

Why Should We Labour For the Lord?

1 Corinthians 15:58

10/03/2024

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Well again, it's a privilege to be here today for this historic moment in the life of Camden Valley Baptist as we lay hands on Joshua and formally acknowledge him as a pastor here at Camden Valley Baptist. It's so wonderful to see what the Lord has been doing here and to be a part of that here today.

I invite you now to open your Bibles again to 1 Corinthians Chapter 15. And we'll be reading from verse 50 through to the end of the chapter, to verse 58. 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, reading from verse 50, Apostle Paul writes:

"I declare to you, brothers, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, nor does the perishable inherit the imperishable. Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed—in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed. For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' '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! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ. 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."

Let's come to God in prayer and ask for His help as we look at His word more closely together.

Holy Father, we ask that You would send the Holy Spirit to us now so that we do not stray from Your word but walk according to it. And we pray this in Christ's name. Amen.

Well, for the induction of Joshua Kure as your pastor today, I thought it might be helpful for us to look at this text that is before us in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, looking particularly at verse 58 where it says, "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."

This verse comes at the end of Chapter 15, and Chapter 15 is a chapter that is well-known in the Bible for being about the resurrection, for being about the resurrection of the Lord Jesus, and about the resurrection of those who trust in Jesus Christ as well. And so, as Paul has been speaking about the certainty of the resurrection of Jesus Christ and of His followers, Paul ends the chapter by encouraging the church—the Corinthians many years ago and us today as we read this letter. He encourages them to do something because of the resurrection. And what is that? It is to stand firm. Verse 58 says, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm." Now, it's not necessarily standing. The idea here is that a person would stay where they are, that they would be steadfast, is another translation for it.

And then the words, the next sentence in verse 58, is "Let nothing move you." So there's this idea that we're meant to stand firm, that we're meant to be steadfast, and nothing should be allowed to move us. But what is it that we should be doing while we stand firm, while we are steadfast and not letting anything move us? Well, the rest of the verse tells us what we should be doing. What is that? It should be work. Verse 58 says, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

What is it we're supposed to do while we remain fixed in one spot? It is to work, to work for the Lord. And what does it mean to work for the Lord? Well, it means to love others, to love. We understand that the Bible, all the commands of God, all the work that God gives us, can be summed up with "love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength," and to "love our neighbor as ourselves." And so, what does that then look like? Well, to love the Lord our God means that we give ourselves over to spiritual exercises, to prayer, to reading His word, to listening to His voice, to meditating upon His word, to singing His praises, and of course, evangelism—sharing with others the good news about Jesus Christ and about our loving heavenly Father.

And of course, the other aspect of what it means to work for the Lord is to love our neighbor. What does that mean? It means that we are to love those in our society, those that are around us. That can be, of course, our family; it can be those in our neighborhoods, our communities, in our workplaces, and in our churches. These are all people who are our neighbors, and therefore, God wants us to work at loving those people who are in our lives. And how are we to work at loving them? Well, the verse actually tells us how we are to work at this love that we're meant to do for others.

We're meant to give ourselves fully to the work. We see that in verse 58. It says, "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord." It means to abound in the work, that the work just continues to flow from us. And how else are we meant to work? Well, it tells us that we're meant to labor at it. In verse 58, it says, "Because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain." It is something that is toilsome, the work of the Lord. But we're meant to labor at it, to work hard, not to just tick a box and try and get as minimal effort done as possible. We're meant to work hard.

And then, how often are we meant to work at the Lord's work? Well, the verse tells us. It opens the last sentence there. It says, "Always give yourselves fully to the work." We're meant to be always working for the Lord. But why would the Apostle Paul need to tell us to stand firm, to stay at the Lord's work, and let nothing move us from it? It's because there are enemies who want to stop us working for the Lord, from doing the Lord's work. We have enemies. Who are our enemies? Well, we have Satan, we have the world, we have even our own flesh, our sinful nature, that does not like us loving God and does not like us loving our neighbor, that's always working to push us away from the Lord's work, to be moved from it. What does that then mean? Well, as we work, it is toilsome work. There are thorns, there are thistles, there are weeds in all our work of loving God and loving our neighbor, but we're meant to keep on doing it. It is painful, sweaty toil to do the Lord's work, but we're meant to keep on doing it. And why would we do it then? Why would we love the Lord our God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength? Why would we love our neighbor, which the Lord Jesus teaches us means even loving our enemies? Why would we do this? Well, the verse tells us. It says in verse 58, "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because why should we do this? Because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

Paul tells us that work for the Lord is not in vain. The other way you could translate that is it's not empty. It's not empty work. Why does he need to tell us this? Because we do understand that much work that people do is wasted work. It feels like it's completely in vain. You can think you're going to do something on a Saturday morning around the house. You think it's going to take half an hour. You end up spending four hours on a project, and you still don't solve it. This is particularly when it comes to IT matters. You think you're going to sort out the computer that morning, but then four hours later, you're still unresolved. You don't know why it's doing what it's doing. And it feels like you just wasted four hours. We understand what it is to feel that work can be wasted. But Paul tells us that work for the Lord is never wasted. It is never empty. It is never in vain. And why is that? Well, we know that the work of God is eternal and is rewarded with an eternal reward as well.

If you look at 1 Corinthians, the Apostle Paul speaks so clearly about this in 1 Corinthians Chapter 3. Turn with me back in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians Chapter 3, and we'll read from verse 9, where he's speaking about the Lord's work, and he speaks about the reward that those who are faithful in building in the way that the Lord wants us to build and work will be rewarded. 1 Corinthians Chapter 3, reading from verse 9, the Apostle Paul says here, "For we are God's fellow workers. You are God's field, God's building." And then verse 10, 1 Corinthians Chapter 3, "By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds, for no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, or straw, his work will be shown for what it is, because the day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work. If what he has built survives, he will receive his reward. If it is burned up, he will suffer loss. He himself will be saved, but only as one escaping through the flames."

Why is our work not in vain? Because there is an eternal reward for those who serve the Lord. And not just a reward, we understand there's also an eternal rest for those who work faithfully for the Lord. There is a rest that is to come. This world is a world that we work. It is not a time for rest and for peace and security and safety that we long for. No, that is to come. That is the next life. That is when we rest. That is our Shabbat. That is our Sabbath. That is yet to come. This world is where we work. The rest is yet to come.

But how can we know that we'll be rewarded for our labor? How do we know that one day we will be able to rest in heaven itself? The verse tells us. How do we know this is true, that there will be a reward one day for those who work hard, who toil for the Lord? 1 Corinthians 15, the very first word in verse 58, what does it say? "Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord." Therefore refers to something that has come before. And what was all 1 Corinthians Chapter 15 about? The resurrection of Jesus Christ. The resurrection of Jesus Christ then leads us to know that we should work hard for the Lord. Why? Because our labor is not in vain, because there is a resurrection of the dead.

If the resurrection didn't take place, if Jesus Christ was not raised from the dead, what does the Apostle Paul say? He says that we who work for the Lord, who toil for the Lord, who let nothing move us and give ourselves fully to it, we are to be pitied. We are to be pitied for working for Him. He says this in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, verse 17. Turn with me back, if it's

in your pages there, 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, verse 17. Apostle Paul says, "And if Christ has not been raised, your faith is futile; you are still in your sins. Then those also who have fallen asleep in Christ are lost. If only for this life we have hope in Christ, we are to be pitied more than all men."

If the resurrection hasn't taken place, the Apostle Paul says it is stupidity, it is foolishness to work hard for the Lord. Because there's no afterlife, there's no rest, there's no reward. And the Apostle Paul knows how hard it is to work for the Lord. He knows that it would be far easier to live for pleasure in this world than to do the Lord's work. That it's a tough slog being a Christian and doing God's work. To love your neighbor and to love Him is hard work. And he knew it firsthand. 1 Corinthians 15, verse 30. Turn with me in your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 15, verse 30. A few verses on from just there where he said we should be pitied. He says in verse 30, "And as for us, why do we endanger ourselves every hour? I die every day—I mean that, brothers—just as surely as I glory over you in Christ Jesus our Lord." The Apostle Paul says for him to work for the Lord is dying every day. And then he continues, verse 32, "If I fought wild beasts in Ephesus for merely human reasons, what have I gained? If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" The Apostle Paul says if the resurrection of Jesus Christ has never taken place, then you should give yourselves to eating and drinking. To feeding the senses with as much pleasure as you can, for tomorrow what happens? You die, and it's all over. That's what the Apostle Paul says you should do if the resurrection hasn't taken place.

But Christ proves there is a resurrection of the dead. And by His resurrection, He proves that there's an afterlife. There's a judgment that is to come. There are rewards that are to be handed out. And there is a rest for His people in heaven itself. And so, we need to therefore give ourselves over to working hard for the Lord.

What would be a good illustration for what it means to be a Christian? Well, an illustration could be that it's like working for a large company. It's like working for a large company. How so? Well, how do we join a company in the first place? How do you join a company in this world? Well, it's not by working our way into it but by being chosen by the company to be a part of it. You can do all you can to try and get them to choose you, but at the end of the day, you go into the interviews, and you do all the requirements that the company asks of you, but even then, they may not accept you. At the end of the day, it's the company that chooses you to belong to it. And it's the same with being a Christian and getting into God's company. God, the employer, He is the one who chooses us.

But surely we need to be qualified to get into His company. Yes, but we don't qualify ourselves. Who qualifies us? It's the Lord Jesus Christ. See,

the problem with us is we have a sin problem. We've rebelled against God's company in the past. We've actually attacked His company. And so, for Him to take us on board on His company would be a foolish thing. But the wonderful thing is that He cleanses us of all our rebellion and all our sin. He takes it away. And we even see that in the verses that are before us, before this verse in verse 58. It talks about our death and the sting of death. And verse 56, it says, "The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ."

How are we qualified to be a part of God's company? It is by the Lord Jesus taking away our sin, giving us the victory, and then giving us His Spirit and the gifts and the abilities and the strength to serve in God's company. But what would motivate us to labor for a company? What would motivate you to work hard for a company in this world? To always give yourselves fully to it? To do long hours? To toil at it? To do more than you would expect from a regular salary? What would make you want to stick with a company and keep on going with it? Well, if you know that the company will endure, that it has longevity, would cause you to keep going at it. To know that your labor for the company is not in vain.

If we work for a company that is dying, if you know the company you work for Monday to Friday is going out of business in the near future, will you give yourself fully to it? No, you wouldn't. But if you know that the company is going to endure, that it's alive and growing, you will give yourself to it because you know your labor is not in vain, that the company is not going out of business in a few months, maybe a year's time. But how would you know that a company is not going to go out of business, that it's going to endure, that it's going to keep going? Well, there's a number of ways that you can know that a business in this world, a company, is going to keep on going.

Firstly, you look at what product are they producing. Is it a quality product? Is it something of value? And do customers keep on wanting that product? Do they keep on buying it? Do they keep on desiring to have it? And then, if we want to know if a company will endure, we should look at the workers. Does a company keep on adding more workers? Is it a growing company, not just in its customer base but also in its workers? And how else would you know if a company will endure? Well, you look at the management. Are the management honest and hardworking? Are they investing themselves within the company? And then, how else can you know that a company will endure? It's by looking at the owner, looking at the owner. And does he and his family fully invest in that company as well? And if you see these things, the boxes being ticked, you can know that a company will endure, that it will keep going.

So how then can we know if God's company will endure, that His kingdom will last? Well, we look at the product. Is it a quality product? Well, what are we supposed to produce as workers in God's kingdom? It was love, wasn't it? Is Christian love a quality product? Yes, it is. It's a valuable thing to produce love. And do customers keep on wanting that love? Yes, Christians want it, but even non-Christians want the love of a non-Christian. What happens when a non-Christian struggles to find help in this world? Their community fails them, the government fails them, their friends fail them, their family fails them, and they don't know who to turn to. Who do they turn to? The church. They turn to the religious people, knowing that if all else fails, the government fails me, my neighbors fail me, my friends fail me, my family fails me, maybe the church will help me still. They know that there's a quality of love amongst God's people that is unlike the love that is in those outside the church.

And how else can we know that God's company will endure? Well, we look at the workers. Are more workers being added to the kingdom of God, to God's company? Yes, and Camden Valley Baptist is a testimony to that, that God is continuing to call people out of the world, out of darkness, into His light, that He continues to do it. Day after day, year after year, more and more workers are added to His kingdom. And then you look at the management, the management of God's company. Are they hardworking? Yes, you look at godly elders in God's churches. They are hardworking. They give themselves over to it. They die every day, like the Apostle Paul, in some instances. They're dying for the people of God. They are hardworking in the management of God's people.

And then, how else would we know if a company is going to endure? We look at the family that owns it, the owner of the company. When we look at God's company, who owns it? It's God Himself. Does He invest in it? Yes, He does. God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit invest in His company every day by giving strength to His people. And then, of course, when we look at God the Father Himself, what did He invest in the company? He invested His one and only Son. And what did the Son invest into the company? He invested His body and blood so that the company would endure, so that the company would keep going, so the company would be established and then endure. Christ has invested, and God the Father through Christ has invested blood, sweat, and tears, literally, into His company.

But what sign do we have that God's company will endure like no other company? We can tick a number of boxes there. We can see them. Yes, yes, yes. These factors are all good for helping us to know whether a company will endure. And they all help us to understand whether God's company

will endure. But what factor do we have that shows that this company, God's company, is unlike any other company? It's the resurrection of Jesus Christ. If the company's boss can come back to life, it's a company that's going to endure. If you can't kill him, he just keeps on coming back and endures. That's a company worth being a part of. And that's what the Apostle Paul is teaching us here in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15, that the boss of God's company has come back from the dead. And therefore, it's a company worth serving.

And why is it good to then serve in such a company, a company that endures? Well, reward is certain. Reward is certain. If it's going to continue, the company, then the fat bonus that is promised, it will come to its workers. And the long service leave that is guaranteed to its workers will come about. It is guaranteed by the fact that the company will endure. If your company's going out of business in the next few months and they're promising you long service leave, you will not accept their guarantee that you'll get long service leave. There's going to be no money for your long service leave. But if you know that the company will endure, you know the long service leave is guaranteed.

And why else is it good to work for a company that endures? There's a joy in serving a company that is glorious, that is doing great things, and that is going to keep on going forever, in this case. So what should we do as Christians? We should do what the Apostle Paul says and never leave God's company. We should stay firm and let nothing move us from our position within it. Why? Because if we leave God's company at any time, if we let the enemy push us out, what does that mean? There is no reward, and there is no long service leave for those who leave the company. And the book of Hebrews is a wonderful book in warning people as to what they will do if they fall away and what will happen to them if they fall away, that there is nothing left for them if they fall away. And of course, what else do we lose? Not just the reward and the long service leave. We lose the joy of being part of something glorious that will go on not just for all of this age but for all of eternity.

So what should we do? We shouldn't leave His company. And then what should we do while we're a part of His company? We should always give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord. We're told not to move, and we're told while we don't move, to work for the Lord. What's that mean? We keep on showing love to others. We love God; we keep on showing love to God in whatever sphere He has called us to. We show love; we meditate upon Him; we pray to Him, and we read His word. But then, whatever sphere, whatever part of the community of this world He has put us in, the different communities we may have, we continue to work at abounding in love and toil for those people around us by showing love to them. We all work for

the same boss, but we work in different areas within the company. God's company is very, very large, and He has us at different works with different people all over this world.

For some of you, it means that you change nappies for God, that you work at doing it. It's toilsome at times, yes, but you keep on doing it because that is the work that the Lord has given you to do. That is your act of love to your neighbors that are in your house. For others of you, it may mean to study hard, to commit yourself to the studies that God has called you to commit yourself to. For others, it may mean employment and working for whatever boss or for whatever customers you have; you work hard at loving them. And of course, it means also loving others within your church. And for Joshua, that includes the work of being an elder. On top of all his other duties that the Lord has given him in his family, in his community, he has the work of loving the people that have been placed under his care.

And of course, you here at Camden Valley Baptist, the members here, you have to labor at loving one another as well, and loving those outside of Camden Valley Baptist, the people who come in. You have to love them, no matter how unlovable they may be at times. You have to love them. Let nothing move you from doing the Lord's work, for abounding in your love for those around you. Because there will come times where there are people within your midst who are not as lovable as you would like them to be. And that will go for Joshua as well. There will be times when Joshua is not as lovable as you would like him to be as well. But you have to work hard and abound at loving him in those moments, just as the people at Des Moines Baptist for 15 years have worked hard at loving me. I'm not as lovable as I can be at times. And you can ask Ray and Danny; at times, Joel needs that support. He needs that encouragement, and he's a bit of hard work. But they voluntarily continue to give of their time and love me and support me. And it will be the same for you here at Camden Valley Baptist Church for Joshua, and vice versa. Joshua will have to love you when you're sometimes not so lovable. But he's called to do it because God has called him to do it. And why will he keep on doing it? Why will you today make solemn vows to love him no matter what? And why will he make solemn vows to love you no matter what? Why? Because his labor and your labor is never in vain. That's what the Apostle Paul says. "Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain."

When you love people who are unlovable within your church, within your family, within your community, within your workplace, the labor is not wasted. As much as it may feel at times it's wasted, it is not wasted. Even if you don't get the results that you want, you labor with the computer for four hours, and you still don't get the result that you want, it is not in vain.

If it was done for the Lord, that you're working to try and overcome the weeds and the thistles and the thorns in this world, you're doing it for the Lord's sake. It is not in vain. Why? There's a fat reward for the workers of God, and there's a long service leave that is yet to come, and there's a joy in being part of something glorious, of being part of Camden Valley Baptist Church. It's a glorious thing because you're part of something that is eternal. You're part of a company that endures for all of eternity, and you get to see the glory of God working here in this place again and again.

But what will you do when you get weary? When you're weary of working and the enemy's coming at you hard and wants you to stop working? Well, what does Paul want us to do? He wants us to look to God. And we even saw Isaiah wants us to do that. In Isaiah Chapter 40, what did we read? He said, "Even youths grow tired and weary, and young men stumble and fall. But those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint." How do we get strength from the Spirit to keep going with the work that God has called us to love others? It is by looking to Him. "Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength," is what Isaiah says. But what about God do we look at so that our strength is renewed? We look at His promises. That's what we do. We look at the words that God has spoken and the promises that He has given us.

What promises has He given us? Well, He's given us wonderful promises in verse 55 and following in 1 Corinthians 15. What has He said? "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! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ." There's a promise that will give us strength, that sin is dealt with. When you feel down, when you haven't stood firm at your post, when you haven't loved God as you should, when you haven't loved your neighbor as you should, and you feel down because of your sin, you look to God. And what do you look to God at? You look at His promise. And you look at His promise here that there is a victory even over your failing to work as you should have.

And what else should we look at then? How do we know that His blood has triumphed over our sin, that we have victory, that we should continue working despite the times that we've fallen down? How do we know that verses 55 to 57 are true? We know it because of what came before in 1 Corinthians Chapter 15. What is that? That the resurrection of Jesus Christ has taken place. Sin has been dealt with, and we know it because Christ was raised from the dead. God's promises are true, and we know they're true because Jesus was raised from the dead. And if you keep on looking at Christ's resurrection, you, by the power of the Holy Spirit, won't move. And you will always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

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Because as you look at the resurrection, you know that your labor is not in vain. Because you know that there is a rest and a reward for those who continue to labor. The problem for us is we forget about the resurrection. That's when we fall back. That's when we don't give ourselves to work. That's when we think, why do I keep on loving that person? It's because we've forgotten about the resurrection. But if we keep our eyes on the resurrection of Jesus Christ, if we remind ourselves that the dead are raised, we will keep on loving the unlovable. And we'll keep on loving the lovable too, because we know our labor is not in vain.

But if you're here this morning and you're not a Christian, I want to speak to you, and I want you to understand that your company, whichever company you're working for, is going out of business. Why? There's no hope of the resurrection of the dead for any company that is not God's company. Whoever you've dedicated your life to cannot raise the dead. They cannot raise the dead. And what does that then mean? Your labor is in vain. It's empty. It's useless. All the years of studying and working and trying to help others, it's for a dying company, which means your work will not endure, and it will be burned up when the business closes one day. And what does that then mean? It means you will not receive any final reward, and you will not receive an eternal rest. Psalm 127 is very clear. It says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its laborers labor in vain." Unless the Lord builds the house, its laborers labor in vain. And that is what you're doing if you're outside of Christ. If you're not working for God, all your hard work, and it is hard work, is in vain. It will be burned up.

So what should you do? I encourage you, leave your company now and become part of a company that endures. How do you join it? Well, not by working your way into it, but by asking the Son, who has inherited the company, to employ you. Why? Jesus alone is the one who has paid the price to bring employees on board. He alone is the one. If you desire it, if you want to be part of God's company, you need to go to Jesus and ask Him to accept you, to receive you, to cleanse you of your sin, and to bring you into His company. I encourage you, don't be too proud to switch companies today. You may have given your life over to something else altogether. You may have given your life over to your own self, or to others, to your family, to your community, to your own business. Don't be too proud to give it all up and join something that endures for all of eternity. To admit that all that you did in the past was in vain, it was empty, but now you're going to serve and do work that will endure eternally because it's for a company that will endure eternally.

I encourage you, do that. Come to Jesus now, and by the power of the Holy Spirit, then rejoice in working for a company that endures, knowing that there is a reward and there is long service leave for eternity. And learn

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what it is to rejoice and have that joy of knowing you're doing something that is part of something glorious, something wonderful that we don't fully fathom even now, but we see glimpses of, that this is a glorious work that we are a part of, a glorious kingdom with a glorious King. Rejoice in the fact that you get to be a part of it now and always.

Let's come to our King now; let's speak with Him.

Lord, we praise You as the eternal King of an eternal kingdom, and we thank You for proving it by raising Jesus Christ from the dead. Oh Lord, we ask that You would forgive us for the times when we have not stood firm and not given ourselves fully to Your work. And we ask that You would help us by the power of the Holy Spirit to work hard by remembering Your promises and remembering the resurrection of Jesus Christ. And so therefore, look forward to our eternal reward and our eternal rest. And Lord, if there is anyone here this morning who is not working for You, may they see the foolishness of working for what does not endure and join Your kingdom now by trusting in Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of sins. And we pray this in His name, Amen.

Well, we're now going to sing hymn 134 in your supplementary books, "Up from the grave He arose." Please stand and sing song number 134.