will stand before God and give account for what we did with our Monday through Saturdays, so we should keep these two truths top of our minds:

1. Our daily work is significant to God and his kingdom—

Whether we're leading a company or leading a church, changing a tire or changing a nappy, making a sales pitch or sharing Christ with a coworker. To make our life count for God and feel the pleasure of extending his kingdom doing the work he has gifted us to do, we don't need to change jobs. We need to change our attitude. Truth is, we can make any job secular or sacred by our attitude. We should all go to work for the same reasons we go to church - to worship God and serve our fellow man. And finally...

2. Work is a key, not an enemy of one's spiritual life

Keeping faith and work in separate departments makes no sense and can be positively harmful. Paul is clear – we can be serious about our work and serious about serving God at the same time. That's not to say that our work can't get out of balance with other important activities of life.

The point to grasp is that Paul sees work as an essential part of our spiritual life. Those who want to separate faith and work have a real problem making Paul's words in Colossians 3:23, "work at it with all your heart," fit with Jesus' words in Matthew 22:37, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart."

If God and work are separate departments, then how can we love the Lord with all our heart and devote all of that same heart to our work? We'd have to disobey one command to obey the other. If all work is God's work, and we do our work with all our heart, attempting to bring glory to God, then our work can be a supreme act of love and worship of God. In Paul's mind, a person would be hard-pressed to please God apart from a healthy attitude toward work. Bringing life into proper balance is impossible unless we see our work as important to God. After all, if we think God doesn't care about our work, then not only will we operate as if we're totally on our own, but God will become an add-on—a leisure-time option we may or may not make room for when it's convenient. But if he indeed does care about our work—and every part of life—then we'll see our relationship with him as essential and depend on him in everything we do.

So, as we sing the closing song today and hear the blessing and then have coffee and walk out to face the coming week think about the opportunities you will have to serve God in the week ahead. Does what happens on Sunday have anything to do with the rest of your week? You bet it does!

Perhaps ask yourself in the activities you principally engaged in during the week, whether in or out of the home, 'employed' or 'unemployed' –how can I serve the people in my workplace with the quality, integrity, and dedication that God deserves? Then, envision yourself standing before God and hearing, "Well done, good and faithful servant!"

Heavenly Father you are mighty, awesome and powerful. The earth is yours and everything in it, the world and all who live in it. We marvel at your work and see that it is good. Thank you that you have ordained us to work and that your purpose is for it to be good. Strengthen us to live out our work in what ever form it takes so that we grow in your image, help us to serve you and our fellow man with true sincerity, integrity, good grace and love.

Father God we pray also for those difficult working situations through being too busy, being stressed or not having enough work or being unemployed or facing other demands - we pray that you will hold and guide us. Help us to seek to serve, to seek to worship and live out our work with a sense eternal expectation.

And in all of this we pray that we will be a shining light for you – that others will see something of you within us and may this be for your glory and to extend your Kingdom. In the name of Jesus we pray. Amen