

How Does Work Touch Eternity?

May 31, 2015

Good morning CrossWinds. We are in a series of studies called Work Matters to God. We are learning what the Bible says about the significance of what most of us do during the hours of 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. What does the Bible teach about work?

We framed this series as a series of questions. So far we learned:

- Why do we work? We learned we work because we are created in God's image. Look at creation. God is a worker. He created us to work just like he works.
- What went wrong with work? We learned sin twisted the goodness of work so while it is still a joy, it is mixed with constant pain and problems.
- How does Jesus change work? That was last week's study. We learned that we now work for a greater master. The quality of our work is much higher. We now respect our earthly bosses as a result of the change in heart God brought into our lives.

This morning we will learn how work touches eternity.

A few weeks ago I was with a friend in another part of the country. We sat in his beautiful living room. In front of us was his stereo system and big screen television. To my right was a beautiful dining room with a table set for dinner. Behind us was his completely rebuilt and modernized kitchen. He did the work with his own hands and a little help from his friends. My friend has a good job and is very successful at his work. As we were talking about his work in the office and the work he did in rebuilding his home, maybe it was because he was

embarrassed by his success, he stopped himself mid-conversation and said, “Well, none of this matters. It is all going to burn. I can’t wait to see Jesus.” That sounds very spiritual. Maybe he says that every time he has a pastor over for dinner. I don’t know. Multiple times through the evening he said, “None of this matters. It is all going to burn.” Is that true?

Is everything he built with the work of his hands going to go up in smoke? Does any of his work matter? Will all his hard work to provide a good home for his family just go up in smoke? Is all that matters the day we see Jesus?

What do you think? Does anything we do with our lives on earth have permanence? This is the question we will answer this morning. Does our daily work touch eternity?

The first half of the message, we will look at what the Bible says about eternity. The second half of the message, we will see what the Bible teaches about eternity means for our daily work. Let’s begin with something that most of us agree on.

God’s plan is to resurrect our bodies, not just save our souls.

What happens to Christians when we die? We know Christians go to heaven to be with Jesus.

If I am to live in the flesh, that means fruitful labor for me. Yet which I shall choose I cannot tell. I am hard pressed between the two. My desire is to depart and be with Christ, for that is far better. Philippians 1:22–23 (ESV)

Paul was adamant. Death for the Christian is the better end. Our spirits being with Jesus is much better than anything life on earth can offer. When we cry at a Christian’s funeral, it is for our loss, not their loss. The death of a Christian means when they close their eyes in this life, they open their eyes to

see Jesus in heaven, which is far better than anything we could ever experience on earth. The Bible describes God's presence as the fullness of joy, and God is the source and fountain of all joy¹.

While many of us are familiar with this part of the story, unfortunately, many Christians don't know the rest of the story. They adopt what is called a neoplatonic view of eternity. Plato taught that matter was evil and the spirit was good. He taught the goal of life was for the spirit to be released from the bondage to the material world. Many Christians, this may include you, subtly adopt Plato's philosophy of life. They focus on the spiritual life and ignore the physical life. They don't care for their bodies. They eat Twinkies while singing hymns. They don't care about this world. After all, they think it is all going to burn and all that matters is our spirits being with Jesus.

That is unbiblical. While God brings our spirits to be with Christ in heaven at the moment of death, and that is better by far than life as we know it, that isn't the end of the story. The Bible is clear that just as Christ rose from the dead and he has a real physical resurrection body that will last for eternity, one day Christ will return from heaven and he will resurrect our self-same bodies and reunite our spirits, which was in Christ's presence, back to our resurrected bodies. We will get the same bodies back, but they will no longer be known for their weakness but for their strength. They will not be known for fatigue but for energy. They will not be known for sickness but for health. We will one day get our same bodies back and they will be resurrected, new and vastly improved.

¹ Psalm 16:11

And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Daniel 12:2 (ESV)

C.S. Lewis once said, “God is not anti-matter. God loves matter. He created it.” God created us to have a body. Even if our spirits are in the presence of Jesus, we can never be fully satisfied apart from having a body. We were created to have a body.

The resurrection of Jesus means that when Christ returns, every Christian will get his or her body back, just like Jesus has a body. Christ’s resurrection body is the prototype for our resurrection bodies.

But our citizenship is in heaven, and from it we await a Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ, who will transform our lowly body to be like his glorious body, by the power that enables him even to subject all things to himself. Philippians 3:20–21 (ESV)

Look at how Paul described our new resurrection bodies.

So is it with the resurrection of the dead. What is sown is perishable; what is raised is imperishable. It is sown in dishonor; it is raised in glory. It is sown in weakness; it is raised in power. It is sown a natural body; it is raised a spiritual body. If there is a natural body, there is also a spiritual body. 1 Corinthians 15:42–44 (ESV)

This is incredibly important. Historically, this is why Christians shied away from the Roman custom of cremation. This is why the Christians in Rome began burying bodies. It was out of respect for the body, which was considered good and will be resurrected. The typical custom in Rome was to burn the body because the body was considered bad and the spirit considered good.

Can God resurrect a burned body? Of course! God can resurrect a burned body or a body eaten by sharks or dismembered by animals. While God can resurrect a cremated body, to the early Christians, cremation pictured the fires of

hell, while burial pictured respect for the body as it slept in the dust of the earth awaiting for Christ's return and its resurrection.

Burial gave the body a place to rest while it waited for Christ's return.

Burning eliminated a body. This became such a big issue to Roman Christians that it gave birth to the catacombs. When Christians ran out of real estate to bury bodies horizontally they dug down and buried them vertically.

The resurrection of our self-same bodies and its reunion with our spirits is a review for most of you. I begin with the basics because it is foundational to our next step.

God's plan is to restore and renew the earth, not just restore and renew Christians.

Will the earth be burned up and dissolved?

For years, many of us were taught the earth we live on will be destroyed. It will be consumed by fire and blotted out of existence. We were taught God would create a new heavens and a new earth, but the earth we live on and the works done on it will perish.

A number of passages appear to support this view. One of the most famous is 2 Peter 3:10.

But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. 2 Peter 3:10 (ESV)

It appears to teach what the friend that had me over for dinner believed.

This earth will be burned up and dissolved. Does burning the earth and dissolving the earth mean it will pass out of existence?

Peter was using this analogy from the work of a metallurgist that melts down metal to dissolve it and burn away the impurities. The metals don't pass out of existence. They are burned up and dissolved when they are purified.

These verses also says the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. To expose something means to take what is hidden and reveal it for all to see. For the earth to be exposed, the earth needs to continue to exist. The earth cannot be completely burned up and destroyed.

But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells. 2 Peter 3:13 (ESV)

This verse appears to teach there will be a new heavens and a new earth. We often think the reason we need a new earth is because the old earth was destroyed. Here is where it gets interesting. In the Greek, there are two words for new'. *Naos* means new in the sense of temporarily new. It means to bring something into existence that did not exist before. The creation of a vaccine for polio was *naos* new. It was bringing into existence something that did not exist. *Naos* is not the Greek word used to describe the new heavens and earth.

The other word for new in Greek is *kainos*. *Kainos* doesn't mean temporarily new, it means qualitatively new. It means restoring an existing thing to a state where it is new just like the day you took off the cellophane. A friend of mine has a Model-T Ford. Most cars of that age are rusted and ruined. His car looks beautiful. He spent a lot of time restoring it to the way it was. That Model-T is *kainos* new. It was around a long time but was restored to make it just like new.

This is the word used to describe the new heavens and the new earth.

They are the same heavens and the same earth but they are qualitatively new and even improved. The Bible doesn't describe a new heavens and earth that did not exist. It describes a restored heavens and earth that now exist.

This same word for qualitatively new is used by Jesus in Revelation.

And he who was seated on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things (qualitatively) new." Revelation 21:5

Just as Jesus resurrects our self-same bodies and makes our bodies qualitatively new and vastly improved, he will resurrect and restore the self-same earth and make it new and vastly improved.

For they deliberately overlook this fact, that the heavens existed long ago, and the earth was formed out of water and through water by the word of God, and that by means of these the world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly. 2 Peter 3:5–7 (ESV)

At a time in the past God hit the reset button on earth. Noah's flood happened because the inclinations of mens' hearts were always evil all the time. The word *perished* doesn't mean perished out of existence. God didn't destroy the earth out of existence. The earth as it was at that time perished. He purified the earth through water. He scrubbed the earth clean with water. Peter paralleled the flood to the return of Christ saying God will purify and restore the earth again, but this time it will not be a surface cleaning but the entire planet will be burned free of sin. It will not be a partial restoration, it will be a complete restoration.

After the flood, Noah and his family still had a sinful nature. The entire earth was still in bondage to decay. The effects of sin were pushed back by the flood but not eliminated by the flood. The purifying of the earth with fire will ultimately destroy all the effects of sin on earth once and for all.

If God was forced to annihilate the universe and completely start over, Satan won a great victory by forcing God to destroy the work of his hand. Satan has not won such a victory. He did not force God to blot out of existence the created order. Satan was decisively defeated at the cross. God is revealing the full dimensions of Christ's victory over Satan's as history unfolds. Today we see people with born-again hearts because of Jesus. When Christ returns we will see resurrected and restored bodies because of Jesus. Ultimately, we see a restored and purified earth because of Jesus. Satan gets no victories.

The earth's restoration is intimately connected with our resurrection.

For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope 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. Romans 8:19–21 (ESV)

What amazing verses these are. As Christians, we can feel insignificant. In this world we feel like a small cog in a big machine. That is not the biblical picture. Our identity as Christians is so important that the entire universe is eagerly waiting for the moment for Christ to return and give us our resurrection bodies.

The entire creation knows that it will ultimately be set free from its bondage to decay from sin as a consequence of Jesus setting us free from our bondage to

sin and death. The restoration of the earth is only possible because of Jesus' commitment to resurrect and restore us, not just in spirit but also in body. The creation knows it will ultimately be freed from sin because we need a restored earth to live on with our resurrected bodies.

Satan doesn't get an ounce of victory. Our bodies may die now but they are coming back better than ever, just like Jesus'. Our planet may be falling apart now but just wait. It is coming back better than ever as our restored home. It will be a planet bursting with life, not twisted by sin and death.

...and through him (Jesus) to reconcile to himself all things, whether on earth or in heaven, making peace by the blood of his cross. Colossians 1:20 (ESV)

The blood of Jesus on the cross reconciles to God all things. Whether things on earth or in heaven. The entire creation will be reconciled to God.

...Jesus, whom heaven must receive until the time for restoring all the things about which God spoke by the mouth of his holy prophets long ago. Acts 3:20-21 (ESV)

God will unite the restored earth with heaven and put it all under Christ.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. Revelation 21:1-3 (ESV)

This is pretty amazing. Not only will God restore our bodies and restore the earth, but just as our resurrection bodies are vastly improved from our earthly bodies, God will vastly improved the earth when he restores it. He will improve it by bringing heaven to earth. Can you think of a better way to improve earth than bringing heaven to it?

We get the same earth back, but completely free from sin and it is combined with heaven. We will see God on earth. If being in God's presence is fullness of joy, having heaven on earth makes earth a place of fullness of joy. It can't get better.

There will be great continuity between our current fallen earth and the new heavens and earth.

We often forget the continuity between the earth now and the restored earth that is combined with heaven in eternity later. The new earth and new heaven then will be very earthy like our life is today.

...through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. Revelation 22:2 (ESV)

There are streets. There are cities. There are rivers. There are trees. The same tree of life from the Garden of Eden is brought into eternity. There are months which means there is time.

By its light will the nations walk, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it... Revelation 21:24 (ESV)

There will be nations and kings in the new heavens and earth. There will still be government and leaders in eternity. Jesus is in charge of it all so it actually works. There is manufacturing as people bring their glory, the things they made, to the new Jerusalem. There is travel.

Isaiah 60-65, which is the old testament parallel for the end of Revelation, provides more details of the new heavens and earth.

A multitude of camels shall cover you, the young camels of Midian and Ephah; all those from Sheba shall come. They shall bring gold and frankincense, and shall bring good news, the praises of the Lord. Isaiah 60:6 (ESV)

There will be animals on the new heavens and earth. How many of you like animals? God created animals. We get them for eternity. Isn't this starting to sound familiar? The best snapshot we have of the new heavens and earth is to look at the things we love about our current earth that are good and glorifying to God and imagine them for eternity in the future.

Here is where I want to stretch your imagination.

God will reveal the truth of our current work, reward us for it and carry it into the new creation.

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw— each one's work will become manifest, for the Day will disclose it, because it will be revealed by fire, and the fire will test what sort of work each one has done. If the work that anyone has built on the foundation survives, he will receive a reward. If anyone's work is burned up, he will suffer loss, though he himself will be saved, but only as through fire. 1 Corinthians 3:12–15 (ESV)

This is talking about what we do with our faith in this life. Each one of us spends our life building on our faith. What we have done with our lives will one day be tested by fire. The purifying fire of Christ will one day reveal the truth of our life's work.

Paul said that if the work of our lives was glorifying to Christ, it will survive and we will receive a reward. We read this passage and jump to the idea of rewards in eternity for how we live for Christ today. That is true. God will reward us in eternity for how we live today. We miss something else very important.

Paul said some of the work of our life will survive and pass into eternity. Just as the new earth is the old earth purified and carried forward, our works from this earth will be tested by Christ, purified and carried forward into eternity. When we

go to work, every good thing we do in the name of Christ will in some way be transmuted to become part of eternity with Christ.

For example, John Newton wrote the hymn “Amazing Grace”. Do you think we will sing “Amazing Grace” in heaven? I think so. I suspect that work will survive and be carried forward. Do you think Michelangelo’s paintings in the Sistine Chapel will ever be seen in the new heavens and earth? I think they will survive the test and be carried into eternity.

Therefore, my beloved brothers, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain. 1 Corinthians 15:58 (ESV)

Paul said none of the work we do in Jesus’ name is in vain. This is hard to conceive. I don’t know how all this works. The Bible only tickles our imagination with the details. We know that just as our planet will be purified, improved and carried forward to eternity, so will the works of our hands be tested to reveal the truth of them, and if they survive the test they will be carried forward to eternity.

Let the favor of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish the work of our hands upon us; yes, establish the work of our hands! Psalm 90:17 (ESV)

Moses prayed that God would establish the work of his hands. Establish means make permanent. It means that God would make permanent the work of Moses’ life. We are learning that God plans to make part of eternity the work that is done in Christ’s name in our lives. It too will last forever.

And I heard a voice from heaven saying, “Write this: Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.” “Blessed indeed,” says the Spirit, “that they may rest from their labors, for their deeds follow them!” Revelation 14:13 (ESV)

We always hear that you can’t take it with you to heaven. A hearse doesn’t pull a U-Haul. Apparently these guys did take it with them. We can take

it with us. The work of our hands that is done for Christ will carry forward into eternity.

God doesn't give us all the details on how this works. We just need to know that it all doesn't burn. Our daily work matters.

God's plan is to reward us with even greater work in the new creation.

How many of you are familiar with the story of the Parable of the Talents in Matthew 25? I won't read it for lack of time, but many of you already know it. There are three different people, each put in charge of different sums of money. One is given one talent, the modern equivalent of \$2.4 million. The other is given two talents, the modern equivalent of \$4.8 million. Another is given five talents, the modern equivalent of \$12.3 million.

The one who has five, makes five more. The one who has two makes two more. The one who has one simply buries his money and does nothing. When the master comes back, he commends the guys who worked and made a return but the guy who just sat on his talent and did nothing was condemned. Do any of you remember the specific commendation given to the first two?

His master said to him, "Well done, good and faithful servant. You have been faithful over a little; I will set you over much. Enter into the joy of your master." Matthew 25:21 (ESV)

The one who is faithful in a little responsibility was rewarded with more responsibility for his work. That is the ultimate reason why our work today matters in light of eternity. The faithfulness of our work now leads to the greatness of our work then.

Call it selfish, but just like you I am looking forward to work in eternity that will be even greater than the work I get to do today.

Conclusion

Does it matter what we do? Will everything be burned up? Will this earth be destroyed? Will all the work of our hands be forgotten? Absolutely not! The earth will be purified and transformed. The work we have done with our lives will be tested by fire. What we have done for Christ will be rewarded, and it will carry over into the new heavens and earth where we will continue our work with more joy and satisfaction than ever.

This week, let's go to work knowing that our work matters — it touches eternity.



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