
Work for God's Glory

DAVE BAST

In the Bible, Jerusalem is not just a place on a map. It also serves as a symbol – Zion, the city of God; and the city of God encompasses all of the people of God in every time and place; and in yet another sense, the city of God – Jerusalem, Mount Zion – is our destination. We are marching to Zion, the beautiful city of God, as the old hymn says. We are pilgrims on the way home. We are the new Israel, watching and waiting for a new Jerusalem to come down from heaven; and if you think this is all pie-in-the-sky-by-and-by with no practical relevance to our daily lives and our workaday world, you would be wrong, as we hope to show; so stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

From Words of Hope and ReFrame Media, this is Groundwork, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DAVE BAST

And I am Dave Bast, and Scott, we are in the middle now of a series – the third of four programs – about work and vocation and our calling and what God created us to be and to do in the world. He created us, work came before the Fall not after the Fall, when He put Adam in the garden and told him to tend it; when He commanded the human pair – the first pair – our first parents – to be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and to subdue it and to rule over it.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And that comes right in Genesis 1, so that was our first program, that God wove work into the fabric of this world, into the fabric of creation. We were made to work, we were created in God's image to work, but then the fall into sin came; and we thought about that briefly at the end of our first program, and then more extensively in the second program, where we went especially to Ecclesiastes, where we had a lot of those verses that reflect how a lot of us feel some of the time. It is like: Ah, what I do doesn't matter. I mean, nobody even notices. Nobody even cares. You work for 40 years and nobody remembers it, and you build up a bank account and then your kids get the money and they fight over it, and what is the point? We all feel that way, and the Bible reflects that and takes that on; and so we thought about that a bit in the second program. Work in a broken world doesn't always go smoothly. If we are blessed, we will find meaningful work. We will feel like we have a good match between our gifts and our passions and the job that we have. If we are blessed, that is true for us, but it can be difficult.

DAVE BAST

Yes; as we said, I think, you can be a doctor and still regret having to get up in the morning and it feels like drudgery to go to the office, or not everyone can be the CEO of a company or a professional athlete or a great artist or musician; but I think we need to see the dignity of everyday labor, and how it fits into a bigger plan of God's design for the world. From the very beginning, God wanted the world to be peopled. He cares about human beings, whom He made in His image. He cares supremely about us. We are special, again, despite what many moderns want to say, as if there is no difference between humans and any other animal, or humans are expendable. In the Bible's view, humans are special; made, as the Psalmist says, a little bit lower than God but higher than the animals; so God's intention is for the world to serve human beings and to help

them to flourish. We sometimes have this ideal of the wilderness as being the place... the way the world ought to be; but you know, the funny thing about the wilderness is, you cannot find anything to eat there...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

You cannot really survive there. You might backpack through it, but the wilderness needs to be turned into farmland and factories and cities that produce and sustain flourishing life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And another thing we thought of, particularly near the end of the first program in this series, was that once human culture got rolling, we had characters in Genesis... a person named Jubal we thought about, who was the inventor of stringed instruments; and a character called Tubal-Cain who invented tools of iron and bronze. We have culture, we have art, we have inventions – amazing inventions – in the history of humanity from iron plows to smart phones today; and what we are going to think about in this program is that God cares about that; and in fact, there is more than a few hints in both the Old Testament and the New Testament, as we will see in just a moment, that God is going to preserve those cultural artifacts. They are not all going to just be boiled off and melted away and burned forever, but that even in the new heavens and the new earth God is going to take the best of our work as a human race and preserve it and make it something that we will revel in and delight in forever.

DAVE BAST

That may come as a shock to some people. It may be an idea you have never thought of, but we think it is there in the Bible, as we hope to show in the course of this program; but for now, just think about human technology. You know, that is a word we throw around all the time these days and maybe don't even know what it means, but technology literally is the science – *ology* – of tools, of making things, of creating things that make our work easier or enable us to do even greater work, even better work; and just as you have been mentioning, it can be anything from a stone-age axe or an iron plow to a smart phone or the International Space Station; so, this idea of culture appears in the Bible's vision of the end times. The idea of a harvest of human culture at the end that will be offered up in praise and glory to God; and there are a couple of beautiful passages that are visionary and sing in the scriptures that point to the end of time and this aspect of it, and we will look at those in just a moment.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

I am Scott Hoezee, along with Dave Bast, and you are listening to Groundwork and this third program in our series on work and vocation; and Dave, you were saying just a moment ago the scriptures in both the Old Testament and the New Testament have these surprising passages – these lyric, visionary passages – that indicate that what we produce as humanity: Our culture, our artifacts, our science, our art... somehow God is going to preserve that, and there are a couple of really interesting passages that we want to get to, the first of which is from Isaiah 60.

DAVE BAST

I think it is important to remind people that the ultimate vision of the future for biblical believers is not to fly up to heaven when we die; that our souls somehow are saved and taken up and live forever in the clouds with God. There is something to say about what happens when we die, and the Bible addresses that. We are not going to talk about that in this program, but the vision of scripture, the end toward which it constantly points us is an earthly vision; a vision of a renewed heaven and earth of life *here* in a new creation, and that is symbolized by a city; and the first one to speak of it is Isaiah.

So we read in Isaiah 60, for example, where the prophet addresses the people in the words of God:

⁴Lift up your eyes and look about you. All assemble and come to you; ^{5b}The wealth on the seas will be brought to you; to you the riches of the nations will come. ^{6b}All from Sheba will come bearing gold and

incense and proclaiming the praise of the Lord – and then a little bit later – ¹¹Your gates will always stand open (there is the city, there is Jerusalem). They will never be shut day or night so that people may bring you the wealth of the nations, their kings led in triumphal procession.

SCOTT HOEZEE

¹³The glory of Lebanon will come to you. The juniper, the fir, the cypress together. ¹⁴The children of your oppressors will come bowing before you, and all who despise you will bow down at your feet and will call you the city of the Lord, Zion of the Holy One of Israel. ^{16b}Then you will know that I am the Lord; I am your Savior, your Redeemer, the mighty one of Jacob. ¹⁷Instead of bronze I will bring you gold, and silver in place of iron. Instead of wood I will bring you bronze and iron in place of stones... and it goes on like that. ¹⁹The sun will no more be your light by day, nor the brightness of the moon shine on you; for the Lord will be your everlasting light, and your God will be your glory.

So here in this passage, Dave, you get this mixing of living with God as our light, and yet, the treasures of the nations flowing into the eternal city, flowing into God's people. So that is tucked in the latter part of Isaiah...

DAVE BAST

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you might think you might not hear of it again except that you get to the Bible's last book, in the second to the last chapter: Revelation 21, and all of a sudden we get an echo of this.

DAVE BAST

Absolutely echo; almost verbatim at points, word for word, of the vision of this city of the redeemed. This is Jerusalem, and God's people – all His people – Old Testament and New Testament together are there, and they are safe and secure; and the thing about the nations is, these are the enemies of the people of God; especially those who had oppressed Old Testament Israel. They are the ones coming from Sheba and elsewhere; coming from Tarsus, the other end of the world, coming in their ships and bringing with them all their treasures – all the things that they have produced; and John sees something very like that at the end of the New Testament when he writes this in Revelation 21:22:

I did not see a Temple in the city because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its Temple. ²³The city does not need the sun or the moon to shine on it, for the glory of God gives it light, and the Lamb is its lamp. ²⁴The nations will walk by its light and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. ²⁵On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there will be no night there. ²⁶The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. ²⁷Nothing impure will ever enter it nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but only those whose names are written in the Lamb's Book of Life.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So if you were tempted to think that Isaiah 60 is just sort of an exaggerated hyperbole referring just to ancient Israel, no, at the end of the Bible – Revelation 21 here – John picks back up on that and says this is going to be for all God's people now in Christ, that the splendor of the nations – the cultural artifacts of history – nothing impure, nothing bad, but all the good things that humans have produced are going to be brought into the new Jerusalem; which, as you said, Dave... important to point out, is not in some wispy, heavenly realm of cloud and vapor. The dwelling of God comes down here, according to the first part of Revelation 21... we didn't read that, but the dwelling of God is now with people. God's glory comes down here, and we have a new heavens and a new earth, and it is on that new earth that we will continue to enjoy and delight in the artifacts of history.

DAVE BAST

Right; you might ask, and I think it is important to ask, what does this really mean? If this is talking about the final consummation and the end of time, and heaven as we tend to think of that, to use a popular term...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right.

DAVE BAST

What is it really going to be like? And the answer is, in one sense, we cannot begin to guess as to the details of it; but what the Bible wants us to understand is the kind of life that it will be; and so it talks about the city in terms of what is *not* there. It says there will be no sea there because in the Bible the sea stands for evil and chaos and sin; and there will be no night there. The gates of the city are open 24/7, as it were, because there is no need to shut them defensively, on the one hand; it doesn't get dark. In the ancient world when night fell, that was when you slammed the gates shut because of all the bad things that might happen of people coming in, what happened in the dark; but God is its light; the Lamb is the lamp. There is no need, even, of the sun, for it is always light there; but the gates are also open, says Isaiah, so that the treasures of the nations can be brought into the city. So we think: What does that mean? I don't know exactly, but it means that we will be living with God and with one another, and the things that we produced in our work as a human family will somehow be part of that; they will be part of the scene; and offered up to God as an act of worship.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Revelation 21 makes clear that the new creation will not be new in the sense of being something novel. There is a Greek word, *neos* – neo – that could be used for that, but that is not the word that John uses. He uses a different word, *kainos*, which means *renewed*...

DAVE BAST

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

So, the earth is going to be *renewed*, not completely made over.

DAVE BAST

God here says: Behold, I am making all things new – not: I am making all new things.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; so even our work is going to somehow be redeemed. You know, you might wonder: Okay, I work third shift at a GM factory making parts of cars. How does my work matter? Well you know, in the grand scheme of things, you know, I think God kind of sees all of our work as of a piece. We only see piecemeal; we only see little bits and pieces of what we do on our next shift – on our next day in the office – on our next day in the classroom or driving the bus or whatever we do; but God sees it all as one and is going to find a way to take the sum total of the work that God has commissioned us to do, and gifted us to do, as we said in the first program, by giving us His image, and He is going to preserve it; and it is all for the glory of God. The great composer, Johann Sebastian Bach always wrote: SDG at the end of every musical composition he wrote: Soli Deo Gloria...

DAVE BAST

Yes; to God alone be the glory. I love that story about Bach, and certainly the things he produced were as great as anything any human has ever created for the praise and glory of God; but in a way, it seems to me that when you put your child to sleep at the end of another hectic, stressful day and you pick up the toys and you finally straighten up the house, you can write SDG on the end of that day's work; or when you punch out at the factory you can clip it to your timecard: This is done for the glory of God. Whatever we do, if we do it honestly as unto Him, redounds to His glory and increases it somehow; and it won't be lost...

SCOTT HOEZEE

It won't be lost...

DAVE BAST

It is not in vain.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It won't be lost because somehow or another it does all matter, and we can't connect all those dots now, and there may be people listening to this program who say: Yes, but if you knew my job, you'd have a hard time putting *soli Deo gloria* at the end of your timecard; but there is hope here. What these passages tell us is that God is paying attention, and God is blessing our work, and that is a wonderful image.

There is one more biblical passage that talks about a city, and we will look at that as we conclude this program.

Segment 3

DAVE BAST

You are listening to Groundwork, where we are digging into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Dave Bast.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And I am Scott Hoezee, and Dave, we are thinking about God's preservation of our work as part of this series on work and vocation. Paul once wrote to the Corinthians: Be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord you're labor is not in vain; and that is sort of a theme of this four-part series: Your labor is not in vain.

DAVE BAST

Yes; it really is, and all the work that we do is the work of the Lord. I mean, usually those words are applied to things like evangelism or preaching or teaching in the Church, and certainly they do apply to that; but, as we have been trying to say, and as I think the Bible teaches, anything that you do that is productive, that helps another person, that creates something, that helps to create, that has a small role in the production of anything useful and necessary, is the work of the Lord; and Paul says explicitly that nothing we do in the name of the Lord, and as the work of the Lord, is in vain – is empty, is pointless, will be lost, will amount to nothing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Which is very important to remember because the fact of the matter is, that a lot of our work does happen in context of brokenness and of some frustration, vexation, feelings of futility; and there is a very interesting passage in Jeremiah Chapter 29... So, Jeremiah is the prophet who worked around the time when Israel was carried into exile in Babylon, where they would be for 70 years; and there is a very interesting passage there that kind of talks about work, but we want to remember the context of Jeremiah's words, or God's words through Jeremiah here... because it was a context of exile – it was a context of hardship – and yet, listen to these words from Jeremiah 29:

⁴This is what the Lord Almighty, the God of Israel says to all those I carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon: ⁵Build houses, settle down, plant gardens, eat what they produce; ⁶marry and have sons and daughters; find wives for your sons and give your daughters in marriage so that they too may have sons and daughters; increase in number there in Babylon; do not decrease. ⁷Also, seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you into exile. Pray to the Lord for it, because if the city prospers, you too will prosper.

DAVE BAST

Isn't that interesting? I don't know about you, but when I heard those words I went straight back to Genesis 1, as we said in our original program, the cultural mandate: Be fruitful, multiply, increase, subdue the earth and rule it; and here God says the same thing exactly to the exiles in Babylon. Now they have lost their country, what do they do? They are at loose ends. Should we form revolutionary groups and fight against the Babylonians? Should we go out on the road and wander around pointlessly? No, God says, I want you to do the very same thing there, living in exile, that you would do at home, that you would do anywhere. I want

you to get married, I want you to have families – God wants the earth to be populated. I want you to plant gardens and raise food. I want you to seek the prosperity of the city where you are living, even though it is ruled by your enemies.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Right; and pray for them. What is interesting is this is Jeremiah 29; in Jeremiah 28 there was this encounter with a false prophet named Hananiah, who said to the exiles: I have a word from the Lord. Two more years and we are out of here – two more years and we are going home. Well, it turned out his prophecy was false; in fact, he ends up dying very suddenly because he had spoken a false prophecy. Now Jeremiah comes in the next chapter, and this could not have sounded like good news at all, because in the following verse, in verse 10 he says: This is what the Lord says: When 70 years are completed for Babylon I will come to fulfill My promise and bring you back; and then this very famous verse, what we have to remember in context:

¹¹For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you; plans to give you hope and a future. Now that is a very famous verse. It is on coffee mugs and counted cross stitch, but it is in the context of exile, and it is in the context of what must have sounded like bad news. What, 70 more years?! Most of us are going to be dead! And yet, God says: You are here now; work. Pray; even for Nebuchadnezzar, pray that things will go well.

DAVE BAST

And then He ends with this beautiful promise that someday they will be brought back home and their exile will be over. ¹⁴“I will gather you from all the nations and places where I have banished you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back to the place from which I carried you into exile.” So, in a sense, we are all in exile – we are all banished from our home, our true city, the heavenly Jerusalem. We are living in these various cities. In one way or another we are all in Babylon; we are not in Jerusalem yet; but while we are here, God says: Settle down and do your work. Do the thing you have been called to do, whatever that is. Do it as for Me. Raise your families. Someday I will bring you home, then we will see what the future really holds.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; and what an important thing it is to notice in this passage is the context. As you just said, Dave, you are not home. You are in Babylon; you are not in Israel even; you are not in Palestine. You are in Babylon; you are not home, and therefore, things are going to be unpleasant to some degree. There will be frustrations, there will be longings, there will be people who will die who will not get back home; but in the meanwhile, you are called to work; you are called to continue to cultivate and plant gardens and build your families. So we said in the first program of this series that in Genesis 1 work gets divided into two camps: Raising families and cultivating the earth; and here it is again: Raise your families, cultivate the earth. Keep doing it even when times are tough; and a lot of us in terms of our work, in terms of our families, we go through hard times. Some people seem to have perpetually tough times in their lives, and live the life of Job; and we don't know why, and it is not easy; but God is with us. He was with them; the Lord of hosts was with them; and there is more than a little comfort, and in terms of our work, more than a little meaning to be drawn from all of that.

DAVE BAST

You know, I was just thinking of a common experience that many of us will face eventually. Some of you perhaps have gone through it already, of paring down and throwing out and getting rid of stuff – maybe treasures that you have collected over the years; but you have to downsize, and you are leaving your home, you are selling your old family home, and all those things that... maybe there was something that you made or your father or your grandfather built it. It is a beautiful object, and we have to kind of give it up, let it go, and eventually we let all of our possessions go; but the message of the Bible is that somehow we are going to get those all back again; and in some amazing, glorious way, the beautiful things that we created, that we made, that we loved, that we cherished, that we end up having to give away as our exile runs its course, will be restored to us; and they will be there in some unimaginable way, part of the new creation, and all adding to the glory of the God who saves us.

Well, thanks for joining our Groundwork conversation. I am Dave Bast, with Scott Hoezee, and we would like to know how we can help you continue digging deeper into scripture. So visit groundworkonline.com to tell us what topics or passages you would like to dig into next on Groundwork.

<https://groundworkonline.com/episodes/work-for-gods-glory>

Printed on June 24, 2026

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