

Individualistic View to Kingdom View

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Introduction

It is Sunday, and I am very excited as I wake up. As the Pastor, I will be leading, singing and preaching at our church and I love exposing the truth of God's word to people. After the service, I am tired but feel satisfied and the random thoughts which came spontaneously while I was preaching are getting rewound at the back of my mind as I drive back home. In less than 20 hours, it is Monday morning and I am driving to my office where I work as a Solutions Architect. My office cell phone is buzzing with emails and I check my calendar to find that I will be in meetings most of the day. I know as soon as I reach the office, I have to respond to emails, address technical issues people are facing, advise customers on technology decisions, etc. At the end of the day, I feel happy that I helped many people and did a good job. Then the big question torments me, except for the paycheck and other benefits which I get: Did I waste my Monday compared to Sunday? I feel Sunday was sacred because I was in the pulpit preaching from the Bible. Monday, I did not preach or do anything directly related to the Bible but I was thinking about the latest innovation, technology, Internet of Things (IoT), Artificial Intelligence (AI), etc.

For some time now, I have started addressing myself as a bi-vocational minister. My story does not end there but on my drive back to home, I receive a call from one of the leaders of the student ministry in which I also give leadership. There are some emails to be sent to our staff in some Asian countries, there are some official issues to be tackled. I am told that the government in a country has recently passed an anti-conversion law that prohibits preaching of

the gospel there. So next year we may not be able to go there since, if caught, it will result in 5 years imprisonment. After taking care of some more ministry and church-related matters, I am done for the day. The question still haunts me: "Did I waste my 9 to 5 and what I did during that time is of any relevance to God or was God with me when I was working on a Cloud implementation using Microservices?"

Kingdom and Connecting All Our Work

When it comes to the subject of faith and work, work should be a delight and not drudgery. We are called to work but we should know who we are in Christ and we should not be driven to worldly success in an age of titles. The idea that God is a worker and called a man to work is liberating. Cultivating the Garden of Eden was work for Adam. Seeing our work as a calling and not as a job is very important. The calling which God gives to different people will differ and our perspective regarding work matters as to how we view it. In some cases, God can move a person from one vocation to another or give more than one work to do at the same time. It is difficult at times to find meaning in work that does not have a direct impact on others. Some work is seen as sacred and others are seen as secular. This can cause some work to become pointless, fruitless and selfish. In my case, I am always tempted to see what I do as a Pastor as sacred and what I do at my workplace as secular. Then we also tend to see people who directly serve others in professions like nursing, social work, etc., as better than someone who is doing work which may not seem like it is having a direct impact. Another issue with work is the dignity it gives and we must understand that all work has its own dignity regardless of its status or what it pays. We can seek work which suits our gifts and passions and every Christian should be able to identify, with conviction and satisfaction, the ways in which his or her work

participates with God in his creativity and cultivation (Keller & Alsdorf, 2012, 52). We can also see work as a service to God and should be able to connect our work to God's work.

Our work matters and we can connect our Sunday worship to Monday work. The word *vocation* simply means "calling" and when properly understood is centered in a sovereign God who calls us to embrace the gospel of Jesus Christ and to follow him in the power of the Holy Spirit as his disciples (Nelson, 2011, 15). This includes every work to which God calls us and our faith and work should be integrated seamlessly. A large portion of our time on earth is given to our work, and we have to take this stewardship seriously. We are created with work in mind and hence we should see all work as important in God's sight. We are fellow workers with God since we are created in His image. We have to realize that we work because we bear the image of One who works. Whatever we are doing is a contribution to God's ongoing creation and to the common good. Some work may not seem to have a direct impact but still is valuable and important, therefore we should do it with the view that we are doing it for God. So every work we do is contributing to God's creation and we are making an important contribution to the world. So all our work is connected and should be seen as valuable from God's kingdom perspective.

Kingdom, Culture, and Our Message

We are living in a culture where independence is seen as superior to dependence on others. As a result, people are becoming self-centered, individualistic and have limited their community life to some events. This has affected the church also and we see a struggle to develop deeper relationships or involvement in others lives. For many, Sunday worship service is all they attend and they walk into a church and walk out without talking to anyone. When I grew

up, I saw that people used to gather and help others in many areas or I would say there was a need to depend on each other. An example which comes to my mind is regarding moving homes. There was a time when someone had to move, church members would get together and do it together. Now as people became financially rich and with the easy availability of moving companies, we don't see people getting together to help others as they used to do in the past. This is just one example which shows how things have changed.

Most of the time preachers are preaching messages which promotes individualism more than a community mindset among people. The songwriters have also done the same and majority of the top Christian songs reinforce a me-and-Jesus view of salvation and Christian living when compared to a kingdom perspective with a broader understanding of Christ's redemptive work and our call to follow Christ in his mission of Shalom (Sherman, 2011, Location No. 699). The counsel of the community or others is no longer valued and we see people taking big decisions on their own without consulting anyone else. Jesus' central teaching theme was the kingdom and the Sermon on the Mount was about the ethics of the kingdom. Joining Jesus on his mission of restoring all things will require us to reorder our priorities. This will require us to stop building and promoting the kingdom of self. This will take away from time invested in accumulating more worldly wealth or acquire greater worldly status (Sherman, 2011, Location No. 1433). Preaching the Jesus of Bible will require a shift from being more individualistic to be more community-oriented. The righteous or *tsaddiqim* mentioned in the book of Proverbs are those who are willing to disadvantage themselves for the community while the wicked are those who put their own economic, social, and personal needs ahead of the needs of the community.

They are the just, the people who follow God's heart and ways and who see everything they have as gifts from God to be stewarded for his purposes (Sherman, 2011, Location No. 98).

The messages proclaimed from the pulpits should have the Kingdom perspective and should connect the faith and the workaday of the believers. We should be careful that we are not presenting a too-narrow gospel which only focuses on personal justification and does not talk about the gospel of the kingdom. This self-focused or inward-focused gospel will never make a person look out for justice for the poor and the needy. This will also result in people not finding any meaning with what they do outside the church or their vocation. How should a person live in Christ's kingdom Monday through Friday, nine to five needs to be addressed from the pulpits; the members of the church must be told about their role in the mission of God and how they can live missionally their vocation. Integrating faith and work should be addressed as an average person spends more than forty hours per week at the workplace and probably interacts more with his or her coworkers than church members or family members on a regular basis. A Christian is a Christian seven days per week and not just on Sunday and this message of Kingdom must be proclaimed.

Kingdom Perspective in Finances

This kingdom perspective cannot be ignored in the area of finances and all the resources which have been made available to us by God. The Bible provides us a vision for life together from the first pages of the Scripture. At the end of the Bible, we again see people gathering in the New Jerusalem (Revelation 21:1-3). From Genesis to Revelation, we see many examples of God's intention for us to live together in community. This is reflected in the formation of Israel as a nation to the unleashing of the church which reflects the fact that we are designed for the

community (Hewitt & Moline, 2015, Location No. 1200). The key point here is that the biblical vision of our life together is not just emotional but also practical. All the believers in Jerusalem were together and had everything in common. They sold property and possessions to give to anyone who had a need (Acts 2:44-45). All the believers were one in heart and mind. No one claimed that any of their possessions was their own, but they shared everything they had. And God's grace was so powerfully at work in them such that there were no needy persons among them. For from time to time those who owned land or houses sold them, brought the money from the sales and put it at the apostles' feet, and it was distributed to anyone who had a need (Acts 4:32-35). This gives us a totally different view than what we see in today's churches. The first-century believers were very radical in sharing with those in need.

We should be looking for practical ways to help others within our community and should not be satisfied by doing things from our comfort zone. As we struggle to overcome the pull from the culture to overcome an independent and individualistic lifestyle, we have to act with a generosity which will result in our world getting expanded. We may not be stingy with our lifestyle or spending for ourselves, but it is easy to become stingy towards others without us noticing it. When we have a sense of ownership on everything we have, it can get difficult to give away something which is valuable to us. This will require us to live openheartedly and resist our natural desires to be stingy. Bringing this kingdom perspective means we give a gift of our possessions, time and money.

Conclusion

First of all, I realize that I am a citizen of God's kingdom, created in God's image, called by Him and belong to Him. I am called to show reveal God to the world through every situation.

In some situations, direct connection with God's word and work may be amplified by the activities I do while in other situations, I may not be able to see any direct connection. Still, I believe the same Holy Spirit who empowers me on Sunday while I preach is empowering me on Monday when I talk to people in a business meeting. I have to do my best in all situations and have the kingdom perspective. I cannot allow myself to become self-centered or individualistic but think about the community. This is a principle I have to follow in all areas of my life.

So coming back to my question about 9 to 5 on Monday, I don't think I am wasting my time or that God is not interested in it. God is very much in it and I need to be faithful in everything I do. I still cannot say that what I do on Sunday and Monday is same or similar but I can say that they are different works and they require different skills and abilities. Impact of what I do on Sunday may be bigger than what I do on Monday from a visibility standpoint, but they both matter to God and He has called me to do both. Hence I do not feel guilty or bad about the time I spend doing my work on Monday. I have been given the same amount of time which God gave to everyone else. I have to understand that limit and do whatever I can do within that timeframe and not worry about things I could not do. As a Pastor, it is my responsibility to bring a kingdom view to people and encourage them to see their work as important to God and help them move from an individualistic to a community mindset.

So Sunday or Monday, I am happy knowing that I am going out to the world to reflect my heavenly father through everything I do and hence I am no more bogged down to the question "what I did is of any relevance to God". From deep inside my heart comes the answer "yes, all work matters to God."

References

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