

MAKING THE MOST OF YOUR JOB!

Revelation 2:18-29

Notes to preachers

Intro.

Several years ago, I counseled a couple who were having significant problems in their marriage. I asked Karen if she believed John loved her and unhesitatingly, she said “no!” She saw no evidence of his love for her. While she was talking, I noticed that John was gripping the side of the chair so hard that his knuckles were turning white. Finally, when he could take it no more, he blurted out “how can you say I don’t love you when I spend 80 hours a week at work, so that you can have a nice house, a new car and new clothes. Why do you think I am working so hard?”

In Proverbs 15:17 the author says according to the Living Bible “better is a bowl of soup with someone you love than steak with someone you hate!” It is too easy to draw the conclusion that if I provide steaks for my family, they will love me. But broken families across our country are testimony to the fact that we can sell our souls to our jobs thinking that that is the best way to care for our families but ultimately lose our families in the process.

When you think of Vatican City what comes to mind? The pope or the Roman Catholic Church. How about the District of Columbia? The capitol. Or what about Detroit? MO-town. Ephesus was Vatican City as far as pagan worship was concerned. Pergamum as the capitol of Asia Minor was Washington D.C and Thyatira was Detroit, Chicago, or Pittsburgh! It was a union town. In Ephesus, you might give your soul to some pagan god, in Pergamum it would be to politics, but in Thyatira it would be to your job.



Open your device or turn in your Bibles to Revelation 2:18-29.

“To the angel of the church in Thyatira write:

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. 19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, 25 except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

26 To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— 27 that one 'will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery'—just as I have received authority from my father. 28 I will also give that one the morning star. 29 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

You may want to summarize the following paragraph if you think this is too technical for your audience.

The key word in the original text is the Greek work “erga.” It is translated in the NIV as is “deeds” in the 1st phrase of 2:19. The later part of vs 19, it appears again. Literally, the original text says your last deeds (erga) are greater than your first. In v. 22 “erga” appears again in the last phrase translated by the NIV “as *unless they repent of her ways.*” In v. 23, “erga” appears translated again as “deeds” in the very last word of the verse. Finally, in v. 26, it appears in the very last phrase. This time the NIV translates it as “will.” “erga” appears 64 times in the Greek New Testament. “erga is the neuter plural form of the noun “ergon.” **Some form of “ergon” appears 174 times in the Greek New Testament.**

In all those appearances, it refers to work done on the battlefield or in industry or on the farm. It is used of the work of women weaving. Thus, in an abstract sense it can refer to a deed or an action. Sometimes, it refers to that which is made or the profit or interest that is the result of work. Finally, sometimes it can allude to a labor guild or a company of workman.

In the following paragraph, I am establishing a felt need and orienting the audience to the biblical text.

Not surprisingly then, to the residents of this “union” town, Jesus is taking aim at their attitude toward their job! **Work is not a part of the curse.** Man worked before the Fall. **Work is what enables us to reflect the image of God in us.** God gave us his

creativity so we can make something special and at the end of a good day's work say, "It is good. It is very good!" But sadly, what God created for our good we can and have abused. Thus, Jesus in the letter to the church of Thyatira is advising us how we can excel at our job!

The subject of this message is "how can we excel at our job?" The big idea is "we will excel at our job when we have the answers to the right job-related questions." 1. Who is our boss? 2. What is our business? 3. What is our benefits package?

I. You Can Excel At Your Job If You Know The Identity Of Your True Boss 2:18

These are the words of the Son of God, whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

A. He is the son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire!

The picture here is taken from Daniel 10:6 where Daniel sees a man who speaks to him whose eyes are flaming torches and whose legs and feet are burnished bronze and whose voice is the sound of a multitude.

When someone looks at you with eyes that burn right through you what does that make you think? It appears here that Jesus is upset but upset about what?

Notice v. 23 where we see that his eyes see all, and he is not happy with what he sees. So, what did he see?

Thyatira was a union town. There was a linen union (Lydia-the seller of purple was from Thyatira). There also were wool, leather, and bronze unions. Each union worshipped its own god. When they had their union meetings they sacrificed to that god and ate meat offered to the god.

Paul speaks directly to the problem they faced in 1 Cor. 10:18-28.

¹⁸ Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? ¹⁹ Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? ²⁰ No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. ²¹ You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. ²² Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?

²³ "I have the right to do anything," you say—but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything"—but not everything is constructive. ²⁴ No one should seek their own good, but the good of others.

²⁵ Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, ²⁶ for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."

27 If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it.

So, Paul's advice to union workers is "don't eat meat with your fellow workers if that meat has been offered in sacrifice to the union idol." What could Christians do then? Avoid union parties? That may sound easy enough but if a believer did not go to the meetings, he couldn't be in the union and if he could not be in the union, he was committing social suicide.

I grew up in other another union town, Flint, Michigan. In 1966 any high school dropout could go to the Chevy plant and hire on with GM at \$40,000/yr. with full dental and medical and the GM retirement plan. They started at about double the starting salary for the average college graduate. In recent years, Flint has come on hard times as GM has shipped many jobs to Mexico or Ohio any number of other places outside of the state of Michigan. There was a time when it was difficult to find any job in Flint. But on June 5, 2023, General Motors announced it plans to invest more than \$1 billion in two Flint, Michigan, manufacturing plants to produce the next-generation internal combustion engine heavy-duty trucks.

Why will they invest so much in my hometown? The Detroit automaker reported a 38% year-over-year increase in heavy-duty pickup sales last year, with nearly 288,000 trucks sold. So, it is all about the money. Is that a surprise? It is always about the bottom line. Historically members of the UAW have not complained because their union bosses have worked to make sure they get their fair share of it.

But amid the euphoria of getting the \$1 billion investment, workers are still a little concerned about what happens after the end of the decade as GM switches to electric passenger vehicles.

Assembly line worker Mike Lakies, who has been with GM for 29 years, is happy that the investment will let him stay at the plant until he retires, but he's concerned for those with lesser seniority. "They want to be here to get through 30 years," he said. Is it any wonder that the UAW has such loyal members in it?

If you have a union that is fighting hard to protect your financial security, you want to be a part of it. That was precisely the pressure believers felt in Thyatira. You may not be in the union, but nonunion shops have other ways to send the message that you must sell your soul to the company!

Thus, are you facing any pressure where you work to keep your faith to yourself? Or worse are you compelled to engage in conversations that do not honor God because that is how people talk where you work? Does the presumption in America that there must be a separation of church and state give you an excuse to give the appearance that you are living for the Devil at work? Jesus tells us that his eyes blaze with fire as he sees

Christians compromising their convictions at work. Would he be pleased with your “deeds” where you work?

B. He is the son of God whose feet are like burnished bronze!

The second picture Jesus gives us of our true boss is that his feet are like burnished bronze. This imagery seems to be taken directly from Daniel 10 where the prophet describes “the son of man.”

6 His body was like topaz, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude. 7 I, Daniel, was the only one who saw the vision; those who were with me did not see it, but such terror overwhelmed them that they fled and hid themselves. 8 So I was left alone, gazing at this great vision; I had no strength left, my face turned deathly pale and I was helpless. 9 Then I heard him speaking, and as I listened to him, I fell into a deep sleep, my face to the ground. 10 A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. 11 He said, “Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.” And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.

12 Then he continued, “Do not be afraid, Daniel. Since the first day that you set your mind to gain understanding and to humble yourself before your God, your words were heard, and I have come in response to them. 13 But the prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. 14 Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.”

Whatever else we say about the meaning of this description of the “son of man,” we can say definitively that everyone including Daniel was afraid in his presence. Furthermore, in Daniel 7 where we 1st see this image of the son of man, he is brought to the “ancient of Days” and given all authority and power to conquer the 4 beasts! So, the “son of man” in Daniel is a regal character who has the power and authority to overcome all the forces of the world. Either you fear him in worship, or you better be afraid of him because he could crush like an ant. I don’t think any of us want to be stepped on by those bronze feet!

So how does that picture help us on the job. Daniel was the first one to receive this image. Consider how it helped him.

In Daniel 1, Daniel was selected for his job in the Babylonian court because he fit the world’s perspective of what you need on your job application form. He was from one of the best families v. 3. He was physically attractive v. 4. He was smart v. 4. He had marketable skills v. 4. He knew the language of the business world v. 4.

In his job environment, there were two other requirements. He was expected to eat “healthy” or at least what his boss’s thought was a healthy diet. Also, he was encouraged to avoid thinking about or talking about the God of the Bible. To that end at work no one called him Daniel which means, “my God is judge.” His name was changed

to Belteshazzar, which means, “may Bel protect his life.” Bel was a god of Babylon. cf. 4:8.

What would you do if your supervisor at work asked you to do something that would cause you to compromise your faith in Jesus? According to Daniel 1:8-21, Here is what Daniel did,

8 But Daniel resolved not to defile himself with the royal food and wine, and he asked the chief official for permission not to defile himself this way. 9 Now God had caused the official to show favor and compassion to Daniel, 10 but the official told Daniel, “I am afraid of my lord the king, who has assigned your food and drink. Why should he see you looking worse than the other young men your age? The king would then have my head because of you.” 11 Daniel then said to the guard whom the chief official had appointed over Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, 12 “Please test your servants for ten days: Give us nothing but vegetables to eat and water to drink. 13 Then compare our appearance with that of the young men who eat the royal food and treat your servants in accordance with what you see.” 14 So he agreed to this and tested them for ten days. 15 At the end of the ten days they looked healthier and better nourished than any of the young men who ate the royal food. 16 So the guard took away their choice food and the wine they were to drink and gave them vegetables instead. 17 To these four young men God gave knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds. 18 At the end of the time set by the king to bring them into his service, the chief official presented them to Nebuchadnezzar. 19 The king talked with them, and he found none equal to Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah; so they entered the king’s service.

20 In every matter of wisdom and understanding about which the king questioned them, he found them ten times better than all the magicians and enchanters in his whole kingdom.

Daniel, according to this passage, is using a method called “prayer evangelism.” He asks his boss if he can pray and ask God to supernaturally answer his prayer. His boss doesn’t see that prayer could hurt anything, so he permits Daniel to pray and then is amazed at how powerfully God answers his prayer. Could that work for you?

One of my first jobs was working as an orthopedic orderly at Lutheran General Hospital in Fort Wayne, Indiana. I was a pre-ministerial student so my immediate boss feared the “damage” I might cause if I brought my faith to work. She advised me, accordingly, to keep my faith to myself!

Shortly after that warning, one evening about 9 pm, I was called down to a surgical floor to help restrain an 18-year girl who was experiencing convulsions. As I entered the room, I found the patient calm and in a coma. Her mom was the only other person in the room. I can’t explain why but I felt led to ask the mom if she would mind if I prayed that God would heal her daughter. She said “yes,” so I prayed. In my prayer, I alluded to the purpose statement for Jesus’ 1st miracle when he changed water into wine recorded in John 2:11.

11 What Jesus did here in Cana of Galilee was the first of the signs through which he revealed his glory; and his disciples believed in him.

Thus, I prayed that God would heal this girl to glorify himself and so that personnel at the hospital, family members and others would believe in him. I prayed but nothing happened. Still, I came back even on my off days to pray daily that same prayer for this young woman. After about a week, the doctors advised the mom that they didn't see any hope of recovery because the daughter's last EEG was near 0 meaning this patient was nearly brain dead. That didn't discourage me because in my spirit I was convinced that my real boss had the power and authority to heal her. But my faith was shaken the last day I came to pray. I saw the mom in the doorway. When she saw me, she began to cry.

My first thought was, "oh no, the girl died." As I came into the room however, the daughter was awake and alert. She saw me and asked, "Are you the young man who has been praying for me. I said "yes" and she said, "will you pray for me now!"

I got goosebumps. As we prayed together, it was like electric shock waves going off as we rejoiced over God's healing. I had never experienced anything like that before, probably because I had never prayed a prayer like that before.

It was sometime after that I learned why those types of prayer work. In John 20:30, 31, John explains what happens when we pray for that kind of miracle.

30 Jesus performed many other signs in the presence of his disciples, which are not recorded in this book. 31 But these are written that you may believe that Jesus is the Messiah, the Son of God, and that by believing you may have life in his name.

Jesus longs to show the lost the power of prayer. That has always been one of his best methods of showing those who don't know him that he truly is the son of God whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze. Will you then, ask colleague at work to give you permission to pray for them in their time of need? Do you believe if you do that Jesus has the power to answer your prayers in amazing ways because he still longs that the signs, he does for unbelievers will bring them to believe in him.

Reintroduce your subject here: The subject of this message is "how can we excel at our job?" The big idea is "we will excel at our job when we have the answers to the right job-related questions." The first question was "Who is our boss?" The next question is "What is our business?"

In the next part of his message to the church of Thyatira, Jesus encourages us that we will excel at our jobs if we know what we are supposed to do where we work.

II. You Can Excel At Your Job If You Know Your Business 2:19-25

19 I know your deeds, your love and faith, your service and perseverance, and that you are now doing more than you did at first.

20 Nevertheless, I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet. By her teaching she misleads my servants into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. 21 I have given her time to repent of her immorality, but she is unwilling. 22 So I will cast her on a bed of suffering, and I will make those who commit adultery with her suffer intensely, unless they repent of her ways. 23 I will strike her children dead. Then all the churches will know that I am he who searches hearts and minds, and I will repay each of you according to your deeds.

24 Now I say to the rest of you in Thyatira, to you who do not hold to her teaching and have not learned Satan's so-called deep secrets, 'I will not impose any other burden on you, 25 except to hold on to what you have until I come.'

A. The employees most “bosses” like.

In this section, Jesus begins by noting what the believers at Thyatira did well. These Christian workers were great at doing “deeds” of love, service, endurance, and perseverance. Furthermore, they kept getting better at what they did.

Wouldn't your boss love you if you displayed these same characteristics? Faith, hope, and love marked this church. It was a great church! They were even busier for Jesus than when they first believed. What could be wrong?

B. The employees your true boss dislikes

In the next portion as Jesus continues their performance review, he notes how they were failing on the job. He says, *I have this against you: You tolerate that woman Jezebel, who calls herself a prophet.*

Who was Jezebel? She was a church leader who led believers into sexual immorality and the eating of food sacrificed to idols. Apparently, at Thyatira, Jezebel taught toleration at all costs. She clearly said things like, “Don't offend anyone.” “Don't risk losing your job.” “Jesus wouldn't mind you participating in telling those dirty jokes and doing those shady deals because he understands that everyone does it. It is just the way the world is!” “He wouldn't mind you coming home so tired after your 80-hour week that you bark at the dog, bite your wife and run from your kids.” “And he doesn't mind when you tell him you are working so hard you are too tired to read his Word or take time to pray!”

The church at Ephesus did not tolerate heresy but lost her first love. Thyatira had her first love but did tolerate heresy in the name of love. Let's face it if we work for a secular employer, we will be encouraged to be tolerant of everything. Similarly, we will be warned to keep our faith to ourselves. The following pledge of allegiance captures well our dilemma. Since the Pledge of Allegiance and The Lord's Prayer are not allowed

in most public schools anymore because the word "God" is mentioned.... a kid in Arizona wrote the attached NEW School prayer.

*Now I sit me down in school.
Where praying is against the rule
For this great nation under God
Finds mention of Him very odd.*

*If Scripture now the class recites,
It violates the Bill of Rights.
And anytime my head I bow
Becomes a federal matter now.*

*Our hair can be purple, orange or green,
That's no offense; it's a freedom scene.
The law is specific, the law is precise.
Prayers spoken aloud are a serious vice.*

*For praying in a public hall
Might offend someone with no faith at all.
In silence alone, we must meditate,
God's name is prohibited by the state.*

*We can get our condoms and birth controls,
Study witchcraft, vampires, and totem poles.
But the Ten Commandments are not allowed,
No word of God must reach this crowd.*

*It's scary here I must confess,
When chaos reigns the school's a mess.
So, Lord, this silent plea I make:
Should I be shot; My soul please take!
Amen*

How much do you tolerate? Would you consider trying prayer evangelism where you work? A few years back my family ate at a local A&W in Flushing, Michigan. Before we prayed, we asked our waitress if there was anything we could pray for her. She said, "Yes, my daughter is very ill. Would you pray that she recovers?" This occurred after my prayer for the girl in Fort Wayne, so I prayed a prayer much like that one that God would touch this daughter in Flushing. About one year later, our family was back at that same A&W. The same waitress was there but I didn't recognize her, nor did I remember my prayer for her. But she knew me. Shortly after we arrived, she said, "I have not been able to forget you because that prayer you prayed for my daughter changed my life!" Wow, can prayers for relative strangers be life changing? I am still learning the truth of that statement. How about you? Do you believe that your true boss can enable you through the power of prayer and a heart of compassion to be a life

changer where you work no matter what restrictions your company has that limit the witness of Christians?

Reintroduce your subject here: The subject of this message is “how can we excel at our job?” The big idea is “we will excel at our job when we have the answers to the right job-related questions.” The first question was “Who is our boss?” The second was “What is our business?” The final question is what is our benefits package?

III. You Can Excel At Your Job If You Know Your Benefits Package 2:26-29

26 To the one who is victorious and does my will to the end, I will give authority over the nations— 27 that one ‘will rule them with an iron scepter and will dash them to pieces like pottery’—just as I have received authority from my father. 28 I will also give that one the morning star. 29 Whoever has ears, let them hear what the Spirit says to the churches.

In this last section of the message that Jesus gave to this church, he details the benefit package he has for his true followers.

A. Christ will give the over comer authority.

First, he says, he will give them authority! What does that mean? In this message to the church of Thyatira Jesus describes himself with the “son of man” imagery from Daniel. With that description, he reminds these believers that he has all authority and power which he is making available to them!

B. Christ will give the over comer “the star.”

Secondly Jesus avers that he will give them the morning star. Who or what is the “morning star”? In Revelation 22:16 Jesus is the bright morning star. Furthermore, in the near east the morning star was Venus which would appear in the evening sky just before sunrise. So, what does this mean? Much of our life we live in darkness especially where we work. Jesus says remember I am the “morning star.” Speak in my strength and with my authority and you will be amazed!

Conclusion:

I have appeared a couple of times on Focus on the Family. They have 6.3 million in their listening audience each week. The 1st time I appeared on the program I asked multiple friends to pray that God would give me the words to say. I knew I didn’t want to attract attention to myself. I prayed then that God would use me for his glory and that unbelievers would be led to believe in him. My heart was pure and humble during that 2-hour interview.

I don’t know how to describe what happened except to say it was almost magical. Every word out of my mouth was right. I was on fire. I felt empowered and energized as I spoke. It was great! A while later I was asked to speak on a local Christian radio station in Minneapolis. I asked the producer how many will hear our broadcast. He said about 250,000. I remember thinking to myself, “is that all?” This time I did not ask anyone to pray for me. I had already addressed much larger audiences on several

occasions, I knew what to do. If I had only said that to myself out loud, I might have realized the folly of my approach. The truth is I just didn't think about it. You know what happened already don't you? You're right. I bombed. I winced with every word that came out of my mouth. It was awful. I couldn't wait for the interview to be done and I apologized to the producer for my poor performance. He was very gracious. He even said he thought the interview was ok. I knew better because I knew what was happening inside me.

So, what happens inside you when you feel the nudge to witness for Jesus where you work? Does your fear of getting in trouble keep you silent. Or have you tried to speak and failed miserably?

I met Bryce Bewley when he was a junior in high school and I was his Youth for Christ dorm leader at a weekend camp. It was clear Bryce was not a true Christ follower yet, but he was very close. Knowing that, one evening I prayed that God would keep Bryce up all night if that is what it would take for Bryce to commit his life to Christ. Then I went to bed and Bryce was up all night. By morning, he had surrendered his life to Christ, so I got Bryce going in his new life in Christ. I showed him how he could start having a regular time studying God's Word. I taught him how to pray out loud. Finally, I encouraged him to witness to others about his newfound faith in Jesus.

To motivate him to witness, I asked that he look up Matthew 10:32 which says,

“Whoever acknowledges me before others, I will also acknowledge before my Father in heaven. 33 But whoever disowns me before others, I will disown before my Father in heaven.

Later in day, Bryce looked up the wrong verse! Instead, he read Matthew 10:19 that says,

19 But when they arrest you, do not worry about what to say or how to say it. At that time, you will be given what to say, 20 for it will not be you speaking, but the Spirit of your Father speaking through you.

Better still, Bryce believed what that verse says. We don't need to worry about what to say when we are in a hostile environment. If we ask, Jesus will give us the words to say. Do you believe that? Do you know the difference between witnessing in your own strength and speaking in the power of the Holy Spirit?

I dare you to be like Daniel where you work! Do your job well. Win the favor of your employers by your hard work, persistence, and faithfulness. Ask Jesus when to speak. When you do pray, ask the Spirit of God to give you the words to say. Finally, be prepared to be amazed as your colleagues at work discover there is a Jesus whose eyes are like blazing fire and whose feet are like burnished bronze.

Will you pray then that God give you a platform to address the felt needs of those with whom you work so you can point them to Jesus who will meet their need and draw them to himself?