

Preparing for Monday

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Preacher: Iver Martin

[0 : 00] I'd like us to focus for a few moments this evening on something that we all have in common, something that affects us all, and that is work. And by that, I don't just mean paid employment. Some of us are in paid employment and others aren't. But whether or not you are in paid employment, we all have experienced and we all know what it means to work. And indeed, there is a sense that some people's work is never done. If you're in paid employment, for the most part, you maybe start at eight or nine o'clock in the morning and you finish at five or six at night. And for you, you can leave your work behind. But some people are in situations where their work is never done. And there are others who may be unemployed this evening.

And that does not mean that you should spend all day doing nothing. There is always something for us to do, whether it's helping someone or whether it's doing something around the house or whatever.

However, I'm quite sure that as responsible people, we will find things to be busy with. And those of you who are students, for you, your work is what you have signed up for in your course in university or college. And your aim is to pass exams and assessments. Now, you might find it strange to hear me talking about work from the Bible because you might think, well, work is surely a necessary evil. I mean, after all, you get up in the morning and you go to work and you just suffer it because it's the only way in which you can make money. And that's the only way in which you could live. And you might be one of these people who dreams of one day coming into lots of money, enough money so that you can give up your work and then you can really enjoy life. You might find it strange when you hear me saying that that kind of thinking is wrong. Life is not about simply enjoying ourselves. Much of our fulfillment in life, the way in which we've been designed by God, is to find fulfillment in work. Now, be careful because I'm not saying that work should be so all-consuming that it's all we have. It's not.

Nonetheless, it is far more than a necessary evil. It's not something that God expects us to just get through in order to make money for better things. We have been designed to work.

[3 : 02] And I know that because of the chapter that I read in Genesis chapter 1. So, it's important to set out from the very beginning that work was found, first of all, in God. God is the great worker, the great industrialist, if you like. And you don't have to go any further than Genesis 1 to see a God who is immensely busy and immensely industrious. The first chapter in the Bible is probably the busiest chapter in the Bible where God appears to just be doing things. And it's described specifically as the work that God had done. Because on the seventh day when God rested, we specifically read that He rested from the work that He had done. He rested on the seventh day. And it's not, therefore, surprising that when God created Adam to be in His own image, that He makes clear that the purpose for which He is to be created is to work. He was to display the image of God and to find fulfillment in God by the work that God gave Him to do. That means that it's part of man's being, his existence, his purpose, to work in which He is quite simply incomplete if He doesn't carry out this function.

Now, I want to look, first of all, I want to divide this into two. And I hope this will be as useful as possible. In fact, I have entitled this sermon, Preparing for Monday. And that's because many of you will go to work tomorrow. Whatever that work is, it might be at home, in fact. For many of us, what used to be work in the office is now work at home. But it's still, you're working for a company or for a group or whatever. And for others, your work is other things. It doesn't matter.

We still need that preparation. And what I hope that we will do this evening is rediscover from Genesis 1 the connection that there is between humankind and work, the good connection that there is and that God has given to us. And then I want to come to Ephesians chapter 5 and draw, chapter 6 rather, and draw out some of the principles and the practicalities of what Paul says here

about slaves obeying your earthly masters with respect and fear. Not that we live in a society where there are slaves and masters. Nonetheless, much of what Paul says in this chapter is applicable in the employment context. But first of all then, let's go back to Genesis chapter 1, and let's try and draw out some of the principles that we find there in which work plays a very important role.

Genesis 1, 26, first of all, says that God says when He makes man, He says, let them have dominion over the fish of the sea and the birds of the air and over the heavens.

What that means is that He is giving them the ability and the mind to rule. That's what makes one of the things that makes humankind quite unique, that He has the ability, the creativity, the sensibility, the rationality to rule over the world. Or rather, I could frame it like this.

He says He and she has the managerial ability and the place to rule over the earth. In other words, humankind have a particular authority. Now, it might surprise you. Let me make this absolutely clear.

[7:11] We're talking here about the world before the fall, not necessarily the world after the fall. However, work is the same, and God places just as much emphasis on man's responsibility to work after the fall as before the fall. In other words, work is not a consequence of the fall. Work was there before the fall. The purpose for which humankind was created was there before in a perfect world.

So work is not something we simply have to suffer because we live in a fallen world, but it was always there, not to be suffered, but to be enjoyed and as a way in which we could glorify God. What can we learn from all of this? Well, let me first of all suggest that we learn the importance of authority, leadership, and submission. I guess that in a perfect world, as it was before Adam and Eve sinned, authority would just simply fall into place. It would come far more naturally, but there would still be that authority because authority rests in God. The problem, of course, with authority is that in a sinful world where pride takes such a central place, humankind tends to resent authority and tries to undermine it by bad-mouthing the boss or bad-mouthing or undermining those who are in authority.

In a sinful world, leadership has come to be resented and rebelled against, and submission is something that we don't want. We see it as a negative. But when we go all the way back to the world as God created it, we see that authority is a good thing. It is a necessary framework which begins and originates in God, who is ultimate authority. He is supreme authority, unquestionable rule.

In other words, He is the only person, the only being that no one can question because everything that He decides upon has got to be good, otherwise He wouldn't be God. Everything that He does, every dictate, every decision, every decree is a good one because He is God.

But even in an imperfect world, God has maintained that authority structure. He is still in control.

[10:06] And when He sent His Son into the world, the perfect Son of God, equal with the Father, He Himself submitted Himself for our salvation to the Father's will in coming into the world to die for us. So I want to suggest to you this evening that authority, when rightly used, is necessary and good.

After all, it doesn't take us long to imagine the chaos that there would be in a world in which there were no leadership structures. Second thing is this, that humankind has been designed with a creativity to rationally reorder creation. In Genesis chapter 2 and verse 15, He is told to work the garden.

In other words, even in a perfect world, humankind had a place to manage and to categorize and to keep tidy and to maintain what God had created. And He's given that creativity to be inventive and to do different things with what God has created. In other words, He's not just to keep it the same way, to keep it going as it always has been. He's given the freedom and the liberty to make adjustments. As long as these adjustments are not self-seeking and self-satisfying, but as long as these adjustments are glorifying to God and they develop and advance God's creation, humankind has been given this amazing ability to be creative.

Third thing is that, and this ties in very closely with the second, that humankind is given the scientific ability to analyze what was around Him, to investigate, to conduct experiments, to question, to ask why, to ask how.

You won't find that in the animal realm at all. Only the supreme being, well, the supreme created being, the pinnacle of God's creation, which is humankind, only He has that ability, that scientific ability to analyze and to get to know His environment. It was man and woman that were to discover the nature of minerals and metals and metals that could be extracted and used as tools. It was men

and women that were given the ability to invent the wheel. Whenever that got invented, I'm sure, very, very early on in humankind's existence.

[13:10] Eventually, He was to discover that the world was made out of elements, atoms, molecules, protons, neutrons, neutrons, electrons, and even thousands of years later. We are still discovering what we never knew in the past. You know, when I have a conversation with someone about whether God exists, I always say to that person, I believe that God exists because I can see evidence of His creation around me in the natural order, the mountains, the sky, the universe, all the natural. But I also believe that God exists because of man's genius, the genius of invention and science and everything that humankind has been able to develop and discover and invent. When I look at the great structures, the wonderful bridges and cities that where buildings reach so high and they're so built with such beauty and with such skill, that in turn reminds me of the greatness of God, even when I know that humankind has done all that for himself and herself. Even although a lot of human invention is built out of selfishness, nonetheless, at the end of the day, when I look at it objectively, I see something of the glory of God because we can't hide the fact that we are made in the image of God. What that means is that we and all that we achieve, all the good things, the marvelous things that we achieve, they all reflect back to our Creator. Then the fourth thing is that there's a personal, in Genesis chapter 1, there is that personal ability to love and respect other people. We are made in community to interact with one another.

And it's for that reason that many of us work in a team. We work with other people, and we know that for many of us, our jobs can't be done if it wasn't for other people, people who are colleagues, even the boss, whether or not I get on with him or her. We are made to work in community with one another, to tap into other people's ideas, to discuss, to have meetings, to bounce things off one another, and to generate plans and structures in consultation with one another. That's one of the great, that's one of the recurring complaints that there are at the moment about the present circumstances is that Zoom is great, but it's just not the same. It doesn't have that personal element. There isn't the banter. There isn't the joking. There isn't the sort of personal interaction. We're very thankful for it, but it's just not the same. And there's that reminder that we were meant to be with one another and to work with one another. And that goes all the way back to Genesis chapter 1, when God said, it is not good for man to be alone.

And it was God's plan not only to create a woman to be with the man, but to create other people so that the man and the woman could relate as friends and relatives and as community.

The fact that workplace relationships break down is a sign of a sinful world. It's a sign of pride and personality clashes and one person trying to dominate over another person and get their own way, very often because that person is insecure in themselves.

[17:19] And because that person, for him or her, it is more important that they get their way than for them to be told what to do because they see that as them being demeaned in some way. That wasn't the way it was meant to be at all. We were meant to work in groups and companies in community with one another. And when all of the pride and the jealousy and the bickering goes on, as it very often does in the workplace, we're not to just opt out as Christians. We're not to sort of somehow take a back seat, and we're certainly not to get torn in in the same way and use the same tactics as we see around us. But we are to display the new life that God has given to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, which reflects that we are made in the image of God by the respect that we show to one another, even people that we don't naturally like and that we find difficult difficult to get on with.

It's a real challenge, isn't it? It's really difficult being a Christian in a hostile world, isn't it? Because the hostile world uses deceit, and they use undermining tactics, and they use all kinds of underhand ways to get their own way. And it would be the easiest thing in the world for us to do the same thing and to retaliate. But God says you're not to be like that.

You're not to use the tactics that you see around us. We are to be the light of the world and to display to others that through our respect for others that we are different because something wonderful has happened to us, and we have been reoriented to reflect the image of God in relationship, in a right relationship through the Lord Jesus Christ. So when you go out tomorrow, or I keep saying when you go out, but probably few of us will go out tomorrow, but whatever, whether even if you're working from your bedroom or your kitchen or whatever, then you're going out as a new creation.

You're going out in the service of Jesus. We're going to come on to that in a few moments when we look at Ephesians chapter 6. We are to do everything as new believers. We're not to leave our Christian witness behind in Bon Accord on a Sunday and become different people on a Monday. It's always challenging, isn't it? Imagine your boss or your work colleague all of a sudden walked in that door on a Sunday and saw you. Would they be surprised to see you worshipping would they be surprised to see you taking the Lord's Supper and professing to be a Christian? I hope they wouldn't. I hope they would say, ah, that's what's so special about that person.

[20 : 30] Yeah, I knew there was something different about that person. That's great. That makes sense now. Or would they say, what? This is the last person. This is the last place I expected that person to be.

That person is such a pain to work with. I find it so difficult. He's always arguing. He's always trying to undermine me. He's always trying to just get his own way. And then they see you in church. No, no, that's not the way it's to be at all. That we are to take our Christian witness into our workplace. And I know how difficult it is. Before I became a minister, I spent 12 years in industry. I know how difficult it is. But that's what God has called us to. We're not called to cheat our way through work. We are called to do the right thing because God is watching us. We are called to do the reasonable thing. Not to be ruled by our temper and our baser instincts. We're not called to be constant moans, to go through life constantly complaining about people and things that we're expected to do, the little gripes others moan about. We are. The Bible tells us to be content. Now, I'm not saying that we should just roll over and just take whatever there is. There are times, I think, when we are legitimate, we are entitled to complain. But when we do that, do we do that in a respectful manner? One which brings glory to Jesus. When we are in conflict with someone else, do we always remember that even in a conflict situation, we are still called first and foremost to give glory to Jesus? Do we remember whose we are and who we belong to and who we serve?

And do we remember that our behavior, even in the most mundane and ordinary circumstances, that that behavior is being watched by other people? And that at some point, they could ask us, well, do you believe in God? And there's your opportunity. But if they say that and you start trying to witness to them and they say, well, you're a pain to work with. I just don't want to listen to you. You see how it reflects. It can reflect so badly on your witness. So anyway, I've gone off a bit of a tangent, but the fifth and the last thing that we find in Genesis chapter one is the moral, the moral ability, the sense to know what is right and when and where to do it.

[23 : 30] Adam and Eve were given that unique quality of relating to God. But it was a relationship that involved their obedience with God and their moral sense of what was right and what was wrong.

And you will notice that that is the very way in which they, that was the very context in which they rebelled against God. And that changed everything in a moment of time, because after that, the whole world changed. And God said that the land that would produce thorns and thistles for you in Genesis 3, 18 and 19, and you will eat the plants of the field. And 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. I'm going to come over to the New Testament now to look at what Paul says in Ephesians and chapter six with regard to slaves and masters. Now, Paul lived in very different circumstances to ours. Slavery was commonplace. Masters owned slaves and these slaves had absolutely no rights. They were owned by them. They were the property of their masters. And sometimes they were treated with terrible cruelty and had no freedom whatsoever. And the temptation in these circumstances among slaves, if you were confined to a life of slavery, was the tendency just to get through life with as little effort as possible. And so it was for that reason that Paul says to these slaves who were part of the church to make sure that they obeyed their earthly masters with respect, verse 5, and fear and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. And then going on to verse 9, he goes on to masters and he tells them to treat your slaves in the same way. Do not threaten them since you know that he was both their master and yours is in heaven and there is no favorite with him.

Now, like I said, there was a tendency amongst slaves to do the minimum, to see what they could get away with and to get away with a very minimum of what they could. And there was also a tendency amongst masters to take advantage of their slaves and to treat them with cruelty. Paul says, you have now been changed by the Lord Jesus Christ because that's what happens when a person comes to faith in Jesus.

That person becomes a new person, a new creation, that he's been raised or she has been raised from death to newness of life. And so their attitude to everything had to change, even the fact that they were slaves. And so no longer they could look at life with a completely different perspective. So no longer did they have to resent the fact that they were slaves, but they could now view their lives as a calling from God. In other words, God had put them into this situation. But the same was true with masters. In fact, in some ways, it was even more difficult for masters because slaves were only required to do what they were told and that was it. But masters had to, for the first time in their lives, regard their slaves as fellow human beings made in the image of God.

[27 : 28] That was a massive challenge. And it was a massive cultural shift. Who knows what their neighbors would think of them if they started treating their slaves with respect? After all, nobody treats their slaves with respect. But God says, yes, you must treat them as yourself because not only are they fellow human beings, but they are brothers and sisters in the Lord Jesus Christ. The whole world had to be different.

Their outlook had to be different. Their attitude had to be different. So what does Paul say to them? He says to them that instead of regarding their master as their boss, they must regard God as their boss, which meant that their whole attitude to work had to be different.

And I want to suggest that there's a really important principle for all of us here, and that is that everything we do is done to the glory of God, which means not minimalist, not lazy, not slovenly, not untidily. But if we really want to glorify God, we do the very best in our work.

Not to win affection and attention for ourselves, but so that God will be clear, because our lives are a reflection of what God has done for us in the Lord Jesus Christ. What is it that Paul says?

If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation. The old has gone. Behold, he says, the new has come. So as a new man, as a new woman, my whole attitude to my life's work is going to be different.

[29 : 27] I'm going to regard it as a calling in which I'm answerable to God and in which God is watching everything I do. You can imagine it. The master would be away somewhere and the slave would be left in the house. He or she would just do the minimum. After all, the master is away. He's not looking too bad if I don't do a good job. And Paul is reminding these slaves, no, it's not about your earthly masters. It's about your heavenly Lord, the Lord who loved you and gave himself for you and has called you to where you are. You are where you are because God by his providence has put you there. God by his providence has put you where you are this evening and tomorrow morning.

God has put you where you are. And I think that's really important. You're not there because you were in the right place at the right time or the wrong place at the wrong time. You're not there by coincidence.

You are there because we believe in the sovereignty of God who has called us to be who we are, where we are. And that's the greatest starting point there can be. We are under the eye of God. We are where we are because God has a purpose for you to be where you are. Now, I'm not saying, you know, that, oh, well, and I'm not suggesting, oh, well, in that case, do I ever look for another job? I'm not suggesting you don't look for another job. There are times when it is appropriate to look and when you pray about it, when you ask God's guidance, and when at the right time for the right reasons that you apply for another of course, that's perfectly legitimate. But what I want to guard against is the kind of resentment that very often creeps in because we feel we've been unlucky. Remember, we believe in the sovereignty of God tonight. We believe that God has called us to be where we are. That's our starting point. And at the very beginning, it ought to inspire us to regard our work in a new light altogether, work that we are going to give ourselves to and that we are going to give our energies and our skills to. And then in verse 9, he talks about masters to treat your slaves in the same way. And this is a great challenge to all of us, again, that we are to, when God puts us in company with other people, we are to do our best to cooperate and to communicate and to collaborate with them as men and women who are our colleagues and who also have been made in the image of God and who God has brought into company with us so that we can be a witness by the way in which we conduct ourselves.

That's the challenge for you as you go out or as you stay in tomorrow, as you face the challenges of a working world, a world whether you're in paid employment or whether you're a student or whether you're a keeper of the home or whatever God has called you to. It is something, it is a context in which you will be given the opportunity to glorify God and to fulfill your purpose, even at times of difficulty. And I'm sure that you'll have found with me, and with this I'm going to stop, I'm sure that

you will have found with me that it's often in the most trying circumstances that we're brought to our knees, that we have to commit the difficulties and the challenges of the workplace to God, that we have to bring our colleagues and our boss and whoever else we work with to God and ask for wisdom and ask for skill, people skills, and other skills in order to meet these challenges. And it's amazing what God can do when we bring these to Him and when we ask that God will create within us the kind of attitude that He will be pleased with and that will glorify Him.

[34 : 15] And so I hope that as we reflect once again on these instructions, on these reminders from Genesis chapter 1 of who we are, what God has created us to be, and in Ephesians chapter 6 what God has called us to be in the Lord Jesus Christ, then I hope that we will be all the more prepared to face the joys, the accomplishments, and the challenges of living in a fallen world.

We've been talking tonight about the new life that God gives to us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and that new life is what God offers every one of us tonight. He offers you a new beginning. He offers forgiveness of sin. There's only one place that we can find that forgiveness, and that's in Jesus Christ.

By believing in Him and by trusting in Him and by surrendering to Him and what He has done, you can have that newness of life because God has offered it to you, and God is always faithful faithful to His Word. Let's pray. Our Father in heaven, we thank you for the new life that you have given us in the Lord Jesus Christ, and we want to rejoice in that new life, and we want to put into practice the Word of God. We want to rediscover who we are, created and formed and fashioned in the image of God. And we want to rediscover what you have called us to be. You have given us a place in this world. And our workplace is our calling. Our home is our calling. Our geographical location right now is our calling. Our family is our calling. And we pray to recognize that, Lord, and we pray to have a positive and a prayerful spirit. We pray that as we face all of the challenges as well as the joys of living in this world, we pray that we may do so as we are empowered and strengthened and energized by

God Himself. So, draw near to us then, we pray, and equip us for all that lies ahead in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.