

The Lily Work of Service

1 Kings 7:13-22

On the desk of a busy secretary to a busy doctor, there was a little sign which read, “Please, Lord, tell me again how lucky I am to be working here.” In a place of business I once saw a sign which read, “If you don’t believe that some people can rise from the dead, then you need to be here at quitting time!”

Some people are really not very happy in their jobs, while others look upon their jobs as a treasure which has been entrusted to them. Those “others” are the ones who make a difference in the world, because they usually apply that same attitude about their work to every area of their lives.

I admit, the Scripture upon which today’s message is based doesn’t at first glance appear to be very promising. Who really cares to know all the details of the construction of Solomon’s Temple in Jerusalem? Who could possibly be interested in knowing the name of the craftsman Solomon employed to do the metalwork, or the height of the pillars in front of the Temple? What difference does it make, really?

Well, when you consider what God has to say to us about His Word, it could make a lot of difference. 2 Timothy 3:16-17 reads, “*All Scripture [even detailed accounts of the construction of the Temple] is God-breathed, and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training so that the man of God may be thoroughly equipped for every good work.*” So if we are turned off by today’s passage from 1 Kings, yet *all* Scripture is God-breathed and is useful to us for training in righteous, then we have a real problem, don’t we?

The problem is that God has given us a message in these apparently boring words, but we don’t know what it is. And we stand in danger of missing a wonderful blessing from the Word of God. I challenge you today to open your hearts to what God would have to say to you personally.

In 2 Chronicles 2, we read that when Solomon was ready to build the Temple, he sent to Hiram king of Tyre and requested the finest building materials and the most skilled craftsmen. The king of Tyre responded in a letter to Solomon that he was pleased to be able to help in this glorious project, and that he was sending an excellent craftsman whose name was like his own—Hiram. But Hiram the king had such great respect for this artisan that he added a descriptive title to the end of his name—Hiram-abi.

He was saying, “Solomon, I am sending a man to you by the name of Master Hiram.” This man was obviously held in such high esteem by the people of Tyre, even by the king, that they called him Hiram-abi, Master Hiram. He was a master at what he did.

Don’t get the wrong idea. Master Hiram of Tyre was not a celebrity. He would never have been able to insist on a contract which guaranteed him millions of dollars for his work. He never threw a game-winning touchdown pass, he never directed or starred in a box-office smash, he never recorded a CD. He probably was never approached by a fan who asked for his autograph. Yet Hiram of Tyre had a simple quality which is far too rare in our day and in our age. He was an honest, skilled workman who did all that was required of him, and even a little more.

When his father was alive, he, too, had been a craftsman in bronze. Master Hiram’s father had been a citizen of Tyre, and perhaps passed his skill on to his son. Hiram’s mother was a Hebrew, who had evidently passed on her belief in one God. Hiram was a good student in both categories, becoming a highly skilled workman, who gave his very best in building a Temple for the worship of the Lord God.

“Well, that’s admirable, but what does it really have to do with me?” is what you may be thinking. In your haste to read this passage, don’t overlook the detailed description of the two pillars which Hiram designed and constructed. Someone once wrote, “Man’s work is an extension of himself. It is a revelation of his inner life, both to others and to himself.” So the two pillars which stood at the front of the Temple tell us much about the character and integrity of Master Hiram.

These pillars were evidently free-standing; they were not to support anything, but were placed there as symbols of the greatness of God. In fact, Hiram even gave the pillars names. The pillar to the south he named “Jakin,” a name which means “He establishes.” The pillar to the north was named “Boaz,” which means “In Him is strength.” Those were two truths every worshipper of the Lord God needed to be reminded of every time they approached the Temple.

Those pillars were massive! Verse 15 says that they were made of bronze, or brass in the KJV. We learn in other places in God’s Word that huge holes were dug in the clay, and that these holes served as the mold for these pillars. The pillars were hollow, with the walls being as thick as four fingers are wide. The Bible even says

that there was so much bronze used that they could not even determine their weight. But that's not all.

Verse 15 also gives us an idea of how high these pillars were. Just the shaft of the pillar was eighteen cubits high and twelve cubits around. A "cubit" was the distance between a man's elbow and the middle finger of his hand, roughly eighteen inches. So this makes just the shaft of the pillar about 27 feet high and about 18 feet in circumference. But that was just the shaft of the pillars.

Verse sixteen tells us that Master Hiram "*also made two capitals of cast bronze to set on the tops of the pillars.*" A capital is the usually decorate design work at the top of a column. Each of the capitals was five cubits high, or about seven and one-half feet high. Then verse seventeen gives the information that there were seven rows of interwoven chains on the top of the pillars. And verse twenty says that there were two hundred pomegranates in rows all around each pillar.

The point is this: when you add all that together, plus a pedestal, you have a pair of pillars which are 18 feet in circumference and nearly 58 feet high! On top of all that, as we see in verse 22, Master Hiram put design work on the top of the capitals in the shape of lilies.

Why? Why did Hiram bother to go to such trouble? Why do all that intricate work and then put it on the top of the pillars where people could barely see it, much less appreciate it? Should we be given a task like Hiram's most of us would say, "There's no point in going to all that trouble! No one will ever see it when it's fifty-eight feet in the air!"

And true, there *would* be no point at all unless you happen to believe what Hiram believed about his work. Hiram and those who worked with him believed that what they were doing was for the glory of God. ***God would see it!*** This was going to be a Temple where the Lord God of Israel, the Creator and Sovereign Lord of the universe was to be worshipped and served. The task deserved the very best they had to give it.

Should we adopt for our lives the same attitude as Hiram did for his, we would have what could be called "***The Lily Work of Service.***"

The Lily Work of Service is that something extra we give to our work. We could do the same job with a lot less bother, and get by. The Lily Work of Service is that which is above and beyond what is expected of us. It is the extra touch we add to

our tasks which is totally unnecessary to get the job done. It isn't the icing on the cake; it's the decoration on top of the icing!

As Master Hiram was pouring the molten bronze into the clay molds, he was also pouring himself into that work. His soul was inspired to do the very best that his hands could do. All these long centuries later, Christian people need to recapture the conviction that work that is done with integrity is the only kind of work that honors God. There are very few things which bring discredit and dishonor to the Name of Christ any more than does a Christian who wastes his time while on the job, or who cheats his employer.

However active he or she may be in the church, however devout and faithful he or she may be in Bible study and prayer, if that Christian has adopted a lackadaisical attitude toward his or her work, then God is not being honored. So the minimum standard for Christians is to at least be honest, diligent and trustworthy workmen.

But let's go even further than that. Let's put the "lily work" on top. Let's do more than what is expected. Why should we do that? The Bible teaches us that when we are engaged in work of any kind, that we are doing it for the glory of the Father. That holds true whether we are working with ledger sheets, blueprints, lesson plans, loan applications, herbicides, or computer screens. When we can look upon our work, whatever form it takes, as being done for the glory of God, then it becomes easy to put the "lily work" on top, where perhaps no one else will see it but God, because we're doing it for *Him!*

The Christian stewardship of work is pictured in an old symbol of the Moravian Church. An ox is seen standing between a plow and an altar. Underneath are the words, "Ready for Either." Christians should be like that ox: ready either for work or worship. Our entire lives, including what we do for a living, should be so committed to Christ that even our work becomes an offering to God. "*Whatever your hand finds to do,*" we see in Ecclesiastes 9:10, "*do it with all your might, for in the grave, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning, nor knowledge nor wisdom.*"

And this is the same principle we see in the directions God gave the Israelites for offering a lamb for sacrifice: it was to be unblemished, healthy, the best they had.

But wait just one minute. It was fine for Hiram and it was fine for the ancient Israelites, but what does the New Testament say? When Paul wrote to the Roman Christians, who were under constant scrutiny by the Roman government, he said to

them, *“Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord”* (Romans 12:11).

When he wrote to the Christians in Ephesus, Paul had a word specifically for the slaves in that congregation, a word which applies just as readily to those who work for a living today: *“Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like **slaves of Christ**, doing the will of God from your heart.”*

Then Paul tells them to put the “lily work” on top! *“Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free”* (Ephesians 6:5-8).

But the principle of the lily work of service is one that can and should be applied to every life, to every area of life. You may be unemployed or retired or so financially independent that you no longer need to work. How does this principle of the lily work of service apply to you? Aren't there other areas in your life which require you to give of yourself? It may be nothing more than washing the dishes in your own kitchen, but wash them to the glory of God! Let even your freshly trimmed lawn be an offering to the Lord God.

Then look at our church. Are you teaching that Sunday School class right now in such a way that it becomes an offering to God? Or has it become a drudgery, something you are doing “because there was no one else to do it,” or because you've been doing it for years? Do the things taught in your class bring glory to Christ? Does your participation on that committee have any “lily work” on the top of it?

What a difference could be seen almost overnight in our church's ministry if each of us would “put the lily work on top” of our jobs and responsibilities here in our church! How much more spiritual growth could be seen and how many more people we could reach with the Gospel of Jesus Christ if we would begin, more than ever, to put the lily work on top!

Listen to what Paul wrote the Corinthians: *“Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain”* (1 Corinthians 15:58). Even Peter, who in the four Gospels was so slow to understand spiritual

truth, could understand this principle. He wrote, *“If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.* (1 Peter 4:11).

That’s The Lily Work of Service. That’s what America needs this Labor Day. That’s what our church needs, as every day becomes a Labor Day for our Lord.

Ron Lamb once drove a truck to and from his job as a postal clerk in Atlanta, Georgia. He was always stopping along the way to aid stranded motorists, replacing a burst water hose or offering a free tow to the nearest garage. He explained, “Helping people who are broke down is my ministry. I knew I couldn’t preach, but I could change a tire, so maybe the Lord could use that.” Ron Lamb put the lily work on top.

Is your commitment to the Lord suffering because you’ve not been willing to give your best, to be your best? Is your witness before others suffering because you’re going about your tasks in a lackadaisical manner? Today I challenge you to consider the things you do in the course of a day or a week—is there something you can do, some little extra effort or care, to put the lily work on top? Is there some task, some area of your life, where the lily work needs to be put on top?