

Hope in Frustrating Work

Romans 8:18-25

Introduction

We've been considering from Scripture the idea of work. And we've learned that we have a God who is a working God. Not only is our God a working God, our heavenly Father is a God who delights in his work. And this God, our heavenly Father, has created us in his own image. Part of what that means is that we are designed for work. In fact we have been specially commissioned by God to exercise and extend his dominion throughout the earth. So work is a gracious gift of God given to us for our good and his glory. God has given us work as a means to worship and glorify him.

But do you know what I love about the Bible? The Bible is brutally honest. The Bible gets in our face and gets real about things. When sin entered the world through the disobedience of Adam and Eve, a curse invaded our planet. Kind of like when a nasty virus gets into a computer, and everything is infected, nothing works right.

So what God created as a paradise for us to work in fellowship with him, has become a briar patch of constant frustration. Genesis 3 echoes into every hour of our work – “In pain you shall eat of the ground all the days of your life... thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you... by the sweat of your face you shall eat.”

Every single human being alive knows intimately what it means to experience frustration in our work.

Just this past week, which one of you have not had some aggravation at work? Which one of you has not had conflict with your boss, a co-worker, a subordinate, or a customer? None of us are exempt from experiencing difficult circumstances in our labor.

Years ago in the field of work I was employed, there was a position that I wanted to get promoted to. This position was very respected and prized position in my career. And so I worked as hard as I could to get assigned to it. And once I did, man I thought all my dreams had come true. But you know what I discovered? I thought I'd won a prized position in an elite group and I was going to get to make a real difference in the world. I thought all my dreams were going to come true. But in reality, it was the beginning of a nightmare. A percentage of the people I worked with, who held all the clout, were unbearably difficult to work with. The climate was very hostile and competitive. Soon, just the thought of going to work made me feel sick inside. After a few years, I managed to work my way up a little in this position. And thinking back, I realize that I had become what I hated. I became one of the unbearable mean guys that gave other people's lives hell for sport. And even though I was a believer in that period of my life, because of my own sin and the nature of that job, I wandered far away from the Lord.

Fast forward to today. In addition to serving as a pastor, I'm a manager for a furniture retailer. What I mean by manager is that I have a job precisely because of the brokenness and fallenness in this world. There's not an hour that goes by that I'm not trying to manage frustrating issues. And here's what I've discovered, even when I try as hard as I can to work for God's glory, I still experience frustration in my work.

And here's the thing, even though I'm having an exceptional pity party up here, I know I'm not special. Each of us have our own unique struggles in our jobs. Did you hear how horrible Ecclesiastes was when Jason read it?

Ecclesiastes 2:22-23 What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun? 23 For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation.

Now here's what I want to show you this morning. Even though the Bible is brutally honest about the frustration of our work, because of the gospel, it also gives us incredible hope. In fact, the hope of the gospel means that for the Christian, every thorn will one day be worth it.

Romans 8:18-25 For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. 19 For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. 20 For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 21 that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. 22 For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. 23 And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. 24 For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? 25 But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

Look at the things Paul says here

1. There are sufferings in this present time – and it doesn't make light of it

Creation has been subjected to futility

Paul paints a very vivid picture of creation longing to be set free from its bondage to corruption

2. In this context of futility, suffering, and corruption there's a ray of light comes shining in.

The sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed in us.

Describes all of creation, including us, as longing to obtain the freedom of this glory that is coming

Standing on tip toe, arms out stretched in longing.

My question for us here today is this, how do we live in the fallenness of today with the hope of the glory God has promised? Let me ask it another way... How does the hope of the gospel enable us to persevere through the frustrations in our work and in our lives?

3 Considerations

1. Consider the possibility that the fallenness in your work is an opportunity to display the gospel.

Eventually, if you work with other people, someone is going to hurt you or take advantage of you. They're going to treat you unfairly. What are you going to do? Are you going to get even? Are you going to give them the cold shoulder. That's what they expect, that's the way it's supposed to work in the world.

Luke 6:27-28 "But I say to you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who abuse you.

How can Jesus even say this? Jesus has the moral authority, because unlike you and me, he was the only truly innocent sufferer the world has ever known and he died a cruel death at the hands of his enemies pleading with his father for their forgiveness.

Sooner or later you're going to be the thorn. Either you're going to make a major mistake at work or it's going to be you sinning against your boss, your subordinates, or your co-workers.

What do you do when that happens? *** Most of us, when we mess up or do something wrong at work, go into self-justification mode. Every single one of us, me especially, when we sin we have this specialized defense attorney who comes out to argue our case for us. Mine comes out and gives me all the reasons why it wasn't my fault. It wasn't me that sinned. Do you know what the problem with this is? We have a much better advocate than our little inner defense attorney. Our little guy can only twist the truth and try to get us and the people around us to buy it.

1 John 2:1-2 My little children, I am writing these things to you so that you may not sin. But if anyone does sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous. 2 He is the propitiation for our sins, and not for ours only but also for the sins of the whole world.

When we run to Jesus as our advocate instead of our little psycho inner defense attorney, our sins aren't just covered up, they're washed away.

I want you to see the power of this... Do you realize how other-worldly this is? Because Jesus knows the worst about you and has loved you anyway, we don't have to pretend we're perfect for other people. This is why this is so powerful, because the people where you work know that this isn't the way it's supposed to work. When they see you taking responsibility for the things you mess up, that's going to stand out.

Eventually someone is going to see that and want to know how you got to be this way. And there's your open door for the gospel.

2. Consider that your biggest problem is not your job, your boss, your coworkers, or your circumstances. Your biggest problems are not outside of you, your biggest problems are you.... I want to let that sink in for a moment... For some of you I just proved the little defense attorney theory because as soon as I said it, yours popped up and started listing reasons why that isn't true...

Matthew 15:11 it is not what goes into the mouth that defiles a person, but what comes out of the mouth; this defiles a person." Matthew 15:17-20 Do you not see that whatever goes into the mouth passes into the stomach and is expelled? 18 But what comes out of the mouth proceeds from the heart, and this defiles a person. 19 For out of the heart come evil thoughts, murder, adultery, sexual immorality, theft, false witness, slander. 20 These are what defile a person. But to eat with unwashed hands does not defile anyone."

The reason this is so important is because your circumstances can't keep you separated from God. And mean people at work, they might be able to make your life miserable for a short time, but they can't separate you from God.

In salvation, God has undertaken to restore fellowship with you by cancelling the power of sin and uniting you with Christ. So being saved means God has begun a project in me of making me perfectly like Christ so that I can enjoy fellowship with God forever.

And here's the truth of it... You and I are not perfectly like Christ yet. There are still parts of my life where sin exists and God is ruthless in getting to those places and weeding them out.

Here's how it works, you're growing in Christ, you're walking with Christ, you're doing pretty good. Then suddenly something bad happens to you at work. Your boss blames you for something you didn't do. Or he gives you more work than you can handle. And what happens at that moment in your heart? There are the bottom of your heart sin had been sitting there quietly like sediment at the bottom of the pond. And what your boss just did stirred that sediment up and now, you're angry. Now you're bitter. Now you're playing through your mind all the terrible things you'd like to say to him if your paycheck didn't depend on it.

What just happened? You could say if it wasn't for my boss or this job or these circumstances my life would be just fine. But no it wouldn't, you'd still have that sin there.

What I want you to see is, yes there are legitimate challenges stacked against you at work, that's what these thorns are, but I want you to open your eyes to see these circumstances, however bad, are designed by God to graciously show you the sin in your own heart that you might lay those sins down, repent of them, and enjoy fellowship with Christ more thoroughly. Friends, when you can learn to process it this way, it's going to give you strength to endure...

3. Consider that your difficult circumstances are designed by God to bring you closer to Christ.

Daniel 3 – The Fiery Furnace

Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego

Hananiah, Mishael, Azariah

Noble families brought captive from Judah to Babylon

Nebuchadnezzar took the most highly educated people and assimilate them into his government.

Dan 3. Neb. appointed S, M, and A over the affairs of Babylon (high appointment in one of the most powerful governments in the world)

Neb – statue (90 ft tall 9 ft wide) – ordered all the officials in his government to bow down to this image

S, M, A refuse, get a second chance

Daniel 3:25 He answered and said, "But I see four men unbound, walking in the midst of the fire, and they are not hurt; and the appearance of the fourth is like a son of the gods."

The only way they got this close to Jesus was through the fiery furnace

Jesus enters our fires...

Thorns.... no coincidence that when Jesus was crucified, they placed a crown of thorns on his head...

Two practical implications

1. Press in close to Christ and his people

Hebrews 10:24-25 And let us consider how to stir up one another to love and good works, 25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.

Realize how desperately we need each other

If you were accidentally shot and said, "I can't afford to go to the hospital."

2. Ask God to and seek to advance to positions of influence so that you can bring more light of the gospel into your work context.