

[EMSB Theology of Work E2]

Speakers in the audio file: Tim Mackie

Hey everybody, I'm Tim Mackie, and this is my podcast, Exploring My Strange Bible. I am a card-carrying Bible history and language nerd who thinks that Jesus of Nazareth is utterly amazing and worth following with everything that you have. On this podcast, I'm putting together the last 20 years' worth of lectures and sermons where I've been exploring the strange and wonderful story of the Bible and how it invites us into the mission of Jesus and the journey of faith. And I hope this can all be helpful for you too. I also help start this thing called the BibleProject. We make animated videos and podcasts and classes about all kinds of topics in Bible and theology. You can find all those resources at BibleProject.com. With all that said, let's dive into the episode for this week.

[Musical Break (00:55–1:01)]

Hey, there. Thanks for listening to Strange Bible Podcast. This is the second of a two-part series that I did a long time ago about thinking theologically about work: Should the fact that I'm a follower of Jesus mean that I think uniquely or differently about my work and career than somebody who is not a follower of Jesus? I think so. I think the storyline that Jesus invites us to live and be a part of has a dramatic effect and significance for how we think about our day-to-day work. In this message, which was the last part of the series, we think about how do we think about our day-to-day efforts at work in light of history's ultimate outcome in the renewed and redeemed creation.

There are many versions of a Christian story out there that say, "Your day-to-day life efforts, they don't really ultimately matter because they're not of eternal value, whether or not you change the oil in your car or what you do at work, emails, and this year's

project, whatever, for this quarter, whatever.” And is that true? Does that actually reflect the teaching of Jesus and the apostles? What I discovered is that it doesn’t. It seems to me that specifically, the apostle Paul, who worked out a theology of work more than any of the other apostles, he really believed that the eternal, redeemed nature of the new creation doesn’t make our day-to-day work here and now meaningless. Rather, he believed it made it more meaningful. How? And why is that the case? That’s what we’re going to explore in this teaching.

[Musical Break (02:39–02:44)]

We’re going to continue on tonight in our new teaching series called “Labor of Love” on work. And we’re exploring what a robust, full Christian vision of work and what we do with our day-to-day hours and what we’re likely going to be doing with those hours for many, many, many, many years to come. And how does that integrate and what significance does our work have in light of our commitment to Jesus? And so, the first week we looked back to the first pages of the Bible, we looked to the past to find this vision of work from the first chapters of Genesis, you may recall. And so we found that this profound story about the meaning of work, that it’s a divine gift, that God was the first worker, and he works by taking what is chaos or disorder and turning it into order and beauty for the benefit of other people. And then he commissions human beings to do the same, to remake the earth for the benefit of others.

And we are not going to look at the past or the present. We’re going to look to the future. If we’re telling a new story about work, we need to take the whole sweep of what the Scriptures are telling us about work. And so tonight we’re going to ask a question that may or may not have occurred to you before, but it’s actually a really prominent theme in the New Testament, and that is to ask about the future of our work: Whatever we do with our day-to-day work, what are we contributing to and what is the future about what we’re putting our lives into in our work?

Now, if this were a message in the last series, on Ecclesiastes, this would be quite a short message. Well, actually I gave that message, and it wasn’t short. Basically it was like, “Life here, under the sun, it’s an enigma. It’s a paradox. And work, if this is all we got, you know, our 70-year shot here, then it’s like we’re making castles in the sand.”

That is not a full, robust Christian view. A Christian view of work envisions a very important future to what it is we spend our days doing here in the present. And that's what we're after tonight.

Let me paint a mental picture that I think will help frame us, and then we'll dive to the Scriptures. One of the things that I love and find quirky about life here on the east side of the river here in Portland, this is a practice that happens in apartment duplex land, which is much of East Portland. I mean, East Portland here, older homes, older sidewalks, there's the green grass strip. And you can always tell, if you're walking around a neighborhood, if someone has moved out of their apartment recently. Yes? You guys know where I'm going with this? How do you know if someone's moved out of the duplex house or something? Right. What's that? Yeah, exactly. All of the free stuff that they discard on the lawn, you know, or on the sidewalk. And so you can always tell, because it's like a mattress stacked up, half a sectional sofa—you know what I mean? Like, a dilapidated lamp or something. You guys know what I'm talking about here. You just walk around, and it's just free stuff. And so in the eyes of some people, they, like me, as I'm writing my bike around or whatever, and I see a pile of stuff, what I mostly see is, sofa chair that's been in the rain for five days or something, you know, and it just looked like junk to me. You know what I mean? It looks dilapidated and run down. I don't want that stuff. So that's some of us. Others of us look at that same exact pile of stuff. You see potential. You see your next dresser, or you see your next end table or something like that. And mattress, I still think is really gross. Period. Especially if it's been out in the rain, but I don't know, people do whatever they do.

So, you know what I'm saying here? Some people are like this. And if you've ever been with—my wife is like this. When we lived in Madison, she—was not infrequent for her to come home and say, “Can you help me get this out of the trunk?” And it's some chair or end table or something. And then I was usually commissioned with the work and that was how I go to refurbish it or something. But some people, they just have these imaginations. They look at the same thing that I see as a pile of junk; they see what it could become, and they just have a bigger imagination than I do. And because of that, this has value and meaning to them. What's other people is just meaningless or has no value. And what's great, there's a lot of these wonderfully creative recycling, refurbishing kind of things happening here in Portland. Lots of websites dedicated to it. Have you heard about a website called Design Sponge before? I don't think it was based in Portland, but there's a lot of intersection and so on. I actually think the website needs to be cooler, but they have a whole section of their website that that's just called “Before and After.” And it's stuff that people find on the side of the road or that, you know, they move into homes or, you know, condos or something that are just trashed. And then it's the before-and-after pictures with the story of what—it's really fascinating just to see what people do.

So, for example, I'll show you. So this is very typical of what you'd see on 17th and Madison or something right here. You know what I mean? Just like a trashed coffee table or desk of some kind out on the sidewalk. But some of you would think, "No, I can refinish that thing." And the crumb—just totally paint that matte black. Take off some of the wood panels and boom, you have this like mid-century, vintage-looking coffee table. Some of you have this in you. Just one other example, because you might not like that piece. This one was really cool. So this is five discarded desk drawers that someone—apparently seems like they stained or something. And then, you know, this is very typical of what you would find on the curb. And then someone thought, "No, no, that's not going to go to the dump. So I'm going to get a little—it's like almost like real thin, maybe three-quarter inch plumbing pipe or something and make this little—" Look at that. Isn't that awesome? It's this end table-type thing.

So to me, that is such a remarkable feat of the imagination. You know what I'm saying? One person sees as junk, another person sees this potential for value. You get the point here. And so we live this principle out many, many days. This is personality type difference and so on. But I would submit to you that the same difference, the same difference in ways of seeing, happens to us with our work. And I would submit to you that if I'm a Christian, if I've come to accept what the gospel has to say about me, that I'm not okay on my own. I'm made in God's image. There's a lot of wonderful things about all of us, but at our core, we're not okay. We're not doing alright before God or just with ourselves. We're deeply flawed and compromised. I need to be healed. I need to be forgiven and remade as a human being. The good news that the gospel tells me that through the cross and the resurrection of Jesus, that's possible, and it's being offered to me. I'd submit to you that if that's my view of the world, if I'm growing and following Jesus and letting that story shape me, I'd submit to you that it's precisely this kind of mindset that should be growing inside of all of us. That when we see things that the world values, that doesn't value or seizes junk or a kick to the curb, throw out on the sidewalk, but that a Christian sees it and says, "No, there's value here." And there's nowhere where this happens more than with our work.

For many of us, we see such a huge disconnect between our work and then our commitment to following Jesus. And I think for many of us, it's a result of a stunted imagination. We just simply don't have the eyes to see what's possible in and through our work and in our workplaces. What we see as maybe not of any value at all for my journey of following Jesus—just my work, it's just what I do for a paycheck—but the Scripture is going to urge us to see that there's something much, much more because there's a future. What we are working with in the present has value for the future. In what way? What way? That's we're going to look at here.

Why don't you open your Bibles with me and turn to, in the New Testament, to the small little letter of Colossians, Paul's letter to the Colossians chapter 3. We're going to briefly touch down here and then let this passage launch us into a theme in the New Testament that I think is really, really profound. Colossians chapter 3, we're going to look at verses 23 and 24. I should also say—I hate doing this—we're reading two sentences in the middle of a paragraph that's developing a whole interesting line of thought, and we're just going to rip them right out of context. By "out of context," what I mean is, it's addressed to a specific group of people in the church or whatever, but it develops principles that are true for all Christians, in all places, and all times. And so there's too many rabbit trails if we try and do all of Colossians 3. Okay. I've said enough already.

Chapter 3, verse 23. Paul says, "Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart as working for the Lord and not for men. Since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward, it is the Lord Christ that you are serving." Couple of simple questions. First of all, basic point: If you're a Christian, who do you work for? Jesus. I work for Jesus. There's something—no, no, no, stop, stop. Do you understand what you just said? Do you understand the implications of what you just said? You gain a paycheck from your employer, but if you're a Christian, you don't work for them. You lend them your time and your energies, your allegiance, and you work for another. You work for Jesus, who calls you to be the most excellent, most integrable worker in whatever workplace you happen to find yourself. But this is such a powerful—and what kind of work qualifies as work that can be done for Jesus? Look closely again. Anything. Do you see how they, "whatever you do, whatever you do." Now again, we can say those words out loud; I guarantee you, most of us don't actually believe that.

If we were to like have a panel up here, and we would have like, a cab driver, a general contractor, a pastor, a barista, and a missionary, and I was to say, "Who does the work of the Lord of this group up here?" And we'd say, "Well, the religious, professional Christians," right? The paid Christians, you know? The pastor and the missionary. So somehow, one degree or another, we have bought into this idea that there is this part of my life that is the secular part. And unless I work at a church or be a missionary or something, I don't know, I just do it to earn money or something. And then there's the Jesus part of my life that I do maybe at my community group. And then I volunteer the church, and I go to a Sunday gathering or something, and I have coffee with some friends, and we read the Bible together. And that's the Jesus part. There they go. And I guarantee you that way of thinking about your life and the world, first of all, it's completely foreign to the New Testament. But I believe that actually it's a damaging way of viewing your life. The schizophrenic way of living as a Christian. The whole idea of underneath what Paul is saying right here is: You belong to Jesus. If I have given my allegiance to the One who loved me and gave himself for me, he gave his life in place of

mine, if I'm a Christian, that means I don't belong to myself. Like Paul says in 1 Corinthians chapter 6, "You don't belong to yourself. You were bought with the price," with Jesus' life.

And so every single part of my life now, my relationships, my time, my resources, my work, these become different areas where I'm working it out: How is this part of my life an expression of gratitude and a way of honoring the One who loved me and gave his life for me? And now all of a sudden, all of life is fair game, and it doesn't matter what you do; it becomes the Lord's work. It becomes the work of the Lord. You guys with me here? Now again, we can read the verses, and we can understand it. I guarantee most of us don't actually believe that. And so I'm —well, you just end the message right here, because I think that's such a profound concept. There is no such thing as a job that pleases the Lord more than another if it's work being done in the Lord. I know plenty of pastors who, they're not really working for the Lord. So they're working for themselves. Plenty of cab drivers and grocery store check-out people and baristas in this city who are definitely working for the Lord. You know what I'm saying? It doesn't matter. It matters that you discern your vocation, your gifting, your talents, and the opportunities in front of you. And so Josh is going to talk about that discernment process next week. But when it comes down to it, there's no such thing as a kind of work that is more glorifying to God than another. "Whatever you do," Paul says, "do it with all your heart working for the Lord."

Now look what else. So that's *who* you work for. Right? You work for the One who loved you and gave himself for you. That's who you work for. What are you working for? Look at verse 24. This is so interesting. "Since you know that you'll receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward." So who are you working for? I work for Jesus. I happen to be employed by this person or this business right now. What are you working for? Well, I happen to get a paycheck from my employer, but apparently, in Paul's mind, if you are working for the Lord, what you're actually aiming towards or what you're investing or building towards is this inheritance. So what is that? Inheritance. And it's tricky because I think most of us, we think at least like in American culture, whatever we think, inheritance is rather an estate or some property or some kind of assets or money that I'll get when somebody dies. So, stop. Don't. That's not what Paul's talking about. So Paul's—"inheritance" is a word that Paul uses all over his letters to describe the future hope of the Christian. And he borrows this term from the Old Testament story, the story of Israel. And so Israel is redeemed out of slavery in Egypt, right? They're led through the desert, and they're brought into the promised land, the land of milk and honey, of goats and bees, right? Lots of goats and bees in the promised land. And it's not for a vacation; it's a place where they are free to live and work in a way that glorifies Yahweh, the God who redeemed them out of slavery. And so one of the most common words in the Old Testament to describe the promised land is that it's Israel's "inheritance," which

means this gift. When they were in slavery, it was this future gift that was just—God graced them with as an opportunity to work and live in a way that honors the One who redeemed them.

And so Paul picks up this image here from Israel's story, and he applies it to Christians. Whatever it is that I'm doing, it's work that can be done for the Lord. And when my motives, when my heart is in the right space, what I'm actually working for is not just compensation to survive, but I actually see my life and my work and the way that I work as investing or going towards this new world that we're going to live and work in. That's what Paul's getting at here, the inheritance, his way of referring to the future. And that's all. And then he just moves on. And we're like, "Wait, no, I want to know more about that." So where do we go to discover what this means? We need to go to Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, 1 Corinthians chapter 15. And I promise you, this is a message about work, but for the next 10 minutes, this is going to be a message about the resurrection of Jesus. And you'll see how it connects here.

1 Corinthians chapter 15: the basic storyline of going down the sidewalk and seeing a pile of discarded furniture. Your ability to imagine something as having a redeemed and restored future is directly connected to how much value you see in that pile of furniture in the present. It's about your imagination about what's possible here. Some of us, I think, have stunted imaginations when it comes to our vision of work, our day-to-day work. The resurrection changes everything. 1 Corinthians chapter 15 is one of Paul's greatest essays on the resurrection of Jesus. It usually gets trotted out at Easter, but I'm always happy to trot it out on a non-Easter message because this is such an important passage in the New Testament.

So he says, "Now, brothers, I want to remind you of the gospel that I preached to you, which you received and on which you've taken your stand. By this gospel, you're saved if you hold firmly to the word that I preached to you. Otherwise, you've believed in vain. For what I received, I passed on to you as of first importance: that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, that he was buried, and that he was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, and that he appeared to Cephas, then he appeared to the Twelve. After that, he appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers at the same time, most of whom—they're still alive. You can go talk to them, though some have died; some have fallen asleep. And then he appeared to James, and then he appeared to all of the apostles, and last of all, he appeared to me as one abnormally born at the wrong time."

So what he's getting at is this treasure of the story of the gospel that Paul received—he didn't make it up—he received it, and he's passing on to the Corinthians, this community of Greek and Roman people who became Christians nearly a thousand

miles away from where the events of the cross and the resurrection took place. And the issue here is that some of these Christians—or people, at least, in the church—they love the Jesus thing—they like the “love your neighbor, forgive your enemies” thing—they like the “he died for my sins” part, but the whole thing about, like, dead people coming alive again in physical bodies is too weird. And so they’re like, “No, I’m not really into that part. So at the resurrection—dead people stay dead, like, haven’t you looked around?”

Verse 12: Paul says, “Now if we’ve been preaching to you that Christ has been raised from the dead, how is it that some of you are saying, ‘Yeah, no. No, we don’t believe in the resurrection of the dead.’” So Paul’s point isn’t that it’s hard to believe in the resurrection of the dead. It’s a very crazy thing to consider and to imagine. But he’s saying this is a core part of the gospel, it’s not some tangent. Go down to verse 16, he says, “Listen, if dead people aren’t raised, if there’s no resurrection of the dead, then Christ has not been raised either. And if Christ hasn’t been raised, then your faith is futile; you’re still in your sins. If there’s no resurrection of the dead—if Christ wasn’t raised from the dead, then he’s simply yet another victim of sin, and evil, and death.” That’s not a new story. That story has been told billions of times now in the history of the human race. What makes the gospel good news and what makes it such a game changer and reorients your whole view of the world is that all of a sudden what seemed inevitable is no longer the inevitable and what seemed like it was the last word is no longer the last word—that is, death, as a result of evil and sin in our world.

And so he goes on, and he says, verse 18, he says “Those who have fallen asleep in Christ, or died in Christ, they’re lost if there’s no resurrection from the dead. And if only for this life we have to hope in Christ, if this is it, and there’s no resurrection of the dead, then we are the most pitiable people on the planet.” But he responds, he says, “Christ has indeed been raised from the dead; he is the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep, or those who have died. Since death came through a man, the resurrection of the dead also comes through a man. As in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive.”

Okay. Holy cow. What’s going on right now? I’m going to draw a picture that I’ve drawn a couple times in the last few months. So during the 90-day fellowship of the burning heart, we explored themes like the kingdom of God or concepts of Heaven and Earth and heaven and hell and so on. And so one of the things that we discovered, major theme in the New Testament, is that the story or the picture that many of us have about earth and heaven—it’s a distorted picture. Many of us have grown up—or we think that Christianity somehow teaches the view that we have here the physical earth where we live, and then there’s God’s space, which is a non-physical space, because God is spirit. And so God made this physical space for us to live in. And we’ve ruined it, of course,

really horrible, full of sin and death. But God, in his grace, became the physical being in Jesus and died on the cross for our sins, so that those who look to him for forgiveness after they die can go to this place forever and ever after they die. And then one day, this will just all get wiped off the map. Now, again, I don't know where you're at in terms of if you think this is your worldview or whatever. So I would just encourage you, the only thing wrong with this view—is most of what the Bible is trying to say.

And not only that, but this view will lead you to a dead end in a Christian view of work. Because essentially what you get is: Work is what you do. You're gutting it out here. And it's a way to honor God. It's a way to provide for yourself or provide people who depend on you and what have you. But there's no future to it, because you're going to hit the grave and then boom, you just, you evacuate, you're gone. And this is often connected with views of heaven as just like one big vacation, something like that, you know, and no longer working. And so all I can say is, this is just simply not what the Scriptures are trying to tell us. So let's do away with that. Let's figure out what Paul's saying.

So Paul's basic view—and he's just been reading his Bible. And again, this will be a review for many of you in repetition, but that's the best way to learn something, yeah? So the story of the Bible begins with earth and heaven completely overlapping and unified. And so this image of where God and humans take afternoon strolls through the garden at the breezy time of day, this intimacy and this harmony. And the original vision was that God's space and human space completely overlaps, and it's completely enmeshed and at one with each other. But of course, the story gets much more complicated, because God commissions the humans to work and to flourish and to begin remaking the earth to flourish so that it can benefit others as the humans reproduce, and so on. And he gives them a choice about how they can go about their work. And so we covered this in the first message.

And so what ends up is that the good times last about a page and a half. What happens, because God in his mercy allows these image-bearing creatures to have a degree of autonomy and will and choice, and so what we choose is that, yeah, we're kind of into this whole work and running the world thing. We just don't want to do it according to God's way of defining good and evil. We want to define all of that for ourselves. And so what you end up with is what the biblical authors call “the age of this world or the world” or “the realm of death” because of sin and evil.

And so the storyline of the Bible, of course, is that humans can't actually push God out of his own creation. That's a ridiculous idea. But he does allow us to create little realms of semi-independence and where things are horrible. But God's never completely absent. He's always pressing in, making himself known to people. And often that's, like, a guy named Jacob. He lays down in the desert, and he sleeps on a rock. And then he

has this dream, and all of a sudden he realizes he's in God's presence. And he wakes up, and he says, "Holy cow, this is God's space. And I didn't even know it." He's in the middle of the desert, for goodness' sakes, you know? And so these moments where human eyes are open to the reality that God's space and human space is still connected.

And so, what the story of the Bible ultimately leads us towards is that the story of Jesus is this moment where God is reclaiming and taking back his world. And the first invasion, so to speak, is the creator God absorbing into himself the sin and the pain of the world in Jesus taking that on the cross so that God's realm of life can begin a slow takeover. And so really, the story of the Bible, what Jesus taught his followers to pray for, is to pray for God's kingdom to come—where? Here on earth. When Jesus taught us to pray that prayer, "May your will be done *here* and kingdom come *here* on earth as it is in heaven," we're asking God to take over more of us. We're asking God to absorb the pain and the sin and the evil and my own selfishness so that more of my life can begin to be taken over by heaven. And of course, the way that the story ends is with Heaven and Earth completely united once again. We'll read about that in just a few minutes. But this is the storyline that Paul has in mind here.

And so if this is the case, let me just ask you, what is the meaning of your work then? Because see, if I'm a Christian, then work is something that I do in the present age. But Paul just said in Colossians 3, he said, "What are you working for? You work for Jesus, and what are you working for? Inheritance." Somehow, my working in the present, when I'm doing it for the Lord, I'm making a contribution to the world that will last.

You guys with me? Verse 50. Paul says, "I'll declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor can the perishable inherit the imperishable." You could read that as, well, we're physical beings, and we can't go to heaven because it's non-physical, but that's not what he means here. When Paul uses this word "flesh," this is the word that he uses to describe the physical world as you and I experience it now. It's a world compromised by sin and death. And so this realm is in such conflict with the purity and the power of God's presence that there has to be some kind of transformation if Heaven and Earth are going to come back together again.

So it's precisely what he says, verse 51. He says, "Listen, I'll tell you a mystery. We're not all going to sleep, or die, but rather we will all be," and what's the word he uses? "Changed, in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet," a reference to the return of Jesus. "The trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be—for the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with imperishable and the mortal with immortality, then, then the sayings of the prophets will become true. Like Isaiah,

‘Death is swallowed up in victory,’ or like Hosea, ‘Where, O death, is your victory, where, O death, is your sting?’ The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law, but thanks be to God, where he gives us victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.”

This is such a powerful chapter, because what he’s saying is we haven’t believed in vain. We don’t live in vain, because of the cross and the resurrection. It’s like the resurrection of Jesus—he used the image of firstfruits. How many of you watched Little House on the Prairie, ever, growing up? Yes, you like this? Alright. So think about—there was a time where it was Saturday afternoons, and we had one TV in our house, and Little House on the Prairie was on the same hour as back-to-back episodes of Transformers. And so it was like World War III in the basement between my sister and I. Because I’m like, “Little House on the Prairie, who just wants to watch that, you know?” So anyway, but whatever. So Little House on the Prairie. So I was forced to suffer through a few episodes during that season. So you have Laura, it’s like the wheat harvest or something, and the seeds have been planted, and they’ve been watering and waiting for the wheat harvest to come. And Laura goes out, and she sees the first little sprouts of grain, right? And so she gathers it up, and she comes to Pa. And she’s like, “Well, look, you know, it’s the first wheat, it’s the firstfruits.” And Paul says Jesus is the firstfruits from the dead. He’s like the first human over whom sin and death no longer have a claim. If I humble myself, and I turn to Jesus, I grab onto him, all of a sudden what’s true of him becomes true of me. And that becomes the basis for my hope. But there’s a whole bunch of me that needs to be left behind here. And there’s a whole bunch of me that needs to die right here at the cross if I’m going to become the kind of fully alive human that God wants me to be. And how much progress I make this side of Jesus’ return, that’s God’s grace. But one day we will be changed.

And the whole idea, of course, is it’s not just individuals that are changed. It’s that this is going to lead to a fundamental remaking of the whole creation, a change and transformation, which means this: It means that your workplace, the people that you work with, the kind of work that you’re doing, the impact that you make, the contribution, it’s going to play on in the next generation after you and after you, and somehow there’s some kind of future. Because we’re not polishing brass on a sinking ship, right? We’re working on a ship that’s in terrible disrepair and will sink unless by the grace of God, he comes to transform it. That’s the image.

This is so amazing. Look at the last sentence of chapter 15. Okay, the sermon on the resurrection is over. We’re back to the work message again. Look at verse 58. How would you end such an amazingly powerful paragraph? I think most of us would end it by saying, “Dude, future’s certain, I’m going to have a margarita. I’m going to kick back and relax or something, you know? So I’m just not going to sweat it or whatever, because what I—you know? You know, Jesus rose from the dead.” That’s not what Paul

says. Look at what he says. He says, “Therefore, my dear brothers and sisters, stand firm, let nothing move you, and get to work.” Look at what he says: “Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain.” Now, had we not read Colossians 3, my guess is that most of us would’ve thought your work in the Lord, your labor in the Lord—oh yeah, like, you know, the Bible study that I have and like the time that I talked with Jesus with that friend about work, and like volunteering at the church. What kind of work qualifies as working for the Lord? What kinds of work, according to Colossians 3? Any kind of work. It does not matter. Drive a cab, make a latte, be a missionary, be a pastor, be a contractor. If it’s done in the Lord, it is work done *for* the Lord. It’s the work of the Lord. You guys with me? Again, I don’t think we actually believe this, but it’s precisely what Paul is saying.

And what are the implications of what he’s saying, then? He’s saying that there are two modes of working, even for a Christian. You can go into your week without thinking about it, without taking any moments to set aside, immersing yourself in the Scriptures or in community or in moments of prayer by yourself or with others, you’re just working with the same mindset that everybody else is working with. I’m just getting by, I’m just hanging on, whatever. That’s fine. There’s no future there. That’s like me, going down the street and seeing the pile of junk on the sidewalk and just being like, “Yeah, you know, it’s what people do when they move out here in Portland.” And what Paul says is, “No, your work done in the Lord, when you work in the Lord, your work is not in vain. Somehow that work is going to find itself into the healed, transformed new creation.”

How? He doesn’t say, and I have absolutely no idea. But do you see what he’s saying? I have a guess. I had a friend in our community group—there was a gal who just mentioned this; it just really piqued my curiosity. She said, when she’s in a right state of mind, when she’s working in the Lord, she prays for every person that she’s making a drink for throughout the day. And I thought, “What an awesome ministry. That is a ministry.” Are you—do you agree? What an incredible—all the different kinds of people that would come in. That’s so rad. But then she was like, “And it’s really hard, because when it gets busy, I forget, or I have a rude customer, I don’t want to pray for them.” I think we’re there. The same exact activity, just like the same exact pile of furniture on the sidewalk, can be viewed through two sets of eyes. And I think what the gospel and what Paul is trying to foster in us is this imagination that these people that I’m working with, they’ll matter, and they’re going to last. And this work and this place, this world that I’m contributing to, it has a future. God’s not just going to wipe it off the map. What I do today at work, how I react to the people around me, and how I actually go about my work, it matters. It has eternal value.

Are you with me? It’s so profound. This is the vision of work. Our work has a future. And so what Paul said, you don’t make lattes in vain. You don’t deliver packages in vain. You

don't frame buildings in vain if it's done in the Lord. If it's done in the Lord. What does it mean to be in the Lord? There you need to dive into the New Testament and discover what all of this "in the Lord" and "in Christ" language is all about. And what you find is that as you grab on tighter and tighter to Jesus, what's true of him becomes more and more true of you. So one of the ways Paul talks about it is this language of the fruit of the Spirit, because the Spirit is the gift of God's presence that's infiltrating and working and healing and redeeming people here in this age. And so if I'm empowered by God's grace to go into my work and labor in the Lord that day, I'm working in a mindset of joy and peace and patience and faithfulness and kindness and goodness and self-control. And that's not just going to be like how you treat people; that's going to affect how you actually do the work itself. And Paul says, "Labor in the Lord is not in vain, it's going to last." Isn't this rad? I don't know what else to say. And it's so hard for me to believe. So I'm guessing it's hard for you to believe, because we just don't think like this.

And there's one other passage in the New Testament that explores this theme. The first week of the series, we went to the first pages of the Bible. Let's go to the last pages of the Bible. Turn to the end of the Bible with me. Or maybe second-to-last page— Revelation chapter 20–21. Some of you did turn to the end, and you found the table of weights and measures. Yeah? What's that doing back there? That's what I've always wondered. So weird. It seems like it should be at the front so you can reference it when you're reading. Anyway, Revelation chapter 21. This is going to be John the Visionary's way of painting this same storyline here. He says, "Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth passed away and there was no longer any sea."

Let's pause here. This is interesting. So, different passages in the New Testament describe this reunification of Heaven and Earth in different ways. What word did Paul use in 1 Corinthians 15? "Transformed." He's talking about how the body that you have in the present is related to the physical body that you will have in the healed, restored creation. It'll be a transformed body, fundamentally different, but yet it will still be a body, and it will still be you in your body. And however that works—I mean, the only reason any of the early Christians thought any of this bizarre stuff is because of what happened in the resurrection of Jesus. And they had to have ways to talk about it. Like, it's quite strange that Jesus is alive from the dead in a physical body with the nail marks in his hands and the wound in his side, and they can recognize them, but yet other times they can't recognize them, and he just disappears in and out of rooms. That's quite strange. But there you go. That's the fundamental claim, that Jesus conquered death and that he's alive from the dead, and he's alive as a man in a body right now that's quite different from our bodies. And so our bodies need to undergo that same kind of transformation.

So Paul emphasizes continuity. It's the same thing but changed. When John talks about this transition, he uses the language of the "old order passing away." This new thing, it can be called a new creation. What he doesn't mean is that this gets completely erased off the map altogether, because—keep reading. He goes on with the metaphors here. He says, "I saw the holy city, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared like a bride beautifully dressed for her husband." He sees heaven coming down and finally overwhelming and enveloping earth. "I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Look, God's dwelling place is now with his people. He will dwell with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them. And he will be their God. He'll wipe every tear from their eye. There will be no more death, no more mourning or crying or pain. The old order of things has passed away.' And the One who was seated on the throne"—that's God in the book of Revelation—"he said, 'Look, I am making all things new.'" The word order is important here. He doesn't say, "I am making all new things." He says, "I am making all things, new." Then he said, "Write this down. These words are trustworthy and true."

Okay, here's the gut punch. Look at verse 22. This is so interesting. John says, "I didn't see a temple in the city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple." They're just there, and you can just go hang out with them. So they are the temple. "The city doesn't need the sun or the moon to shine on it. The glory of God gives it light. The Lamb is its lamp. The nations"—that's us—"the nations walk by its light, and the kings of the earth will bring their splendor into it. On no day will its gates ever be shut, for there won't be any night there. The glory and honor of the nations will be brought into it. Nothing impure will enter it, nor anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful, but those whose names are written in the Lamb's book of life."

This vision is so powerful. What is it that people are doing here in the new heavens and the new earth? Well, they're certainly not on vacation. We know that much. And they're not on clouds playing harps. He envisions the city that has this new creation and its epicenter with God's presence, fully accessible to all. The gates are never shut. And this redeemed humanity is constantly coming in and coming out. And what are they doing? They're offering. What does he say? They're "bringing their splendor," and they're bringing "the glory and honor of the nation." So we're asked to have this vision of a throne-room scene. And there's a king, and then his people are bringing to him the best that they have to offer him, the best music and the best food, right? And it's the things that they're known for and famous for, the things of their glory and their honor. But they're laying them at the foot of the King, the One who loved me and gave his life for me and redeemed me—you see the idea here.

So it's borrowing an image from a story in the Old Testament, a story about the Queen of Sheba, who came to visit King Solomon. And so she wanted to impress him. And so

she brings all of her gold and her best sculptures and jewelry and so on to impress him. And that's the idea right here. And so apparently humanity is busy making awesome stuff in the new creation. Our work doesn't cease. In fact, it continues, but it's this redeemed version of our work.

And so here's where I think our imaginations are supposed to connect all of this. So I'll put it this way: How many of you like living in the city of Portland? I like it immensely. I crossed 2,000 miles of the Midwest Plains to make it back here, and I'm really, really, really happy about that. It's a wonderful city to live in. I love the music, I love the food, the art, I love all the bike lanes everywhere. I just—I love it here. It's a wonderful city to live in. Does that, all the products of the city, does that mean that everything that is produced in Portland brings honor to the name of Jesus? There's a lot as image bearers, common grace, absolutely, that's honoring to God here, but there's a dark underbelly to this city. Instead, the price of cool for some parts of Portland comes at the expense of the non-cool parts of Portland, and you know what I'm talking about, right? And so what I think this passage invites us to imagine a redeemed, restored, healed Portland, what this kind of place would be like in the new creation. I don't know if the food will be any better, but there's a whole lot of other things that will be much, much better. Whatever labor has been done in the Lord, it lasts, and it will be the same kind of work and the same kinds of labor that we'll be doing in the new creation. Because if I'm laboring here in the Lord, I'm living in this in-between space—right?—where God's kingdom is taking over my life. And so I guess in the drawing, it's like, when I'm laboring in the Lord, and I'm beginning each day on my knees and asking that I can work for Jesus today, what we're invited to see is that I'm living in this space right here, where Heaven and Earth overlap. And don't think too highly of yourself, because we're mostly falling back out into here. But that's the idea. And so whatever this is, restored, redeemed version, that we are available to get little tastes of here and now when we work in the Lord. I think that's what these passages are saying.

This is kind of dense theology, but I can't think of anything more practical, because the fact is, there's a whole bunch of us that have no imagination for what it would be like for Jesus' presence to show up in our workplace. We just aren't even looking for him there, because we think it's just a secular job, and it's not. It's not. It's a place where image-bearing humans are working out either being redeemed from or being oppressed by the world of sin and death. And the work that you put your hands to, it may be the kind of work you're going to do for a really, really, really long time. Who knows? But if it's done in the Lord, it's not in vain. It'll last. And so I have no idea what this means for each one of us. But if you work, you face this reality, and you face this opportunity to see your workplace with the eyes of faith that don't see a pile of junk, but see, man, what would your workplace look like in the new creation? And how could you participate in just a

small way of experiencing that or bringing that about by laboring in the Lord when you go to work? I want us to just allow the Spirit to stir our imaginations.

And as we enter into worship, and as we come to the bread and the cup, and we think about this key moment where Heaven and Earth were locked together forever in the cross as God took on flesh and suffered and died on our behalf, I really encourage you to allow God to let you rethink and reimagine your day-to-day work and how you see it with new eyes.

[Musical Break (47:21–47:23)]

Alright, guys, thanks for listening to the Strange Bible podcast. Again, I hope that was helpful for you. This was a really profound message for me to prepare for and thinking about my own day-to-day work, and I hope it was helpful for you too. We'll see you again next time on Strange Bible Podcast. Thanks for listening, you guys.