Is Work Sacred?

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Noah was a righteous man, outstanding in his generation. We read in the New Testament that as well as being righteous, he was also a preacher of righteousness (2 Peter 2:5). He preached what he practiced! Besides building the ark in obedience to God, he was preaching a message of hope to a corrupt generation of people who had turned their backs on God completely.

Where We Find Our Identity

Jesus tells us that before his return, the people of the earth will once again be united in total rebellion against God (Matt 24:37). I had to think about this when we were recently discussing work. Is work in itself sacred, holy unto the Lord? In answer to this question, I believe we need to deal with a deeper issue: identity. Who are we in Christ? Where is our position and why are we, as His followers, here on earth?

It may sound strange, but it is important to get our heads around this. Noah was a postdiluvian[1] preacher in a prediluvian[2] world. What I mean is, God had told him that his generation of people would be judged and wiped out in a global flood. God had shown Noah a way of escape and survival of the judgement to come and how he could, in a manner of speaking, reach the other side. As a result, Noah was the only one who knew how to get to from the 'present' world of his time to the world to come.

Noah's Focus Wasn't on Building the Ark

When God told Noah what was about to take place and gave him a blueprint for the ark, Noah did not start a brisk boat-building business, believing that this was what God wanted him to do (he could even have made a lot of money selling boats!). Instead, he was obedient and carried out the plan that God had given him. In the meantime, he preached to the corrupt generation, warning them of what was about to happen. He preached to them a message of right and wrong, and how to get right with God.

> Noah was showing them the way of salvation. They were to put their trust in God's escape plan and build their own arks.

Often folk have put out this challenge about Noah's preaching: if anyone had listened to him, how would they have fitted in the ark? In fact, Noah was showing them the way of salvation. They were to put their trust in God's escape plan and build their own arks. He sure was a preacher with impressive visual aids!

We Work as Ambassadors of Christ

How does this relate to us today? In Ephesians 2:5, Paul states that believers are seated with Christ in heavenly realms and this is echoed in Colossians 3:1 where he challenges the believers to focus their whole life on the virtues of heaven where Christ is seated (and they are seated with Him). We are in Him, Jesus states in John 17:3. How should we understand this when we are still so tangibly present here on earth? How can we be on earth as well as in heaven at the same time?

In his second letter to the Corinthians, Paul tells them that they are ambassadors of Christ. They are representatives of another kingdom which is not of this earth (2 Corinthains 5:20). Let's consider the American Ambassador to South Africa. He is physically in South Africa – living here, working here, eating here etc. – but positionally, he is seated in Washington DC. Though in South Africa, all the power and authority of the American administration is vested in him.

He has the backing of the whole U.S. government and is charged by the Administration to speak 'only as he hears'. He has the responsibility to represent, uphold and promote American values in every area within his responsibility. He does not act on his own – in all he does, he represents America. He even has the power to declare war. If he ever steps out of line, he will be removed from his office, as he is no longer aligned with the American Administration.

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This gives a good illustration of why we are here on earth. We are physically and functionally on earth, but positionally, we are seated with Christ in the heavenly realm. We too are to carry out a mandate given to us, which is to represent the King and His Kingdom and communicate the message entrusted to us. Like Noah, we are the only people who are entrusted with a message of righteousness. We implore the corrupt generation we live among to be reconciled with Christ and to put their trust in His plan of salvation and become citizens of His kingdom.

Furthermore, the Bible tells us that we are foreigners on the earth, strangers in this world (Ephesians 2:19; 1 Peter 1:17 & 2:11 and Hebrews 11:13), members of a Kingdom that is not of this world (John 18:36). As followers of Jesus, we simply do not belong here.

Our Primary Focus

What has this got to do with the 'ethics of work'? Well, we have an ambassadorial mandate to carry out wherever we are working, living and serving. Jesus makes it clear in John 17 that His followers don't belong on the earth and that He desires for God to remove them from the world to be with Him where He is (John 17:14, 16). However, He asks His Father to leave them in the world and to protect them from the Evil One (John 17:15). He furthermore gives the reason for His followers to remain in the world: 'So that the people of the world may know that the Father sent his Son.' (John 17:23b)

Noah was not called to be a shipyard developer and to build many boats. He was called to preach the 'gospel of righteousness' whilst building the ark in obedience to God's command. I believe that we must always maintain the right perspective in the work that we are doing. As followers of Jesus, we don't work primarily to make a living or to become successful in the business world. These are all important issues to take into consideration, but they are not our primary focus. We are placed wherever we are to be representatives of the King.

> Whether we are full-time in ministry or full-time in the market place, we must never lose perspective of why we are in this world.

Like Noah, we communicate a message about righteousness. In our work, we carry out our responsibilities as if we are doing it for the King; unto Jesus. In that way, our attitude and motivation will be a powerful witness to the unbelievers around us.

No Division Between Secular & Sacred

Whether we are full-time in ministry or full-time in the market place, we must never lose perspective of why we are in this world. As a result, there is no division between secular and sacred. All is sacred, part-time or full-time. All followers are involved in a sacred, full-time ministry, as all are part of the Missio Deo in this world, representing Christ and partnering with Him in building His Kingdom through being part of his Church (Matthew 5:16 & 1 Peter 2:12).

We are here because Jesus sent us into the world. We are here because we are partners with Him in His mission to the world. We are here to communicate His message and, like Noah, challenge the people of this corrupt generation to seriously consider the coming judgement and the means of escape, which God has provided. We are postdiluvian ministers proclaiming the gospel of righteousness in a prediluvian world. We too have a message that echoes with Paul, whether in the church or in the workplace: We implore you, be reconciled with Christ! (2 Corinthians 5:20b)

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[1] Definition of postdiluvian: of or relating to the period after the flood described in the Bible
[2] Definition of prediluvian: of or relating to the period before the flood described in the Bible