

RECONSIDERATIONS

EXPLORING CHRISTIAN THOUGHT IN THE UNIVERSITY COMMUNITY

DECEMBER 2015

VOLUME 16, NUMBER 1

*Author, speaker, and pastor Tom Nelson has greatly influenced our conversation in the Study Center's programs over the past year and a half. His book entitled *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*¹ lays the foundation for our Undergraduate Seminars on Faith and Vocation, and he will be a featured speaker at an important local conference this coming spring (see our Recommended Resource on p. 4 for more details). We are pleased to share this excerpt from *Work Matters* with our readers.*

MORE, BUT NOT LESS, THAN A CARPENTER

Tom Nelson

I don't know why I didn't see it for so long, but one day as I was reading through the Gospel of Mark, I stumbled across a verse that stopped me dead in my tracks. In Mark 6 we are told that Jesus, who was spending his time as an itinerant rabbi, came back to his hometown of Nazareth. The hometown crowd listened to Jesus teach in the synagogue, and they were stunned by their hometown boy who was displaying such extraordinary wisdom and power. In their eyes, Jesus was first and foremost a carpenter from Nazareth. Mark records the hometown crowd exclaiming with a tone of incredulity, "Is not this the carpenter, the son of Mary and brother of James and Joses and Judas and Simon? And are not his sisters here with us? And they took offense at him" (Mark 6:3).

As I slowly pondered these words, I began to reflect on the significance of Jesus spending so much of his time on earth working with his hands in a carpentry shop. Here was the Son of God sent to earth on a redemptive mission of seeking and saving the lost, of proclaiming the gospel, yet he spent the vast majority of his years on earth making things in an obscure carpentry shop. We know from Luke's Gospel that even at the age of twelve, Jesus was demonstrating his amazing rabbinical brilliance to the brightest and best in Jerusalem (Luke 2:47). How

did Jesus's brilliance fit in with a carpentry career? At first glance this doesn't seem to be a very strategic use of the Son of God's extraordinary gifts or his important messianic mission. Why was it the Father's will for Jesus to spend so much time in the carpentry shop instead of gracing the Palestinian countryside, proclaiming the gospel and healing the multitudes?

“Why was it the Father's will for Jesus to spend so much time in the carpentry shop?”

The New Testament records Jesus spending only about three years in itinerant ministry, what we might refer to as full-time vocational ministry. But for the many years before that, Jesus worked as a carpenter. Speaking of Jesus as a carpenter, Dallas Willard brings a refreshing perspective.

If he were to come today as he did then, he could carry out his mission through most any decent and useful occupation. He could be a clerk or accountant in a hardware store, a computer repairman, a banker, an editor, doctor, waiter, teacher, farm-hand, lab technician, or construction worker. He could run a housecleaning service or repair automobiles. In other words, if he were to come today he could very well do what you do. He could very well live in your apartment or house, hold down your job, have your education and life prospects,

Continued on page 2

More, But Not Less, Than a Carpenter, continued from page 1

and live within your family surroundings and time. None of this would be the least hindrance to the eternal kind of life that was his by nature and becomes available to us through him.²

Several years ago I remember reading a fine book that was winsomely titled *More Than a Carpenter*. In this book, the author points out a great deal of convincing evidence that supports the deity of Jesus. This is essential to understanding the person and work of Jesus. Yet in no way should we conclude that because Jesus was more than a carpenter, his vocational calling to work as a carpenter was somehow less than important. Clearly the Son of God was much more, but not less, than a carpenter. This incarnational pattern of Jesus's earthly life speaks volumes about the importance of our day-to-day vocational work.

Incarnation and Work

When we contemplate who Jesus really is, his joyful contentment to work with his hands day after day constructing things, making useful farm implements and household furniture in an obscure Nazareth carpentry shop, we find him truly stunning. Jesus's work life tells us that he did not think being a carpenter was somehow below him or a poor use of his many gifts. Here is the very One whose hands not only created the world but also the very wood he was crafting in a carpentry shop. The apostle Paul gives us a glorious description of this carpenter from Nazareth: "He is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of all creation. For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities—all things were created through him and for him. And he is before all things, and in him all things hold together" (Col. 1:15-17).

Think about it for a moment. The very One who was the master craftsman of the universe spent a great deal of time during his thirty-three years on earth crafting things with his hands. The One who had masterfully fashioned humans from the dust of the earth was making chairs for people to sit on in their houses. No doubt Jesus had strong, well-worn, callused hands. It is all too easy for us to overlook the fact that Jesus knew what it meant to get up and go to work every day. Jesus experienced both the

exhilaration and exhaustion of putting in a hard day's work. Jesus faced work and a workplace profoundly affected by sin. I am sure Jesus dealt with difficult and demanding people in the workplace who complained about this and that. I am also confident that the sinless Son of Man not only modeled humility in the workplace, but also maintained a teachable spirit as he served under the tutelage of Joseph, his human guardian father. I doubt if Joseph was the perfect boss. I have yet to meet a perfect boss, and when I look into my mirror each morning, I see anything but a perfect boss.

We are rightly in awe of Jesus, who shockingly ignores cultural convention by picking up a basin and towel and washing his disciples' dirty, stinky feet. Yet we tend to forget that Jesus had been modeling a basin-and-towel kind of servanthood in a carpentry shop for years. Jesus's humble service in the workplace was the training ground for that glorious display of servanthood in an upper room in Jerusalem.

Working with his hands day in and day out in a carpentry shop was not below Jesus. Jesus did not see his carpentry work as mundane or meaningless, for it was the work his Father had called him to do. I have a good hunch that Jesus was a top-notch carpenter and did top-notch work. Even before Jesus entered his itinerant rabbinical ministry, Matthew reminds his readers of the Father's good pleasure in his Son. Following Jesus's baptism, the Spirit of God descended as a dove, and a voice out of heaven declared, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17). I am sure there were many things that made the Father well pleased, but one important aspect of Jesus's well-pleasing life that we must not overlook is his well-pleasing work as a carpenter.

“No doubt Jesus had strong, well-worn, callused hands.”

Jesus's Great Invitation

Jesus invites us to become his apprentice and learn from him a whole new way of living. Jesus said, "Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:28-30). In this great invitation to be yoked with Master Jesus, we are invited to experience life as God

originally intended way back in the garden of Eden, before sin and corruption entered the world. The path to "rest," this life as God originally designed for us to live, is made possible because of the gospel and is found in Jesus's yoke. In Jesus's yoke we learn to live our new-creation life of submission and obedience.

The word *rest* is not necessarily kicking back in our recliner or chilling out in some way, but rather a joyous ease in our work as we wear the yoke that has been tailor-made just for us. When we enter the yoke of Christ, we press into God's design for our lives and we learn from Jesus how he would live our lives if he were us. A vital part of our learning from Jesus, of being yoked with him, is learning the path of vocational faithfulness. Brilliantly, Jesus teaches us not only how to live but also how to work. Writing to the local church at Colossae, the apostle Paul places vocational faithfulness at the heart of apprenticeship with Jesus and a 24/7 life of God-honoring worship. "Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord

you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ." (Col. 3:23-24). We are to be learning from Jesus how to do our work, and living and working each day as unto the Lord.

Our ordinary day-to-day work life is designed by God to be extraordinary. As we go to work day in and day out, it seems as though our lives are filled with many ordinary days. It is what we do on these ordinary days that makes our work and our lives extraordinary. As pointed out earlier, the Hebrew word *avodah* recorded in the Old Testament presents to us a seamless understanding of work and worship, thereby eliminating any compartmentalization of a worshipful life whether it is Sunday or Monday. Not only do we worship God in and through our work, but one of the primary ways we love our neighbor is in and through our vocation. In his Great Commandment, Jesus calls us to love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and our neighbor as our self (Luke 10:27). A

Continued on page 6

Do You Realize?

You matter in the lives of students. A couple weeks ago our director received notes from two alumni who have recently moved away, and they have given us permission to share their thoughts with you.

"I really felt illuminated and enriched by the [discussion of] your manuscript...It was really doing a lot to piece together huge gaps that my 'liberal education' had never begun to fill. As always at the CSC, my experience in your seminar was providing the environment of intellectual breadth and dynamism that most people never find." - Jim

"The Christian Study Center has played a more pivotal role to my current Christian living than any other organization. I am honored to play a financial role in the continuation of the program. Thank you for all you do!" - Brett

Your year-end gifts enable us to serve Jim and Brett and others like them by offering the thoughtful consideration of a Christian understanding of life and culture in the university community.

Have you heard?

The Christian Study Center now offers electronic funds transfer (EFT) via ACH. Just fill out the simple form on the website in order to be set up for a one-time or recurring gift (you may discontinue your gift at any time).



RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

THE CHURCH AT WORK CONFERENCE: Equipping the Saints for Everyday Faithfulness

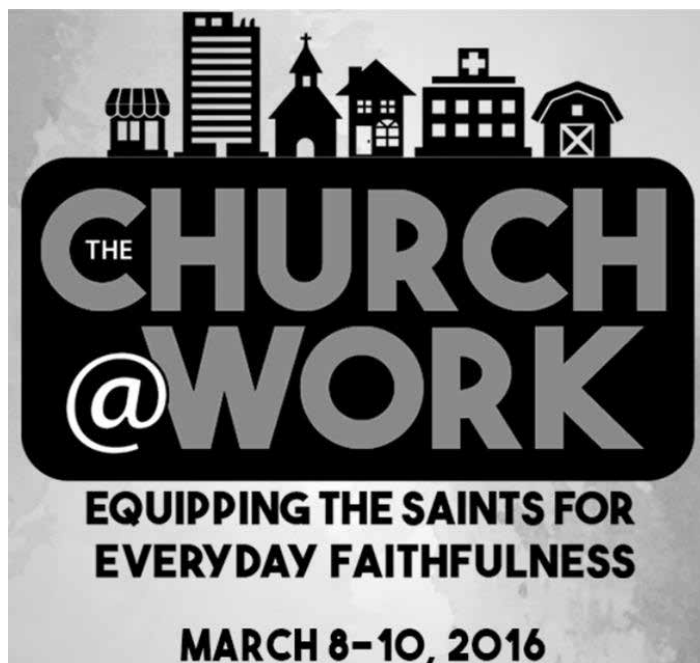
*A conference for pastors and ministry leaders - March 8-10, 2016
Creskide Community Church, Gainesville FL*

thechurchatworkconference.org

This local conference is an opportunity to dig deeper into the biblical vision of integrating faith into every aspect of life, including work and vocation. Two of the country's leading voices in this growing conversation, Tom Nelson and Steve Garber, are featured speakers. Besides hearing from them in plenary sessions, there will also be opportunities throughout the conference to interact with a variety of professionals who have grown in their understanding of everyday faithfulness, and who see faith and work integration as vital to discipleship and mission.

Session topics include:

- Why faith and work integration is crucial for breaking down the secular/sacred divide (and why we should care);
- Why faith and work integration is critical for the church in this cultural moment;
- What biblical, theological and church-historical foundations are essential in equipping the saints for everyday faithfulness;
- How to read and preach Scripture with a view toward faith and work implications and applications;
- What the implications of faith and work integration are for the church's discipleship efforts;
- What the implications of faith and work integration are for the church's mission in the world; and
- Why lay leaders in your church see faith and work integration as so important and what sort of fruit it could be bearing in their lives.



The vision behind this conference is to foster a growing community of pastors and ministry leaders who understand the Gospel as impacting every area of life. By conveying the biblical call to work as a vital part of discipleship and mission and providing resources for churches to grow in an ability to integrate faith and work, this conference aims to help pastors and other ministry leaders equip and send their church to the mission field in their own backyard.

For details and registration information, visit thechurchatworkconference.org.

CHRISTMAS CAROL

In keeping with our Study Center tradition, we are pleased to present this Welsh Carol (music by Dr. Caradog Roberts, words by Pr. K. E. Roberts) to serve you in your celebration of the birth of Jesus Christ¹.

The musical score is written for a piano or organ. It consists of three systems of music. The first system is in 4/4 time and features a treble clef with a key signature of one sharp (F#) and a bass clef. The melody is primarily in the treble clef, with a steady accompaniment in the bass clef. The second system includes a crescendo marking 'cres.' and a fortissimo marking 'f'. The third system contains two first endings, labeled '1st time.' and '2nd time.', which lead to a final cadence.

Awake were they only, those shepherds so lonely,
 On guard in that silence profound:
 When colour had faded, when night-time had shaded
 Their senses from sight and from sound,
 Lo, then broke a wonder, then drifted asunder
 The veils from the splendour of God,
 When light from the Holy came down to the lowly,
 And heaven to the earth that they trod.

May light now enfold us, O Lord, for behold us
 Like shepherds, from tumult withdrawn,
 Nor hearing, nor seeing, all other care fleeing,
 We wait the ineffable dawn.
 O Spirit all-knowing, thou source overflowing,
 O move in the darkness around,
 That sight may be in us, true hearing to win us
 Glad tidings where Christ may be found.

The board and staff of the Christian Study Center extend our warmest Christmas greetings. May God bless you in this special time of year as we anticipate the coming of our Savior.

1. Taken from Percy Dearmer, R. Vaughan Williams, and Martin Shaw, editors, *The Oxford Book of Carols* (London: Oxford University Press, 1928), pp. 122-123.

More, But Not Less, Than a Carpenter, continued from page 3

proper understanding of Christian vocation puts flesh and feet on this commandment.

Incarnating the Great Commandment

Recently I was the recipient of neighborly love expressed through vocation. On a flight from Kansas City to Los Angeles, many individuals knowingly or unknowingly honored the Great Commandment through their work. When I arrived at the Kansas City airport, the baggage handlers assisted me with my luggage. At the gate, security personnel served me. Then a gate agent facilitated my getting on the plane. On the plane, the pilots charted the course and readied us for flight. A maintenance team filled the plane with jet fuel and even fixed an ailing plane toilet. Once we were airborne, a flight attendant brought me a cup of coffee. It was in and through many individuals' diligent work that I was able to get to my destination and be ready for my meetings.

One of the primary ways we tangibly love our neighbors is to do excellent, God-honoring work in our various vocations. When we look at our work through a proper biblical lens, we can see vocation's close connection with loving our neighbor. Your vocational work is your specific and invaluable contribution to God's ongoing creation and an essential aspect of God's Great Commandment to love your neighbor as yourself. Martin Luther reminds us that it is not God who needs our good works, but it is our neighbor who needs our good works. A transforming truth we must firmly grab onto is that God is very much at work in our work. God is transforming us in our work and transforming the world through our work.

Shifting Workplace Paradigms

When we begin to grasp the rich biblical truths of vocation, we see our work and the workplace where it occurs through a

different lens. A friend of mine who has spent a great deal of time looking at his work as a CEO through a vocational lens, often reminds me of how this paradigm shift radically changed his approach to work. Previously he had understood that his primary goal as a CEO who happened to be a Christian was to make a lot of money and then give that money to charitable causes that were making a difference in the world. As a very generous person, he gave sizable amount to Christian missionaries and other philanthropic causes.

As he put it, "I wanted to support Jesus's Great Commission as much as I could." Though my friend continues to give generously to his church and other causes, the game-changer for him was when he began seeing his work as having intrinsic value and not merely instrumental value. He recognized his work as valuable in itself—God-

honoring and good. Work was not just valuable because of its economic benefits or as a platform for Christian ministry. Of course, work's economic benefits and the opportunity it provides for Christian ministry can be good things, but they are not work's main goal. Work's main goal is worship through a lifestyle of God-honoring vocational faithfulness.

Cultivating a New Attitude in Our Work

Every day when you arrive at your workplace, an attitude arrives with you. Our attitudes are like the perfume or cologne we are wearing; we smell the fragrance when we first put it on, but others smell it throughout the day. The fragrance you are wearing at work, others are picking up. So what are those around you smelling? The apostle Paul reminds us that as apprentices of Jesus, we have the fragrance of Christ. The attitudes we wear to our workplaces should remind others of Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control—should make up a great deal

“ Work's main goal is
worship through a lifestyle
of God-honoring vocational
faithfulness.”

Did you know?

We are offering a handcrafted coffee mug with a CSC hand stamp to all new monthly donors and to all current monthly donors who increase their gift by \$5 or more per month (Deadline for mug offer is January 15, 2016).



of our attitudinal fragrance. Yet for me, Paul's inspired words to the followers of Jesus at Thessalonica are most helpful in cultivating a new attitude about my work and my workplace. After urging the Thessalonian believers to seek the common good of all, Paul lays out three attitudinal adjustments that powerfully transform the workplaces we have been called to inhabit. Paul says, "Rejoice always, pray without ceasing, give thanks in all circumstances; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you" (I Thess. 5:16-18).

In these power-packed verses Paul encourages us to cultivate attitudes of joy, of prayer, and of gratitude. Though our work and workplaces can be very frustrating and at times we often deal with some very difficult and demanding people, we are empowered by the Holy Spirit to positively influence a workplace culture that better promotes human flourishing, synergistic teamwork, and the common good. If we will take the time to commit Paul's inspired words to memory we can take them to work with us. Perhaps it would be helpful to write out Paul's words and put them somewhere in your workspace as a reminder. In my workplace, I often review Paul's words and make the necessary attitudinal adjustments throughout the workday.

It is also helpful for me to regularly remember who my ultimate audience is at work. Living and working before an Audience of One is amazingly transforming in both the good times and the bad. In my own workplace, I am particularly encouraged by the truths of Proverbs 16:3, "Commit your work to the Lord, and your plans will be established." When we live before an Audience of One, we have nothing to fear, nothing to hide, and nothing to prove. We can devote our complete energy to doing good work. Having an Audience of One means we can practice the presence of God as we work and enjoy an ongoing conversation with him. As an overflow of our walk with Christ, we have the wonderful opportunity to bring a positive, joyful outlook to our daily work. No matter what our circumstances, our steadfast hope remains firmly tethered to the good news of the gospel. Because of our Christian faith and our understanding of Christian vocation, we can give a warm smile to all of our coworkers, even those who at times rub us the wrong way. We can look for the good in others and praise them. We can truly celebrate when others are recognized for their achievement. We can express our appreciation through kind words and handwritten notes. Our attitudes can be the sweet aroma of Christ to those around us.

Pursuing Excellence in Our Work

As I have interacted with business leaders over the years, I have heard negative words about the shabbiness and shadiness of Christians in the workplace more times than I can count. Whether the stories I hear are exaggerated for effect, I do not know, but I do believe that many times the reputation of Christians and their work is a sobering indictment on our inadequate understanding, as well as our day-to-day application, of the transforming truths of vocation. Sadly, a great deal of the shabbiness and shadiness of many Christians' work is directly related to an inadequate and often distorted theology of vocation.

I once heard the story of the legendary Alexander the Great who, in a rather serendipitous way, encountered one of his soldiers who was, to put it charitably, a pitiful sight. The soldier was dressed sloppily, seeming disheveled, and clearly reeked of a long night of drinking and debauchery. When asked by his great military commander what his name was, the soldier replied, "Alexander, sir." Alexander the Great glared back at the soldier and said, "Soldier, either change your name or change your behavior."

“ Every day when you arrive at your workplace, an attitude arrives with you.”

I fear that many of us who call ourselves Christians do not live up to that name in our work. Perhaps we need a fresh reminder that those who call themselves Christians are to behave differently.

The apostle Paul makes an important connection between the name of Jesus and our day-to-day behavior. Writing to the followers of Jesus at Colossae, Paul says, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him" (Col. 3:17). When we embrace Jesus as our Lord and Savior, by his grace we work and behave differently in the workplace. Like our Master, Jesus, who modeled excellent carpentry work, in his grace we, too, labor with diligence and strive for excellence in whatever work God has called us to do.

Notes

1. Nelson, Tom, *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2011). This excerpt is taken from pages 87-96, reprinted here with the permission of the author.

2. Willard, Dallas, *The Divine Conspiracy* (New York: HarperCollins, 1998), p. 14.



112 NW 16th Street
Gainesville, FL 32603

NON-PROFIT ORG.
U.S. POSTAGE PAID
GAINESVILLE, FL
PERMIT NO. 188

Inside this Edition

MORE, BUT NOT LESS, THAN A CARPENTER

an excerpt from pastor Tom Nelson's book entitled *Work Matters: Connecting Sunday Worship to Monday Work*
(See p. 1)

RECOMMENDED RESOURCE

The Church at Work Conference: Equipping the Saints for Everyday Faithfulness
A conference for pastors and ministry leaders - March 8-10, 2016
Creekside Community Church, Gainesville FL
thechurchatworkconference.org
(See p. 4)

ADVENT MEDITATION

Traditional Welsh Carol
(See p. 5)

This newsletter is a publication of the Christian Study Center of Gainesville which facilitates the thoughtful consideration of a Christian understanding of life and culture in the university community.



CHRISTIAN
STUDY CENTER
of GAINESVILLE, INC.

112 NW 16th Street
Gainesville, FL 32603

352 - 379 - 7375
christianstudycenter.org

Dr. Richard V. Horner
Executive Director

CSC Staff
Editor