

Part 2. Career

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[0 : 0 0] Well, I want us to turn back initially to the book of Genesis, chapter 2, and let me just read again chapter 2, verse 15, which describes, well, let me read it as it says, the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

Now, we'll be coming back to that verse and to the passages that Mary read for us, and we're all doing that under the heading of the series that we're working through just now called Good Dreams, Better Certainties.

And that title is capturing two crucial truths. One is that everyone has dreams, and that's true of everybody in the world around us.

And one of the big things that we are wanting to emphasise is that those dreams are good. They give us purpose and direction and joy. And sometimes those dreams come true, which is wonderful.

Sometimes those dreams don't come true, which is hard. And sometimes dreams come true, but they aren't as good as we expected them to be, and that can be difficult and confusing. But on the whole, one big point we're emphasising is that everyone has dreams, and those dreams are good.

[1 : 1 6] The second big point that we're highlighting in this series is that the gospel gives you certainties, and these certainties are even better.

So dreams are maybes, they're possibilities, they're hopefulies. Sometimes they come through, often they don't. The gospel gives us promises that are certain and guaranteed and unlosable.

And not only that, the content of those promises that God gives us in the gospel are bigger and better and beyond even our very best dreams.

So everyone has dreams, those dreams are good. The gospel offers you certainties, those certainties are even better. And as we go through this series together, we're going to be coming back again and again and again to Genesis chapters 1 and 2.

As today and every other week, we'll be referring to other parts of the Bible, but we'll keep coming back to the beginning, because the dreams that we have and the dreams that we see in the people around us all find their origin and their explanation in the Bible.

[2 : 2 9] And we see that in the creation narrative that we have in Genesis 1 and 2. And one of the key lessons that we're hoping to establish in this series is that the gospel actually makes sense of your dreams.

And not only that, without the gospel, your dreams don't make sense. And what that means is that if we want to discover whether or not the Bible makes sense to us, if we want to think about whether the gospel has any relevance in our lives, you don't need to think about your core religious convictions, your philosophical presuppositions, or any of that.

What you actually need to think about is your dreams. The gospel speaks so powerfully into them. And we're going to look at eight dreams. We started last week, and I've actually tweaked my list a tiny wee bit, because somebody suggested to me after last week, you should include health as one of your dreams.

I thought that was a great point. So last week I had holidays and retirement as two separate dreams. I've lumped them into one dream together. But these are the dreams we're going to look at. Home, the dream of a home, of a career, of a relationship, of family, of sport, of wealth, of health, of holidays and retirement.

I think we can all agree, these are the dreams that people have. And there's so much that we can learn about the gospel as we think about them.

[3 : 43] So this week we are looking at the dream of a career. And for all of our sermons, our headings are going to be the same. We're thinking about the fact that these dreams are good dreams, these dreams are broken dreams, and the gospel replaces these dreams with better certainty.

So we're going to think about all of these three headings in relation to this dream, the dream of a career. And that dream is a good dream. And the fundamental reason why the dream of a career is a good dream is because God created us to work.

Genesis 2 makes that very, very clear. God makes the world as this beautiful homeland for humanity. He places us in that home and gives us the instruction to work it and to keep it.

And so work is a key part of what humanity is created to do. Therefore, work is what we call a creation ordinance. This is something that has been ordained. Ordinance.

My eyes just disappeared. Creation ordinance. This is something established by God from the very beginning. And this is actually part. Work is part of how we bear the image of God.

[5 : 00] Because God himself is a worker. In creation, in providence, in salvation, God is working. We work because we're made to be like him. So if you dream of succeeding in your career, that's a good dream.

And the Bible explains why you have that dream. We're made to work. We're made to use the gifts and skills and capacities that God has given to us.

And through these, we can accomplish great things. And that's why your career can bring many, many good things into your life. And so maybe if you're setting out in your career or in the midpoint of your career, you can see that.

And maybe if you've retired, you can look back and see many, many good things that your career brought into your life. So I'm going to run through a list that you can see on the screen there. Your career, your job, gives you an opportunity for purpose.

Gives your life focus, direction, opportunity. So we're not aimlessly wandering. Instead, every week, we pour our time and our energy into a job that needs to be done.

[6 : 02] And because of that, we can make a positive contribution to our community and to society. Work gives you satisfaction. So we have this sense of accomplishment. Monday morning, there's stuff that needs to be done.

By Friday afternoon, it's done. And I think that maybe that satisfaction can be especially experienced by those who work in trades or those who work with their hands. That was my background.

I was an engineer. There was something so satisfying about something came into the workshop broken. It went out fixed. You felt you had achieved something. And it can apply in lots of different ways.

There's the satisfaction of providing for your family. There's the satisfaction of building up a legacy that you're doing something that other people will benefit from. And there's the satisfaction of gaining a good reputation.

Now, I don't mean that in a kind of arrogant way. I just mean in the very appropriate sense of being known as somebody who's good at their job, who can be relied upon. And so our work can give us satisfaction.

[7 : 0 0] It's also an opportunity for improvement. Our jobs will stretch us and allow us to become better. So there's the improvement of education. That starts when you're a child, but it continues into your adult life.

You're learning more. You're getting better. You're becoming more experienced. There's the improvement of honing a skill. And again, trade's an amazing example of that. You see somebody. I remember watching a bricklayer once.

And he made it look so easy. It was so frustrating. Because I had tried bricklaying and it's always a mess when I do it. It just looked effortless for him. And that's true in so many parts of life.

People who are skilled at their job make something difficult look so, so easy. And there's improvement in terms of efficiency, dependability. In our jobs, we grow into those who are reliable, competent, and talented.

It's an opportunity for responsibility. God made us. We carry responsibility. Again, that's a key part of what it means to be human. God made us to fulfill a role. He's entrusted us with resources and opportunities.

[8 : 0 4] And we have a responsibility to fulfill these well. And you'll see that in Genesis 14, it says that we are to work and keep the garden. And that word keep really emphasizes this whole concept of responsibility.

Work is not about exploiting resources from a biblical point of view. It's about managing them wisely. And in our work, we also, through our work, we actually entrust responsibility to others.

And you see that in lots and lots of ways in our society. So we entrust, all of us parents entrust our children's education to teachers. We entrust our food supply to farmers and the commercial sector.

We entrust our health care to doctors, nurses, and all those who support the administration of the NHS. We entrust the utilities that we depend on at our home.

Clean water, electricity, all of these things. We entrust them to tradesmen who make sure that these things are still in position. We entrust the functioning of our society to civil servants, public sector workers.

[9 : 1 0] And you could think of hundreds more examples. Responsibility is a key part of our jobs. It's a good thing. Your work's an opportunity to help people. And in Genesis 2, you see how Eve is made to be a helper for Adam.

A beautiful reminder that humanity can only function when we are side by side helping one another. And so in our jobs, we strive to help other people. That might be just through serving the public in a shop, in the doctor's surgery, in a call center, or whatever it may be.

It may be that you just have to interact with the public in that way, day by day. It might be providing very practical help as a mechanic, a plumber, electricity supplier, or whatever. You might be in the supply chain.

That might be supplying tweed to the textile industry. It might be supplying lamb to the butchers. It might be maintaining someone's garden. It might be helping somebody with their accounting. Whatever it may be.

And our whole economy runs in the principle of supply and demand. And that concept of demand means that there are things that people need. People need help with things. And our jobs are an opportunity to supply that help.

[10 : 17] Work is also meant to be something that we enjoy. It's meant to be a delight. And your dream career doesn't necessarily have to be a kind of prominent role or a high-paying job.

It just needs to be something you love doing. And our dream career can mean whatever it is. It means that we can wake up on Monday morning happy, excited. And in our careers, we get a reward.

We get many rewards. A salary, success, appreciation, accomplishment, and a healthy sense of pride where we think, I had a job to do and I did it.

So when we dream of a career, we're not chasing something awful or evil. We're actually dreaming of something good. And that's why the Bible places a huge value on our work.

And a very interesting place where you see examples of that is the book of Proverbs. And I've just got some examples here from the book of Proverbs, which highlights the value that the Bible places on work.

[11 : 19] And also the converse has highlighted how the Bible is critical of a kind of lazy approach to life. So you can see the examples there. I'll just read a couple. A slack hand causes poverty, but the hand of the diligent makes rich.

He who gathers in summer is a prudent son, but he who sleeps in the harvest is a son who brings shame. The people curse him who holds back grain, but a blessing is on the head of him who sells it.

Whoever works his land will have plenty of bread, but he who follows worthless pursuits will spend. And the same emphasis is made again and again. The Bible values your career because God created us to work.

The dream career is a good dream. So what's your dream career? Now, it's important that when I ask that question that we define career in a broad sense.

It's not necessarily tied to a specific job. So some people do have the dream. They want to be a teacher or a doctor or a vet or a pilot or an electrician or whatever it might be. That can be a clear dream.

[12 : 20] But for others, the dream career is more in terms of the role rather than the specific sector. So maybe for some people, there's the dream of owning your own business or the dream of being able to work outside or being in a position of leadership or management.

And for some people, their dream career is not a paid job, but it might be raising a family. It might be volunteering in a charity. It might be being a key part of your local community.

There's lots of different ways that we can fulfill this dream that we're placing under the heading of dream career. All of it's reminding us that our basic view of work as Christians should be positive.

And so, yes, there's a lot about work that's negative. But at its core, the Bible tells us that work is a creation ordinance. It's established by God.

It's a good thing. And that has two very important implications that I want you to remember. One, you are doing a good job. And if you're now retired, you did do a good job in your life.

[13 : 26] Now, what I mean by that is that in your job, you're doing a good thing. Your job's valuable. Your contribution is worthwhile.

And even if the job that you're doing right now is not your dream job, you're still doing something that's very important, very valuable, and that is known and recognized by God.

You're doing a good thing in your job. But the second important implication is that other people are also doing a good job as well.

In other words, other people's jobs are immensely valuable and important too. And that's why, you know, as Christians, we should always have a deep sense of appreciation for the contribution that everybody else around us is making to our community, to our country.

There are people who are doing things that we benefit from every day. And in particular, you should think about the job that you would hate to do that somebody else does. And we are so thankful that that happens.

[14 : 31] So the dream of a career is a good dream. It's a good dream. It's also a broken dream.

And so work is a creation ordinance. It's a good thing. But like everything else, it's been damaged by sin.

So Genesis 2.15 speaks about working and keeping in the perfection, the paradise of Eden. But you go into Genesis 3, and that work has now become much, much harder.

And so God said to Adam, because you've listened to the voice of your wife and you've eaten of the tree, which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it. Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you'll eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you.

You shall eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground. For out of dust you are taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

[15 : 27] So sin has brought toil and frustration into our work. And that was captured very, very powerfully in the passage that Mary read from Ecclesiastes chapter 2.

Let me read it again. So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me. For all is vanity and a striving after the wind.

I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it behind to the man who will come after me. And who knows whether he'll be wise or a fool. Yet he'll be the master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun.

This also is vanity. So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toils of my labors under the sun. Because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it.

This also is vanity and a great evil. What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun. For all his days are full of sorrow and his work is a vexation.

[16 : 28] Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity. So we've been speaking about work as a good dream. We've seen that it's a creation ordinance.

We know that theologically work is a great privilege. But when you think about your job, does Monday morning feel like Genesis 2?

Or does it feel like Ecclesiastes 2? For so many of us, that's what it feels like. For so many of us, work is not a dream.

And that might be because we're not doing the job that we long for. It may be that we're not able to work like we used to.

And maybe it could be because we actually have our dream job, but it's actually way harder than we expected it to be. And again, the key point is that the Bible makes sense of this.

[17 : 29] The Bible explains all of this. Because the Bible teaches us that sin has affected every area of life, which means that sin affects every aspect of our work. So all the positive aspects of work that we identify, they've all been affected by sin.

So instead of having a clear sense of purpose, so often we don't know what we want to do. We don't know what our dream is. We don't know if we're doing the right thing.

We don't know if we should change our career. We're lost and we lack that sense of clarity and direction. Often, instead of satisfaction, there's a sense of anti-climax.

And so sometimes you might work your socks off to get the career that you thought was going to be the thing that would really make you happy. And then you're like, actually, I'm not as happy as I thought it would be. And the satisfaction is replaced with a sense of anti-climax.

Often for many, many people today, instead of work improving us, work is burning us out. And so week on week, we are getting more tired, more stressed, more pressured.

[18 : 34] And sometimes that takes us to the point of burnout. For some people in work, instead of carrying responsibility, you get overlooked. And so sometimes you can be in situations where you think, I would love, love that role, and it goes to someone else.

And you feel overlooked. You feel worthless. In work, when we're supposed to be helping people, I am 99.9% sure every single one of you has experienced this, that instead of helping people, you get hurt by people.

And so situations you find yourself, you never expected. People speak to you in a way that's cruel and harsh and cutting.

And you're there thinking, I want to be helpful and positive. And you end up on the receiving end of some of the worst examples of people's behavior and sometimes from people who you never expected it from.

So often you come home from work feeling bruised. Work's supposed to be enjoyment. We have to be honest to say, sometimes it's just boring. And the effect of sin brings boredom to work, where some days feel like they're never going to end.

[19 : 51] And you just struggle through what is a dull and monotonous task. And while work should give us a sense of reward, many people, when they think about their jobs, actually feel a sense of failure.

Now, for some people, that might be a fear of failure. And for others, it might be a sense of failure. For many of us, maybe it's a mixture of both.

But we all feel these realities in our career. And even if things are going really well in our career, so maybe you're looking at that red list and you're thinking, I know what every single one of them feels like.

Maybe not so much. But even if things are going really, really well, success in your career can also be affected by sin and bring dangers because we can become proud, we can become self-reliant, we can become arrogant, we can become controlling, we can become defensive.

And not only does sin affect that, sin also affects our bodies and our minds. So we are left subject to injury or to disease or to aging or to being knocked either physically or mentally.

[21 : 08] And all of that can leave us unable to work or unable to work to the same extent that we used to be able to do. And all across the world, you'll see there's inequalities, there's injustice, there's conflict, meaning that people don't get the opportunity to work or their opportunities are taken away.

Sin has ruined work. The good dream is now a broken dream. And the reality of sin in relation to work brings two opposite dangers.

There's the danger of idolizing your career. And that's where we take the good dream and we make it the ultimate dream and we think that work is the thing that matters more than anything else.

That's a danger. And we've got to recognize that your career will not satisfy your deepest cravings. And so there's the danger of idolizing your career on this hand, but there's also the danger of hating your career.

And that's to take the bad dream too far. Because even if your job right now is a long way from what you want it to be, and even if you're looking back in your career and thinking, that is not how I wanted it to be, you have still made an immensely positive contribution.

[22 : 22] And there's far more value in your work than you realize. So we can drift towards idolizing our career. We can drift towards hating our career. The key to avoiding both of these dangers is to realize that the gospel gives you better certainties.

Now watch just beep for 12, so we need to be super fast with this last wee bit. There's lots that we could say here. I just want to focus on those two dangers that we've just identified.

The danger of idolizing your job, the danger of hating your job. They're both avoided when you recognize that the gospel places you and places your career as part of something bigger.

That's the big point I want you to see in this regard. The gospel places your career as part of something bigger. And so if you're a Christian or if you become one, the job that you do in your working life is part of something bigger.

Your job's part of the great gospel reality that everything we do has been done under God's purposes, with God's help, and for God's growth.

[23 : 26] And the Bible emphasizes that in a slightly surprising way. And I'm just going to mention this very, very briefly, and I'm conscious that I'm only touching on it because it's a big subject.

In the Bible, there's one big topic that is constantly linked to people's jobs, and it's a theme that's teaching us about the bigger picture that our jobs fit into.

But it's not the topic that you would think of first. So what am I talking about? I'm talking about the temple. The temple in the Old Testament was massively important in the lives of God's people.

Before the temple, you had the tabernacle. It served the same purpose. And in both the tabernacle and the temple, it was a place of God's presence, a place of sacrifice, a place of thanksgiving, but it was also a place of work.

So in the Old Testament, there's a massive emphasis on the skills needed to build the temple. I don't have time to read it, but Exodus 31, you'll read about the two best tradesmen in the Old Testament, there to build the tabernacle.

[24 : 33] And same with the building of the temple, and not only in terms of construction, but also in terms of serving in the temple, there's a huge emphasis on people's work.

The temple's a place of work. And that shouldn't surprise us, because the temple is echoing the Garden of Eden. The Garden of Eden was a place of work. The temple's a place of work. And at the same time, the temple is not just an echo of Eden, it's also a shadow of the New Testament and the fullness of God's promises, where Jesus comes as the true temple, and we are united to him by faith, and we become the temple as the church of Jesus Christ.

And so as that temple, what do we do? We work. And so the Old Testament temple is a shadow of Jesus coming as the true temple, and the church that is united to him as the temple of the Holy Spirit, and that temple is a place of work.

And that's exactly what Paul speaks about in 1 Corinthians 3, that Mary read for us. And so emphasizing that we are God's fellow workers, God's field, God's building, and we all serve in that, building upon it, and we do that as God's temple, as you can see there at the bottom.

Now, when I say all this, when I say to you that being a worker is like being in a temple, you might be thinking, Thomas, that sounds so weird, and so obscure, and it sounds completely irrelevant to my working life this week.

[26 : 11] But the truth is this, nothing is more relevant to your career than this concept of a temple. Why is that?

It's because every workplace is a temple. because whatever job you're doing, you are pouring yourself out into that job.

And you are offering yourself, and your life is a sacrifice for the benefit of that temple. And the key question is this, if you're not doing that for God, who are you doing it for?

In our jobs, we pour out our skills, our energy, our working lives as an offering. Who are we doing that for?

And the amazing reality of the gospel is that if you're following Jesus, you are doing that for him. Whatever you're going to be doing this week, even if it's a paid job, or if it's voluntary involvement with our community or with your family, whatever it might be, whatever we're doing, we're doing it for him.

[27 : 31] We are his temple. We're his building. We're serving him. And that means that our jobs are part of something bigger.

They're part of something glorious. I wish I had more time to unpack that more. But I just want to conclude by going back to our list. Our work is supposed to give us purpose.

Sometimes sin leaves us just not knowing at all what we're to do. The gospel brings a new purpose to your life. And it assures you of your giftedness, of your value, and of your importance to God as you go into whatever you're doing this week.

Sin has taken away the satisfaction that work is meant to give us. The gospel restores it because it shows you where lasting satisfaction is found.

So it means that if your career goes brilliantly or if it goes medium or if it goes maybe not as good as you hoped, ultimately you will enjoy total satisfaction for eternity with Jesus.

[28 : 39] The gospel encourages you to grow and improve, but it also reminds you to rest and to balance your work life carefully. The gospel, you might feel overlooked, but the gospel reorients you as part of God's workforce and you have responsibility from God to serve him.

We'll often get hurt by people in our work. The gospel does two wonderful things. The gospel softens your heart and toughens you up. What I mean by that is that the gospel softens your heart to fill you with compassion for the person who's just a nightmare to work with.

But the gospel also toughens you up because if somebody's horrible to you, then you're like, I can let that go and that can bounce off me because I belong to Jesus. And the gospel empowers you to accomplish more than you ever expected in life.

And even if we have face days that are boring, God can work in and through us to do amazing things. And ultimately, when we think about reward, the gospel promises you the eternal approval and smile of God.

All of that shifts our perspective. All of that makes this week exciting. And all of that reminds us that the gospel fills our deepest cravings because the gospel gives us better certainties.

[30 : 02] I hope every single one of us can remember that as we head into Monday morning again. Amen. Let's pray.