

Work Amidst Death and Resurrection

From the Theology of Work Bible Commentary on Matthew

While Jesus' death has not yet transformed all work on the earth as we know it, his resurrection can influence the work of all those who follow him. To this end, Jesus gives a commission to his followers before he ends his earthly ministry:

“All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Go, therefore, and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything that I have commanded you. And remember, I am with you always, to the end of the age.” (Matthew 28:18-20)

We have our marching orders. We are to take the good news to all nations, baptizing those who believe the good news, and teaching them to obey all the commandments that Jesus taught, including those in the Gospel of Matthew that pertain to our everyday work. Up to this point Matthew's Gospel has addressed issues of power and influence, treatment of workers, conflict resolution, wealth, and workplace relationships.

Christians often assume that our lives are to be split into two realms, the secular and the sacred. Our work can become merely a way of earning a living, a secular activity with no godly significance. Going to church and personal devotion are assumed to be the only sacred elements of life. A misreading of Matthew could support this. The kingdom of the earth could

represent the material, secular parts of life; and the kingdom of heaven, the sacred, ethereal parts. But a true reading of Matthew is that both kingdoms include all of life. The kingdom of God has both material and spiritual aspects, and so does the kingdom of the fallen earth. The Christian way is to put our entire life, including our work life, at the service of God's kingdom, which Christ is bringing to earth even now.

Jesus calls his followers to live and work in the midst of the fallen world, while holding fast to God's purposes, virtues, and principles. For individual Christians, the sacred and the secular cannot be separated. "No one can serve two masters" (Matthew 6:24). In this universe created and sustained by God, there is no "secular" space, immune to his influence, out of his control, or upon which he does not claim sovereignty.

But while the kingdom of darkness remains, the kingdom of God is also at hand. The world's people and systems often do not reflect the ways of God. Those called by Christ have to learn how to serve God's kingdom faithfully while learning to exist amidst the very real powers that oppose God's way. The Christian worldview cannot be one of escape or disregard for this world. Above all people, Christians should rightly be engaged in creating structures that reflect the kingdom of God in all realms of life, the workplace included. We are to model the practices of God's kingdom in our workplaces, especially practices in which we turn over our power and wealth to God and depend on his power and provision. This is what it

means to live (not just speak) the paradigmatic prayer of the Lord, “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.”