

Work as Crucible

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[0 : 00] So we're talking about faith and work, this massive part of our lives. As Jaya said, our waking day, probably more than a half of our life in many ways.

And we're seeing it's absolutely critical that we think about this really important part of our life in light of what does God say and how does God want us to think about this really important part of our life.

For those of us that are Christians, how does our commitment to love and follow Jesus shape this really important part of our life. And so far what we've seen is that work is not just a necessary evil, something we've just got to grin and bear until we can one day retire or live for the weekend.

No, it's actually part of what it means to be a human being made in God's image. And we've seen that God calls us to see our work as an opportunity to love, love our city, love our co-workers, love the world in which we live through our work.

And I hope this has been encouraging and inspiring and uplifting. And yet, as we said two weeks ago, that isn't always our lived experience.

[1 : 09] Sometimes work is hard and frustrating and difficult. Sometimes it's degrading. And you have bosses and co-workers and markets and all sorts of things that go wrong.

And why is that? Why is it that this thing that God gives us, which is good, can also be so hard and difficult? Well, this morning we're going to look at Genesis 3 and understand why it is that work is sometimes difficult and hard.

And why it is that sometimes God calls us to difficult work. And so Celeste is going to come and read Genesis 3 for us. And so let's listen to that. And as she does that, I'm going to tell you, we've got two things to say.

You can come on up, Celeste. This morning we're going to look at the curse, why work is hard. And secondly, the crucible, why God calls us to difficult work. So let's listen up. So this morning's scripture reading comes from Genesis 3.

Please follow along in your bulletin or on the screen. There you go. Starting in verse 1, we read, Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made.

[2 : 20] He said to the woman, Did God actually say, You shall not eat of any tree in the garden? And the woman said to the serpent, We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, but God said, You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it lest you die.

But the serpent said to the woman, You will not surely die, for God knows that when you eat of it, your eyes will be opened and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.

So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate.

Then in verse 16, To the woman he said, I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing. In pain you shall bring forth children.

Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you. And to Adam he said, Because you have listened to the voice of your wife, and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, you shall not eat of it.

[3 : 38] Cursed is the ground because of you. In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and 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 it you were taken. For you are dust, and to dust you shall return.

This is the word of God. Great. Thank you. Thank you, Celeste. Let's pray briefly as we come to look at this word. Heavenly Father, your word is always good.

God, your word is life-giving. You are the true God, and your word speaks life to us. And so God, as we come to your word this morning, we want to understand your heart. We want to understand what it is that you have to say about our work.

And God, we want to hear your commissioning and your calling to send us into our workplaces full of your spirit, alive to you, trusting and obeying you, and being a light and a blessing to this world.

[4 : 42] And so we pray, God, as we look at your word, won't you, by your spirit, speak to us. In your name we pray. Amen. Okay, so, like I said, we're going to look at two things this morning.

The curse, why work is hard and difficult, and secondly, the crucible, why God calls us to difficult work. So firstly, the curse. Now, Genesis 1 and 2, we looked at it a few weeks ago, describe God's pattern and design for our world, the way that the world ought to be.

But Genesis 3 describes the way the world actually is. And there's a big difference between the twos. And Genesis 3 tells us why the world is fractured and difficult and hard and is full of sickness and death and injustice and selfishness and chaos and tears and agony and frustration.

And at the heart of the Bible's understanding of the world in which we live and the brokenness of our world is the concept of sin, which is mankind's rejection of God, rebellion of God, and as a consequence, our alienation from Him.

Now, I know that we live in a world in which we're always told to think well of ourselves and positive thinking and, you know, don't think about such bad stuff. And I know it can feel like, oh boy, here we go again.

[6 : 07] The past is just trying to make me feel even worse about myself than I already do. But hear me out. Because the Bible says that unless we understand the roots of the problem, we'll never grasp the solution and the good news of the gospel.

And so the Bible, like a good doctor, goes right to the root of the problem and tells us what's wrong with the world. And so Genesis 3, we see that in the midst of this garden paradise that God created, God tells Adam and Eve not to do something very specifically, not to eat the fruit of a certain tree.

Now, what is so important about that tree in particular? Well, probably nothing. Very important. Wasn't that tree. The issue is the instruction.

Will they listen to God and trust Him and obey Him? Will they trust that God knows what's best? Or will they go their own way? And so, Satan comes to Adam and Eve and he says three things.

Firstly, he twists God's word and he says, has God really said this? And he puts a different spin on it. Secondly, he questions God's word by saying, you won't really die.

[7 : 18] God is lying to you. You can't really trust Him. But thirdly, he says, if you do what I tell you, you will be like God. And so Adam and Eve trust the Satan and they rebel against God.

Now, on the one hand, what the Satan said was absolutely right. In a sense, Adam and Eve, mankind, humanity, did become like God. It didn't become divine in that sense, but we took on the status of God in our lives and in our world.

We decided, we know what's best. We'll determine what's right and wrong. We will become our own authority. We will decide how we should live. And so, having dethroned God from the heart of humanity, having usurped His authority and put ourselves where God should be, we unleashed this catastrophe across the world.

And because of our rebellion, it unleashed the root of all that's wrong and broken with our world.

But, so on the one hand, what Satan said was right, but on the other hand, what he said was absolutely wrong because he says, you won't surely die.

Nothing's going to happen to you. And yet, as a result of Adam and Eve's rebellion, absolutely death entered the world. Now, Adam and Eve didn't suddenly fall over and stop breathing, right?

[8 : 42] But, but in a sense, decay, deterioration, breakdown of society, death itself entered into the very kind of fabric of our entire world.

So that every aspect of our world and our humanity, physically, spiritually, emotionally, psychologically, every aspect of this world is now tainted and affected by the deterioration and the death virus.

Our world is broken. Nothing works as it should be. It's kind of like, I don't know if you've seen those before and after photos, right? You see them everywhere in the MTR station, right?

Before you signed up for that dieting program and afterwards, right? Before you bought that million dollar hair treatment program, right?

You look like me and afterwards, right? You look like Oscar, okay? Before and after photos, right? It's kind of like that except it's the other way around. Before, the world is full of beauty and joy and purpose and delight and meaning and significance and harmony and afterwards, the world is full of chaos and confusion and pain and agony and heartache and anxiety and stress and the death virus has come in.

[10:07] And Genesis 3 says, or Genesis says that this is true of every area of life but as Celeste read to us, one of the areas that this impacts is our work. Our work.

And so, look at Genesis 3 with me if you've got in the bulletin. Verse 17, to Adam, God said, because you have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you saying you shall not eat of it, cursed is the ground because of you.

In pain, you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you and you shall eat of the plants of the field. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread until you return to the ground for out of it you were taken from, you are from dust and to dust you shall return. Now, this passage is rich and full and there's a lot we could explore in it but let me just pick up three things that relate to our work in this passage. The first is this. It tells us that our work is frustrating and difficult.

Okay? Now, you probably don't need me to convince you of that. If you've worked more than one week in your life you will know that. Right? Work is hard. It's frustrating.

[11:17] Whether that's physical work or mental work whether it's paid work or unpaid work you're a student at university and you put in so many hours in that exam and you still only just pass or maybe you don't.

Okay? You, it feels like you're pushing rocks up a hill. Look at what he says here. The ground is cursed of you. It means the resources that you're meant to work with time and people and energy and things they seem to conspire against you.

You put hundreds of hours into something and you see mediocre results. Now, it's not that work itself is a curse. It's not that God says, okay, you sinned.

Now, I'm going to make you work. Before that, you could just live on holiday. Work itself is not a curse but now our work operates under a cursed and fallen world and so our work becomes hard and difficult.

Look at verse 19. By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread. Okay, that just feels like life in Hong Kong in the summer, right? That's just the way it is.

[12:26] In pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life. So, in other words, you'll be fruitful. It won't be that there'll be no fruit from your work but it'll come through difficult work.

Rather than the environment working with you, now it seems like the system is stacked against you. Maybe you spend months developing this new product or this system and you're about to unleash it and you get a new boss and in one minute he pulls the plug.

Okay, I'm sure many of us have experienced that. Or maybe you spent years developing this product, you sign this deal and you're about to go full steam ahead and the next day one of the key members of your team resigns, hands on their resignation.

It just feels like, oh, can everything, just obstacle after obstacle after obstacle. And remember, God's mandate to Adam and Eve was to work the ground to cultivate the garden so it would flourish and fruit trees and blessing.

And what do they get? Thorns and thistles. In other words, the garden of delight at times resembles more of a desert. It's hard work.

[13:36] Maybe you have this great vision for your industry or your company and you've got to introduce something that's going to bring safety for employees or change the way that the industry works or change business ethics in your company.

And yet it just feels like the more you try, you come against obstacle and frustration and difficulty. It's just hard work. Now if you were here last year, we preached through the book of Ecclesiastes and one of the things that Koheleth, the teacher, says to us in chapter 2, he talks about work in the broken world.

Look at what he says. He says, I gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun. Because sometimes the person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must

leave it to be enjoyed by someone who did not work for it.

What is a man from all the toil and striving with which he toils under the sun? For all his days are sorrow. His work is an irritation. Even in the night his heart does not rest.

How many of us can resonate with that? You sign off on Friday afternoon, you should be at rest for the weekend, but the whole weekend your mind is thinking. Or you lie in bed at night and you're wondering, grappling.

[14:52] Even at night your heart does not rest. Now, what's the implication of this? Well, one of the implications is this. It doesn't mean that if work is hard or difficult, it doesn't mean you're in the wrong job or the wrong career and you need to jump ship, right?

So sometimes people say, oh, I'm working so hard, 50 hours a week, can you believe it? Maybe this is not my calling. I know my calling is to be a quality assurance control manager at Lindt Chocolate, right?

That must be my calling in life. Or to, you know, be a snow ski instructor on the slopes of Japan. That must be what God has called me to do. Or maybe, my calling is to test the deck chairs in the Maldives, right?

Somebody's got to do it. Okay, God, I will respond to that calling, right? No, but actually, just because work is hard, difficult, doesn't mean you're in the wrong place.

Because all work in some sense is going to be hard. Because we live in a fallen and broken world. Every job is going to have difficulties. Every job is going to have its challenges. And many jobs, they look like the perfect job until you get inside.

[16:06] And then you find that actually your manager at Lindt Chocolate is the grumpiest person in the whole world. Or maybe you finally get that job at Lindt Chocolate and some batch is contaminated and a whole bunch of people in Brazil get sick and you are responsible, right?

Every job in its world is going to be difficult. And just because we think this job doesn't spark joy in my life, doesn't mean it's time to change jobs so that you're in the wrong job. Actually, God's design and calling for our work is not to necessarily be the most wonderful place in the whole world.

It's to love. It's to serve. It's to serve our society and God. So, first thing, work is difficult and challenging. Second thing is this. Our relationships at work are affected by the fall.

Now, we're going to talk about this a little bit more next week. So, let me not say too much about this. But in verse 16 that Celeste read to us, one of the things you see is the breakdown of relationship between Adam and Eve.

And this is symbolic of all relationships in the world. That where God has put people together to partner together and work together and strengthen and encourage each other for the task that He's called us to, now often those relationships are marked by friction, frustration, difficulty, irritation.

[17:27] And we see this all the time, right? With our colleagues and our co-workers. Rather than celebrating and encouraging each other, strengthening each other, now there's aggression. There's competition from colleagues.

There's managers degrading and abusing people. There's gossip. There's talking behind people's back. And our relationships get difficult and hard. And sometimes the work environment, Jaya spoke about it.

It's not always easy. Now, we'll talk more about this next week. But what are the implications of this? Well, one of the implications is this. Develop the discipline of examining your own life and your own heart.

What I mean by that is this. Sometimes at work people are difficult. Sometimes colleagues in particular can be difficult. And it's easy to think, oh, I can't believe I get to work with these people, right?

But here's the thing. They might just be thinking the same thing about you. Okay? And maybe one of the reasons why there's friction in the team is because I'm selfish.

[18:28] And it's my issues with my heart. And so one of the best things we can do is to pray Psalm 139. Search me, oh God, and know my heart. Try me and know my thoughts.

God, see if there's any grievous way in me and lead me in the way of everlasting life. And then secondly, make it your goal to be the best colleague, the best member of the team in your school, your company, et cetera.

Okay? So the fall affects our work itself. It affects the relationships, the people at work. But here's the third thing that the fall, the curse of the broken world does, is that it makes work selfish and

enslaving.

Again, Jaya spoke about this. One of the main consequences of the fallen world in Genesis 3 is the fact that our relationship with God, the life source of all hope and meaning and purpose in life, is now, that relationship is fractured.

And there's an alienation that has come into the world. And so, what that means is that we now tend to look to things in our world to do what only God is meant to do.

[19 : 37] We tend to look to the things in our world, such as work and people and money, to provide the things that God is meant to or play the role that God is meant to play. And so we often tend to look to our work as a kind of God-like idol.

What's an idol? An idol is something we look to or make sacrifices for, something we lay down our life to in some way, something we worship, trusting that in return, it will bless us, it will provide for us, it will keep us safe and secure, it will give us validation and identity.

The things that God has meant to provide for us, we now look to work to do those things. And so we see this not long after Genesis 3 in Genesis 11. it's a fascinating account of a bunch of men and women that come together, they've made some technological and engineering breakthroughs, they've learnt how to bake bricks rather than just relying on stones, and they come together and they say this, let us make a tower and a city and we will make a name for ourselves.

And so they gather together to build the city, this tower, the tower of Babel. Tim Keller says that in the Bible, to make a name for yourself, always means to construct an identity, to build a sense of self-worth that proves to us that we're not a nobody.

And that's what the people are trying to do, right? They come and they work together to construct an identity, a sense of self, to prove that I'm not a failure, I'm not a nobody.

[21 : 12] But friends, don't we do this with work all the time? Jai spoke about it. We look to our work to provide an identity to prove to ourselves at least that we're not a failure.

We look to our work, we make great sacrifices to our work. We sacrifice our kids on the altar of work. We sacrifice our well-being and our health on the altar of work.

So that work can provide for us what God has meant to provide. A sense of identity, a sense of hope, a sense of security, a sense of purpose.

And what that does is it makes work selfish and it ultimately enslaves us. Richard Phillips said it like this, God never designed people to find their identities or their ultimate delight in the achievement of their own hands.

God intended for our work to be a way of delighting in and worshiping him, not an act of self-actualization and self-glory. This is why one of the consequences for sin is not only that work is difficult, but that success is empty.

[22 : 22] That's a profound thought. One of the consequences of sin is not only that work is difficult, but even success is empty. Now, what are the implications of this?

Well, for work to not become an idol, the thing that you look to to validate you or give you meaning or purpose or identity in life, you've got to encounter in a profoundly deep way the true and living God.

In other words, unless you, God says this, the way to demolish the idols in our heart is not just to tell ourselves, don't worship work, don't worship work.

You've got to encounter a better and more profound God, the living God, the true God himself. And you've got to encounter God in such a way that he disrupts your life, okay, by dismantling your idols, but at the same time gives you profound peace because you've encountered the true and living God.

You've got to allow God to disrupt your life by dethroning the idols that you look to. And yet, as you do that, as you trust him, you'll find that in that disruption, actually he'll bring you peace.

[23 : 34] You see, one of the things with idols is that we look to them to give us security and peace, and all they give us, they give us restlessness. They actually rob us of peace. And God says that if you allow him to dismantle the idol, to demolish the idol, if you allow him to actually disrupt your life, it will feel so scary.

It'll feel like you're taking a step out of the boat onto water. It'll feel profoundly scary, and yet in that place, you will find peace. peace, the peace that your heart really longs for.

Remember the words of Augustine, our hearts were made for you, O God, and we'll always be restless until we find our rest in you. And so that's what the gospel is all about.

Jesus says he came to prove to you by going to the cross and dying and rising again, that he alone is God, but also that you can trust him. Okay, so work is difficult. difficult. Work itself is difficult. Our relationships are difficult. Work becomes ensnaring and selfish. But the other thing that we see in the Bible is work is not only operate under the curse and difficult and hard.

[24 : 47] Secondly, work is a crucible. Why God calls us to difficult work. So what I'm trying to argue here is that all work is hard and difficult because we live in a fall and a broken world.

But here's the question. Sometimes God calls us specifically into difficult work. And why is that? Why doesn't God just call, you know, why doesn't God just say, listen, you're a Christian now. I love you. You should go and work in the Maldives, right? Let all the difficult work be done by those people out there, right? Why does God call us to difficult work? Well, one of the things that the Bible tells us is God doesn't just say, listen, you live in a fallen world, a broken world, suck it up, one day you'll get to heaven, okay?

One of the things that God tells us is that you live in a fallen and a broken world, that's true, but the difficulties that come our way are not just bad luck, but are filtered through the hands of a loving Father, okay?

In other words, to endure the difficulty of work is not just a fact of life. For many of us, in some way, it's part of God's divine call on our lives. It's actually that God calls us and leads us into difficult work.

[26 : 05] And that's because if you are a Christian this morning, and I know not all of us are Christians, but if you're a Christian this morning, part of God's call is to see your work as a crucible. Now, I don't know if you know what a crucible is.

A crucible is this pot or a container that is put into an extremely hot furnace so that the thing that's inside of it, often precious metals or gold or silver or something, is able to be melted and refined and purified or shaped and molded.

So they put some gold or some kind of metal in a crucible, they put the crucible in this insanely hot furnace, and it melts the thing inside so that it can be purified. What God is saying is this, throughout the Bible, God says again and again and again, that God calls us sometimes to difficult and extremely hard circumstances because God uses those circumstances as a crucible to shape us and to purify us and to mold us and to shape our characters to be the kind of people that he's called us to be.

So for instance, Proverbs 17 says, a crucible is for silver, a furnace is for gold, but the Lord tests the heart of his people. In other words, sometimes the struggle and the frustrations of our work is not only because of the curse, but because actually they are God's crucibles to shape us, to reveal what's inside of our hearts.

What are we really trusting in? Where are we really finding our identity and our hope and our security? And for those of us who are Christians, we tend to think, okay, my identity is in Jesus, I know that, I'm secure in him, until you get to work and that deal falls flat, right?

[27 : 47] Or your boss scolds you or something goes wrong or you don't make that promotion and suddenly our whole world crumbles and falls apart. What's happening? The refiner is at work in your world.

God is at work in your life and he's shaping you and he's molding you. And so sometimes the difficulty of work is meant to refine our characters. So God wants us to be patient, but how are you ever going to know how impatient you are until your patience is tested, right?

Or how are you going to see that you've got an anger problem when life is always going your way? Sometimes God uses the difficulty of work to reveal what's really in our hearts and to show our need for him.

I often think to myself, I used to, I kind of laugh at this, I used to think I was a very patient person. Until two things happened. One, I had kids. And two, a whole bunch of work situations arose where I got so impatient with people and I realized I am a very impatient person.

But it took the difficulty of the crucible to reveal that, right? And so sometimes God allows difficulty to come our way, oftentimes in and through our work, so that we can see our need for him.

[29 : 02] Paul writes this in Corinthians, listen to what he says here. He says, we do not want you to be unaware, brothers and sisters, of the affliction we experienced when we were in Asia. Some of you might feel the same, right?

In America, it was so easy. I came to Asia, deep affliction. For we were utterly burdened beyond our strength and we despaired of life itself. Indeed, we felt we had received the sentence of death. But that was to make us rely not on ourselves, but on the God who raises us from the dead. You see that? Again and again, the scriptures say that the hardship and the difficulty of work are meant to be like a shepherd's goad, a shepherd's staff that are actually meant to draw us back to God and lead us to the foot of the cross and say, God, I need you.

They're meant to reveal the counterfeit gods that we are trusting in. And sometimes we may think, oh, work is difficult and the environment isn't that good, it must be time to leave. Maybe, but maybe not.

Maybe that's exactly where God wants you because he wants to show you what you're trusting in and what's in your heart. Friends, again and again and again, the scriptures tell us that God is absolutely clear on this, that God is infinitely more concerned about our character than our comfort. [30 : 24] And I know that in the 21st century, that's hard to believe because we think that the one thing we're entitled to is a comfortable life. But again and again and again, God says that he's infinitely more concerned with our character than our comfort.

Just read almost any book in the Bible, any of the New Testament epistles, any of the gospels, right? You'll see again and again suffering and hardship, anxiety, difficulty, stress.

This is a normal part of the Christian life. And sometimes God brings these things into our life because he wants us to see what's in our hearts. Now, last thing before we, last section.

What about, what about if your job or you work in an environment or a company or for a boss that the values directly contradict your values as a follower of Jesus?

Maybe your company is very vocal in supporting a cause or a movement that you as a follower of Jesus don't, can't support. Maybe you work for a company that invests in the industry or brokers deals for an industry that is doing harmful stuff to the environment or is contributing towards division in society and breakdown society.

[31 : 39] What do you do? What do you do if your boss treats people badly or sexist or racist or abuses people in the company? What do you do when your boss wants you to go out drinking with clients and binging on alcohol so that you can win business for the company?

Should we leave our job? Go work for a Christian NGO? Go start a Christian investment company?

Maybe go work for a church because, you know, we don't have any challenges at the church.

Okay. Well, friends, the Bible doesn't give us answers to each and every situation, but let's just think about this briefly. And I want to say three things to us in that situation.

Four things. One, it's really hard and there's no short, quick answers. Two, that book over there by Daniel Doriani is a really great book and he's got a great chapter on that called Work in Hard Places.

I encourage you to read it. Three, no workplace in the earth is going to be purely good or purely easy or purely ethical. Okay. Every workplace is going to come face to face with these challenges.

[32 : 44] And every workplace, in fact, in some ways, the more corrupt the workplace, the more it needs God-centered people who have the wisdom of a God-fearing life and who's hard to shape our Christ to be in that place.

And so if it's possible that you can still work in that place without contributing towards the evil, maybe God wants you to be in that place as specifically to bring some element of wisdom or light to that workplace.

It may be that God wants us to stay there because our responsibility is to love others more than find a comfortable job. And when we think about it in the Bible, there's actually tons of examples of men and women that worked in really difficult work environments.

So I think of Daniel, right? Daniel goes to Nebuchadnezzar and he works as an advisor to King Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon, who was this pagan, ungodly man. And Daniel works in the palace for almost 70 years, his entire life for Nebuchadnezzar and his followers.

Or think about Queen Esther. She's married to King Xerxes, the king of the Persian king. He was a terrible man, a misogynist. And she's in the palace.

[33 : 55] Or think of a man called Obadiah, who worked as a court official in the palace of Ahab. Ahab was a terrible king in Israel. Murders people, kills people.

Obadiah works as a court official in his palace. And Obadiah, we're told, is a God-fearing, godly man. All these men and women worked for in the service of pretty wicked, egomaniac men.

And yet, who did terrible things. And yet, they stayed there. And one of the reasons why they stayed there was because they saw that God had called them there and that their purpose there was to serve, and in many instances, save the lives of people that otherwise would have been severely impacted had they not been there.

So, for instance, right, Esther saves almost the entire Jewish nation in Persia because she's in the palace and can speak up and stand up for the people who are going to be exterminated.

Daniel saves the lives of other advisors to the king of Nebuchadnezzar and gets to tell Nebuchadnezzar about the God of Abraham and Israel and Isaac. Look, Obadiah gets to save a number of people, hundreds of people in Israel because he's in the palace and because of his influence there.

[35 : 11] And so, all these men and women saving get to save and do great good even though they work in extremely difficult circumstances. Imagine they had left and said, I think I'm going to go taste chocolate at the Lymph Factory, right?

But God had a calling there, a purpose there. But here's the other thing that we really need to see. All of these men and women served in dangerous and difficult situations and yet all of them were willing to put their jobs and even their lives on the line because they knew who their true king was. And so, while they serve in the palace of the king, all of them ultimately know there is a higher king who has a higher authority whose voice I will listen to ultimately.

All of them knew that there was a God in heaven who had the ultimate authority of their lives and who they had given their ultimate allegiance to. And so, do you remember Esther? She does a very dangerous thing.

Mordecai says to her, if you keep silent at this time, God will bring deliverance through another means. And she says, I will speak up to the king even though it is against the law and if I perish, I will perish.

[36 : 25] Or do you remember Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego? They say to Nebuchadnezzar, you want to throw us in the fiery furnace? Our God is able to save us and deliver us. But even if he does not, we will not bow down to you, O great king.

And so friends, these are difficult and challenging decisions and there's no quick answers. But ultimately, what's going to determine whether the hard and challenging environment corrupts you or whether it refines you is who is your king?

Who have you sworn allegiance to? Who holds the ultimate voice in your life? Where does your allegiance lie? And so here's my final thought for us today.

That working in hard and challenging environments, it may be that God has sent you to that environment because out of love for those people, he wants them to hear about the good news of Jesus.

Friends, isn't that why Jonah went to Nineveh? Hundreds of thousands of people in Assyria did not know God. And so God sends Jonah into Nineveh, into Assyria, to tell them about God.

[37 : 31] Isn't that why God sent Joseph into Egypt to save people? Friends, is that not why God the Father sent the Lord Jesus Christ into a dark and crooked world?

Because of his profound love for you and for me, that we could come to know the hope of the gospel. You see, we didn't read it, but in Genesis chapter 3, we go back to the curse.

In verse 15, there's an amazing line. And God says to the snake, which is a symbol of the Satan, he says, there will come a descendant of the woman of Eve.

A man will be born and you will make it your business to destroy him and to crush him. And you will try to kill him. And even as you kill him, actually he will be killing and crushing you.

And so God says to the Satan, there will come a descendant of the woman who you will think that you have crushed him and yet, and you'll even think that you've succeeded.

[38 : 34] And yet in doing so, he will crush you and the rebellion that you've unleashed on the earth. There will come a man that you will think that you've put to death and yet his death will actually bring life because in his dying, he will take upon himself the curse of this broken world so that all those who trust in him will start to feel the curse of this world start to lift off of their shoulders.

Friends, God tells to Satan that there will come a descendant who will in dying bring an end to death, who in dying will bring life.

Kevin DeYoung summarizes the entire message of the Bible saying, the snake crusher has come to bring us back into the garden. And friends, isn't that true? Jesus Christ came, Satan did his best,

tried to kill him and crush him.

And yet in his dying on the cross, he crushed the curse of what Satan had did in the world. And on the cross, you remember what Jesus' final words are? Some of his very last words, he says, Father, it is finished.

My work is done. Father, I've done the work that you called me to do. Friends, Genesis 3 is full of darkness and difficulty. It tells us about how the curse has come into the world because of our rebellion.

[39 : 57] And yet even there in the Bible's darkest moments, there's a ray of light, a ray of hope, because it tells us about how Jesus Christ will come and reverse the curse and take upon himself the curse of the world so that all those who hope in him and trust in him and believe in him and follow him will start to feel the curse lift off our shoulders as we start to feel the effects of the new world come in.

Friends, work is hard and is full of frustration because of the curse of sin. But thank God almighty, that's not the final word in the Bible. The final word is that Jesus has come and Jesus is coming again.

And he will take those who love him and trust him into the new heavens and the new earth where we will work with joy and dignity and delight and with pleasure and out of love and where the curse of this broken world will be no more.

Friends, because if you trust him and love him and follow him and obey him, sometimes God will send you into the darkest and the hardest moments and places of our world full of his strength, full of his power, full of his light, full of his hope that you can bring hope into those places as well. Let's pray together. Maybe actually before we pray, I've got some questions on the screen. Maybe you can go there. Let's take a minute just to think and reflect about these scriptures and these questions and then I'll lead us in a time of prayer.

[41 : 30] Friends, in what ways God, in what ways have you experienced the frustration and difficulty of work? In what ways work a crucible to shape and grow you? How might God be calling you to trust him this week?

Is there anything you need to pray, confess or celebrate? Let's take a few minutes just to think about that and then I'll lead us in prayer. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen.

Let's pray together.

Heavenly Father, today we offer you our work with all its joys and frustrations, its delights and difficulties. Father, we pray through the power of your spirit, won't you help us to worship you in our work, to love and serve others through our work, to persevere amidst the frustrations of our work, to live out our distinct identity as we work.

Father, won't you help us to surrender the idols that steal our work and to trust you in the challenges of our work, to be steadfast for you in the crucible of work and to be a light of transformation where we work.

[43 : 30] Father, as we worship you now and tomorrow, through songs at church and through our work, won't you give us the faith to know that you will refine us and use us in your ultimate work of creating a new heavens and a new earth.

We pray this in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen. Amen. Amen. Amen. Hodan II its

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