

WORKING – Luke 2:8-20

Our common view of divine assignments or “callings” from God applies to things like pulpits, ministry, and mission fields. Other work and the common 9-5 feels disconnected from God’s work. Yet the shepherds’ pivotal involvement in the Christmas narrative reminds us that this is hardly the case. Our view of callings and divine assignments is woefully constrained, and we need to connect our work to God’s work again.

What do you think of when you hear the word saint?

The New Testament alone uses the word “saint” some **59 times**.

And in scripture we see two important things about saints –

- 1.) Saints walk the earth as God’s redeemed.
- 2.) Saints are plural. Saint is almost universally used in the plural.

There is but one instance of the word saint in the singular:

Philippians 4:21 – “greet every saint in Christ Jesus.”

- Paul doesn’t use it in the Catholic sense, but as synonymous with Christians.

In **1 Corinthians 1:2** he opens by speaking to:

“Those sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints”

Every child of God here tonight, as defined by scripture, is a saint: made holy and set apart.

That means each of us tonight have a divine assignment.

1 Corinthians 7:17- “ each person should live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to them, just as God has called them. This is the rule I lay down in all the churches.”

Whatever situation that Lord has **ASSIGNED** and **CALLED** them to.

Each person living as a new believer is called and assigned by God to whatever situation they are in. Blacksmith. Soldier. Politician. Doctor. Fisherman. Seamstress. All divinely assigned and called. Yes... this even included shepherds.

READ LUKE 2:8-20

The first person in ALL of scripture that God says was filled with the Holy Spirit: **Bezalel**. Bezalel was Moses’ foreman for his Tabernacle project. A blue collar worker and creative. Stripped down, Exodus 31 reads: ***God called Bezalel by name... and filled him with the spirit... to work.***

What if this is a fill in the blank text for each of us tonight? Replace the name Bezalel with yours

What a perspective might we all walk away with tonight in regards to our work?

The Tabernacle built by Bezalel foreshadowed **the Temple** built by Solomon later on.

Both were the place of worship for the Jews.

Both were the place of sacrifice. A holy space marked by the presence of God.

Shepherds - by the very nature of their job - from cohabitating with sheep, to chasing and killing animals that would attack sheep... they worked a nomadic, smelly, dirty gig that often left them too unclean to enter the Temple without a ritual cleansing.

The Mishnah - a later text from Jewish culture made up of Rabbinic sayings and traditions – these religious leaders considered shepherds such scorned figures that their testimony wasn't permissible in court!

What the religious elitists saw in the Mishnah as unreliable witnesses, God gave this divine assignment.

The shepherds were to leave their flocks to seek out Jesus as a sign and then bear witness to it.

And it says people were amazed at what the shepherds were telling them.

No doubt not only because of the news, but because of WHO was telling them.

These blue collar, nomadic shepherds were *the first to testify to the incarnation of Jesus Christ*
Wouldn't that be a job for a rabbi or Pharisee?

But God was flipping our idea of who carries a divine assignment on its head.

“They went back to their flocks... glorifying God...”

We often seek an encounter Jesus on the weekend.

But then unlike the shepherds... we struggle to go back to work glorifying God...

Our work feels largely disconnected from the work of God.

“They went back to their flocks... glorifying God...”

No matter what job you drive to Monday morning and clock into.... Plumber. Politician. Homeschool mom. High School Teacher. Doctor. Doordasher. You go back this Monday a saint, a child of God made holy and set apart for God's divine assignment in your life.

And you too can go back, glorifying God in the midst of it.

Again this return to the work of shepherding echoes Paul's future advice to the many new believers joining the church in Corinth: ***“live as a believer in whatever situation the Lord has assigned to [you], just as God has called [you].”***

Assigned and called to shepherding, they went back to shepherding. Glorifying God on their way

And this echoes Paul's advice just a few verses later in Corinthians 10:31 where he says:

“whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God.”

The shepherds walked this out, going back to their flocks, to the glory of God ...and Luke in his Gospel records it for all time... and it's a powerful revelation if we'll let it break the 4th wall.

Isn't God pointing through them to the fact that all work is connected to His work?

We have an *appropriate* focus on the Great Commission and being a light in the workplace in most of our commentary on work, but we forget what many consider to be the original Great Commission that happened long before Christ. It's this Old Testament foreshadowing of the Great Commission that gives deep meaning to our work, connecting it to God's work.

For that we turn all the way back to Genesis 1, where we see from the jump **WORK as DIVINE**

Jesus says in **John 5:17**– *“My father is always at work to this very day, and I too am working.”* This is the image we were made in.

See the **value of a human life – our dignity** - is found in the fact every man woman and child in every color race and creed is created in the image of God.

In a similar way, I'd contend that the **value of work** is found in the fact we were created in the image of a working, creative God.

Jesus spent more time in carpentry than in vocational ministry!

Work isn't beneath God - he in his *divinity* already joined us in it.

God gives Adam and Eve mankind's first job description, what many would call The Creation Mandate:

It starts with a divine blessing, carrying the tone of a covenant between God and man... It says God blessed them and said to them: *“Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”*

WORK AS DEVELOPING

In the Creation Mandate we see it has three parts:

The blessing

The command to be fruitful and multiply – to fill the earth.

- Yes this is about procreation and caring for kids.
- But filling the earth would also require civilization and caring for culture.

That's why we get the last part of the Creation Mandate:

- Subdue creation, and rule over it.

**This means we aren't just called to live and die on earth.
We're called by God to labor to develop it.**

God didn't want to just create a **species**.

He wanted those humans to go on and create **society**.

And He left the work to us.

See in Genesis God creates both **body** and **soul**.
And God cares about our **body** and **soul**.
And meaningful work ministers to both.

Martin Luther's commentary on **Psalm 147:13** where it says God strengthens the bars at your gates. Luther asks, how does God do this? He says *“By the word “bars” we must understand not only the iron bar that a smith may make but... everything else that helps to protect us, such as good government, good city ordinances, good order... this is a gift from God.”*

WORK AS DUTY

Colossians 3:23 – **“Work as if you are working for the Lord.”**

But before we get to this work – whether in the church, in our workplace, or caring for our homes - we need to have a tight grasp on God's grace.

Because when we lose this posture of God's grace at our core, work quickly becomes an idol.
Work becomes how we strive to assert our dignity and worth and value.
It's why rest is elusive and we're a burnout culture.
Because you'll never do enough to feel enough.

This saves us from underwork – because we are working for God, we wouldn't sell him short.
This frees us from overwork – we don't have to prove ourselves to God, we don't have to strive for approval... we already have assurance.

Some theologians and teachers refer to the Creation Mandate as the original Great Commission, or the Old Testament Great Commission.

- *We see in the Great Commission the divine blessing, “I will be with you always.”*
- *We see that the Church is called into all the nations, to cover the earth.*
- *And we see that we're called to disciple making, the New Testament equivalent of subduing.*

The Creation Mandate is an ongoing charge to work for the benefit of where God has placed us. God's original plan is in place, but the Great Commission has echoed and added to it.

We don't have to choose between working for the culture and worshipping Christ.
We glorify God in both.

1 Thessalonians 4:11:

“make it your ambition to lead a quiet life: You should mind your own business and work with your hands, just as we told you, so that your daily life may win the respect of outsiders and so that you will not be dependent on anybody.”

People often don't remember what you said. They remember what you showed.
They don't remember what you said. They remember when you showed up.

The platforms and microphones we associate with a calling and divine assignments in the end aren't the only way to bear witness and glorify God. Personally – I'd tell you they're overrated!

We need to recognize we are all saints, called and assigned by God to do work right where he's placed us. And that doing so can glorify him as much as any platform or sermon.