



St. Andrews Sunday, October 30, 2011  
Pastor Mark Toone  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *Zombie: Dying to Be Significant*

Genesis 3: 14-24

When I was doing youth ministry in Bakersfield, one of our annual events was the visit of Snake Man. Snake Man would come to the church with his supply of serpents and provide an educational and entertaining introduction to those much-maligned creatures. One year, Snake Man showed up to a room full of 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> graders. The place was buzzing. He asked for a volunteer and up popped one brave little fifth grade girl. Snake Man pulled out a beautiful green non-venomous tree snake and asked if she would hold it. "He's very gentle," said Snake Man. "Nothing to worry about." The girl said yes, so he placed the snake in her hands and went on with his spiel.

Suddenly, the little girl said, "He's biting me. He's biting me!" "No he's not," said Snake Man, looking over his shoulder. "He's very gentle." "He's biting me, he's biting me," she insisted. Finally, Snake Man turned around and sure enough, that snake was clamped down on the little girl's arm. He slapped the snake in the head to make him let go. He knocked the snake out of her hands. The snake just held on and the little girl stood there, arm outstretched, crying, "He's BITING ME. HE'S BITING ME!" Snake Man kept slapping the snake silly, the little girl kept saying, "He's biting me, he's biting me," and the room full of kids was screaming.

Finally, Snake Man knocked the snake off. And there, on that little girl's arm, was a perfect, bloody mouth mark. Snake Man didn't come back to church again.

When the Serpent took a bite out of Adam and Eve in the garden, it scarred them—and all of us—forever. This morning, we take a look at that scar as we listen to God's curse on their disobedience. And pay especial attention to verse 17. (Read)

God is a good parent. When he told his children there would be deadly consequences if they ate of that tree, **there would be consequences**. Now, God spells them out. The serpent first: He will crawl on his belly and there will be hatred between him and the woman and her offspring forever. Now this is not just about all you people who are completely creeped out by snakes. (Raise your hands?) Remember... who was the Serpent, actually? This is the Devil. So at a deeper level, this curse is a prediction of the battle that will persist for all of history between humanity and the Devil, a battle to tempt and destroy us. Anybody blow it this weekend; really mess up? The curse continues.

But there is a word of hope in this curse. Did you see it? 15. *"He will crush your head and you will strike his heel."* Who is He? Who is God talking about? Jesus! This is one of the earliest prophecies concerning the coming of Jesus... a descendant of Eve. The Devil will strike at him—will wound him—as he did on the cross. But in the end, Jesus will bring his heel down to crush the serpent's head. In the end, God will be victorious. But before then, the Serpent will tempt us and seek to destroy us.

Next comes the woman's curse: How many mothers out there? Every labor pain you experienced... you can thank Eve for that. Furthermore, the marriage relationship is harmed by the Fall. Adam was given spiritual authority in the garden, including the responsibility to care for his wife. But now, that care turns into domination. *"...he will rule over you."* Every time you see a husband bullying his wife instead of providing loving servant-leadership, you are watching the curse at work.

But now we come to Adam's curse, on which we will focus this morning. Remember, since they ate the fruit, we have seen all kinds of alienation. They are alienated from God and hide from him. They are alienated from themselves and cover up in shame. And they are alienated from each other, pointing their fingers in blame, right?

But in verse 17 comes more alienation. What kind? Alienation from the earth. *"Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return."*

**So even the earth suffers because of the sin of humanity.** You don't have to be a radical environmentalist to notice that the earth has taken a real beating at the hands of fallen humanity, do you? But the curse on the earth ends up being a curse on the man, too, doesn't it? Why? The ground is now full of thorns and thistles. What is the impact upon the man? His toil will be painful. He will sweat and struggle in his labor. He will have to work HARD in order to survive.

When we build houses in Mexico, we have to hand-dig every foundation. How many of you have done that sort of work? Believe me, when you are swinging a pick and clearing out that rocky, sunbaked site one shovelful at a time, by the time you are done, God isn't the only one cursing that ground!

The curse in the garden affects everything, doesn't it? Even the man's work. **It is a curse on vocation.** Let's think through this together. What does this story tell us about work? I have a few questions for you.

1. "Because of the curse, we have to work." Yes or no?
2. "The primary purpose of work is to take care of your family and yourself." Yes or no?
3. "The purpose of work is to make money." Yes or no?

Well, the answer to all three of those questions is NO, NO and NO. Work is not a part of the curse. **Toilsome, difficult work** is the result of the curse. But look back to Genesis 2: 15: "The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to **work it and take care of it.**" Wait a second, that can't be right, can it? Didn't God put Adam in the garden to lounge around, rest, and enjoy himself? How can paradise include labor? And doesn't the story teach that work primarily about taking care of your family? Nope. Why? Because, when Adam was given work, he had no family. Eve hadn't been created yet! And obviously, work can't be about making money; there was no such thing as money when God assigned Adam to his labors.

So, if work is not a part of the curse—if work is not primarily about taking care of your family and making money—**what is work for? Why do you work?** What is the Bible's answer? Not the world's answer. Not the Tempter's answer? What is God's answer to the question: **Why do you work?** The answer: **Work is worship!** We were created by God to work. It is part of our spiritual wiring. And when we work—when we labor, whatever it is that we are called to do—if we do it well, we are worshiping God!

When we labor—and especially, when we find the sweet spot where our gifts and our passions are aligned with our vocation—we are tapping into a deep sense of our original creative purpose. **ESPECIALLY for men.** Think about it. How do men greet each other as strangers? First, they shake hands and say their name. What's the very next question out of their mouth? "What do you do?" And what is the question that is being asked here? "What is your work?" It's easy to criticize this response as being shallow. Shouldn't the first response be, "I am a follower of Christ" or "I am a husband and a father."

And we can certainly see the effect of the curse on work, can't we? Men who labor at a job they don't love—where they don't feel appreciated—or men who love their job **so much** that they are workaholics. They neglect their wives and their kids. One of the issues our youth staff deal with repeatedly is kids who have every material thing they could want but who feel neglected by their absentee dads and begin to lash out in anger. The Devil has certainly managed to twist work into an obsession that can be damaging.

But beneath the question, "**What do you do?**" At a fundamental and spiritual level is this fact: **we were created to work.** God created us to worship him with our work. This explains why unemployment is so emotionally and spiritually devastating, especially for men. We feel things like this: "I have no purpose. Nobody wants me. I can't take care of my family the way I should. I have no worth." None of these things are true, of course, but they are the cries that arise out of the fact that God created us to worship him with our work!

This is not something you hear very often in church. And I would say, to my discredit, it is something that you have not heard enough from this pulpit, either. You often get the sense that the REALLY spiritual stuff—the REAL worship of God—is the stuff that happens during Sunday worship or on Wednesday nights or in Life Groups or when we teach Sunday School or go on a mission trip. THAT'S really worshipping God. What we do Monday through Friday—and sometimes on Saturday—is really just what is necessary to provide for ourselves and our family so that we will be free to do the REALLY important spiritual work on Sunday morning!

If I have ever said anything that sounds like that—and for every time that I have failed to make this point more clearly—I ask you to forgive me. For every businessman or woman who has ever left here feeling like their day job was somehow a second-rate enterprise, not nearly as holy as what preachers do, forgive me. For every mom who has ever felt like her vocation to raise her children to love God and love humanity was not as important as what we do up here, forgive me! For every student who never understood that when they study well, THAT is their work. That is THEIR worship—forgive me.

There is a gap between Sunday morning and Monday morning, and it is not a gap of God's design. It is a gap in the message of the Church and her leaders. It is we who have failed to declare what Genesis shouts from the very beginning: That your WORK is Worship. That

whether you are a banker or carpenter a doctor or lawyer or garbage man or accountant or stock broker or mom or student—you get the point—WHATEVER God has called you to do for your vocation, that is a SPIRITUAL calling! THAT is YOUR ministry. And when you do your work as if you were doing it for Jesus, you are worshipping him.

What does that look like? John Lennox tells a story about a young apprentice electrician had been hired to wire new homes. After a week, his boss called him into his office. He wanted to know why he was wiring only half as many homes as the other electricians. The young man replied, "There are a lot of regulations to follow, especially for wiring beneath the floor. I can't go any faster." His boss replied, angrily, "You better go faster. Who looks under the floorboards!" The young man replied, "My lord does." Now THAT was a believer who understood that he could worship God with his work.

How about you? If you knew that work was worship—if you believed that—how would it change the way that you approach **your** vocation? What if a restaurant was a church and its workers, ministers of Jesus? If you realized that your welcome as a hostess might be the first time that someone spoke kindly to that person all day long... if you realized that your table-waiting was actually an opportunity to share Christ's love with those you served... if you realized that every meal you prepared was a creative act of worship... if you realized that by being the very best dishwasher you can be, you were honoring God... if you knew that your work was worship, would it change the way that you greeted or waited or cooked or washed?

There are only a handful of us "professional" Christian ministers. Most of us are "amateur" Christians... just as God intended it. But your ministry in your vocation is no less important, no less significant, no less spiritual than anything that I do on a Sunday morning. God gifted you for that. God called you to that. God ordained you to that purpose. And you might have more opportunities in one week to share the Good News with unbelievers than I will in a year of Sundays.

Do you believe that **your** work is worship? Have you ever committed your vocation to the Lordship of Jesus? I know... most of you have given your heart to Jesus. But have you ever given him your work? A doctor friend told me this week, "I have started doing something I've never done before. I try to sense if they would welcome it, and then I ask my patients if I could pray for them." Exactly! Have you ever told the Lord, "I offer you my skills, my career, my labor as an act of worship. Please take the work I do, the relationships that I develop, the opportunities that I have every single day on the job, to witness to your salvation...take them and bless them. May my work be a daily act of worship that is pleasing in your sight and worthy of you."

In a moment, we are going to watch as the names of deceased members of our Chapel Hill family appear on the screen before us. Every name that appears represents a life of labor. (When you loved one appears, please stand to honor them.) One day, **your name** will be on that screen—every one of you—just a few letters to represent your legacy. The largest part of your life will be devoted to work. So, as we watch these names, ask yourself this question: Would I be proud of the way I worshiped God through my labors? Will the legacy of my vocation bring honor to Christ? And if you aren't so sure, wouldn't this be the perfect moment to rededicate your life—your whole life, especially your Monday-Friday life—to the Lord who created you to work and redeems your labor?

## SERMON DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- **READ** the passage out loud.
- **REFLECT & APPLY INDIVIDUALLY:** Each person take 5-7 minutes to circle words or phrases that jumped out at them; jot down your reflections; check the notes in your Study Bible for insight or help. Grapple with what the Spirit is saying to you, your group, the church—write down some applications.
- **REFLECT & APPLY TOGETHER:** Share your thoughts. Don't teach! Listen and reflect on God's word together; grapple with what God is calling us to do and be through this passage.
- **PRAY TOGETHER:** Tell the Lord one thing you are thankful for, and lay one concern before the Lord.
- **DIG DEEPER**
  1. When does work appear in the creation story? What does this tell you about the purpose of work?
  2. In what way does God's curse upon the ground continue to impact our experience of work?
  3. What is the difference between work and vocation?
  4. How does this passage speak to your own experience of vocation?