

Work and the Man in the Mirror

There's No Such Thing as a Secular Job

Unedited Transcript

Patrick Morley

Good morning, men. Please open your Bibles to John chapter five verse seventeen. As we get started, I'll collect the clicker if I can. We'll begin by giving a shout out. Today we want to give a shout out to some men in Lapeer, Michigan. These are five men. They've been meeting weekly at 7:00 p.m. on Sundays, on Mondays for two years. They call themselves the Monday Night Men's group. They're part of St. Matthew's Anglican Church. David Hudspeth is the leader. I wonder if you would join me in giving a very warm and rousing Man In The Mirror welcome to the Monday Night Men's group. One, two, three hoorah. Welcome, guys. We're really glad to have your with us.

There is a book that I've been reading, and it's an all-time favorite. It's called When Breath Becomes Air. It's a raging bestseller right now. It's a memoir by a thirty-nine year old man who died of lung cancer as a physician, very excellent credentials, degrees in literature and neuroscience, Stanford, Cambridge University for a year, Yale Medical school all this kind of thing. It's so interesting. I think one of the reasons I'm so fascinated by the book is something that he says that so parallels what my own interest in life has been. He says, "I was driven less by achievement than by trying to understand in earnest what makes human life meaningful?" What makes human life meaningful? I basically have always been fascinated by the same subject. What is the purpose of life? What is the meaning of life?

I've always believed that your greatest need and my greatest need is the need to be significant, to make a contribution, to be useful, to do something with our lives that will have mattered, and so this is a huge driving force for us as men. Many of the other concepts of life seem to be so inextricably, easy for me to say, inextricably linked to this finding of significance. Whether it's joy or happiness, however you want to talk about that, or the concept of contentment, this satisfying, this need to be significant or finding what does make life meaningful, what does give life purpose, is so important. As it turns out work is a very important venue for you and I to find God's meaning, purpose, and plan for our lives, and so we're going to do a three week series on it. The title of the message today is There's No Such Thing As A Secular Job. There needs to be when we have a message an urgent or a compelling problem that we're trying to solve that is addressed by the text that we're going to be looking at.

Wow, that is really a great telephone ring tone. I've never heard one that good. That's the loudest one I've ever heard. That's great. I don't know who it is, but the poor guy who has it go off you think it's bad elsewhere just think about how incredibly embarrassing it is because you've had the phone go off right so you're just like totally "Hope they don't catch me". You can't get it to shut off. It's terribly embarrassing sorry about that. Can I single you out? Would you raise your ... I'm just kidding. You do need a compelling problem to solve. Here's the compelling problem that I'd like us to deal with for the next three weeks, and that is that even though we spend half of our waking hours involved in vocation

in work, very few of us have ever been trained about how to integrate our faith into our work. That's what I want us to talk about for these next three weeks. We're going to start here with a theology of work.

Now, when I say, "a theology of work", I go with John Frame who says that, "Theology is application." When we talk about a theology of work, we're really talking about how do we actually apply what's in the Bible to the work that we do. The first thing I'd like us to take a look at is John chapter five verse seventeen. The first thing I want us to see here today is this every vocation is holy to the Lord. Every vocation is holy to the Lord. Now, obviously we're excluding things that are, "Immoral or outside the circle of scriptures", as Francis Schaeffer would say, but every vocation is holy to the Lord. The first thing we find in scripture here is that work is part of God's nature. Work is part of God's nature. My gosh, verse seventeen Jesus said to them, "My Father is always at his work to this very day, and I too am working." Work is part of God's nature. We saw it built right into the creation story in Genesis one with the garden to tend it and all that kind of thing.

Now, turn if you would to Psalm chapter eight. We're done at John. Psalm chapter eight and verse three so this by the way is Martin Luther King Jr.'s favorite text in the Bible. It's really one among a handful of my favorite texts as well. I love Psalm eight. In fact, I was thinking this morning someday I should just take Psalm eight and just teach you some of the things, show you some of the things that I've picked up over the years from Psalm eight. Beginning in verse three not only is work part of God's nature but we being made in the image of God, the imago De, we also have work as part of our nature. Verse three, "When I consider the Heavens the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?"

"When I consider the Heavens", so the Heavens, the cosmos of which Earth is a little grain of sand, a little pebble, a small marble in all of creation, the works of Heaven that's God's product. If God were a manufacture, that's his product, the Heavens. "When I consider this work of your fingers, the moon and the stars which you've set in place", then the Psalmist asks, "What is it that makes life meaningful?" That's what he's asking. How do I find significance? "What is man that you're mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" Now then he moves to the answer, and he's answering two questions: Who we're created to be and what we're created to do. We're going to past over verse five quickly, who we're created to be, this is the issue of identity, "You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor." I'd like to come back to that on another day. That's who've been created to be.

Then moving into for today's lesson what we've been created to do verse six, "You made him", that would be you, "You made him ruler over the works of your hands." In other words, you have given man dominion over the works of your hands. You put everything under his feet, all flocks and herds, all the beasts of the field, birds of the air, fish of the see, so everything in the land, the sky, and the sea has been put under the rule of mankind. There is nothing in all of creation over which we have not been given dominion. Work is part of God's nature, and he has delegated work to us as part of our nature and given us dominion over every single thing in the world because every vocation ... and that makes every vocation holy to the Lord. You see it right in scriptures it's absolutely indisputable. Every vocation is holy to the Lord.

Then there is this mandate that we have that God has given us and it's simple. You can pick it up from Psalm eight anywhere in the Bible. You're in charge until I get back. The question then becomes is a career in ministry more spiritual than being a carpenter, a lawyer, a real estate guy, a contractor,

landscape maintenance worker, or a bus driver? Is it more spiritual to be in ministry? Well, I certainly got the impression earlier that it was. I remember going to one of the local churches here a missionary was visiting, and he was talking about the importance of the Great Commission and being on the mission field. I basically ended up slinking out of the sanctuary at the end of the service feeling like I was less than all I could be because I was not in full-time Christian ministry. I was given the very distinct impression, and I believed it unfortunately, that unless I was in ministry that there was something second class or less spiritual about the work that I was doing.

Well, a very interesting thing happened, but I'm going to give you the big idea first. Here's the Big Idea for the day. **My work is not just a platform for ministry it is ministry.** Your work is not just a platform for ministry it is ministry. You're not going to work and thinking that, "What I need to do is I need to endure the first two hours of my job until the water break, so I can go over to the cooler and try to trick somebody into a conversation about Jesus. Then I need to go back to work for another couple hours until that lunch meeting that I set up, so I can go out and ask this man that I work with where are you on your spiritual journey?" Do that, but to say that is the only part of ministry completely misses the scripture. The two hours before the water break and the two hours after the water break are just as much ministry, are just as important to God as anything we might do to build the kingdom.

The two big mandates, the two tasks that are laid down in scripture, the Great Commission and the Cultural Mandate, taking care of God's creation, is one of these more important than the other? Well, in some sense yes because the Great Commission deals with eternity, and the Cultural Mandate deals with the temporal world in which we live so in some sense there is a difference, but in another sense to say that one is more important than the other is a false dilemma because God doesn't say that one is more important than the other in scripture. Do you see that? Do you get that?

I happen to have the benefit of having worked both sides of the street because I've been in business and then I've been in ministry. I was in business for eighteen years, and I've been in ministry for more than eighteen years. I've been able to see both sides of the street. Now by the time I actually left business this idea that ... I said I'd come back to this idea that a career in ministry is more spiritual than a career, in my case, business that idea had pretty much dissipated, but it's so interesting. There is still the shadow of that idea in my brain.

When I left business and went into ministry, I was absolutely certain that I would feel more spiritual. I was far enough along that I didn't really think that you would necessarily see it, but I had this very strong suspicion that I would see it, that one morning after having given my life to serve God full time in ministry, vocation as opposed to some other vocation, that one morning I would look into the mirror and I would see looking back at me over my head the faint trace of a halo, angelic to myself if not to you. It never happened. I'm still waiting. Beyond that I was absolutely confident that I would feel so passionate and so called to a ministry that it would dwarf my passion and calling to real estate development my previous career. Never happened. I'm still waiting for that. Now don't get me wrong I'm very passionate and very called to what I'm doing now, but I was also very passionate and very called to real estate development when that was my calling. Don't ever make the mistake of thinking that if you're in ministry you're going to be more spiritual or you're going to feel more passionate or called because guess what? Every vocation is holy to the Lord, and our work is not just a platform for ministry it is ministry.

How do we respond? Well, if you would turn to Colossians chapter three verse twenty-two, the second point I want to make ... The first point every vocation is holy to the Lord, and then this idea to follow to

unpack the big idea that my work is not just a platform for ministry it is ministry, let's look at this idea that work is ministry. Work is ministry. How do we respond? Colossians chapter three verse twenty-three so God is always working. It's part of his nature. He has delegated the joy of work having dominion over his creation to us it's also as part of our nature. It's a very significant venue for us to satisfy our own desire for significance and meaning and so forth. The way we respond to that, the way we incorporate this into our daily life is that we understand that our work is ministry. Listen whatever you do work at it with all of your heart as working for the Lord not for man since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving, so when you do your work.

I have a friend he drives a bus. He's been driving a bus for fifteen years maybe something like that. He has constantly over these fifteen years questioned whether or not what he was doing was making any difference. Now, this is a person who gets up in the morning and navigates around our community to different bus stops where there are people who are wanting to better themselves by going to a place of employment so they can earn the income to pay their rent, to pay their electricity, to pay their water bill, to buy food, to buy clothes for their kids, to send their kids to school, and maybe have a hobby. These people are not making enough money to be able to afford dependable transportation, so they're taking the bus. A lot of these people are downcast because it's hard. They're not really making ... Maybe if they make ends meet they're not making enough to have life insurance or a savings account and investments and things like that. They're living hand to mouth that's why they don't have a car.

This man has a gift. What a gift. If you could see him the way he lifts their spirits, the way he encourages them, he creates a community among these people. He gets them loving each other. He gets them thinking positive thoughts. He gives them hope. Then he goes home and he wonders if he's making a difference because really hasn't grasped ... We've talked about it many times, and we'll still talk about it I guess till the cows come home that his work is ministry. It is ministry. The big idea today is this my work is not just a platform for ministry ... The driving of the bus is ministry. The welcoming of the people on the bus is ministry.

I love to tell the story of the young man who came here to the Bible study once, came to the first-timer table, and when it was his time to share. He said, "Well, I'm a high school math teacher. All my life all I ever wanted to do was to be a high school math teacher, and now I am, but I've noticed two problems in my school. Number one, my students are coming to class with problems that math can't solve, and secondly, the Christian teachers in my school they don't know each other. God has been putting in my mind a vision to try to address those two problems." Then he said something I will never forget, and I hope that you will never forget either. He said, "I am an ordained math teacher." Don't you just love that? There is a man who has completely grasped this idea that my work is not just a platform for ministry that it is ministry. He's a math teacher, and he's trying to figure out how to do all the other things and incorporate it all in together into one big package. I love that.

The take away for us today is this for you what is it that you have been ordained to do? How do you or would you or will you or do you want to complete this sentence, "I am an ordained ..."? That's the big idea for the day. The big question for the day what is your answer to that? If you are a waiter, if you wait tables, you are an ordained waiter. This means that every time someone sits down at one of your tables, whether it's a two top or a four top ... I'm an old waiter so I know these inside terms "two top" "four top" figure it out. Every time you have a couple sit down at one of your tables that is a divine appointment set up by God who is trying to accomplish the main thing in this world which is what? The main thing that's always happening in this world is what if you've been here for a while? God is doing what? He is sovereignly orchestrating what? All human events. Even the what? Seemingly what?

Random circumstances of our lives. To do what? To bring us into right relationship with God and each other. That's it.

When that couple sits down, they thought they were coming to buy a dinner but you know different. You know that God has sovereignly orchestrated this occasion, this divine appointment, so that ... It's not random. It's not random because he wants to make sure that you have an opportunity to help them be in right relationship with God and right relationship with each other. What do you do next? "Good evening how are you today? I'm so glad to be able to serve you today. Can I get you started with something to drink?" You just do what you do, but you do it from a heart of faith understanding the bigger perspective of what God is trying to do in the world. Why do you do it this way? Because why? Because I am an ordained waiter, and my work is not just a platform to do ministry. The work itself has intrinsic value. It's important.

Do you know how important it is for this couple to connect at dinner to be in right relationship with each other, and God has given you as a waiter the privilege of being the broker of that deal. You get to broker that deal that right relationship between each other. You are God's agent of reconciliation at that moment. You are an ambassador of Jesus Christ because that work is important. Boy, I want to cuss. Makes me want to cuss. It's blankety blank important. You're a business owner. You are an ordained business owner that means that you're not just a widget producer, you're producing widgets or selling real estate or building buildings. What kind of buildings do you build? Commercial buildings, yes. That is what you do, but you are an ordained builder. You are an ordained manufacturer. You are an ordained real estate company. Ordained to do what? To sell real estate, to build buildings because that matters. Those are venues which our great God is using, sovereignly orchestrating, to bring people into right relationship with him and right relationship with each other. What a privilege we have. What a joy.

The question then I hope you will answer even better that you already have the answer, "I am an ordained what?", and why do you want to understand what you have been ordained to do? Because every vocation is holy to the Lord because work is ministry, or as the big idea today says, "My work is not just a platform for ministry, although it is, but the work itself is ministry." I'm always asking the question what one thing if fully understood and truly believed could change everything, could change your life ... Really half of your life goes to work if you can become a true believer ... There's no way that you can't fully understand it after this great message, right? I mean you understand it. Now, can you truly believe that? Did you see enough in the scriptures on your own to believe it? This is an idea that can change your life.

Let's pray. Our dearest, Father, thank you for your word, your truth, your nature, our nature, and this unbelievable message about how we can find meaning and purpose in work that you've given us because the work itself matters to you. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.