



June 1, 2014  
Rich Jasper and Pastor Mark Toone  
Chapel Hill Presbyterian Church

## *Blue Collar God: Work Ethic* Colossians 3:17

### **Mark:**

Our work matters to God... and we have been developing a biblical definition of work. Here it is: "Work is doing something with what God gives you so that the world thrives and Jesus is glorified." Of course, this is a very counter-cultural definition. It doesn't talk about paychecks or career advancement or retirement planning or a sense of personal fulfillment—the things we normally associate with reasons to work. This definition is entirely outward-oriented. It is God who gives us our gifts and passions and the opportunities to use them, and it is our calling—whether we draw a paycheck or labor in retirement—to do something with those God-gifts so that the world thrives. Obviously, our family and future are part of our thriving world, but if I do not care for a world that is bigger than our boundary lines and bank accounts and self-interests... I will never experience the joy God intends my work to bring to me.

This morning we complete the definition and you get to ask yourself this most important question: "Is Jesus glorified in my work?" He can be. Unless your work involves things that violate scripture—working as a prostitute or thief or drug pusher—the way you do your work should bring glory to Jesus. The way you plunge a toilet, change diapers, serve drinks, develop a budget, fire an employee, study for an exam, draw blood, try a case... all of these jobs can and should bring glory to Jesus. Our text is short and sweet: Colossians 3:17: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

Do you remember this bracelet? WWJD They were everywhere for a while. Translation: "What would Jesus do?" This verse in Colossians is the "what would Jesus do" verse, "...do all in the name of the Lord Jesus..." Do everything as if you were Jesus' representative—his agent, his steward. As if, when you speak or act, you are doing so with his full authority. As if he were standing right there, watching. As if he were doing it himself. That's what the phrase "in the name of the Lord Jesus" means.

"Whatever you do in word or deed..." It can't get more inclusive than that, can it? Word. The way you speak on the job, the promises you make, the things you say about your customers, your boss, your employee... only say things Jesus would say. And your deeds. Talk is cheap. How many have known Christians who talk a good game, who put up the Jesus front but are absolute hypocrites. Or they play

the Jesus card but are lousy employees. Their work is shoddy, they cannot be counted on to complete their assignment, they are lazy or late or sloppy or over-promisers or blame-shifters.

“Whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus.” WWJD? The way we do our work should enhance Jesus’ reputation.

There are many of you who work this way. I know, because I know you and your work ethic. You bring honor to Jesus by the way you represent him in the workplace. This morning I want you to hear from a friend who has been that kind of worker. Rich isn’t perfect, of course; none of us are. But I have watched him seek to honor Jesus through his work for over twenty years, and I have seen the fruit of that faithfulness. I’m blessed that he is my friend and that he and Sandy are a part of our congregation. Please welcome Elder Rich Jasper.

**Rich:**

First off, let me say that I come before you honored and humbled to be asked to share the pulpit with our Senior Pastor Mark Toone and share some parts of my story about work in my life, a subject about which I am deeply passionate... and very qualified. Because few people have held as many different jobs as I have:

- Dry Cleaning and Tailor clerk
- Window Washer
- Caddie at a Maketewah Country Club
- Paper Boy
- Chauffeur
- Delivery Man
- Store Clerk
- Chemical and Paint worker
- Postal Worker
- Assistant Buyer at McAlpins Department Store
- Ladies Shoe Salesman
- Steel Worker
- Space Plaque Salesman
- Grass Cutter
- Snow Removal Specialist
- Sales and Management Training Executive
- Speaker
- Travel Coordinator and Tour Guide
- Teacher
- Financial Service Executive
- Consultant/Advisor in Merger and Acquisitions
- Partner at Wealth Investment Partners

My working career started by helping my mom and dad in their dry cleaning and tailoring shop in Elmwood Place, Ohio. By the age of 5, I was waiting on

customers in dad's shop. I went through a rigorous training program! The job was six days a week and for a bonus, I got to go to the movie theater on Saturday afternoon! I had to learn to count money, smile and greet the customer and try to exceed the expectations of each one.

The lessons I learned in that first job prepared me for the string of jobs I would hold throughout my career. And as I look back, one of things I have come to realize is that every one of those jobs has been a blessing from God... not only a financial blessing but also the means by which God has shaped me into the person he wanted me to be.

For whom do you work? Boeing, the school district, a volunteer organization, a financial service organization, Starbucks, a health system? No, first of all, you work for God. And what does he require of us as his workers? Let's read Colossians 3:17 again: "And whatever you do, whether in word or deed, do it all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him."

As I have learned what it means to glorify Jesus in my work, whatever the job, God has seen fit to bless me beyond measure. And I'm not just talking about financial blessing. I'm talking about the way that God has used my job to shape me as his disciple and to invest in the lives of other people.

Tuesday of this week, I had lunch with a former business colleague from my days at Russell Investments. Tiffany attended my farewell lunch but, other than email, we hadn't stayed in touch. This was a chance to get caught up. She told me how she was married... for the third time. She also related that she and her husband are trying to have children and seeing a fertility specialist. (Lord, even now, would you give Tiffany and her spouse the desires of their hearts?)

We began to reminisce about old times. And she shared that she and her husband had been invited to a couples group where they were discussing "God stuff." As she told me this story, my heart was overjoyed because, frankly, while she identified with God during my time of employment with her, she was far too busy trying to get ahead to make much room for God in her life.

Several times during our lunch, she told me that my walk with the Lord had been an encouragement to her. The steadiness of my walk with God somehow showed through to her, and she remembered the many times we discussed allowing God to occupy the throne of her life. Yes, believe it or not, we did this in a work environment. It is amazing how open people will be to conversations about spiritual things when their worlds are falling in around them and you've indicated a consistent openness to talk with them about things that matter. Sandy and I spent considerable time with Tiffany, and we tried to live in a way that brought glory to Jesus. At the time, I was never certain my witness had made much of a difference. Tuesday, after eight years, I was grateful to discover that it did.

I'm not sure what difference my lunch with Tiffany might make in her life, but it reminds me of a breakfast meeting that saved my marriage. Sandy and I and our 3-month-old son Aaron moved to Atlanta in 1977. I was working for a "Christian Company" that cited John 10:10 as its work verse: "The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." Ironically, that company tried to steal the most important things in my life.

I was constantly on the road while Sandy was left at home in a new house in a new subdivision with a new baby and no friends. This was a formula for disaster. I would come home on weekends exhausted and get ready for a Monday flight and another week on the road. I was in the air so often that at one point, Sandy's friend asked her which airline I flew for. It was a toxic recipe for our marriage, but I justified it to Sandy and to myself: "Honey, I'm just trying to achieve success, and aren't you happy with all the trappings of success that my job is bringing us? I was blinded by my ambitions. Have you ever been there?"

Thank God for a man I met at Fellowship Bible Church in Roswell, GA setting up and taking down chairs before and after services. His name was Roy Ludwig and he was a living example to me of Colossians 3:17. He invited me to breakfast—the first of many—and became a mentor in my life. I would catch him reading the Bible when I walked into the restaurant for our appointment. We would pray together there in that restaurant. In fact, he ended up hiring me to work as a leader in a firm he started. This mentoring relationship with a gifted businessman who put God and his family first marked my life and career in ways that I didn't even realize.

Years later, I was having lunch with a man from another firm in Atlanta. I asked if it would be okay if I asked a blessing over our meal—something I have tried to practice all my life. Michael reluctantly said yes, and we enjoyed lunch together. Afterwards, he told me he had never heard anyone offer thanks for a meal in his life, especially in a public setting. Could this be "Whatever you do in word or deed..." in action? I think so. And I had no idea how God would use that simple prayer of thanks.

Michael called the National Sales and Marketing Director at Russell Investments in Tacoma and recommended that he hire me to lead a new division at the company. Sure enough, within a few days, I got a call and, as they say, the rest is history. I joined Russell in January of 1990. We were blessed to work for a great company with many outstanding team members. I put into action the things I had learned so many years before from Roy in the workplace... a life that was balanced between family and work, work that I tried to perform in an ethical way that honored Christ.

But I also put into action the things I learned around the breakfast table. I helped start a Bible study with a good friend for those who were interested and, over the years, I'll bet 100 people participated in that time of study and prayer. I

remember a young man named Bruce who attended our Bible study faithfully. I ran into his wife a few months after he started attending the study. She thanked me profusely, because by his attending our study, he became a better husband and father to their children. Wow, I hadn't expected that! Bruce did, and still does, an outstanding job in the workplace, and his family is thriving!

I don't know when I first discovered Colossian 3:17 but when I did, it rang true with the things God has taught me about work over the years. I have always believed that Christians, especially, should demonstrate a high degree of competence. We should strive to do our work excellently so as to bring glory to Jesus. We can't have a "fish sign" at our desk or a bumper sticker on our vehicle and expect that will enable us to succeed. But work isn't just about succeeding or making money—although those are wonderful blessings. Work is one of the most important places where I learned to follow Jesus and where I had the privilege of discipling others.

My work was a daily opportunity to bring glory to the Christ who saved me back when I was 19 years old and who has walked with me ever since. And now, since my retirement from Russell, in some ways, I am working harder than ever. I became involved with Ravi Zacharias Ministries and have had the opportunity to share about faith in the workplace with people around the world.

Pastor Mark has been talking about the sacred/secular divide. I'll bet there are some here this morning who have never considered that God might use them in their workplace to bring glory to Jesus. But I can tell you from personal experience, when you make a commitment to the Lord, who by his power, every word and every deed will bring honor to the name of Jesus. God can do amazing things in and through you!

If you sense the Lord stirring you in this area, I have four suggestions for you: First, read this book: Tim Keller's *Every Great Endeavor*. I know the pastors have used this as a study guide in their work on this sermon series. It is an excellent starting point to re-think your work. Second, seek out a mentor in your life who exhibits maturity in Christ, and ask them to meet with you regularly. I have been on both sides of those mentoring relationships, and it changed my life. For some of you... start and mentor someone beginning this coming week. Third, get serious about studying God's Word. For 30+ years I have started every day in the Bible and it has reminded me whose I am. Lastly, bathe each day of your life in prayer and thankfulness for God allowing you to share with Him in this adventure we call life!

Thank you for the privilege of sharing a small part of my life with my Sweetheart Church. For the remaining days that God grants me on earth, I pray that he will continue to remind me to have a servant's heart and recognize that I'm working for Him and desire to have him say to me, "Well done my good and faithful servant!"

**Mark:**

WWJD. What would Jesus do? This morning, we come to our reminder of what Jesus would do. What Jesus did, in fact. Jesus, the small business owner for most of his life, was also the Savior of the world, sent by his Father to redeem creation. That was His work—and as I said weeks ago, he worked himself to death—so that the world would thrive... so that your world might thrive. Did you notice the last phrase in our text this morning: “giving thanks to God the Father through him?”

One of the names for what we do here is “Eucharist” which means “thanksgiving.” This morning, because every word and every deed of Jesus was done so that the world might thrive and that the Father might be glorified, we give thanks to God.

I want to offer something else to you. Rich and I and other members of the prayer team will be up here on the stairs, ready to pray with you specifically about job issues. If you are unemployed, or underemployed, or disabled, or if you are convicted that you are not really working in a way that glorifies Jesus, or your retirement has not been significant in the way you want it to be—we would like to pray with you. After you have received the sacrament, step behind the servers and join us, and we will pray for you.

**Sermon Questions**

- 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. “Work is doing something with what God gives you so that the world thrives and Jesus is glorified.” What do you think of that definition? Anything missing? Anything troubling to you?
  2. Read Colossians 3:17. Where does that fit in our definition of work?
  3. What does it mean to do something in “the name of the Lord?” There are three aspects to our work: word, deed and thanksgiving. Talk about each? Which is your strength; which needs work?