
Life's Work

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Sunday, June 14, 2020 — Part 3: The Ruin and Redemption of Work

Work after the Fall of Humans

Genesis 3:1 (ESV) Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden’?”

The snake is obviously under the influence of some other being. What does this being do? He deceives and dupes humans into all sorts of rebellion and foolishness. Is God holding out on me? There are things that could work for you that God says you shouldn't do.

Is this a being of equal status of the creator? One that has God biting His nails and wringing His hands worried about its power?

Genesis 3:6 (ESV) 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.

Sin enters the story and begins to undo all the goodness that God has made and turns it back into “tohu vavohu.” Human relationships get fractured, relationship with God is affected; marriage gets fragmented, family gets fragmented. Even humans' relationship with work is fractured.

Genesis 3:17-19 (ESV) 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,’ 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.”

Humans can still eat (receive the fruit of their labor), but the environment has changed. Humans were made for work, but now it becomes much more difficult with the elements working against you. Thorns and thistles enter into the picture. (This may or may not be the origin story of weeds and thorns.) The environment of work with sin being present is our work becomes harder because there are things that begin to resist your work and diminish the fruits of your labor. I may poor choices

between what is good and not good, other people are making poor choices, my own competency caps work against me, my own selfish agenda and ego resist the fruits of my labor, other people's ambition work in resistance. There are things completely outside our control that resist us, market conditions, pandemics, industry upheavals, technological advances, etc. These can be thorns and thistles in our work that resist the good we work for.

The **environment** of work is made more difficult by sin

Work consists of moral decisions about what is good and not good. Sin in our lives and the lives of others are now resisting our efforts toward goodness and beauty. Sin clouds our judgment in discerning what is good and not good. It distorts and fractures the relationships we engage in while carrying out our work.

Genesis 1 through 3 gives us the tension between the vision of work, going into the wild and waste and bringing out the raw potential and bring order and beauty and goodness, and the ruin of work, our labors are difficult and fractured with resistance from sin and death entering into creation. Work can be both good and hard. Work and life being difficult and having resistance does not necessarily mean you're in the wrong place or job or career or marriage or friendship.

But there is a seed of hope...hope for redemption.

Genesis 3:14-15 (ESV) The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel."

Two lineages emerge from this story: one will be those who give into the temptation of the serpent, of evil, sin, and death, and those who will cling to the line of God's promise. There is a "he" that will emerge from the line of woman who will crush the head of the serpent, one who will destroy sin and evil at its source. How? He will "step on its head" but at the moment of his victory, he will be mortally wounded as defeats evil. He will be a "wounded victor" who has to take the venom of the serpent into himself, but at the absorption of the venom, the evil of the serpent that he has lured all of humanity into, is the means by which he crushes the serpent's evil at its source.

Work in New Creation

This promise is not just about our personal redemption, but includes even the redemption of our work. If we fast-forward to the end of the story we see a city/garden/temple...

Revelation 22:1-5 (ESV) Then the angel showed me the river of the water of life, bright as crystal, flowing from the throne of God and of the Lamb through the middle of the street of the city; also, on either side of the river, the tree of life with its twelve kinds of fruit, yielding its fruit each month. The leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations. No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him. They will see his face, and his name will be on their foreheads. And night will be no more. They will need no light of lamp or sun, for the Lord God will be their light, and they will reign forever and ever.

What does the final redemption look like? A city that is a garden, a new creation. This is a vision of “tov” (good) in its final, redemptive form. Our work is going into all of the wild wastelands of creation and bringing goodness and beauty into it.

This is the grand story of work, the story we are to find our place in so that our story makes sense within this larger context.

At the cross, Jesus absorbs all of the sin and evil of the serpent and takes it into death with Him. His resurrection means that sin and death do not have the final word. What the resurrection enables is a slow, partial moving forward of this redemption of God’s world and work in our lives. We are called to take more and more of God’s redemptive work into our lives, taking the wild wasteland’s of our hearts and lives and transforming them to goodness, and allow that work to flow into the totality of our lives, including our work.

Conclusion

Our lives and our work are about moving this new creation agenda forward. This is why we pray, “Your kingdom come, Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.” We worship and pray and read scripture to anchor our whole lives in this story, the work of Jesus’ redemption. This is not just at a “soul” level, this is for all levels of our lives.

Each day of our lives can move this new creation kingdom of God agenda forward, not only in “church work” or “spiritual matters,” but in our workplaces and homes and cities. This is how we see cities transformed by Jesus, you and I being His kingdom vessels and working for Him every day.