

How is God at Work?

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[0 : 00] Well, thank you so much, Kate. Just for your real honesty and just for encouraging us, thank you so much for doing that. And I'm thinking there to myself, she left a beach in Australia to come here.

And thinking, well, I wonder if I could get myself a wee minister exchange over in Australia. But it's great to be together. Thank you so much for coming out tonight. I hope this is going to be useful.

We're here at the final installment of our little series that we began six weeks ago, looking at the subject of work. And the question we've been thinking through is how does being a follower of Jesus, how should it and how does it make a difference to the things that we do with the waking hours of our days?

And if you remember, we started out in the early chapters of Genesis and we were thinking about God at work. He created the cosmos from nothing. He spoke and things came into being.

He created out of his all-powerful words. We saw that he created male and female, both made in the image of this great loving community that we meet in Genesis of the three-in-one God.

[1 : 11] And he tasked Adam and Eve, this great complimentary dream team that he had made, with the job of caring for and cultivating his good creation for their good and for his glory.

And it was all going so well until Adam and Eve rebelled against God. And we thought about how sin is at work. And we saw sin enter the world.

And we heard God pronounce that one of the consequences of sin was that work, whilst not ceasing to be good, was going to bring frustration. And it will be at times hard.

And it will be at times unfruitful. And if nothing else, one day you won't be able to work because death and decay will have set in. But thankfully for the Christian, the truth of the gospel is that Jesus Christ has redeemed us and he's made us his own.

And yes, we still live in this fallen world. Yes, we still live with our fallen bodies. But in Christ, not only has our future been radically altered, but our life's purpose here and now has been radically altered too.

[2 : 25] Because we've got a new master. We've got a new vision. And we've got a new agenda. And we serve King Jesus with our everyday work. And so this evening, as we bring it home, we're going to think about how God is at work today.

And we're going to see this great invitation that Jesus makes to us as his followers, as we serve him in our work that is temporary, to join in with God's work, the fruit of which will last for eternity.

So why don't you turn back to John chapter four and to this quite wonderful chapter of scripture that is so much to teach us. But just before we pray, I'm very aware that we've been sitting for about half an hour now.

So what I want you to do is just to stand. And we've been thinking about children. If you were here this morning, we were thinking about children, how God, how Jesus invited, don't hinder the little children from coming to me.

So I thought we'd get our inner child out this evening, just as we come to pray, okay? Now this is what the, this is what Pete, this is on you here. This is what Pete teaches, if we're all looking at him.

[3 : 35] This is how he teaches the children to play in kids' church. Is this right? I've been watching you for almost six years now, so I hope I get this right. P-R-A-Y. Do that together?

I feel I mastered that, didn't I, Pete? I nailed that one. Okay, here we go. P-R-A-Y. Let's pray together. Dearest Father, we ask that you would help us grasp something more this evening, something more of your ways, which are so much higher than our ways, something more of your wisdom that is so much greater than our wisdom, something more of your plans that are so much greater than our plans, and by your spirit, help us grasp something more of the greatness of your son, Jesus Christ.

And it's in his name that we pray confidently. Amen. Please have a seat. And to get us thinking this evening, I've got three questions for you. Here's question number one.

Name the building. St. Paul's. Okay, question number two, if you're really on the ball here. Does anyone know the year of construction? If you know the century, that'll probably do.

So it's the late 17th. Is that what you said? Spot the architect. I like it. Thirdly, name the designer. Christopher Wren. So there's a famous story told of Christopher Wren and St. Paul's Cathedral.

[5 : 08] Christopher Wren had designed the grand plan of what St. Paul's was going to look like, and it's under construction. And Christopher Wren decides to go undercover into St. Paul's Cathedral to see what the moods of the men who were working to make this thing a reality, to see what their mood was like.

So he walks in undercover into St. Paul's Cathedral and he comes across a man and he says, man, you'd probably call them sir, sir, what are you doing? And the man replies, sir, I am cutting a piece of stone.

So he goes, very good, keep on working. He goes on, makes another man, he puts the same question to him, sir, what are you doing? And he replies, sir, I am earning five shillings, two pence a day.

I've got no idea what that's worth in today's money, but that's what he was earning at the time, five shillings, two pence a day. And on he walks and he comes across a third man and he puts the same question to the third man.

He says, sir, what are you doing? And this man replies, sir, I am helping sir Christopher Wren make his plan a reality. Now, here's the question for you as we set out this evening.

[6 : 14] If you were Christopher Wren, which mindset would have encouraged you the most? Surely, it's the man who grasped the bigger plan and the bigger purpose for what you were trying to achieve.

Because this evening is all about buying into and grasping the bigger plan. So this is, if you get one thing from this evening, that is what we're all about this evening, grasping a bigger plan.

And what we're going to see is Jesus invite us to sink our life's work with God's bigger plan. So if you've got John 4 there, I invite you to turn back there now.

This is what we're going to see in John chapter 4. We're going to see Jesus invite his disciples to see how God is at work and he's going to invite them to join God at work.

And if you've got John chapter 4 there, you'll see that the action takes place with Jesus having left Judea in the south and he's heading for Galilee in the north.

- [7 : 23] And see, if you notice it there, what John tells us at verse 4, that he had to pass through Samaria. He had to pass through Samaria. Now as the crow flies, this was the shortest route from the south to the north.
- But for Jews, if you wanted to avoid defilement, if you wanted to stay clean, as it were, then the travel route that you took was the one that was on the east. And that meant that you bypassed Samaria.
- But Jesus, do you see it there? John tells us he had to pass through Samaria. Now not because he's got dry cleaning to pick up there, not because he's got a distant cousin that he needs to visit, there's no other reason for Jesus to go to Samaria except a divine and a purposeful impulse.
- Do you see what's going on? It's John's way of telling us to sit up and listen, sit up and take notice because something quite magnificent and something quite striking is just about to go down in his gospel.
- Verse 5, do you see it? Jesus comes to this town called Sychar. And as you might expect, he's tired and he's weary from his journey. He's tired and he's weary.
- [8 : 36] Now that's not just a throwaway line that John's chucked in there. That is actually a line of very, very deep theology. Blink and you might miss it. Because what is John telling us?
- That Jesus, he may be fully God. This is what we've seen in John chapter 1. He's fully God. But don't forget he is also fully human. It's the truth that we're remembering, isn't it, this time of year?
- The truth that we're working towards as we look forward to the 25th, we remember, we celebrate, we sing, we declare that veiled in flesh the Godhead see hail the incarnate deity.
- This is Jesus. He is God with us. He is God in flesh. And here he is in John chapter 4. And Jesus sits by the well. Do you see it in the narrative there?
- When does he sit by the well? At the sixth hour. So at the very height of the day, he's by the well. And who does he bump into? Verse 7.
- [9 : 37] This woman. Now immediately, we should smell that something's not quite right here. Because women in this day, they would normally come to collect their water at the cool of the day.
- Now that makes sense, doesn't it? Makes sense. Unless you had some kind of factor 200 sunscreen that you were wearing and you wanted to look like Casper the ghost, this is when you would go out to collect your water, the cool of the day.
- But here is this woman. She's out at the height of the day. She clearly doesn't want anybody, for one reason or another, that will come on to see. She doesn't want anybody to see her in public.
- And the scene develops. We see this back and forth dialogue between Jesus and this woman. And we soon discover that Jesus knows this woman. Jesus knows.
- Do you notice it there that she's had five husbands who have either divorced her or who have either died? And Jesus knows that the man that she's with now is not her husband.
- [10 : 37] And we've got to ask as the reader, how does Jesus know that? Did he read it in Hello Magazine of the day? How does he know that? Well, he may be fully human, but don't forget that he is also fully God.
- Do you see how the two truths combine in John chapter 4? This is Jesus. This is our Lord. He knows every little detail of this woman's life. He feels her pain. He sees her tears.
- He hears her words. He knows her sin and he understands her questions. And most importantly, he knows what she doesn't know at this outset of John 4.

He knows what she needs most of all. She needs living water. She needs living water. She's not going to find it from the well. She needs living water that's going to what?

It's going to quench her thirst. See, her life up to this point has been this endless cycle, this endless merry-go-round of disappointments and failed dreams.

[11 : 39] There we go again and again and again. This woman, here she is. You know, as Christian writer and apologist, Ravi Zacharias, he puts it like this, the loneliest moment in your life is when you have just experienced what you thought would deliver the ultimate and it's let you down.

That's this woman. Every bubble of her life, she's watched it grow. She's watched it promise and ultimately she's watched it burst. Now we're left here, aren't we, John chapter 4, thinking, does this woman need a husband?

To her right, she needs a husband. A selfless husband. A husband who will give his life selflessly to die, to save her.

A husband who will complete her. A husband who will transform her into a spirit and truth worshiper of the living God. Do you see what she needs? She doesn't need a husband.

She needs the great husband. She needs Jesus. Jesus. Truly, Jesus had to pass through Samaria.

[12 : 54] He had to meet this and let's get it in context who she is at this point. She is theologically uneducated. She is religiously impure. She is ritually unclean. She is morally disqualified and she's a woman.

And it's no surprise then that when the disciples, when they come back, remember they were off buying bread in town. When they come back, return at verse 27, they are flabbergasted that Jesus is speaking with this woman.

And this woman, after her encounter with Jesus, what has she done? She's gone back where? Into her own town. And as we sometimes say in the West where I'm formed, she's clearly got the gift of the gap, hasn't she?

She's just telling everybody she meets. Verse 29, inviting everyone that she meets. To what? Come and meet a man who told me everything that I ever did. That's her invitation.

And so are the people going to come from this village? You bet they're going to come. Meanwhile, the camera pans to the disciples. What are their minds? Jesus, have you had something to eat?

[14 : 05] Jesus responds, verse 34, effectively, boys, you need to up the game. You need to get your priorities right. You see, for Jesus, the accomplishment of God's mission is way more urgent than filling his belly with food.

God is at work, says Jesus. God is at work. If only you would see it, and if only you would seize it, and if only you would buy into God's bigger plan.

And how is God at work? Jesus shows them. Verse 35, don't you have a saying? It's still four months until harvest. I tell you, open your eyes and look at the fields.

Invitation there to the disciples, lift their eyes and look. Well, I was trying to picture it this week, as they lifted their eyes and as they looked, what would they have seen?

Most likely, just brown, empty fields. It's not harvest time yet, but what does Jesus say? That these fields are ripe for harvest. Really? Brown fields?

[15 : 12] You can understand, can't you, the disciples who were previously thinking of bread are looking at Jesus and thinking, is he one sandwich short of a picnic? Has he lost the plot? What's he on about? Brown fields?

So their eyes up, they're still looking and thinking, what's on the horizon? You flip the question, they think, who's on the horizon? The people from this Samaritan village, who they are, responding to this woman's invitation, they're making their way across the fields to get to Jesus.

Here is the harvest, says Jesus. You see, he's not talking about a physical harvest, is he? He's talking about a soul harvest. This is how God is at work, says Jesus.

In the coming of Jesus, in the coming of his son, he is breaking into people's lives. He is calling people to repent and believe in his son, Jesus. He is bringing men and women, boys and girls back to God.

See, when Jesus talks about God's work here, what he's talking about is God's work being a harvest work. And what are the disciples invited to do? Join in the Father's work.

[16 : 21] Verse 34. Join in the Father's work. And what would that mean? Two things. You see, firstly, Jesus invites them to get sowing. Get sowing.

So tell everybody that you come across about Jesus. Make it your life's business to seek to introduce everyone that you come across to Jesus. And make it your life's business to invite everyone that you come across to put their faith in Jesus.

So your life's work is to be about diligently sowing the seed, expectantly spreading the word. And if you wanted a case in point example of what that looks like, surely it's just this woman.

What has she done? She's just gone back and she's told everyone that she's met, come and meet a man, come and meet a man. They told me everything that I've ever done. Get sowing, Jesus said. And secondly, get reaping.

Work hard. Make it your life's work to get those gospel seeds reaped. Work to see those gospel seeds that the others before you have planted.

[17 : 24] Work to see them come to fruition. Do you see that these fields currently full of lost people making their way to Jesus? This is the harvest, says Jesus to his disciples.

So the question for them is, will they lift their eyes to what God is doing or will they be dominated by the world's work? As they look out, will they continue to have their horizons dominated by the world's work or will they take up the invitation to join in the Father's work?

Will they look on the world through the eyes of Jesus? Will they have a heart for the harvest? Will they have a mindset for mission?

And here we are back to our big question this evening. Will they sink their life's work with God's bigger plan? That's the question of John 4.

And I think that's the big challenge that will come to us this evening as we finish this series and as we think about how God is at work. Will we sink our lives, our working lives, with how God's is at work?

[18 : 45] And just to help us think through, we're just going to go for another 5-10 minutes, okay, just to help us think through the implications of what that might look like in our lives, I've just got two things that we can take away and apply from John chapter 4.

Sound okay? Here's the first one. Here's the first thing we learn from John chapter 4. The places that God targets. So Jesus had to pass through Sumeria.

Why? Well, presumably because no Jew in Jesus' day would ever venture there. And we see Jesus, don't we? I love this in John 4. We see him smashing gospel barriers and we see him building gospel bridges.

Jesus smashes the male-female barrier, doesn't he? And he smashes the Jew-Gentile barrier because this woman, she was lost, she was helpless, she was spending her life chasing bubbles and she needed to be reconciled to the God who created her.

And so I think that as readers, the question we're meant to ask is, where are the lost people of our day? Where are they? I think the answer has got to be everywhere.

[19 : 56] And the question we need to ask ourselves as we see Jesus' prerogative is his mission our mission. Ask yourself firstly, where has God deployed you?

Where has he put you? How often we forget, don't we, the sovereign purposes of God for our lives? How often we forget his sovereign hand over our placement, if you like, that he's not put us to places where we are, doing what we do simply so we can fill time between now and his return.

He's placed us where we are with a divine purpose. The office, the playground, the surgery, the classroom, the changing room, the building site, the hairdressers, the shop, the family, the stairwell, the coffee shop, everywhere he has placed us with this mission.

Now, we need Christians, don't we? We need them witnessing in all different areas of society, all different sectors. That's what we need. But do you see how God in his almighty wisdom has done that?

It's been so incredible. I've loved having these interviews up the front over the past few weeks because we've seen how God has been at work deploying his people all around this city in all different areas of society. We've seen Christian parents.

[21 : 16] We've heard from Christian teachers, Christian scientists, Christian students, Christian civil servants. Do you see, and we didn't even interview a doctor. I don't even know how we managed to do that. But do you see how God has placed his people, and we're just a microcosm of this in our city, how God has placed his people all over the place.

So have a think, where has God deployed you? And ask yourself, secondly, who has God put around you? It's a constant theme, it's a constant pattern in scripture that we see that God places people, his people places, so that he can reach other people.

If you want to check out the book of Acts, we see this all the time. God wants to reach the Philippian jailer. What does he do? He preaches Paul in prison. God wants to reach the Ethiopian eunuch.

What does he do? He brings Philip to him. God working out his purposes, his sovereign purposes through his people. You see, this is God uniquely wiring and uniquely placing each of us where we are to accomplish his sovereign purposes.

And that means, if you work that through, that means he has placed you places that you can reach people for Jesus that I can't reach.

[22 : 31] and I can reach people for Jesus that you can't reach. But the question is, will we see it and will we seize the opportunity and the invitation to be part of something bigger?

You see, the Great Commission is no young man's game. The call to make disciples is not simply for the seasoned and mature saints. We're all in this together. That Jesus summons us to join in God's work.

And so the question we need to ask ourselves is, whatever we are, whatever we're doing, will we sink our lives with God's bigger plan? So there's the first thing we learn, I think, from John chapter 4.

We learn the places that God targets. Here's the second thing I think we learn. The people that God uses. Because you have to see, as we read this through, there is a beautiful simplicity about John chapter 4.

Isn't there this woman? Now just think about her. She doesn't go to church. She's got no theology degree. She hasn't attended a Christianity Explored course.

[23 : 36] She hasn't been taken through a Two Ways to Live manual and how to do that. She hasn't read a stirring book on evangelism. She simply has met Jesus, has been transformed by him, and has gone back to her village and told everyone that she meets about him.

From the text, you notice that we didn't, we don't even see Jesus tell her to go and do that. It just kind of happens naturally. But notice why people came, verse 39.

Because of this woman's testimony. Come and meet a man who told me all that I ever did, she says. Now you can imagine the townspeople when she drops that one in, can you not?

Wait a minute, he told you everything that you've ever done? She responds, yes, everything I've ever done. Everything I've ever done. Do you see in Jesus she's clearly found someone with whom there is no hiding, with whom there is no pretending, and with whom she can be herself worse and all.

And you can imagine her, can you not, going back to her townspeople and saying, isn't it incredible that the man that I met, the Messiah, hasn't come to judge me for my sin. He has come to save me from my sin.

[24 : 47] It's the same thing that we see at the rulers, the elders and the scribes, that they say of Peter and John in Acts chapter 4. You can check that out afterwards. That they perceive that these men are what?

Uneducated and common. In other words, they were just country bumpkins. But what did they recognize? What did they say about these men? That they had been with Jesus.

They had been with Jesus. Presumably these men, remember their intent on stamping Jesus out, they look at Peter and John, they hear how they talk, they see how they behave, and it simply reminds them of Jesus who they tried to stamp out in the first place.

And there was a survey carried out in 2012 by Marie Curie Cancer Care as part of their Cancer Awareness Week. And they asked living celebrities to write in and tell them what they would like to be written on their tombstone.

If you want to check it out, you can Google it afterwards. There's some quite funny entries in there. This is my favorite. Louis Theroux wants this in his tombstone. And if you're a man, you'll click with this, okay?

[25 : 59] So now, do you believe me that I've got man flu? This is what he wants to write on his tombstone, okay? There's some great entries in there. But here's the question I want to ask you. What would you like written about you?

What would you like written about you? I was thinking on it this week. What would people say about me? Husband? Father?

Airdrie fan? Probably. But here's what I want people to write. Graham Shanks, we saw that he had been with Jesus.

And if that's it, praise God, we saw that he had been with Jesus. That's clearly what these townspeople saw in this Samaritan woman.

That's evidently what these chief elders and rulers saw in Peter and John. And the question for us this evening is, do we live our lives in such a way that that is what people in our circles, people in our workplaces would instinctively say about us?

[27 : 08] They had been with Jesus. You know, every Christian has the same story. Sorry, every Christian has a different story, but each story has the same message.

that I was lost and I met Jesus. Or rather, Jesus met me and he transformed me. It's the old hymn we used to, I remember singing it when we were growing up.

I was lost, but Jesus found me, found the sheep that went astray, threw his loving arms around me, drew me back into his way. Yes, I'll sing the wondrous story of the Christ who died for me.

Sing it with the saints in glory, gathered by the crystal sea. Do you see, these are the ordinary people that God uses. And I find that massively reassuring when I look at my own life because I know I'm an ordinary person, living an ordinary life, doing ordinary things, but simply to tell people about an extraordinary God.

As my friend's Twitter profile reads, I'm simply a nobody trying to tell everybody about somebody. I think that's a great way of putting that. I'm a nobody trying to tell everybody about somebody.

[28 : 24] So I hope you're encouraged just by a short little time in John chapter 4 that God uses simple people with simple stories. Because I know that's hard, isn't it, for many of us in the workplace.

We think we don't have the answers. Well, I hope the woman has encouraged you here that she simply went and told and said, come, come and meet a man who's known and who knows everything I've ever done.

You see, this woman didn't just testify to Jesus to see how she invited. Just on a personal note, how encouraged I was to hear how many people invited friends to that gingerbread event yesterday.

Now, I know they didn't all come, but so encouraged this week hearing how many invitations had gone out to people to come. Come to an event, yes, but come and meet Jesus. Come and meet Jesus.

You know, Christmas presents us with just a wonderful opportunity, does it not, to invite people to come. It's such an easy sell. Such an easy sell. Who could we be inviting to come to the Christmas events that go on here?

[29 : 26] Who can you invite? And here's the challenge I want to leave you with. Who are you praying for? Who are you praying for? Somebody challenged me this week that if, and get this, this is a challenge, that if God was to answer every one of my prayers for my non-Christian friends to become Christians, how many people would be added to the kingdom?

Are we praying for our friends? Are we praying for opportunities? Are we praying that God would give us the heart and the gumption to seize those opportunities? Who's on your heart this week? Who can you be praying for?

That's the second thing I think we learned from John chapter four, the people that God uses. Will we sync our lives with God's bigger plan? So just as we close, let me take you back to Christopher Wren.

Remember those three men that he talked to? Let me ask you just as we close the question, what do you do? What are you doing? Same question that he asked those men.

What are you doing? Are you simply cutting a piece of stone? Are you just performing a job? Are you just going through the routine? Are you simply earning five shillings, two pints a day?

[30 : 38] Are you just trying to fill your face? Are you just trying to put food on the table? Or are you like that third man? Have you grasped? Have you seen? Have you seized? Have you bought into the great designer's master plan?

See, Jesus is telling us that is the very reason that he has come because God is building something bigger. God is building something more beautiful than St. Paul's Cathedral and he's building something that's going to last well beyond St. Paul's Cathedral.

He's building his church. He's building his church. How is God at work today? He's working through his son by his spirit to seek and to save the lost and to gather in the great soul harvest.

Here we see it in Revelation chapter 7. The great multitude of people that through Jesus God has won to himself. John writes this, After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and before the Lamb.

And you read on down, They fell on their faces before the throne and they worshipped God saying, Amen, praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honour and power and strength be to our God forever and ever.

[31 : 50] Amen. Amen. Let's pray together. Father, and so just maybe in the silence now as we've maybe come to the end of this series, maybe now is a great time just to pause and maybe to rededicate ourselves to God's master plan.

And so Father, thank you so much for this evening. Thank you for these last few weeks as we've studied your word and particularly as we've looked at applying it to this particular area of our lives, the things that we do during the waking hours of our day that we call work.

And Lord, we ask that the message and the challenge of these last few weeks would last long in our minds and it would profoundly change the way that we act and behave and live and view the world.

Help us, Lord, to sink our lives with your bigger plan for this world. And so this is our prayer. Dear Father, hear it because we make it in Jesus' name.

Amen.