

Work | More Than A Paycheck

Work Is A Gift From God

The Revelation 21.1-5, 10-11, 24-27; 22.1-5, 20-21

9.1.24

Revelation CH 21 Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth; for the first heaven and the first earth passed away, and there is no longer any sea. ² And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, made ready as a bride adorned for her husband. ³ And I heard a loud voice from the throne, saying, "Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, ⁴ and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." ⁵ And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new." And He said, "Write, for these words are faithful and true."

¹⁰ And he carried me away in the Spirit to a great and high mountain, and showed me the holy city, Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, ¹¹ having the glory of God. Her brilliance was like a very costly stone, as a stone of crystal-clear jasper.

²⁴ The nations will walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their glory into it. ²⁵ In the daytime (for there will be no night there) its gates will never be closed; ²⁶ and they will bring the glory and the honor of the nations into it; ²⁷ and nothing unclean, and no one who practices abomination and lying, shall ever come into it, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life.

CH 22 Then he showed me a river of the water of life, clear as crystal, coming from the throne of God and of the Lamb, ² in the middle of its street. On either side of the river was the tree of life, bearing twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit every month; and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. ³ There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; ⁴ they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. ⁵ And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever.

²⁰ He who testifies to these things says, "Yes, I am coming quickly." Amen. Come, Lord Jesus. ²¹ The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen. (Rev. 21-22)

This is the final sermon on WORK... we're ending the series on labor right on Labor Day Weekend.

Today, we sort of wrap up our nine sermons with a final question *i.e.* "IS work is a gift from God?" And I ask YOU (maybe you know the Bible fairly well), *where would YOU go in the Bible to prove or support that claim. "Does the Bible actually teach or state that work is good? Because, if it does, then maybe I should stop thinking of it as a necessary evil."*

I think many people IN our modern society do feel that way about work – that work is something to tolerate at best... better than things falling apart but not a universal good. Some religious people may think that work is a part of the curse or a compulsory part of life in a fallen, sinful world. Some people have jobs that are especially difficult or arduous and THAT person can't bring him-/herself to say, "work is good" ... I'm sure you can imagine jobs you wouldn't want to do, hopelessly boring, repetitive, messy... or traumatic.

Others, worship their jobs. It's certainly possible to look to a job as one's primary sense of identity so if you lost that job...you'd... be a "*Nobody*". Work can be a place where people hide from relationships or a home-life that's tough. Work can be a self-salvation project, something we THINK we can control... to sustain the illusion that we are "large and in charge"– the god-complex.

So...is work truly good (even being a dishwasher or a rickshaw driver or a deodorant tester)? And where in the Bible is that stated? Let's look at the END of work by which I mean, the purpose, aim or goal of work as depicted in these final chapters of the Bible. Let's look at:

- 1) Believers Will Work in the Afterlife**
- 2) Work Will Be Redeemed**
- 3) Work Is a Gift From God**

It's a necessary inference that if work is something included in God's New Creation, heaven, paradise, the reward of the justified... if work is found in the place that's only good, then work must be a good thing.

The explicit work noted in these passages is serving and reigning (almost opposites). A third and fourth are implicit and that is bringing (i.e., the glory and honor of the nations is brought into the New Jerusalem) AND worship...

I listened to a discussion recently, a response to a former Christian who had a "deconversion" and has become a kind of "influencer" or proponent for atheism ... because he wants to set people free from wasting their lives in false terror of hell or in the deception and false hope of heaven. And the theologian responding to "Brandon" (*aka MindShift*), this deconverted "YouTube-Influencer", the theologian was a model of respect and gentleness (1 Peter 3.15-17). The theologian, Gavin Ortlund, questioned Brandon on all his points, one of which was over-literalism e.g., Brandon questioned the streets of gold... but that's symbolic language in the *Book of Revelation* for durability (non-rust).

Harps stand for joy and celebration. What looks like an endless hymn-sing is a symbolic way to express ongoing awe and wonder. These are symbols/metaphors.

Then Brandon took up the objection that heaven (as described in the Bible) would be boring. And our respectful theologian replied by quoting a book by Randy Alcorn called *Heaven* (2004)... which Gavin Ortlund praised for being a thoroughly Biblical and orthodox (i.e., in keeping with Christian consensus over the centuries). I have to admit that I have not read that book (though I've heard good things about it since its release 20 years ago [when I was in my mid-twenties]!) In his summary, the theologian, Gavin Ortlund,

claims that through careful study and making necessary inferences and conclusions, *“Randy Alcorn argues that in heaven we will have friendship, we will have laughter, we will have culture, we will have books, we will have technology, we will have trade, we will have sports, we will have dancing, we will have music and drama. There will be storytelling. He even argues that there will be space travel in heaven! If that sounds ridiculous to you, read the book. His arguments are actually very biblical.”*

Ortlund brings up the ancient Christian belief that the New Heavens and New Earth pictured in the Bible have always been understood by Christian thinkers and Bible scholars as the resurrection of Jesus Christ WRIT LARGE – as if Jesus went into the ground like a seed and came forth like a tree. His Body was recognizable...but different...complete and indestructible. As Jesus is resurrected Man, so heaven is “resurrected creation.” Jesus resurrected physically, and the New Creation will also be physical.

C.S. Lewis labored to show from Scripture that our ideas about heaven as gaseous and misty and light as a feather are NOT Biblical...Heaven is heavy, glorious, dense and solid, *“the eternal weight of glory”* (2 Cor 4.17).

Will there be work in heaven? Yes. And IF work exists in the place where there’s only good... work must be good.

To think of actually reigning with the Lamb of God ...somehow ruling over the Universe and all the New Creation... I’m sure it strikes people as a crazy faerie-tale or a science-fiction fantasy that modern people just can’t believe... I get that... It actually sounds like a fantasy to ME...

That we, who believe in Jesus Christ, will (1Cor 6.2-3) judge angels, will be like mangers, picking up where the First Adam left off and cultivating the New Earth into a garden...and serving as God’s willing servants (bond-servants) in a Universe that’s purged of all evil... You?... I? Does that sound far-fetched to you?

It does to me... and that’s why my own favorite verse to ponder when I think of Eternity is from 1st Corinthians CH 2: (St. Paul writing) *“we speak God’s wisdom in a mystery, the hidden wisdom which God predestined before the ages to our glory; the wisdom which none of the rulers of this age has understood; for if they had understood it they wouldn’t have crucified the Lord of glory; but just as it is written, ‘things which eye has not seen and ear has not heard, and which have not entered the heart of man, all that God has prepared for those who love him.’”* (Isa 64.4, 65.17)

If it sounds crazy it’s because we can’t even imagine it. And that’s why our deconverted friend is stuck. He has become so grown-up that there appears to be very little child-like wonder or liberated imagination in him. I really want to follow Gavin Ortlund’s stellar example of respect toward an opponent, but I have to add that poor Brandon seemed like all the so-called *New Atheists* (Christopher Hitchens, Sam Harris, Richard Dawkins etc.) about whom someone has commented, *“Their unintended message seems to be, ‘There IS no God and boy am I MAD at Him!’”*

Whatever the work will be in the New Creation, the serving God AS our worship, the co-labor-ation with God and with one another will be work like we've never known and i.e., WORK without the curse. *"Behold, the tabernacle of God is among men, and He will dwell among them, and they shall be His people, and God Himself will be among them, and He will wipe away every tear from their eyes; and there will no longer be any death; there will no longer be any mourning, or crying, or pain; the first things have passed away." And He who sits on the throne said, "Behold, I am making all things new."*

And in this Garden City where even the leaves of the trees bring eternal healing, *"There will no longer be any curse; and the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and His bond-servants will serve Him; they will see His face, and His name will be on their foreheads. And there will no longer be any night; and they will not have need of the light of a lamp nor the light of the sun, because the Lord God will illumine them; and they will reign forever and ever."*

The Last Adam came into the world, God incarnated and became Man. And He was born into the home of a worker (τέκτων) and whether Joseph was a carpenter or a blacksmith (1st Sam 13.19 LXX) Jesus Christ was apprenticed as a laborer, a craftsman, a worker. And by His beautiful and perfect life of love and obedience to the Law and by the Carpenter/Creator being nailed to a tree and executed and rising from the dead: the Worker ("But He answered them, 'My Father is working until now, and I Myself am working.'" John 5.17) came to work and to redeem work, to take the curse OUT of work... to remove from His New Creation everything that's frustrating and hazardous and deadly and toxic from work.

And all this leads to the fantastic (fantastic as in fantasy as in too-good-to-be-true but it IS True!) and it leads us to conclude: work is good! Even UNDER the curse, we have to receive it as a Good Gift From God and as a kind of training ground for the work to come, the New Work secured by Him who is making all things NEW...we have to see our present work even if it's a dishwasher or changing diapers or GARDENING (esp gardening!) we have to see it as a training for what lies ahead.

I can't have this over-literal, flat, boring and monotonous view of the New Creation. To quote Gavin Ortlund once more, *"why would creation be more interesting and more generous than heaven (will be) why would reality contract from Genesis 1 to Revelation 21?"* No! It won't contract and shrink, it will expand and open to us infinite possibilities to work WITH Jesus Christ, our Older Brother and with the Father and Him Who rules in Heaven with Them, ONE God forever and ever.

Remember (Matthew 25) Jesus Christ's *Parable of the Huge Sums of Gold or Talents* (a talent was an enormous amount of gold like hundreds of thousands) and when the Master gave these huge sums to each servant (5, 2, 1), the one who was given ONE "talentōn" apparently felt slighted (he still had hundreds of thousands of dollars, but he had to compare with the others and comes away feeling jealous, sorry for himself and highly critical of the Master). He then concluded about the Master, *"I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you did not sow and gathering where you scattered no seed. And I was afraid and went away and hid your huge sum of gold in the ground. Here, take what's yours."* (24-25)

And because the servant entertained jealousy and self-pity and he projected his own motives onto the Master; that servant was sent away.

But to the other servants who saw that they'd been given enormous wealth to invest...and they invested courageously and wisely and they trusted the Master. When He returned *"His master said to him, 'Well done, good and faithful slave. You were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things; enter into the joy of your master.'* (21)

Whatever God has given you to do in this life, even if it looks like a lot less than others have (BTW – ask God to help you NOT to compare your lot with others!) but we HAVE to all see, street-sweepers and goal-keepers, artists and baristas, teachers and preachers, billionaires and those barely making it – we all have to see that Thē Master is infinitely generous and gracious... So full of love and kindness – how do I know? Is it because I have a great job or because of how much I have in my bank account or investments or because I'm healthy, happy and wealthy?

No... those things come and go.

The reason I trust the Master and therefore seek to make the most of what He has generously loaned me to invest is that He gave me His own Beloved Son... to redeem me and to secure for me a future unimaginable glorious... That's why the entire Bible ends with the words:

"The grace of the Lord Jesus be with all. Amen."

Q U O T E S

We are talking about eternity... I honestly do not believe there is any good version of heaven... If it's a choice, and I get to talk to some creator at the end of all this, I don't care who the creator is or what his plan or her plan or its plan is for an afterlife, I would honestly prefer at some point maybe I want to check it out for 500 years but at some point I want the option to not exist to not be conscious...

– Brandon (aka MindShift) "The Problems With Paradise: 7 Reasons Why Heaven Fails" (Sep 10, 2023)

There is no need to be worried by facetious people who try to make the Christian hope of "Heaven" ridiculous by saying they do not want "to spend eternity playing harps". The answer to such people is that if they cannot understand books written for grown-ups, they should not talk about them. All the scriptural imagery (harps, crowns, gold, etc.) is, of course, a merely symbolical attempt to express the inexpressible. Musical instruments are mentioned because for many people (not all) music is the thing known in the present life which most strongly suggests ecstasy and infinity. Crowns are mentioned to suggest the fact

that those who are united with God in eternity share His splendour and power and joy. Gold is mentioned to suggest the timelessness of Heaven (gold does not rust) and the preciousness of it. People who take these symbols literally might as well think that when Christ told us to be like doves, He meant that we were to lay eggs.

– C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (“Hope”; 1943)

In a previous video I’ve done on heaven, I argued that heaven is basically the resurrection of creation; so what happened to Jesus’ body on Easter morning, that’s going to happen to the universe – that’s heaven. Easter is the first-fruits or the anticipation of that... In this book about heaven (*Heaven*, 2009) a really interesting and helpful book, very thorough and biblical, Randy Alcorn argues that in heaven we will have friendship, we will have laughter, we will have culture, we will have books, we will have technology, we will have trade, we will have sports, we will have dancing, we will have music and drama. There will be storytelling. He even argues that there will be space travel in heaven! If that sounds ridiculous to you, read the book. His arguments are actually very biblical. But there’s also this logical appeal that he is making from what he calls the “principle of continuity” and it’s basically “why would creation be more interesting and more generous than heaven why would reality contract from Genesis 1 to Revelation 21? And what I want to argue in support of what he’s saying there is: this conception of heaven as “resurrected creation” is consistent with the historic Christian doctrine of heaven.

– Gavin Ortlund, “Is Heaven BORING and WEIRD? Response to MindShift” (Aug 22, 2024 podcast response to “deconversionist” Brandon aka MindShift; Youtube.com)