

Worship in the Workplace

Bryn Jones

When man loses the sacred significance of work and of himself as worker, he soon loses the sacred meaning of time and life. Carl F.H. Henry

John was a hard-working farmer. Whenever you met him, his face was wreathed in smiles, his eyes blue and twinkling, his complexion clean and ruddy.

I used to love going to help him at weekends. He had one of those farms which was too small to employ additional labourers yet too large to manage alone, and so my weekend help was greatly appreciated. He had thirty-two milking cows. He had no milking-machines so he would start at one end of the parlour and I at the other, milking each cow by hand.

That milking-parlour often became a house of worship, John's rich tenor voice leading us both as we sang, praised and laughed together, even as we emptied the milk-pails into the cooler. Then, singing the praises of God, we would return to more milking.

I was learning with John that worship embraces the ordinary day-to-day experience of our lives. Worship must not be severed from the rest of our human activities; it ought to pervade and dominate every routine in our daily duty, for God is 'in all and through all and over all'.

This time-space world is an infant-school classroom of our emerging human spirit. It is here in the school of life that our spiritual capacity is developed to appreciate the wonder of God's person and to prepare us for our privilege of co-sovereignty with him in the coming age.

Our awareness of God's love and kindness, of God's strength and mercy, of God's goodness and favour, are all provoked by the daily experiences of our lives. The heart has nothing of God to sing about unless it has been proven in the workshop of life.

The prophet Zechariah saw what in foretaste we already experience: the closing of the gap between secular and spiritual life that will mark the great end-time revival destined to cover the earth. All of life becomes spiritual-the kitchen and workshop are as much sanctuaries for the presence of the Most High God as any cathedral or church building:

'On that day HOLY TO THE LORD will be inscribed on the bells of the horses, and the cooking pots in the Lord's house will be like the sacred bowls in front of the altar' (Zechariah 14:20).

Sometimes people think that preachers or pastors have a special place in the heart of God beyond others, that somehow these 'holy people' find it easier to enjoy fellowship with God because they are close to him throughout the day. Such people see themselves, by contrast, as disqualified from intimate fellowship with God because they have to 'go to work in the world'.

It is a strange idea, because none of us can isolate ourselves from the world around. Indeed, it would not be desirable. Jesus himself said, 'My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one' (John 17:15).

God wants every individual equally to enjoy unbroken fellowship daily with him. Our worship is not to be confined to special days and special places. Worship has to do with the spirit of a person enjoying and loving God in the normal flow of life.

I am sure Joseph's carpenter's shop in Nazareth was filled with the praise and worship offered by Jesus and the other apprentices who worked alongside him learning their trade. People must have been blessed simply by walking into such an atmosphere of joy and thanksgiving, free of rancour, grumbling and gossip. Jesus knew what it was to live in worship in the everyday flow of life in this world.

Aquila and Priscilla experienced the same thing while making their tents, surrounded by the cosmopolitan atmosphere of the city of Corinth. The hustle and bustle of commerce, the labour and sweat of the poor, the poverty and pain in the inner city ghettos, the drunkenness and loose morals. Yet they continued their task with worship-filled hearts, for the sanctuary of God was within them.

God reveals himself not only in times of solitary meditation but also in the circumstances of daily life. Each situation affords opportunity for a new unfolding of his power and wisdom, some new experience of his grace and kindness, some new demonstration of his greatness and ability, some fresh appreciation of his worth-until we are 'lost in wonder, love and praise'.

Alan was one of the finest men of God I've ever known, devoting his life to serving God and God's people. But he was not a pastor; he was a joiner in an electrical firm. Everyone knew where he stood. His testimony was one of an uncompromising Christian lifestyle.

Boldly he would testify in street meetings, preaching faithfully and fearlessly the salvation of Christ for all people. But the thing I remember most about him was the long hours we would spend together in worship and prayer before God. I would grow tired but he seemed born for these sacred hours. He was as filled with vigour and life after half a night as when we'd first begun.

Again and again he would say to me, 'Bryn, boyo, I love God more than life. I'd rather worship him than do anything else on earth.'

Wherever you are, in office, factory, home, school, college, university-God is there, for God is in you. Nothing outside of you is greater than the God who is in you. Everything you

touch can have the stamp of holiness placed upon it. Your life and faith create the environment necessary for you to worship in spirit and in truth.

The way you do your work, your attitudes towards your colleagues, can all express your love and heart for God.

Paul described worship as part of the thanksgiving process of our lives (Romans 12:1-2)- thanksgiving for every ordinary experience, not only for the 'spiritual' things. Worship makes it *all* spiritual.

Worship leads us away from a preoccupation with ourselves and our self-conditions and directs our attention towards Christ. Worship is not egocentric but Christocentric. But this doesn't mean that we need to leave our legitimate responsibilities in life in order to find him. Wherever we are, there Christ is, and whatever we are engaged in, Christ desires to be fully involved in it. He is not only the Christ of the heavens but the Christ of the workplace.

When he left his Father's presence to come to earth he laid aside the majestic splendour that was rightfully his in the heavens. In becoming a man he assumed the responsibilities true to men and women. By being a carpenter he was not any the less God, but signified to men and women that God is entirely comfortable in the carpenter. This would be equally true had he been an accountant, an electrician, a computer analyst or a business executive.

We must not think that the workplace is alien to God, but recognise that he is as much at home in the workplace of our legitimate responsibilities as he is in the highest heavens.

Work was something God was engaged in before man was created. Indeed, men and women are the result of God's work. Work is not a consequence of the fall of man; it was part of God's and man's experience before the fall.

In becoming a carpenter, Christ sanctified the workplace, illustrating to us by his own labours that work is the place for the holy as much as for the skilled. We need to be filled with the Spirit to do our daily work as much as we need to be filled with the Spirit to preach the gospel of Christ. And in our, we worship him.