

All Work Trains You

By Bobby Schuller

Well today we're continuing our series on work and labor on what it would look like to actually enjoy going to work on Monday morning. What it would feel like if Monday's were just like Friday's. And my argument, and this is not an original to me, it's a Jewish idea that we don't have to toil in our work. That our work can be life-giving, joyful, meaningful; that the rhythms of work and rest can bless one another and this is my hope for you.

Some of you are in your careers right now, some of you are retired, but for the most part, a lot of American's, for some reason, have this view that non work is the ideal. And what we want to encourage you is that in your volunteering, in your ministry or in your actual career, or whatever it is you're doing, that it should be life-giving, it can be life-giving, that there will be work to do when we get to heaven that will be life-giving and meaningful and joyful, and so this series is on that. It's a vision for how we don't have to have five days, Monday through Friday of some existence we can't stand; we're always exhausted, unhappy, in order to get two days of pleasure and a couple of weeks of vacation. That is not God's vision for your life. We should go on vacation, we should enjoy our weekends, but we should enjoy our work, too. We can enjoy our work and so be encouraged by this – that there is a way.

And so today we're continuing on this. The name of the series is Avodah. Everyone say Avodah. (BOBBY & AUDIENCE REPEATS – Avodah) Its even relaxing to kind of say it, isn't it. Avodah is this Hebrew word that means work, but it also means worship, and it also means service. It begs the question in and of itself, what if our work could be service to our neighbor, and if our work could be worship to God. What if all the work that we did was for the benefit of others, in particular, worship to God and service of others. That in and of itself is the main answer to the struggle that so many people struggle with. That yes you have goals, you have dreams that the work we do which it should be good for us, but in the end, it should be for God. That we're doing it for His glory. And second, for our neighbor. We're doing it because we love our near dwellers, even our enemies, as Jesus taught us.

So today I want to talk about this thing that many of us struggle with: what happens when we have major setbacks in life? What happens when we hit an obstacle? What happens when we've been working on something for years, or decades, and now it's looking like its slipping away from us. What happens when we empty nest? Or when things in our, whatever it is that we're doing, or our volunteering, or our church doesn't go our way. Many of you watching on TV, you have churches that are closing. What happens when that happens? That was our work, that was our worship.

So there's a lot of grief and heartache for many believers across the globe and here in Irvine where we've done all this work and we're asking the question – was it all for nothing? Did it even matter? Maybe you got fired, or maybe you've been laid off, or maybe you went out of business. You were given something to take responsibility for and you were faithful. You did everything right. You never broke the rules. You honored God. You did it as worship to Him and still, even still it's gone. Well what do we do then?

And I think the temptation is to think well God's punishing me. It's some sin in my past that's coming back to get me, or that one time I did this, or whatever. It's so easy to assume that when things are going good, it's because God's happy with us, and when things are going bad, it's because God's mad at us, when unfortunately, God's just not that predictable. He's not like us. He's His own. He has providence, and let me tell you that He's looking at you now, despite your shortcomings and your mistakes, and your hidden sins, He sees you and He loves you. He's proud of you, He's on your side, He's going to get you where you need to go.

And part of enjoying our work is trusting that where we are now is right where we need to be. And God is going to get us right where we need to go and He loves us. Can I get an amen for those who are a little older in the audience and have been through the fire, have been through the crucible, and have seen the faithfulness of God. He is faithful.

All right. So this is true. Keep hope alive. Your best is yet to come, but so is your worst. And that's what we're going to talk about today. The worst always comes before the best. The harder it is now, the better it'll be then. As he cackled evilly. I don't think evilly is a word. Anyway, let's carry on.

This is what we learn through the whole narrative of the scripture, that God can take any tragedy, any difficulty, any bad thing we're going through, and make it amazing. He loves doing that kind of thing. He loves elevating the humble, and laying low the proud, right? This is the message of the Old Testament.

And we see it particularly, and I'm going to give some examples in my own life, but we see it particularly in the story of Joseph. You guys know Joseph in the.. how does the song go again? I forgot it. Not the opening the.. Joseph.. (CHOIR SINGING & BOBBY JOINS) yes, okay, we got it. You guys see Joseph and the Technicolor Dreamcoat? We just lost everyone. It's been around since the 70's, hasn't it? All right, thank you choir.

Joseph is a great story, and of course it begins with an idiot named Joseph, 17-year-old kid who decides to tell his dream to his brothers. I'm joking, he's not an idiot. Joseph, he's the 11th son of Israel, also known as Jacob, and Jacob, the father of these 12 sons, says very clearly that Joseph is his favorite. And to add insult to injury, he creates a long ornate robe, a symbol of favor, and it has many colors on it, which are

expensive, because dye is expensive in the ancient world, and gives this precious coat to his son Joseph as a symbol of favor.

So Joseph, then, has a dream and the dream comes from God. It's actually a prophecy. And in the first dream; remember, by now his brothers really don't like him very much at all. He's young, he's probably accidentally rubbing his dad's favor in their faces, and it only gets worse. He has this dream that he and his 11 brothers are harvesting grain and they put them into 12 hay bales or stalks of grain, and he tells his brothers guess what, your 11 grain stalks bow down to my grain stalk.

And then he has another dream and he tells his brothers and his family, there were 12 stars in the sky, a sun and a moon, and 11 of the stars and the sun and the moon bowed down to the one star, and clearly the sun is the father, the moon is the mother and the 11 stars are his brothers.

And at this point, his dad rebukes him. He's like what are you saying. In an honor and faith society, it should be anyway that the eldest son is the favorite, so now you have one of the younger sons who's the favorite. Now he's rubbing it in. And he really is an idiot for doing this. It's going to wind up getting him sold into slavery.

But for me, I sort of sympathize with Joseph. He's 17-years-old when he has this dream from God, and the dream really is from God, isn't it. It's not Joseph's ambition, it's not Joseph mustering this up; God gave this to him and he was dumb enough to tell people about it.

Look, I am and I was a dreamer when I was 17, and I was an idiot, too, and that's why I sympathize with Joseph. There's a sort of foolishness in adolescence, isn't there. And what Joseph didn't understand was the path that he would have to take from God's dream to God's destiny. God's dream to God's fulfillment. Whenever there's a great dream from God, there is always a great price to pay. Maybe the Lord is asking you today – are you willing to pay it? Are you willing to go through the crucible? Are you willing to go through the difficulty to get where I want you to be?

In this case, of course, this dream story pushes his brothers over the edge. They sell him into slavery, and they were actually going to murder him and so they sell him. You almost get this naiveté about Joseph that he almost probably thinks his brothers actually like him. That's what I would have thought. That's how naïve and stupid I was.

And that's what happens, I think, to Joseph is this incredible betrayal, sadness, rejection, loneliness, and instead of murdering their brother, they sell Joseph into slavery to Ishmaelites and he ends up in Egypt and he is sold to a very powerful military man named Potiphar. And Potiphar just buys Joseph, I guess, on a normal slave lot, and puts him to work, and very quickly, Joseph in his work, in his labor, and in his faithfulness gets elevated to the main guy. And here he is, Joseph probably feeling pretty good about life. Yes, he's a slave, but he's kind of almost a CEO. He's in charge of everything. He's doing this guy's books,

he's running his business, he's doing all these things and maybe even he's wondering has my dream been fulfilled? Is this where God wanted me? And Joseph continues to be so faithful to the Lord, and faithful to his boss.

And one day Potiphar leaves and Potiphar's wife doesn't go with him. Joseph at this time is now probably in his late 20's. He's definitely got a six pack. And Potiphar's wife she's into it. She's into it. And the story goes that Potiphar's wife tries to seduce Joseph into relations, and Joseph clearly rejects her. He thinks this is evil, and in the story, she reaches for his clothes in this sort of 1960's style seduction scene, and in his passion to be honorable to God, this is probably what any young man should do in this scenario, he runs away! And in his running, his robe tears and there's this very funny scene of him running away in the nude. Sun's out, buns out. It's Egypt.

But as funny as that is to us, for ancient Hebrews and near Eastern people, this was shameful, embarrassing. And part of it is Joseph saying I'm willing to be totally degraded, totally shamed in nakedness in order to be faithful to God, and faithful to Potiphar. He's been good to me, he's cared for me, he's elevated me, he trusted me. I will not break this bond.

And what happens to Joseph? Potiphar's wife lies, says he raped her, and he ends up in prison. Now one of the most amazing things about the Joseph story is most of the Old Testament heroes are very

flawed. They have a lot of mistakes and a lot of brokenness in their families. But probably the only two I can think of are probably Joseph and Daniel that are utterly pure good from beginning to end in the story. Utterly moral, utterly good, utterly sound, utterly faithful to God and to their neighbor, and here's Joseph. God, I've been faithful to you and look what's happened to me.

And there he is in prison, this story is over 14 chapters, but essentially he gets elevated through interpreting the dream of a cup bearer. And he tells the cup bearer when this comes to pass, and you're promoted, tell the king about me. Tell Pharaoh about me. And of course the cup bearer forgets him again. So you have Joseph just rejected by his brothers, then attempted murder, then sold into slavery, then betrayed by Potiphar's wife, then rotting away for several years in an Egyptian prison, and wondering God, where is my dream?! I've done everything right! I've been faithful to you and here I am wasting away in a dungeon.

I know many of us, we're tempted to say God, why am I here? Is it because something I did? Is it because of my past? Is it generational curses? Did I do something wrong along the way? Listen to me: the answer is no. Look to Joseph. Utterly perfect, utterly moral, utterly faithful, utterly rotting away in a dungeon cell. But God's not done with him, and God's not done with you.

Through the interpretation, the cup bearer gets elevated and he ends up working for Pharaoh for awhile, totally forgets Joseph, forgets

his promise, and then Pharaoh has this dream. It's a weird dream about seven skinny cows eating seven fat cows, and nobody can interpret the dream. And this cup bearer says oh yeah, yeah, Joseph! That's right, you got to talk to this guy Joseph. And through interpreting the dream, Pharaoh puts Joseph in charge, and he gets elevated to this position where he becomes almost equal with Pharaoh, which at the time is probably the greatest empire on earth, maybe the greatest military, and you can make a very strong argument that Joseph is maybe the most or second most powerful man on earth.

And the story ends, of course, where Joseph is there and he's reunited with his brothers. They don't know it's him. And there's this back and forth of tricks that he plays on them, essentially, to have this big dramatic ending where he says it's me Joseph. And they're not elated, they're not excited, they are utterly afraid because in the near East, heads would normally roll, right? And they just beg him – please, let us be your slaves. Do to us what we did to you. Make us slaves, don't kill us.

And Joseph is merciful on them. He brings his whole family in. He provides for them, cares for them, treats them like royalty, reunites with his father, who this whole time thinks he dead. And this is at the end of Genesis, Genesis chapter 50, after this long dramatic scene, this famous line from Joseph, and it truly is the narrative of all of scripture. It's the narrative of the gospel: as for you, talking to his enemies, to those who

betrayed him, what you intended against me for evil, God intended for good in order to accomplish a day like this. To preserve the lives of many people.

See, Joseph had to endure probably what is it 20 years of betrayal, of unfairness, of violence, and who else knows what happened within this gap in order to achieve this? Reconciliation with his brothers, but even more importantly, the saving of millions of lives. It was God's plan the whole time, and this is sort of the ending of Genesis and it's the narrative of the kingdom of heaven.

This is what God does. There's no tragedy God can't turn around, there's no difficulty God can't turn to your advantage. Wherever you are now, it's exactly where you need to be. God is going to get you exactly where you need to go. Don't be impatient, don't worry, be faithful in your work. Be faithful to your bosses. Be faithful to your peers. Be faithful to God and He will get you where you need to go. Can I get an amen from the saints.

Joseph is encouraging to us because it teaches us about God's sovereignty. That God's redemptive sovereignty is good. He's not holding your sins against you. You can count on the cross for your forgiveness. It's not by our works, it's not by our effort that we're saved, but by grace alone. And you can trust that in your faithfulness, God will get you where you need to go by His faithfulness. Actually, the scriptures even

say even when we're faithless, He remains faithful. He can't deny Himself. God is so good.

Reminds me of like my son Cohen, he doesn't always understand everything, but his favorite, the one thing he does understand is Disneyland. He just loves Disneyland. We go at least every week, and we have season passes that were a wonderful gift given to us, and we go every single week. And when we get in the line, Cohen doesn't always understand how lines work. So sometimes when you're in line, the line moves away from where you want to go.

So a perfect example is Buzz Lightyear's Astroblasters. There is this door that you go into in order to get on the ride, but when you get in line, you turn left and go away from the door. So as I'm getting on the ride with Cohen, he's bright eyed, all excited, and then we go this way. And I'm holding his hand, we're very slowly in line walking away from where he wants to go. And the farther we get from that little doorway, he's going no, no, no, please I want Astroblasters! Please! No! No! And then the line, it kind of goes around a corner, and it goes into this kind of dark thing where you're really close to Tinkerbelle, etc. It just goes on and on. And the whole time he's getting more frustrated because in his view, we're getting farther from the ride. Little does he know we're making progress. We're getting closer. We're getting nearer. And I'm trying to tell him. He doesn't understand. No, no, this is how it works. We're getting closer. We got to wait our turn. We got to wait in line. And

sometimes he gets it, and sometimes he doesn't. After all, who likes waiting.

So I think our life with the Lord is a lot like this. Very often it seems like we're going from where we want to be. It seems like we're not where we thought we'd be at this stage in our life, but just stay faithful to God. Just trust Him. He wants to get you where you need to go. And you can count on it that no matter how hard things are now, you're growing, you're improving, you're getting better, you're getting closer to the next thing, good thing God has for you. Don't worry about the difficulty you're going through, God will get you through it. It'll pass. Keep hope alive.

Speaking of Disneyland, I think that it's interesting how the younger people are, the harder it is to understand that for every great dream, there's a great price to pay. That for every great story, there's a great villain. That for every great achievement, there is a lot of great loss. That for every comeback, there are many, many setbacks. And this is something that's difficult because in our culture, everything is so high speed and fast and quick, and yet that's not the God of trees that take hundreds of years to grow, for example. The things that God makes, they take forever to get there, but they last forever. That's the kind of God we serve. He's not a microwave, instant fix, instant oatmeal, over the counter kind of God, and I'm thankful for that, aren't you? And so we have to trust that His process is ultimately better.

So one thing that makes me think of this, since we're on the subject of Disneyland, I'm interested how rides have changed so much at Disneyland. So you look at the old rides, the best rides, the ones built in the 50's and 60's at Disneyland, and they are very dark. They're very difficult. Like you get on like Pinocchio and you're like oh we're in Geppetto's toy shop, la, la, la, la, la, la, and then all of a sudden everything's going wrong: kids turning into donkeys and cages and people screaming and like guys throwing beer around and then more cages and a whale comes out to eat you and then they lived happily ever after. It's over.

Snow White, same thing. Here's Snow White, hanging out with seven dwarfs and there's jewels, that's the first room, and then everything is like evil, living trees with chowel's and a witch with apples and dungeons and blood and then witches at the top and there's a thunderstorm and they're knocking her off a cliff, and the last thing you hear before the ride is over is (SCREAMING). And then the door opens and all there is not even a robot but just a picture that says they lived happily ever after. You're like where's the prince even? Like where is he? I didn't even see him.

Don't get me started on Mr. Toad's Wild Ride. Driving around. Half the ride is just hell? I'm not cussing, its literally stones with fire and its hot and there's a devil at the end, and then you just exit and it doesn't

even say he lived happily ever after. And I love those rides. I don't know what it is. Because they're honest.

And the newest narrative ride at Disneyland, Little Mermaid. I was trying to figure out why it was so soulless. Little Mermaid's a great story, and a great cartoon, but the ride, I get on the ride, and it's just like you get on the ride, and here's the bird, what's his name? Scuttle. Scuttle's there and he's like let me tell you about Little Mermaid. And the first thing you see is like Little Mermaid and she's in a room with all of her stuff. You don't see the dad destroy it, just like there's her stuff and it's cool. And then you go into the next room and it's a party and it's like (SINGS – under the sea) she's dancing. And then she's in a boat, she's about to kiss a prince, and then the next scene is she kisses the prince and way off in the distance you kind of maybe see Ursula dying. And then the next one is another party! Actually there is a scene with Ursula, the villain, but even there, she like gets her legs and it's like not bad. I'm going way too deep into this, aren't I.

My point is, think about it. The layout of this ride is cool stuff, cool party, kiss a boy, kiss a boy again, another party, rides over. And you compare that to Mr. Toad's Wild Ride, and something is amiss.

All this to simply say I think that when a story loses the cost, loses the suffering, loses the difficulty, it becomes not believable, doesn't it. It becomes soulless. And I think it's because God has shown us, especially in this time, that where He wants us to go will come with a price. The

bigger your dream, the bigger your enemy. The bigger your dream, the bigger the obstacles. The bigger the dream, the bigger the time it will take to get there. And that's okay. God will get you where you need to go.

Remember what the old rides teach us. Remember what the old stories teach us. Remember what the Old Testament teaches us. That we face trials, we face difficulty, we face war, we face all these things, but in the end, God is faithful.

Many of us, we feel like we've got one call or one great thing we're supposed to do, but I don't think that's true at all. I think that for many of us, we have many calls. And each call prepares us for the next one. I don't think you have a Joseph leading Egypt without Joseph leading Potiphar's house. I think one leads to the next. So very often we lose our treasures, we lose our position, we lose our prestige, but we forget that we don't lose our experience, our knowledge, our wisdom.

I remember once desperately trying to hire a man who is 72 and he said to me you don't want me to work for you, I'm 72. I said you're the smartest guy in the room! You've got more experience than any of us! He's like well that's true, I'm glad you saw that. Or something like that, you know. Its true! The older you get, the more experience you have, and being old doesn't mean you're too old for dreams. Abraham was in his 70's when he got his promise from God, and was in his 90's before it was even fulfilled. God can do what He wants to do. If you're alive, it's for a

reason. Just be willing to be patient, to understand that sometimes there's a price to pay.

Many of us, see this is the thing, all work trains you. So all work, whether its sweeping floors, or making cappuccinos, or playing violins, or singing, or volunteering, all of it trains you. All of its an opportunity to grow as a disciple of Jesus; to learn what it means to be faithful to God, to make your work your worship, and just trust that as you do your work in your labor, whatever it is: parenting, it all means something to God. And all of it is like making you like a snowball being rolled around in snow. Maybe you just feel like you're going in circles, not getting anywhere, but that snowball's getting bigger and bigger. You're becoming a bigger person. Every day you endure your work with faithfulness. Every day you apply your hand in labor to what you're doing in order to worship God, and to be faithful for what you need to do today.

Stop worrying about tomorrow. Be faithful to today. Be a person of integrity, trustworthiness, joy, and worship. You're in the kingdom of God! You don't lack anything. God will provide everything you need, just trust in Him.

In a day like today, we talk a lot about money, but we don't talk a lot about wisdom. This is so funny because the scriptures teach us, like if you look to Proverbs chapter 16, how much better to get wisdom than to get gold. To get insight, rather than silver. Do we really believe that?

Look, you may say just give me money, man, but the scriptures also say that a fool and his money are quickly parted.

So let me ask you this crude question: would you rather have a million dollars, or would you rather have the knowledge to make a million dollars? Almost all of us, if I asked you publicly, you're going to be like I want the knowledge, but in your heart you're going to be like just give me the money. I'll just take the money, I'll figure it out. I'll read up. I'll get a mentor.

But the truth is a fool and his money are quickly parted. All you have to do is look at lottery winners. There have been lots of studies that show these people who win hundreds of millions of dollars end up destitute, broken families, kids on drugs, depressed, suicidal. What went wrong? They got everything they wanted. So I want to teach you that look, it's not about money. You can't take it with you when you die, but anything that you want, it comes from your insight, your wisdom, your knowledge, your experience, and most of all your faithfulness, your integrity. Your reliability. That people know that if they give you something, that they can trust you with it. That God knows if He gives you something, you'll be faithful to do it. When nobody's looking, you're going to do what's right. And none of us are perfectly there, but I know you can get there, friend. I know you can, and make that your goal. If you want to expedite your calling, if you want to expedite where God wants you to be, focus on this: your integrity. Being faithful. Being pure

of heart. Being good to your neighbor, and doing what's right even when nobody's looking, and watch how much faster you get through what you need to get through to get where God wants you to be, amen?

God's good. He sees everything and He loves promoting humble, life-giving, loving, joyful people like you. God's proud of you and I'm proud of you, too.

Let's pray: Father, we thank you that you love us, and I just pray that by your Holy Spirit you would affirm the words that have been spoken from this pulpit. That people would believe, not because I've said it, but because you've said it. That you will get them where they need to go. That we will not be distracted by the difficulties that we're going through, or the things that the enemy would throw at us, but we will trust, Lord, that you'll get us through these things to where we need to be. We choose today to take a deep breath, to relax and to say I trust God, and we do. We love you. It's in Jesus' name we pray, amen.