

# THIS TIME TOMORROW

SERIES: KINGDOM WORK



Catalog No. 20170618

Genesis 2-3

1st Message

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June 18, 2017

## Genesis 2-3

I'd like to start out this morning with a little exercise. Think about what time it is right now. Sunday morning. You're sitting here in church, enjoying music that has led you to an awareness of God and now you're settling in for a sermon. This is what you're doing at this moment.

Now fast forward twenty-four hours. Think about what you'll be doing this time tomorrow. Maybe you'll be at work. Maybe you'll be studying or at an internship. Maybe you'll be home with your children, trying to figure out what to do with the week. Maybe you're retired, and you'll be with your grandkids or you'll be enjoying a quiet Monday morning. What will you be doing this time tomorrow?

Finally, think about what the thing you're doing in this moment right now has to do with the thing you'll be doing at this time tomorrow. How does worshipping God on a Sunday morning relate to what you'll be doing the rest of your week: on Monday and Tuesday and the rest?

On a high level, this is the topic that we're going to be discussing during our new summer series that kicks off today. We've called this series *Kingdom Work* because our goal throughout the summer will be to explore the ways that following Jesus results in every moment of our lives being about the kingdom of God.

We want to explore how to connect the dots between Sunday and the rest of the week. How does what you're doing here and now relate to what you'll be doing this time tomorrow.

To do that, we're going to be thinking broadly about the idea of vocation. We'll be using that word to refer to all the things that we do with the bulk of our time in life. For many that is professional work. But it could also be schooling or staying home to raise children. It could be looking for work or being retired from work. It could be volunteering or travelling.

Whatever fills your time, we want to understand how what you do is part of the work of God on earth. We want to explore together how we can see our vocations as fulfilling our God-given purpose. We want to see how everything we do can be kingdom work.

It's an honor to be preaching on this topic at PBC because this is one of the things that first drew me to this church. I was a student at Stanford and was involved in some of the on-campus Christian groups that ministered there.

I'm not sure anyone was specifically teaching this, but somehow I picked up the message that my classes weren't really that important. I started to hear the message that what God really wanted me to do was to volunteer with my fellowship and tell people about Jesus. Anything that detracted from that—studies or hobbies or jobs—was just a distraction. It was as if the thing that I spent most of my time doing was simply “throw-away” so that I could do “Christian stuff.”

During that season, I attended a men's retreat at PBC. I was shocked by what I heard from the speaker. I don't remember who spoke or what the main topic was, but I picked up on a message that I couldn't believe. This speaker seemed to acknowledge that most of these men spent 40 hours (or more) at work, doing something that wasn't specifically “Christian.” And he seemed to think it was okay.

In fact, he even seemed to think that it was worthwhile. That it could matter to God. That blew me away.

This is so important for us to understand. It's possible to walk away from Sunday after Sunday with a fairly thin view of vocation. You might think: 1) Volunteering at church is the most important thing to do. 2) Out there, I'm supposed to earn money so I can give a lot of it to the church. And while I'm out there, I need to focus on 3) finding opportunities to tell people about Jesus; and 4) being a nice person.

Is that all we have to go on while we're "out there?" Tell people about Jesus and be nice? Neither of those is wrong. But if that's all we have, you might start to feel like I felt in college. Most of your hours don't have anything to do with what's really important.

Because it's Father's Day, I was reading some dad jokes. Here's what comedian Jim Gaffigan had to say about fatherhood:

*Every night before I get my one hour of sleep, I have the same thought: 'Well, that's a wrap on another day of acting like I know what I'm doing.' I wish I were exaggerating, but I'm not. Most of the time, I feel entirely unqualified to be a parent. I call these times being awake.<sup>1</sup>*

We don't want to feel that most of the time our time and energy is wasted. There has to be more. There has to be more to how God wants us to understand our time and our effort and our energy. And there is.

Over the course of the summer, we'll hear from a variety of voices unpacking the idea of Kingdom work. Several of our pastors, elders, and gifted members of our congregation will preach from a variety of perspectives. We will address topics such as finding fulfillment, developing rhythms of rest, using your power and authority, having a meaningful impact, wisdom for work, and more.

Our hope is that we walk away from this series with a bigger picture of how God created us to spend our time. We want to see our lives—the entirety of them—as engaged in Kingdom work.

## Created For Vocation

This morning we want to build a basic framework for understanding our vocation: what it is, why it is so challenging, and what can be done about it.

The idea of vocation begins in the first pages of the Bible. There is so much rich theology packed into the first few chapters of Genesis. For this morning, we want to notice one big idea: we want to observe why, in the course of the story, God created humankind.

### Genesis 2:4-5:

**These are the generations of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the LORD God made the earth and the heavens. 5 When no bush of the field was yet**

**in the land and no small plant of the field had yet sprung up—for the LORD God had not caused it to rain on the land, and there was no man to work the ground,**

This is the key phrase: "there was no man to work the ground." God had intended for a garden to be on his earth. But the text points out that even in the perfection of God's initial creation, something was missing. There was a need that nothing on earth could meet. God was about to create a garden, but he had no gardener.

God's creation had a hole that needed to be filled. So he filled it .

### Genesis 2:8:

**And the LORD God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed.**

God had a garden. Now his garden had a gardener.

This is the first idea that we need to understand. It is foundational to everything that will follow. We were created to meet a need.

But here is where things get interesting. God created us to meet a need. But God also created the need itself. God created a garden that needed a gardener.

People have managed to create all sorts of things that operate on their own. We're getting close to perfecting the self-driving car. Yesterday, my teenage son was telling me about a new bed that could make itself in the morning. My new sprinkler controller will read the weather and decide for itself how much water. Couldn't God have created a self-gardening garden if he wanted?

Of course, he could have. So did God create humans to meet the need? Or did he create the need for humans to fill? Or a little bit of both?

In Hebrew, the word for ground is "Adamah." God needed someone to work the Adamah, so he created a man, the "Adam." Adam was created to work the Adamah.

It may seem like small talk to ask someone you've just met, "What do you do?" But the way we spend our time is a very significant part of our lives. The need we meet is part of our identity. What we do has a lot to do with who we are.

But for Adam, something is still missing. The story continues in with a new problem.

**Genesis 2: 18:**

**Then the LORD God said, “It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him a helper fit for him.”**

I used to think that this verse meant that Adam was lonely, so God created a companion for him. But it doesn't say that. We aren't told that God created a companion. Rather, he created a helper. Adam needed someone to come alongside him to help fulfill the task that God had given him.

The word used here to describe that helper is the Hebrew word “*ezer*.” It is translated here as “helper” and that's a decent translation except that it could imply someone with a lower status, like a personal assistant. It is not that at all. The word is most often used to describe God when Israel is in need of his help in a military context. “Ally” would be a good general translation.

So the “not good” part of this verse means that the man can't accomplish his task by himself. He needed help. Adam wasn't up to the task of gardening the entire garden alone.

Have you been there? Have you faced some task that you realize you simply can't do by yourself?

God gives Adam the woman so that they can garden together. But what Adam finds in the woman is so much more than a gardening partner. By the end of this little story, he celebrates her not for her gardening skills, but because she gives him something he didn't even realize he was missing: companionship and intimacy.

He was looking for productivity, but he found intimacy.

We weren't created just to meet a need. We were also created for relationship.

This passage is often used to describe the creation of the first marriage. It certainly is that. But notice that this is also the creation of relationship in general. This is God creating relationships for people to enjoy. And while the relationship in particular here happens to be marriage, a lot of what we see here applies to all sorts of relationships.

So the creation story is told in such a way that there are two problems that exist even before sin enters the world. Two holes are progressively filled as creation unfolds. “There was no man to work the ground.” and “It is not good for the man to be alone.”

These are the two purposes for which humankind was created. We meet a functional need in the world. Stuff needs to get done. And we meet a relational need. People need to love and be loved.

We are supposed to get things done. We are supposed to love each other. We are about tasks. We are about people. We contribute, and we relate. We were created to contribute and relate.

And in some mysterious way, when we are living the way that God intended us to live—when we are participating in Kingdom work—we manage to combine these aspects. This is what we are going to call *vocation*: living out our purpose to contribute and relate.

There is an African proverb that says, “If you want to go fast, go alone. If you want to go far, go with others.”

I read an article recently in Forbes about Randy Komisar, a partner at Kleiner Perkins, the prestigious venture capital firm down the road from us. In the midst of a professional crisis, Komisar came up with a new philosophy that he called “relational thinking.” The article describes how he “focused on building deep, long-term, win-win relationships and less on being solely goals-oriented.”<sup>2</sup> But what may have seemed like a radical transformation to Komisar, we could recognize on the first pages of the Bible.

This is our starting point. We were created us with a purpose to do something productive and to be with other people. Somehow these things—the drive to contribute and relate—are buried deep within the core of our being. We were created to contribute and relate.

Adam and Eve were set up for an incredible life of contribution and relationship. They had something important to do and someone to do it with. It was all looking so promising. But then things went terribly wrong.

## **Our Purpose is Tarnished**

Most of you know how the story continues in Genesis. Adam and Eve together violate the one restriction God had put in place for them. At that moment, the whole

plan of God's creation changed. The cosmos itself was altered forever.

God describes the consequences in a series of pronouncements.

**Genesis 3:16-18:**

**To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." 17 And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; 18 thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field.**

Notice that both aspects of the creation that we observed in the first part are marred. Relationships are fractured: the woman is told of pain in child-raising and the struggle for power in marriage. Work is made frustrating: the man is told of thorns and thistles that will invade his garden.

Contributing and relating both just got a whole lot harder.

Think for a moment about the kinds of things that you complain about. I expect that most of them have to do with either not being able to accomplish what you hoped to accomplish, or some kind of relational conflict.

Stuff didn't get done: the project failed; the house is a mess; the test was impossible. Or, people were difficult: the kids are going crazy; your professor was mean; your boss was unreasonable.

Don't most of the problems we face fall into one of these two categories? The garden that was supposed to flourish under our care instead produces thorns and thistles. The people who were supposed to be allies and partners turn out to be difficult to work with.

This is the state of our world. Think again to what you'll be doing "this time tomorrow." Won't you be facing tasks that are difficult to solve with people who can be difficult to work with? When sin entered the world, God's intention for his creation was damaged, and everything was affected. Everything.

That means that vocation is broken. Our ability to contribute and relate has been marred.

A few weeks ago, one of the windows in my car just disappeared into the body of the car. It just dropped in and it was gone. No possibility of rolling it up. So I did what any reasonable person would have done. I abandoned the car by the side of the road because it was no longer useful.

But I didn't do that. That would be crazy. Instead, I brought the car to my mechanic. He ordered a new motor assembly, opened up my door panel, replaced the part, and realigned my window. I picked up the car a few hours later, and everything worked again.

My car was broken, but it wasn't destroyed. If it were destroyed, it would make sense to abandon it. But it wasn't destroyed, it was broken. So I got it fixed.

This is a critical distinction. Vocation is broken. But not destroyed.

This has several very practical implications as you think about your vocation. First, it means that all those complaints you have about your job are normal. It's not unusual. You should expect your work to be frustrating. You should expect the people you work with to be difficult.

As followers of Jesus, we have to understand that our jobs won't fulfill us. Parenting won't be what we thought it would be. Our education can't become our identity. And retirement isn't the ultimate vacation. People around here have their expectations set way too high. Working is work. Parenting is exhausting. Studying is tedious.

The root of your problem is not your circumstance. A different job won't fix it. A different family won't make it easier. A better spouse won't complete you. The problem is what the Bible calls sin. That broke everything. Our vocation is simply broken.

But a broken vocation also means that the feeling you have about deserving something better is true. You are supposed to be doing something more, something deeper, something fuller. That feeling is true. You do have a God-given design in your heart to contribute meaningfully and relate intimately. You're not just crazy or demanding. You're created to live out a vocation.

You ought to long for something more.

There was a billboard a few years ago from Monster.com, the job posting website. It read, “With 10,000 jobs out there, one of them has to be better than yours.”

That idea taps into the longing that we have, this realization that we were created for something more.

So we’re left with these two truths: what we have is broken, and we know there is something better out there.

In response, we can spend our whole lives looking for that something better in the perfect job or the perfect retirement or the perfect family or the perfect hobby. Or we can let that brokenness and longing do what it is meant to do: lead us to Christ.

## Our Purpose is Redeemed

Broken things can be fixed. My car window works great now. Just like it used to.

But this is where God’s story is different. God doesn’t fix his creation. He doesn’t just make his creation work the way it was supposed to work in the first place. God does something much more grand and beautiful and mysterious.

As soon as the creation got broken, God set to work. Not to fix it, but to redeem it.

You know the story. God became flesh. He walked the earth as a man. Jesus entered creation. But you may not have noticed how at the end of his life, Jesus was systematically taking on all of the various aspects of the broken world.

It was in a garden that Jesus asked his father if there was an easier way to redeem the garden that had been broken. But there wasn’t. So he was betrayed. One of the people who supposed to be on his side—we may even call him an “ezer” or an ally—one of those people became his betrayer. Instead of the ground producing thorns and thistles, he was given a crown of thorns. Instead of the pain of child-rearing, his very creation turned against him to crucify him. And life itself died.

But when Jesus came back to life in a garden tomb, something new began. Death was defeated. And life wasn’t fixed, but it began to be redeemed. Everything about what God intended life to be started to be restored at that moment.

Following Jesus doesn’t just mean that your sins are forgiven, and you will go to heaven when you die. This isn’t just about feeling better about yourself because you are reconciled to God. Being a Christian isn’t just believing a set of true ideas.

Following Jesus means that you get to be part of the story that Jesus is telling in the world. You get to be part of the transformation that is happening as the broken world is being redeemed. It means that everything you do has the potential to be wrapped up in God’s great work of redemption. It means we find Christ in our vocation.

### Colossians 3:23-24:

**Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, 24 knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.**

You might think that this verse means you’re supposed to treat your boss like you treat God. God is your real boss, so you should get to work on time and work hard as if you were working for God.

Those things are true, but there is more. The apostle is not just saying that we should pretend God is our boss. Listen to the beginning and end of this verse: “Whatever you do, you are serving the Lord Christ.” You aren’t just pretending that God is your boss. You are serving Christ. In everything.

And at the end, it is the Lord who will give you your inheritance. Does that mean Jesus will present you with your vested stock options at the end of your career? No, it means that the work that you do—whatever you do—is going to have an impact in eternity. It will lead to something in eternity.

Christ redeems our vocation. Everything we do can somehow be of eternal value. Not just leading Bible Study. Not just attending church. Everything. This is our call: to live a redeemed vocation.

Many of you know that I worked in software development before going into ministry. I enjoyed my work, for the most part. I liked the people whom I worked with. The work was challenging and interesting. But I always had the sense that I was solving problems that didn’t necessarily need to be solved. I was designing software that would help warehouses ship products faster.

But do we really need same-day delivery? Don't get me wrong, my family loves it. We use all of it: Google Express, Amazon Prime, Prime Now, Door Dash. All of it. But do we really need that?

It had been part of my plan to go into ministry at some point. And I always thought that being a pastor would feel different. When I started doing spiritual work, I'd feel, well, more spiritual. As if my every moment was dripping with the presence of God. As if every conversation I had was pre-ordained by the Spirit. As if my efforts participated in the redemptive story of Jesus Christ.

As it turns out, that isn't always the case. Some parts of being a pastor can feel like I'm solving problems that don't really need to be solved. Being a pastor sometimes doesn't feel all that different from being a product manager.

But here's what I'm realizing: maybe the problem is my perception. Maybe every moment of my time is dripping with the presence of God. Maybe all of my conversations are pre-ordained by the Spirit. Maybe every single one of my efforts as a pastor does participate in the redemptive story of Jesus Christ.

And maybe the same was true when I was a Product Manager. Every moment was dripping with the presence of God. Every conversation Spirit ordained. Every effort was participating in redemption.

When we live a redeemed vocation, everything we do is eternal. If I'm serving the Lord Christ by writing software or taking classes or raising children or caring for grandkids or whatever it is that I do, then I am doing something eternal. I can't explain how. It's part of the mystery of the Gospel. But when I follow Jesus with my life, then my ordinary contributions and relationships become eternal. That's living a redeemed vocation.

This is the idea that we want to unpack over the course of the summer. Everything we do can be Kingdom work.

## Conclusion

Think again about what you'll be doing this time tomorrow. The challenge is that tomorrow is so far away from today. For some of us, it feels like a completely different universe. God is here. His people are here. Today, I'm following Jesus. But tomorrow...

We need a Mjolnir. Isn't that what you were thinking? How what you really need is a Mjolnir? That's spelled M-J-O-L-N-I-R. I had to look up how to pronounce it online. Fortunately, a very nice Scandinavian guy on YouTube taught me.

Mjolnir is the hammer of Thor. It was forged in a different world, so it has powers in this world that are above and beyond what a hammer in this world can do. Somehow, it brings the powers of its original world into this world.

You'll find a Mjolnir in your bulletin this morning. It's a prayer that was given to the church by the one who started this whole thing two thousand years ago. We've rewritten it a bit to give it some fresh language. We'll be praying this prayer together throughout our summer series as a way to ask God to help us do what he has given us to do. This prayer encapsulates many of the ideas that we'll be exploring.

In the Old Testament, God is always giving his people reminders so that they can be aware of his constant presence with them. So we wanted to give you something from here that you can take into there. It's a piece of this world—of the kingdom of God—that you can take into your vocation.

Following Jesus in Silicon Valley means more than being nice to the people you work with or your classmates or the other parents at your kids' school. It means more than making money that you can give away and sharing the Gospel with the people you know.

Following Jesus in Silicon Valley means finding your place in his kingdom. It means discerning the call that God has given you. Discovering how your efforts and your attitude and your relationships and your time become an expression of the contribution and community that you were called to be a part of.

This time next week, we'll be learning more about what this all means. Come back. Invite your friends. This time tomorrow, you will be participating as agents of the redemption of Jesus Christ in big and small ways. Take your Mjolnir with you. Contribute and relate for the sake of Christ. Be about Kingdom work.

## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> Coleman, Nancy. "Father's Day observations from some truly funny dads" *CNN*. 17 June 2017. Web. <http://www.cnn.com/2017/06/17/health/fathers-day-observations-trnd/index.html>)
- <sup>2</sup> Simmons, Michael. "If You Want To Go Fast, Go Alone. If You Want To Go Far, Go Together." *Forbes*. 22 July 2013. Web. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/michaelsimmons/2013/07/22/power-of-relational-thinking/>