February 20/21, 2010

Your Work Matters: It's a Gift from God

Genesis 1, 2, 3

Your Work Matters

Pastor Mark Kremer

When you hear the word *work*, what's the gut-level emotion that accompanies that word? You know, do you just kind of get excited? You kind of go, "Wow, you know tomorrow morning, I just can't wait! Monday morning—before the alarm clock goes off—I'm up!" Your theme song is, "*Hi ho! Hi ho! It's off to work we go!"* We get a little suspicious of people that are that excited about work, right? Perhaps your first response is going...(sighing)..."Oh! Another week!" It's sort of like my 5-year-old—when we give him a chore to do—you know...(groaning)..."Oh, all you make us do is work!" (Laughter) Poor kid, he's just so overworked! Your theme song perhaps is more like, "You can take this job and shove it!"(Laughter)

Well probably most of us fall somewhere in-between but there is no question that work is a significant part of our life. In fact sixty to sixty-five percent of our waking hours are spent doing work. Now when we talk about work, as we're going to do for the next few weeks, we're not talking about just your paid job—your career. We're talking about all the work that we engage in. For those of you who are students, we're talking about school—the work you do in school. We're talking about stay-at-home moms and dads who take care of their children and manage a household. We're talking about retired folks who get up and, every day, engage in activity. We're talking about all of that when we talk about work and it's where we spend the significant part of our waking hours.

So it's important, it would seem, that we would talk about it and try to understand it from God's perspective. What's interesting to me is that the Church, over the years, has had very little to say about work. In fact you can go to a Christian bookstore and find shelves full of books on marriage, on parenting, on emotional issues, on spiritual growth and you will find very, very few books on work and a theology of work. For some reason the Church has kind of stayed away and out of this area and I think, as a result of that, there's kind of been a growing chasm between our spiritual life—what we think about, is what we talk about at church and engage in; it's what we do in our quiet time at home; it's, you know, about our families—and there is this chasm between that and our work life. We've just kind of put that off into its own category and left it alone. It never was as clear to me—that that was true—as when, at age thirty, I left being on a church staff and went into the marketplace. I had always thought I was going to be called to be in the marketplace—to work in a career. It's just part of what I was thinking and yet, when I was in college, I got invited to be a part of a church plant and felt like that's what God wanted me to do and so I did that for a number of years. And with each passing year I thought, "You know I really want, I really think God's calling me out." And so I went out and started a business and did some other things and I came to church, coming out of my work week, and I sat and I listened. And what I heard in the church that I was a part of was, "You all ought to be really excited about what's going on here at church!" And I'm thinking, "Man, I've got a boat-load of questions and challenges and issues that I face in my work life; what do you have to say to me to help me with that?" And it really became an even deeper conviction in my heart, at that point, that the Church is about equipping people to live life 24/7—that would include our work life.

I think as a church, we've done much better in that regard. I think we have woven the message how our faith relates to work in and through many, many of the messages that we hear. But we've never really devoted an extended a period of time to just looking at work from a biblical perspective. And that's what we're going to do over these coming weeks. One of the things, the reason why I think we are more effective at that, is because many of the people on our staff have lived in both worlds. They've lived in the marketplace world and they've lived in the church world—and I think that is a good mix to have. I always, when I worked with college students and they'd want to go into ministry right away, I'd say, "You know, go work for a while. Just go work because, even if God calls you to speak or preach someday, you won't know how to relate to the average person in the pew if you haven't lived where they live." Well we've got people here that have lived where you live. I spent, you know, a good ten years—primarily my thirties—in the marketplace. I was reluctant to come back and be on a church staff. I liked being in the marketplace. We have people who have been engineers. We have people who have worked in steel mills. We have people who were in healthcare. Jeff Petersen and I both share this: we were DJ's early on. (Laughter) The only difference is he spun Top 40 records and I spun Bill Gaither and George Beverly Shea. Bryan Clark ran a tow truck. You need to understand that. Can you just imagine Bryan pulling up with his tow truck to tow your car away and just giving you *that look*: "You parked here." (Laughter) So we have some experience living where you live and I think that helps us to be more effective.

It's interesting, when you look at the Scriptures though, that much of what we read about Jesus' encounters and His teaching took place in a workplace setting. Of the one hundred thirty-two public appearances recorded in the gospels, one hundred twenty-two—all but ten—take place in a workplace setting. Of the fifty-two parables recorded, forty-five had a workplace theme to the parable and work is mentioned more than eight hundred times in varieties of ways in the Scriptures. So it's a big deal to God and it should be a big deal to us. I think it's also fitting that we talk about work in the context of living this *Decade on Purpose* because if you and I are going to spend sixty to sixty-five percent of this next decade working, we'd better figure out how that relates, how to do it *on Purpose*, how it relates to God's bigger picture or we're going to be very frustrated. If you and I work sixty to sixty-five percent of the next ten years, we will have spent twenty-four thousand hours working—the equivalent of a thousand twenty-four hour days spent working—doing the ordinary, normal things that we have to do as a part of our job, our work life—whatever that is. So we need to understand, from God's perspective, *"What does it mean to live my work life on Purpose?"* And that's going to be our study over these next six weeks. And not only are we doing this as a study here in our worship auditorium, but we're going to be launching—we are launching—a brand new ministry area in our church called *WorkLife.* It will be an ongoing ministry. Like all the rest of the ministries, it'll be here to be a resource and a help to people around issues related to work. We think that's a very important part of our job as a people, as a congregation, of preparing and helping each other to be effective—on mission, on target—with our *WorkLife*.

Now my goal for you this morning, for us this morning, is that we would walk away today embracing five great ideas or reasons why we should be excited about working—five reasons why we ought to be excited tomorrow morning to jump out of bed, sing in the shower, smile in the mirror, greet your family cheerfully, laugh at those awful drivers that are all the way around you, and engage all day with excitement in whatever our job is, regardless of what that is. Changing tires, changing diapers, building something, farming, whatever it would be, going to school—that we would be excited. I think there are five reasons that we ought to be excited about work and they are answers to the question, "Why work?"—Why work? What's the purpose of work? Where did it come from? Is this just part of the curse, that because of sin, we have to work or is there some

greater, more significant reason for work? So, to help us come away with those five reasons to be excited, let's go to the Scriptures and go to Genesis, Chapter 1 and Verse 1. We're going to be looking at Genesis 1, 2, & 3—just to go back to the very beginning and see what it has to say to us about our work life. Genesis 1:1:

> **In the beginning, God created the heavens and the earth**. (*NASB, Genesis 1:1)

Now it's important for us to note from the very first words of Scripture what God is doing. God is not sitting; God is not being served; God is working; He's creating; He's creating the physical universe—the material world that we know about. It's valuable; it's important; it's significant and He is creating it. And, as you go through verse by verse, day by day of creation, He continues to add new things that He creates and you'll notice that almost every verse begins with an action verb.

Verse 3: **God said—**God spoke**—and there was light.**
Verse 5: **God called the light day**. He named what He had made.
Verse 6: **God spoke and said, "Let there be an expanse."**
Verse 7: **God made the expanse.**
Verse 8: **God called...God said,** in Verse 9.
Verse 10:**God called.**

All the way through He's naming and calling and speaking and working to build and create this incredible universe—this majestic creation that we've been thanking and praising God for this morning. And we celebrate, most often we think about creation—the beauty of it, the majesty of it— and visually I think that's what comes to mind when you think about creation. But you have to dig a little bit deeper. The simplicity of the way this is recorded belies the complexity and amazing engineering that God put into this material world. He designed it. He created the very laws that would govern it—the laws we know of physics and chemistry, of biology. He made it all—that it would work and flow together and He did it flawlessly. It performs and functions absolutely perfectly. The amazing thing about God's work is the beauty of it—yes—but the functionality of it, the precision of it, the absolute perfection of it, of all that He has made and it is a marvel! It has led to hundreds of fields of study. It has been the thing that has captured the imagination and the work of generations of people since the very beginning of time. Man has been fascinated and been trying to understand and fathom this creation that God made as a worker. God works; He creates; He builds. And I think Mike even mentioned this morning that the scientists would tell us that God today is still creating the physical universe. It's still expanding—to think that, even today, God's still in this business of creating.

What's the crown of His creation? We'll notice in Chapter 1 and Verse 26, God has this conversation among the Trinity.

> **And God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth." And God created man in His own image, in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them.** (Vs. 26-27)

Here we have God creating man and man is distinct and different from the rest of creation. Man is uniquely made in the image of God. And this passage goes on to talk in Chapter 2 about how God did that—that God formed the man out of the dust of the ground. You have this picture of God

actually, with His hands, taking the earth that He had created and forming it into the form of a man and then bending over and it says, **...and breathing into his nostrils the breath of life**; **and man became a living being just as God is a living being.** (2:7)

Now there are many, many facets to being made in the image of God—to being created in His image. But for our purposes this morning, what's important to know is that part of being made in the image of God is that we, like God, were created to work. We're created to do something, to accomplish things, to build things, to make things, to manage things. That's a part of who we are. We're made in the image of God who is a worker, a creator, a designer. And you and I don't have to do anything more than have little children around to know how true that really is. I mean get a child old enough to where they can manipulate things with their hands, where they can move things around, and what do they do? They build things. They put the blocks together to make a tower. They take all the blankets out of the linen closet and off your bed and they put them over a table and they make a fort or a house. Let the snow fall down and you're out there shoveling and complaining and what are they doing—they're getting it together and making a snowman or building a fort. It's a part of who we are; it's how God wired us to do something—not to sit idly, but to be actively engaged in meaningful work. And that's the first reason that you and I ought to be excited to get out of bed in the morning and face whatever the job is we have, because we're created to do that: *on Purpose*—to get up and be like God. Make something. Build something. Grow something.

There's a second reason why we ought to be excited to get up and it's again found here in this creation of man account. Verse 26 again:

> **God said, "Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness; and let them rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over the cattle and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps on the earth."**

Verse 28:

> **God blessed them; and God said to them, "Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and rule over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the sky and over every living thing that moves on the earth."**

Chapter 2, Verse 15, says that when God made the man...

> **He took him and put him in the garden of Eden to cultivate it and keep it.**

So not only are we created in the image of God to be workers, but we have been given some specific work by God to do. He has got a call on the life of every human being to be engaged in meaningful work that He gave us to do. It involves a number of things. First He talks about being **fruitful and multiplying**. The words mean to flourish or to replenish, expand, grow, multiply. We think of that, obviously, in terms of human reproduction, of filling the earth, of multiplying and reproducing and some of us have taken that command very seriously. (Laughter) Others of you lag behind. (Laughter) But you know I really believe it goes beyond that. I believe it really is, "*Take what I've made and multiply it; cause it to flourish and grow; build upon what I have.*" And you really get that sense from that next phrase which is **...fill the earth.** You know what that phrase really means? It really means *finish it; complete it.* Because I think what happened is that God created Adam and Eve and He put them into this garden—this absolute paradise where everything was beautiful and wonderful—and what He's saying to Adam and Eve is, "*Take that and multiply it*

throughout the earth and fill the earth; complete the creation that I've started." And mankind has been doing that ever since, trying with all of the ingenuity and wisdom and intelligence that God gives us, to continue to try to create a better and better and better place to live. It's a part of what God called us to do. Then He said **...we're to subdue it and rule over it**...two very interesting phrases. **Subdue it** means to overcome it, to bring it into submission. We would probably say that we are to harness the creation, to kind of bring it into a useable form so that it can be harnessed and be useful. And then to **rule over it** means to administrate it or control it. God's given us the mission—the command—to harness what He has created and to make a life out of it, to control and administrate all this wonderful creation that He made. So we have meaningful, significant work to do. We're to **cultivate and keep the garden** he told Adam and Eve—that is to work it. God had commanded them to work the garden. You know I think in our minds we think that Eden was one of those places where you just sort of sat and everything grew. You know—*"Hey the daisies are popping up over here, crocus over there. Wow, this is pretty cool."* But God told Adam and Eve, "Work the garden."

Now notice all of this comes before The Fall. This isn't the result of sin that he had to work the garden. This is part of the call of God on man—to keep the garden, to guard it, protect it, to take care of it. It's a stewardship from God. We've been given this world as a stewardship to manage on God's behalf. What's amazing here is that there is a partnership that is formed between God and man—that God says, "*We're going to work as partners in caring for this world, in advancing what is good. We're going to be hand-in-hand. I've given you things to do as a partner, right alongside of Me.*" What an amazing thing!

I love in Chapter 2, in Verse 19, where God formed, it says:

> **Out of the ground the LORD God formed every beast of the field and every bird of the sky, and brought them to the man to see what he would call them; and whatever the man called a living creature, that was its name. The man gave names to all the cattle, and to the birds of the sky, and to every beast of the field...**(Vs. 19-20a)

Isn't that amazing? Imagine that you were a genius and you, of your own ability, imagined, invented, created, designed, engineered the most amazing, stunning invention of the 21st Century all by yourself. No one helped you; you didn't need anybody's help. What are the chances that you would take that invention and hand it to someone else, far inferior to you and say, "Here, now it's yours? You name it what you want to name it; you manage it and run it." That's exactly what God did. He handed over this magnificent creation for us, not only to manage and run, but he even gave Adam the opportunity to name the animals. It was God's way of saying, "Hey, we're in a partnership. We're in a partnership every day, all day, regardless of what it is you're doing." We have been given these amazing tasks by God to do. And that's the second reason why you ought to be excited to get up: because God's called you to a partnership, to work right alongside of Him and, as long as you and I are engaged in work that's in keeping with what God wants—is in keeping with our stewardship of His commission to us—we're stewarding what He has made; we're benefitting others. Then it's meaningful and significant work. It matters. It matters to God what we do every single day. It's important. Whether that's changing diapers or changing tires, making computers, managing money, it doesn't matter. It's significant; it matters to God; it's a call that God has on your life.

Now there's a third reason that we ought to be excited about getting up and going to work and it's found here in Chapter 1, Verse 29:

God said [to Adam and Eve]**, "Behold, I have given you every plant yielding seed that is on the surface of all the earth, and every tree which has fruit yielding seed; it shall be food for you;**

I mean one of the reasons we should be excited to get up and work is because we have to. I mean if you don't work, you don't eat, right? God gave us His incredible creation and it's there. But He didn't bring the food to Adam and Eve. He said, "There it is; go get it. Work. Engage. Find your sustenance. Make a life; make a living off of what I have made." It's part of God's call on our life. And just like God, at the end of every single day of creation, stood back at the end of the day and declared that what He had made was very good, I think there's a deep sense of satisfaction that is a gift from God—that when we do our work and do it well and do it for Him, there is a deep sense of satisfaction.

I remember as a boy, growing up on a farm, there were a lot of things that I had to do that didn't give me a great deal of satisfaction. I hauled a lot of manure in my day. In fact in Gladwell's book, called *Outliers*, he says to be an expert in anything, you have to spend ten thousand hours. He studied that across all kinds of fields and in all kinds of people and ten thousand hours, invested in doing something, is what it requires for you to become an expert. So I'm an expert in manure hauling; I guarantee you that. But you know, even in that, there was a sense of satisfaction. But I remember many, many nights, at the end of the day of work, standing at the end of the field with my dad, whether we had just harvested a field or planted a field or shipped a load of cattle off to market, standing there and feeling this sense of satisfaction. There is a sense of, *"You know we're partners with God; we did something today that was good. We fed people; we accomplished something*." That's a gift from God and a reason why you and I ought to be excited about getting up every single day.

Now it's important that all three of those reasons: *Because we're created in God's image*, *Because we've been given a work to do*, and *Because we can make a living and be satisfied in our work*, all three of those things came before sin ever entered the picture. So the ten thousand dollar question is, "What did sin do to our work life?" Well in Chapter 3, we get in Genesis the account of the Fall of Man—when man was tempted to doubt God's goodness, to believe that God maybe was holding out on them, maybe God had something that He was holding back. There was something better; there was more life to be found outside of God and so they bit on that temptation, literally, and took the fruit from the tree and ate it and sin entered the picture. And God cursed the serpent, beginning in Verse 14 of Chapter 3, for Satan's role in bringing man down. And then in Verse 16 He speaks to the woman and in 17 to Adam. I just want to look particularly in Verse 17 because it relates to work.

Then to Adam God said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree about which I commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat from it';
Cursed is the ground because of you;
In toil you will eat of it
All the days of your life.
Both thorns and thistles it shall grow for you;
And you will eat the plants of the field;
By the sweat of your face
You will eat bread,
Till you return to the ground,

Because from it you were taken;
For you are dust,
And to dust you shall return." (Vs. 17-19)

It's important to know that work was not the curse, but the ground was cursed. The creation was cursed, which made work more difficult. Work, with sin, became a very difficult thing and I think for a couple of reasons. One is because now our work was separated from God. Man went about his work without this sense that God was in it, that it was a partnership. Man had fled away from the partnership and now was trying to do and make a life and make a living apart from God and that doesn't work well. We continue to see, and part of the deep dissatisfaction that even Americans feel about their work is, that I think sometimes, for many people, we believe that work holds this incredible promise to satisfy us and fulfill us and we pour all kinds of energy into work—but apart from God it's empty. So we demand more and more and more from work. We exploit the creation because we want more. We exploit other people because we want more. And exploitation and seeking to find our value and significance in our work becomes the norm for people apart from God—who have no relationship with God.

The second thing I think happened, as a result of that, is this: Work became this overwhelmingly difficult thing. Weeds and storms, droughts, insects, wind, and heat made work very unpleasant, very difficult. And so there is this sense for many of futility, of hopelessness, of, "I just keep grinding it out and grinding it out and grinding it out and I can't seem to really get any satisfaction from it and it seems futile" —again apart from God. That was the result of sin—that work became difficult because it and man were cut off and separated from God. But here even in Genesis, Chapter 3, the very beginning of the story, we get a sense that God is about to work again to do something about that problem. And we read the hint of that in Verse 21 of Chapter 3, where the Lord God, after giving this curse to Adam and Eve and they recognized their nakedness and their sinfulness, it says:

The LORD God made garments of skin for Adam and his wife, and clothed them.

God, in a very intimate act, took an animal and killed it—the first animal to die in this new creation—and took the skin and He clothed Adam and Eve with it. He covered over their shame and their sinfulness and it's a picture that, without the shedding of blood, there could be no covering for sin. It was that hint of what was to come: that ultimately God's work of redemption which began this day was going to culminate in the coming of Jesus Christ—God Himself—to die, to bleed, to suffer, to take the punishment for sin, not so that sin could just be covered up, like the animal skin did, but so sin could be taken away—forgiven, removed. And for all who will come to Christ and believe in Him and accept His sacrifice—His gift on our behalf—to all who will do that, the Scripture tells us that we are made a new creation in Christ. There is another creation that takes place: *Now I'm given a new heart, a new life in Christ*.

No verse I think says it better than Ephesians 2:10 and, over the next couple of weeks, I'm going to challenge you to memorize it. In fact you're going to get this card with this verse on it as you leave today. The ushers are going to hand this to you. But really this verse is so foundational to understanding our life and our work. It says:

We are His workmanship {or His masterpiece}**, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.**

That's a foundational verse and I hope you'll memorize it—put it on your mirror—because it's so important to realize that in Christ I am re-created and in that re-creation, work—I now have a new purpose to work. Now I'm called to something that goes beyond just the stewardship of a physical and material world. I'm now given a part in building God's eternal kingdom and I can do that in my work, not as leaving my work to *go off* and do it, but to do it as I *go about* my work. I'm building God's kingdom as well as doing all the things that were talked about in Genesis 1 and 2. Now my work has purpose and meaning and significance once again, because I'm now connected to God in it, He's there in my work. And in fact your work environment is a primary place of discipleship. Do you know that it says when we go about our work that we come to understand where we need to grow, where we need to change, where we face problems that are beyond ourselves, where we have to fall on our knees and ask God to show up and help us and teach us and lead us 'cause we don't know how to deal with those difficult people or those ethical challenges? We don't have what it takes and so we call on God and God shows up and He disciples us and He changes us in our work environment. It's a primary place of growth and discipleship, which is another reason that you and I ought to be excited to get up tomorrow morning and face this week—because God is now reconnected to our work life and there is even more purpose and significance to it.

The final one that I want to mention—and we'll talk more about it later in the series—is the fact that we should be excited about work because we're going to work forever. We're going to work in the New Heaven and the New Earth. We're going to have meaningful, significant work to rule and reign with Christ forever and forever and our work life today is preparing us for that future work that we'll do for all eternity. Every day is a day of preparation, learning a little bit more so we're prepared, by God's grace, to rule and reign and work in partnership with Him for eternity. Now I know that you may have a thousand things that make your work not very exciting but here are at least five good reasons that you ought to be excited to get up and engage in work every day.

One is you were created to work because you were created in the image of God. Second He has given you significant, meaningful work to do in partnership with Him. Third, you can take deep satisfaction and make a life and a living for yourself from your work—take pleasure in it. Fourth, because when you are in Christ you are re-created and work has even a greater meaning and you are now part of building His kingdom as well as providing for yourself and others. And fifth, every day our work is preparing us for eternal work that will be exciting and wonderful and fulfilling for all of eternity.

Now I know that just talking about this one time won't probably work these things down into our hearts but my prayer, as we leave this morning, is that over these coming weeks, as we unpack various aspects of work, that this biblical view of work would permeate us and transform the way we face our work life every single day.

> *Our Father, we thank You that You have created us in Your image. You've given us significant work to do. I pray, God, that we would embrace Your view of work and we would engage with You in our work and we would invite You, God, to guide us, to lead us in our work life, for the glory of Your Name. Amen.*

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WorkLIFE
your work matters

YOUR WORK MATTERS:
It's a Gift from God

Genesis 1-3
Pastor Mark Kremer
February 20/21, 2010

Engage

Read Genesis 1-2 and reflect upon what we learn from this text about God as a worker and about the God's original purpose for man's work. Write down your observations and make note of the connections between God's work and man's work from this text.

How would work be different today if it were being done according to God's original design? How did sin affect the work of man in Genesis 3?

How are people's views on work and practice of work today a reflection of man's sinfulness and separation from God?

How does sin affect your work life today?

What new work did God engage in as a result of man's sin? Does God's work of salvation offer a new (renewed) vision for work? If so, what is it?

How has becoming a "new creation" in Christ changed your worklife?

How does sin and distorted cultural views of work continue to affect your worklife?

What excites you about engaging in purposeful, meaningful work in the new heaven and earth?

How is your current worklife preparing you for your future in God's Kingdom?

Memorize

Memorize Ephesians 2:10 this week:

"For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God has prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them."

How is God's craftsmanship evident in your life?

What good works has He prepared for you to do?

Pray

Thank God for His awesome works that we get to enjoy. Thank God for the talents and work He has given you to do. Acknowledge to God where your worklife is out of alignment with His purposes. Ask God to renew and enlarge your vision for your worklife.