

Your Work Matters to God - II Kings 5

Argyle – 9/6/15 – Labor Day Weekend

Introduction to Scripture

You may recognize the title of this morning's sermon - "Your Work Matters to God," because I've used it before. It comes from a book published in 1987 by Doug Sherman and William Hendricks ([picture](#)). "Your Work Matters to God" expresses a Biblical truth that is not understood by a lot of us. Sherman and Hendricks write, "From Washington to Wall Street to Main Street, work dominates the landscape of modern life. But unless you can connect what you do all day with what you think God wants you to be doing, you will never find ultimate meaning in either your work or your relationship with God. But how can you make such a connection? It starts with a certainty that...Your Work Matters to God." (repeat 2nd sentence)

What you do in the marketplace matters to God as much as what you do in the church. By marketplace, I mean our activities outside of church. So that would include work, school, community activities and our neighborhood interactions. What you do in the marketplace is God's work every bit as much as what pastors and missionaries do. What you do Monday through Friday and how you do it matters to God. That's because he created you to be a worker.

We are introduced to God in the first chapter of the Bible and what is God doing - he's working. God is busy creating and organizing the world. The first

day he created light and then separated the light and the darkness. The next day he created the sky and separated the water and the sky. On day three God gathered the water in certain places so that dry ground would appear. The God went back and filled the spaces he had created. On day 4 he put the sun, moon and stars in the sky; on day 5 he put living creatures in the sea and birds in the air; and on day 6 he created animals to fill the land. But God wasn't finished. As impressive as all of this was, his greatest act of creation was still to come. We read in Genesis 1:26, "Then God said, "Let us make mankind in our image, in our likeness, so that they may rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky, over the livestock and all the wild animals, and over all the creatures that move along the ground."" The design for human beings is that are created in God's image, which among other things means that we are workers just as God is a worker. This becomes clearer when God begins to delineate some of the work he has assigned to us. In Genesis 2 we see God put Adam in the garden with the instruction to "work it and take care of it."

We were created to work. It is fundamental to who we are as human beings. The 20th century English writer, Dorothy Sayers, sought to bring a revolution to Christians thinking about work. In her influential essay, "Why Work," she wrote, "Work is not, primarily, a thing one does to live, but the thing one lives to do. It is, or should be, the full expression of the worker's faculties, the thing in which he

finds spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction, and the medium in which he offers himself to God.”

Do you find spiritual, mental and bodily satisfaction in your work and do you see it as a way in which you offer yourself to God? Because our experience of work often falls short of this exalted vision, we have a tendency to mislabel work as a necessary evil that we have to do to live rather than something we live to do. In Genesis 3 we discover the reason for this discrepancy between God’s intent and our experience. There we read about the rebellion of Adam and Eve against God’s authority and the disastrous consequences that resulted. People would get sick and die. Conflict was introduced to our relationships. The environment would be polluted and would rebel in the form of hurricanes and earthquakes. And our work would become difficult. God said to Adam, “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. ¹⁸ It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”(Genesis 3:17-19) Our farmers and every one of us who has ever had a garden has experienced this curse first hand.

Although work can be pretty difficult and discouraging at times, we need to remember that work was part of creation that God pronounced as “very good.”

The challenges of our work are because of human sin, Adam and Eve’s sin, our sin

and our employers, teachers, employees, students and clients' sin. That means that like with all of the other consequences of sin - death, illness, marital and family problems, etc., we are working with God to reverse those consequences.

The foundation truth of this sermon is that God is a worker and as beings created in his image, we are workers, too. Work is something we live to do. We want to keep moving toward the goal that our work glorifies God, blesses others and brings fulfillment to us.

Although this sermon is half over, this lengthy introduction is meant to get us to an interesting example of a worker who understood what we have been talking about. She is an unnamed slave girl who we read about in II Kings 5. Her boss was married to an Aramean army commander named Naaman. Naaman was quite successful and well regarded, but he suffered from leprosy which was a physically and socially devastating disease. That is where we are going to pick up the story in II Kings 5. It is around 850 BC. Joram was king of Judah and Elisha was the prophet. (Read & tell) (Pray)

Introduction

I love how this unnamed slave girl lives out the principle that our work matters to God. If there is anyone who had a reason to think that her work was unimportant it was this slave girl. If there is anyone who had a reason to resent her boss, it was this slave girl. If there is anyone who had a reason to question God about her circumstances, it is this slave girl. And, yet, 2800 years after she lived

we are studying her as an example of what it means to be God's servant in the marketplace.

Our Priorities in the Marketplace

The thing that I want us to learn this morning from this young woman is what should be our priorities in the marketplace. The slave girl said to Naaman's wife, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy." Did you hear what I said? "The slave girl said ..." I don't think any of us can realistically imagine what it is like to be a slave, but let's give it a try. Think about the worst job you've ever had, or the worst class you've taken in school or the worst boss or worst teacher you've ever had. In other words, think about the worst marketplace conditions you have ever been in. What was your attitude toward your boss or teacher? Would you have wanted them to be healed if they were suffering from a disease? Maybe? Hopefully, we would have been able to transcend our circumstances to desire God's blessing on them. That's exactly what this slave girl wished for her master.

In our marketplace activities, what should be our priorities? I want to argue that there are three things we should seek as we head to work, to school and into the community. The thing we see clearly illustrated by this slave girl is the priority to seek the well being of those around us. We should seek the well being of our bosses and teachers, our employees and students, our co-workers, our neighbors, our caregivers, the clerk at the store, the other drivers on the road and everyone

else who we interact with as part of our daily lives. This young woman wanted to see Naaman healed. She was concerned about his wellbeing and, in that, models for us one of the things that should be a priority for us in the marketplace. We see this, also, in God's instructions to the Israelites when they were taken as captives to Babylon. He told them, "But seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile, and pray to the LORD on its behalf..."(Jeremiah 29:7). We are to seek the wellbeing of those around us.

A second and the most important priority we should have in our marketplace interactions is to seek that God would be glorified in what we do. God should be glorified in how we conduct ourselves in the marketplace. The quality of our work and how we do it should bring glory to God. The way we interact with others at work, at school, at the store and in the community should bring glory to God. The Apostle Paul wrote, "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."

(Colossians 3:17) A few verses later he specifically applied these verses to slaves in words that easily translate to our work. He wrote, "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." (Colossians 3:23 & 24) So in our marketplace interactions we should seek the well being of those around us and we should seek to glorify God.

Our third priority in the marketplace should be to seek that people would come to know God. That is what happened with Naaman. Through his encounter with Elisha and his healing, he became a follower of God. That likely was the goal for this slave girl from the beginning. It should be our goal for all those who are part of our lives. We should be doing everything we can to make that happen. It is, of course, God's job to convert people, but he gives us important roles in that process. We are to pray for folks who don't know Christ. Do you have a list of non-Christians that you pray for to meet Christ? Does it include your co-workers, fellow students, neighbors and others you interact with regularly?

In addition to praying we should create thirst in people's lives for God. By that, I mean we should live in such a way that people will want to know our God. The integrity of our lives, the depth of our love, the overflowing of our generosity, the grace that we offer others, the ways in which we serve should make those around us thirsty for God. Our lives should make it hard for people to ignore our God.

In addition to praying and creating thirst, we participate in the salvation process by telling people about Jesus. When we have the opportunity we tell people about Jesus and the difference he has made in our lives. This week Danielle Bailey, our missionary with InterVarsity issued us a challenge. This is something she is with college students on local campuses and she invited her supporters to do it, as well. This challenge has 3 components to it. First, write

down each day what you see and hear God doing around you.(Repeat) Second, pray for boldness and then tell someone who doesn't know Jesus what you seen and heard God do that day. Third, invite one or two other people to do this with you. One of the things InterVarsity has discovered with the students who have taken this challenge is that they are more aware of the powerful things that God is doing and they have had more significant conversations with the non-Christians in their lives. I wonder why that is?

Conclusion

What do you have to show for your efforts in the marketplace this week? A paycheck? A good report card? Favor with those you interact with? Those are all good things. But because we are people who have been created in the image of God and saved by the blood of Christ we should have much higher goals than a paycheck or a good report card or the favor of others. Our efforts should result in God being glorified, the well being of others and people coming to know Jesus. Your work matters to God, because it is the means by which those things happen. What will be your priorities in the marketplace this week?

II King 5

Now Naaman was commander of the army of the king of Aram. He was a great man in the sight of his master and highly regarded, because through him the LORD had given victory to Aram. He was a valiant soldier, but he had leprosy.

² Now bands from Aram had gone out and had taken captive a young girl from Israel, and she served Naaman's wife. ³ She said to her mistress, "If only my master would see the prophet who is in Samaria! He would cure him of his leprosy."

⁴ Naaman went to his master and told him what the girl from Israel had said. ⁵ "By all means, go," the king of Aram replied. "I will send a letter to the king of Israel." So Naaman left, taking with him ten talents^b of silver, six thousand shekels^c of gold and ten sets of clothing. ⁶ The letter that he took to the king of Israel read: "With this letter I am sending my servant Naaman to you so that you may cure him of his leprosy."

⁷ As soon as the king of Israel read the letter, he tore his robes and said, "Am I God? Can I kill and bring back to life? Why does this fellow send someone to me to be cured of his leprosy? See how he is trying to pick a quarrel with me!"

⁸ When Elisha the man of God heard that the king of Israel had torn his robes, he sent him this message: "Why have you torn your robes? Have the man come to me and he will know that there is a prophet in Israel." ⁹ So Naaman went with his horses and chariots and stopped at the door of Elisha's house. ¹⁰ Elisha sent a messenger to say to him, "Go, wash yourself seven times in the Jordan, and your flesh will be restored and you will be cleansed."

¹¹ But Naaman went away angry and said, "I thought that he would surely come out to me and stand and call on the name of the LORD his God, wave his hand over the spot and cure me of my leprosy. ¹² Are not Abana and Pharpar, the rivers of Damascus, better than any of the waters of Israel? Couldn't I wash in them and be cleansed?" So he turned and went off in a rage.

¹³ Naaman's servants went to him and said, "My father, if the prophet had told you to do some great thing, would you not have done it? How much more, then, when he tells you, 'Wash and be cleansed'!" ¹⁴ So he went down and dipped himself in the Jordan seven times, as the man of God had told him, and his flesh was restored and became clean like that of a young boy.

^b That is, about 750 pounds (about 340 kilograms)

^c That is, about 150 pounds (about 70 kilograms)

¹⁵ Then Naaman and all his attendants went back to the man of God. He stood before him and said, “Now I know that there is no God in all the world except in Israel. Please accept now a gift from your servant.”

¹⁶ The prophet answered, “As surely as the LORD lives, whom I serve, I will not accept a thing.” And even though Naaman urged him, he refused.

¹⁷ “If you will not,” said Naaman, “please let me, your servant, be given as much earth as a pair of mules can carry, for your servant will never again make burnt offerings and sacrifices to any other god but the LORD. ¹⁸ But may the LORD forgive your servant for this one thing: When my master enters the temple of Rimmon to bow down and he is leaning on my arm and I bow there also—when I bow down in the temple of Rimmon, may the LORD forgive your servant for this.”

¹⁹ “Go in peace,” Elisha said.

After Naaman had traveled some distance, ²⁰ Gehazi, the servant of Elisha the man of God, said to himself, “My master was too easy on Naaman, this Aramean, by not accepting from him what he brought. As surely as the LORD lives, I will run after him and get something from him.”

²¹ So Gehazi hurried after Naaman. When Naaman saw him running toward him, he got down from the chariot to meet him. “Is everything all right?” he asked.

²² “Everything is all right,” Gehazi answered. “My master sent me to say, ‘Two young men from the company of the prophets have just come to me from the hill country of Ephraim. Please give them a talent^d of silver and two sets of clothing.’”

²³ “By all means, take two talents,” said Naaman. He urged Gehazi to accept them, and then tied up the two talents of silver in two bags, with two sets of clothing. He gave them to two of his servants, and they carried them ahead of Gehazi. ²⁴ When Gehazi came to the hill, he took the things from the servants and put them away in the house. He sent the men away and they left. ²⁵ Then he went in and stood before his master Elisha.

“Where have you been, Gehazi?” Elisha asked.

“Your servant didn’t go anywhere,” Gehazi answered.

²⁶ But Elisha said to him, “Was not my spirit with you when the man got down from his chariot to meet you? Is this the time to take money, or to accept clothes, olive groves, vineyards, flocks, herds, or menservants and maidservants? ²⁷ Naaman’s leprosy will cling to you and to your descendants forever.” Then Gehazi went from Elisha’s presence and he was leprous, as white as snow.

^d That is, about 75 pounds (about 34 kilograms)