

Do Your Best (ZCC2.8.15) Scout Sunday
Ecc 9:10a and Col 3:23

Ecclesiastes 9:10a *Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might;*
Colossians 3:23 (From "The Message") *Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God.*

[Begin sermon with the Boy Scout Oath]

On my honor I will do my best to do my duty to God and my country and to obey the Scout Law; to help other people at all times; to keep myself physically strong, mentally awake, and morally straight. Boy Scout Oath

There is a lot of discussion of "best" in the Bible, especially when it comes to what we give to God.

The two verses I read just a minute ago talk about our best—though one talks about doing your work "with all your might."

Do you remember the Bible story about Jesus clearing the temple of the moneychangers? It is one of the stories that is in all four Gospels.

Let me remind you a little bit: Just before the Passover and four days before his crucifixion, Jesus went to the temple and saw all that the moneychangers were doing. He made a whip out of some cords and he drove them out—turning over their tables and scattering them, their money, and the animals.

There were multiple reasons why he did that. He said that God's house was for worship and they had made it a den of thieves.

Also, since this probably was in the court of the gentiles and women—they were interfering with the worship of those who had no voice—no recourse. Then there was the probability that they were cheating those who were exchanging their coins for coins acceptable in the temple.

One other reason. They were selling animals that were less than perfect—to the point, I understand, that they were dying or bleaching spots and blemishes so that the imperfect animals looked fine to the buyer—the traveler. In a real sense, they were cheating God out of receiving "the best" animals for sacrifice.

God required that only the best were given for worship.

This idea of giving "the best" was used when I was a teenager to condemn wearing jeans or casual clothes of any kind to church. Well, at least on Sunday morning :)

Later, when I was in seminary and in my late 30's, I can even remember having a "discussion" with an older family member who said that it was a sin to wear jeans to church (of course, again, that was on Sunday morning).

Now, I like the idea of giving God my best—but maybe my idea of best and someone else's idea could be different.

For me, my best is my newest pair of Tony Lamas, a pair of Levis, and a blue-jean-jacket over a nice starched white shirt.

That combination would certainly have set me back more money than most of my suits and ties :)

Maybe that works for you and maybe your best is a shirt, a tie, and a jacket.

As we honor our scouts today, I like the idea that they make an oath to do their best. I also like the idea that they make an oath to help other people.

[Address the Scouts]

I thank you for your promise and your efforts to keep that promise. I also thank you for what you do to help others. I encourage you to make it a lifetime goal to help others and to do your best in all that you do and all you are.

I don't want to keep you too long, but I would like to share a little bit about the two verses I read.

The verse from Ecclesiastes says that whatever our hand finds to do we should do it with all our might—all our being you might say.

I assume that all of you have heard someone talk about getting older—with the aches and pains and not seeing or hearing like they used to. Sometimes when they go through a litany of negative things that happen, they say, "but getting old is better than the alternative."

The verse ends a section on life and death. Basically, the writer—the preacher some call him—has talked about how life can be hard and difficult and disappointing.

But he tells us that life, at its worse, is better than death. In life, he says, is awareness and opportunities.

He tells us that life is way better than the alternative and that we are to embrace it and live it for all we are worth.

That includes our work.

Whatever we find for our hands to do—do it with all our being. To me that means with all the skill and all the energy and all the talent and all the effort we can.

It means “do our best.”

That discussion of work is the reason I paired that verse with the one from Colossians.

That verse comes from a chapter about giving oneself over to God totally and completely, The 17th verse of this chapter says: *Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father, through him.*

This thought process continues into verses 22-25. In fact, in this section Paul is speaking specifically to servants or slaves. Even at that level of society, he encouraged them in verse 17 to do their work in the name of Jesus—giving thanks.

Servants, obey in all things those who are your masters according to the flesh, not just when they are looking, as men pleasers, but in singleness of heart, fearing God. And whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord, and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ.

I used “The Message” for verse 23 before and I like the way it feels. *Do your best. Work from the heart for your real Master, for God.*

Obviously Paul lived in a day somewhat different from our own. I don't believe that Paul was holding up slavery as right and good—he was just commenting on the attitudes, actions, and hearts of them—just as he did with many other people in different stations in life.

In Paul's day you could be a slave for many reasons.

You could have been born to parents who were slaves. An unwanted child could be taken in as a slave. You could be sold by your parents so they could raise money. If you defaulted on a debt, you could be taken as a slave or sold into slavery to pay off the debt. You could be made a slave because you had committed a crime. It was also possible to be kidnapped and sold into slavery. We talked a little bit about Joseph last week. His own brothers sold him into slavery.

A slave had no choices. A slave was property and there were no laws against torturing them or even killing them.

Sometimes we joke about our work and compare it to slavery—though of course, for most of us anyway, that is quite an exaggeration.

We are always free to quit and go somewhere else (though the job market may make that seem pretty scary).

Still, if we don't think too literally, we can compare the two.

First let's think about how the 17th verse applies to work. We are to do everything we do—really, what we say and what we do—in the name of Jesus and with thanksgiving to God the Father.

Then Paul says that in all our work—in fact in all of our life—our true master is God. And we are to do “our best” because we are really working for him.

Is that what you see out there when you go to work—or if you are retired, is that what you saw? Everyone is doing their best. They are working with all their might and being. Everyone is doing their work in the name of Jesus and thanking The Father for the opportunity.

They are working when the boss is looking and when the boss isn't looking. They are doing what they do fearing God—which in this case means honoring God. Who, of course is their real master or real boss.

Right?

When we lived in Downeast North Carolina, the fishing industry was being hit pretty hard by regulations and by the price of fuel.

Another thing that weakened the industry was the lack of workers. Fishing is hard work. It is dangerous work. But except for the captains and those with special responsibilities, it is work that virtually anyone can do. It isn't rocket surgery.

Warm bodies were fairly easy to come by but workers were not. I hear it is that way all over the place—not just on the water. Restaurants and landscaping companies and lots of other labor-intensive industries struggle.

But we Christians are to be different. Whatever our hands find to do—actually in all areas of our lives—we are to do it with all our might and to be like the Scouts. Doing our best. We are to do it for our REAL master, our REAL boss—God the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit.

Scouts—I encourage you to be examples for us. Christians, I encourage you to be examples for these Scouts.

Do your best...