



I've always admired people who can build things. While I've rebuilt several carburetors and alternators over the years, and while Jill and I successfully built two screen doors from scratch once upon a time, for the most part, I'm not very "handy," and I appreciate people who are. And, given the fact that I've spent a fairly substantial amount of money on car repair, air conditioning repair, and plumbing repair in the last month, I'm able to appreciate the fact that person can make a pretty good living pursuing these arts.

The current issue of *Christianity Today* has an article about "reclaiming the honor of manual labor" that caught my eye. Entitled "The Handcrafted Gospel," the article notes that current American culture tends to teach young people that becoming a tradesman or a craftsman does not carry the status or the opportunities for advancement that "white collar" work does.<sup>1</sup>

Brandon Yates is a thirty-seven year-old Master Electrician in Kansas City, Missouri who was interviewed in the article. "*Craftsman* is a lost word in our day," Brandon notes. "Society teaches kids that they'll become losers if they become electricians. My job is to unteach them."



The article notes that, "considering that Scripture identifies Jesus himself as a *tektōn* (Mark 6:3, literally 'craftsman' or 'one who works with his hands'), we think it's high time to challenge the tradesman stereotype, and to rethink the modern divide between white collar and blue collar, office and shop, in light of the Divine Craftsman who will one day make all things new."

You may have heard of Bezalel, one of the most famous craftsmen in the Bible. God chose Bezalel for some of the most difficult work on the Tabernacle, and God said of him that "*I have filled him with the Spirit of God, with wisdom, with understanding, with knowledge and with all kinds of skills—to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of crafts*" (Exodus 31:3-5).



From the Tabernacle to the Temple, God intended what was built to reflect and to reveal God's character, God's craftsmanship, and God's holiness. The Cosmos is a work of exquisite craftsmanship that we are only beginning to understand, and the same thing could be said of life itself.

The article points out that, while industrial jobs are especially vulnerable to globalization, the work of craftsmen—craftspeople—resists outsourcing.

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<sup>1</sup> Jeff Haanen and Chris Horst, "The Handcrafted Gospel: Reclaiming the Honor of Manual Labor," *Christianity Today*, July/August 2014, 66-71.

When lights must be installed or framing must be constructed, as is happening at this moment at The Meeting House, that work can't be done in India. Cement and rebar can be imported, but highways cannot.

The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics has predicted that four of the top ten fastest-growing occupations through 2020 will be skilled trades: #4, brick masons, block masons, stone masons, and tile and marble setters; #5, carpenters; #7, reinforcing iron and rebar workers; and #9, pipe layers, plumbers, pipe fitters, and steam fitters.

While college graduates often find jobs scarce, two-thirds of construction companies in the U.S. are struggling to find enough skilled workers. And the pay isn't bad at all. According to this article, the average annual wage for elevator installers and repairers is \$73,560, and for electrical repairers at power plants it is \$65,950.

The article closes this way: "If there is a renaissance in craftsmanship, it should be welcomed—even heralded—by Christians. After all, we look to a day when we will inhabit a house God has built—a richly prepared mansion that owes its beauty to a single designer and laborer (John 14:2). God is Maker, Creator of the heavens and the earth; and God is Fixer, Redeemer and Restorer of a broken world.

"As we look forward to the heavenly city, whose architect and builder is God (Hebrews 11:10), perhaps we owe it to our children and grandchildren to encourage more of them to be makers and fixers, too."

### **CHANGING SUBJECTS . . .**

With several others, I'm re-reading Charles Sheldon's classic 1898 Christian novel, *In His Steps*. As you may know, this book is the source of the question, "What would Jesus do?" and it chronicles the efforts of a band of believers who tried to govern their lives by that question.

Although the work is fiction, I find myself joining in the struggles the characters experience as they try to take the WWJD question seriously in their daily lives. And there are many followers of Jesus in our world today for whom the question is not theoretical at all. The question is not infrequently a matter of life or death.

As I read, I've found myself remembering one of my favorite scenes in *The Lord of the Rings*. In their heroic quest to destroy the One Ring, Frodo and Sam find themselves alone in a desperate wilderness . . .

"I don't like anything here at all," said Frodo, "step or stone, breath or bone. Earth, air and water all seem accursed. But so our path is laid."

"Yes, that's so," said Sam. "And we shouldn't be here at all, if we'd known more about it before we started. But I suppose it's often that way. The brave things in the old tales and songs, Mr. Frodo: adventures, as I used to call them.

"I used to think that they were things the wonderful folk of the stories went out and looked for, because they wanted them, because they were exciting and life was a bit dull, a kind of a sport, as you might say. But that's not the way of it with the tales that really mattered, or the ones that stay in the mind. Folk seem to have been just landed in them, usually – their paths were laid that way, as you put it.

“But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t. And if they had, we shouldn’t know, because they’d have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on – and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end. You know, coming home, and finding things all right, though not quite the same – like old Mr. Bilbo.

“But those aren’t always the best tales to hear, though they may be the best tales to get landed in! I wonder what sort of a tale we’ve fallen into?”<sup>2</sup>

The part I keep thinking of is this: **“But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t.** And if they had, we shouldn’t know, because they’d have been forgotten. We hear about those as just went on – and not all to a good end, mind you; at least not to what folk inside a story and not outside it call a good end.”

I think of Sam’s words and my thoughts move on to “The Roll Call of Faith” in Hebrews 11. I think of those whose names are recorded there: Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, Moses’ parents, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, and Samuel.

*I remember what was said of them, that some “were tortured, refusing to be released so that they might gain an even better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. They were put to death by stoning; they were sawed in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated—the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.*

*“These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.*

*“Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles. And let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us, fixing our eyes on Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of faith”* (Hebrews 11:35-12:2).

**“But I expect they had lots of chances, like us, of turning back, only they didn’t.”** I wonder what will be said of us? Let us lift our sails into the Wind of God’s Spirit and take the adventure that God sends . . . .

Dave



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<sup>2</sup> J. R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings: The Two Towers* (New York: Ballantine, 1965).

## ***The Joshua Code: Fifty-Two Verses Every Believer Should Know*** O.S. Hawkins (Thomas Nelson, 2012)

### **Week twenty-eight: GOD'S ANSWER TO CULTURAL CHAOS**

*“In him we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, in accordance with the riches of God’s grace” (Ephesians 1:7).*

Our Western culture has seen a systematic and degenerative decline in traditional values over the past many decades. By and large, the American church has awakened to the reality that at least two generations have been lost to the church. Culture warriors and analysts of social trends have identified several common characteristics of these “lost generations.”

Among the most prominent of these characteristics are five specific ones that rise to the surface. The number one quest of these lost individuals is a search for a *meaningful relationship* in life. . . . Second, they desire *immediate gratification*. . . . Next, they want *something for nothing*. . . . Fourth, these lost generations want *guilt-free living*. . . . Finally, they are on a *search for prosperity*, but they have little hope of obtaining it. They will be the first generation in American history that, on the whole, will not raise their children in homes as nice as the ones in which they were raised.

Who has the answers that meet the needs and desires of these younger generations? Ironically, only the church holds the answers and can meet all five needs of these lost generations. And all five are found in one single verse of Scripture: Ephesians 1:7.

#### **THE LORD OFFERS SOMETHING PERSONAL “*In Him*”**

What Christ has to offer is not about religion or ritual. It is about a relationship, a vibrant, personal relationship with Him. What He offers is “in Him.” The very thing for which the lost generations are searching is only found in Christ. The bottom line is, we will never be properly related to others until we are properly related to ourselves. And we will never be properly related to ourselves until we discover how valuable we are to Christ and enter into a personal relationship with Him.

#### **THE LORD OFFERS SOMETHING PRESENT “*we have redemption*”**

What Christ has to offer is for right now. This tense is present active indicative, meaning the event is occurring in actual time right now. While they may think all Christ has to offer is for some future life in heaven, the reality is that He makes a difference right now. When, as a seventeen-year-old young man, I came to know Him, I was overwhelmed with the reality that He made an immediate difference in me: “Christ *in me*.” Talk about immediate gratification! It is only found in knowing Him.

#### **THE LORD OFFERS SOMETHING THAT’S provided “*through His blood*”**

What Christ has to offer is free. He provides it without cost or condition. He is the very thing for which these young adults are searching. And we who know Jesus are the only ones who have the answer to their hearts’ deepest needs. That privilege is neither earned nor deserved and cannot be bought. It is provided freely to us through the sacrifice of Jesus’ blood.

#### **THE LORD OFFERS SOMETHING PROFITABLE “*the forgiveness of sins*”**

These young people lost to the church are also searching for guilt-free living. Only through Christ can we find forgiveness for sins through our confession. Then, as the psalmist promises, “As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us” (Psalm 103:12). The east and west know no end; they simply keep going. God removes our sin from us forever.

#### **THE LORD OFFERS SOMETHING PURPOSEFUL “*according to the riches of His grace*.”**

Here we find the real answer to the quest for prosperity. Christ does not say *out of* His riches, but *according to* His riches. If I were to give you a dollar, I would be giving you *out of* my riches. But if I were to hand you a blank check with my signature affixed for you to use as you will, I would be giving to you *according to* my riches. God offers us His grace *according to* His rich supply. The *something* people think they need is really *Someone*. And His sweet name is the Lord Jesus. He holds the answer to every need of every heart. Those answers are in Him and in Him alone.