

Supply chains. Well, as you can tell from Whitestone episodes devoted to supply chains so far, it's clear that one of the key features of successful economic activity that's often taken for granted is that of fruitful but mostly-unseen supply chains. So...just how *did* the appearance of that jar of dill pickles requiring almost magical cooperation across many parties get to your neighborhood store? Yeah, participation ranging from fertilizer suppliers to cucumber farmers to glass jar makers to truckers to store managers!

And how about the remarkable Amazon: warehousing, displaying, processing, invoicing, and scheduling delivery of huge numbers of inventory items such that a consumer can routinely, digitally purchase, say, five very different items from five different manufacturers. And those items then delivered even in just a few hours to that individual's chosen doorstep pretty much anywhere in the United States. ...Whoa!

But here's the thing: taking a look at the universe of supply chains, it is *God's* stunning supply chain strategy, design, and delivery that's simply unparalleled! In a previous episode titled "Real Reliability in Your Supply Chain," we identified 12 key dimensions regarding the ways that God manifests His Kingdom's supply chain. Yeah, those dimensions run from supply chain production...to communication...to capture and growth—while also touching on desired supply-chain-partner redundancy...partnership rewards...support infrastructure...and continuous improvement of the supply chain! And there's even more. Go listen to that episode again...and, once again, expect to be blown away by God and His ways!

So, in *this* supply chain episode, we're going a bit deeper, turning our attention to some of God's specific features of executing His supply chain. Let's take a look by asking a few key questions, first with these...

Who is involved in God's supply chain? And just what is supposed to be supplied? Well, the overwhelmingly primary answer to "who" is...Christ, of course! But, more specifically, it is Christ as Lord, Savior, and King—not merely Jesus the good man...not merely Jesus the wise teacher...not merely Jesus the savvy ethicist!

God's commitment is to "supply" eternal life to each individual who believes in response to God's offer of the Good News of Jesus's death, resurrection, and Kingdom! Actually, God's offer is what today's marketer might call *a bundle of unicorn services*. Eternal life...remission of sins...reconciliation to the Father through Christ...fellowship with God...amazing grace instead of the justice deserved...joy...peace—and more.

But—contrary to what some might think—God is not the only participant in His supply chain! With the Great Commission (Matthew 28:18-20), Jesus commanded His disciples to actively "go forth" to make disciples around the whole world—from Jerusalem to the end of the earth (Acts 1:8). Yes, we are to be His ambassadors (2 Corinthians 5:20), loving God and loving neighbors—the two commandments that He called out as key—yes, loving folks all the way to the gospel! 'Course, the ultimate act of love that Christ's ambassadors can give to their neighbors is the gospel of Christ and Him crucified, His Resurrection, and His finished work on that Cross—and yes, Jesus offered Himself as a ransom for all! (1 Timothy 2:6)

This good news...coupled with our appointed role in it...is huge! And why is all that huge? Because that package is the key to unique services for literally billions! But, sadly, the role of believers in God's glorious supply chain is often deprioritized by many who label themselves Christians—by those who effectively supplant the eternal message of the Cross with such temporal priorities such as fallen politics and cultures.

Still, the amazing truth is—whether you are intensely interested in politics and culture or not—you can still do your part to help get the best possible results in those important arenas! You see, there is only one Way to truly effect New Covenant righteousness in politics and culture—and that's through citizens being born again (John 3:3), thus being transferred to the Kingdom of God (Colossians 1:13-14) that Jesus Himself proclaimed here on earth (Mark 1:14-15)...then living transformed lives in Christ. (Romans 12:2)

Let's talk. There's a widespread allegation in politics that there's "fake news" proliferating—and, yes, there often is! But there's also "fake good news" in the mix of religious ideas, too, that somehow Mosaic Law or political programs of various stripes are the core thrust and purpose of the New Covenant's supply

chain. No, the only true remedy for what ails citizens and their nations is...*Christ and Him crucified*—not instituting endless laws and exercising political power often born of the self-righteousness of proponents.

So. God and His ambassadors (that's us!) are the "who" and the true gospel is the "what" of God's supply chain. *We must now ask this: "where" and "when" should His supply chain take place?*

Well, some might say that's what pastors are for! And there's a measure of truth in that—we need every pastor to take the lead in reaching others with the Gospel! But that's simply not close to the totality of God's supply chain structure for His Kingdom. No, the comprehensive opportunity for the "where" and "when" of the active, fruitful supply chain of God is...*all the other commonplace supply chains of daily life!* And that's essentially the pinpoint topic of today's episode: *the providence of intertwining supply chains!*

What's that, you say? *The providence of intertwining supply chains?* Yes, that's exactly the position each of us is providentially occupying constantly: we participate in the ordinary supply chains of life—and that's where God intends us to represent His supply chain of the gospel, too...with the Spirit's leading and power!

Even a small village has an economy with key supply chains, perhaps like the economy of a centuries-old nursery rhyme: *a butcher, a baker, and a candlestick maker*. You see, each of those workers is a node on a particular supply chain—that's right, the roles of providing meat, bread, and light to others. Each of these workers is interacting with other key players in their distinct supply chains—for example, the baker bargaining with farmers one afternoon and then serving hot bread to customers early the next morning!

All these workers' competence truly matters—yes, success or failure for the enterprise is in the balance! Are the cuts of meat done just right...or badly? Is the bread delicious...or burnt? ...And each worker's demeanor matters deeply! Are they routinely joyful? Are they peacemakers in the face of conflict? Are they loving...or are they condemning? All this truly matters in the full process—from supply chain partners to customers—especially key in our era when many alternatives to existing supply chain options abound!

Let's deepen the point of God's providence in supply chains. Simply stated, *God intertwines His supply chain of the Gospel with the supply chain where we work for a living—yeah, leveraging our competence and winsome demeanor!* In this way, a very key purpose of our workplace participation in supply chains—whether investment advising or teaching or plumbing—is to expectantly intertwine our supply chain roles. Our love and care for excellence for our customers in our workplace is the very love and attentive care we exhibit on behalf of Christ. And when our Christlike love and care prevails, God's supply chain is at work!

For thirty years now, the university business school where I was the founding Dean has taught each business student this key slogan: *the pioneering witness for Christ in the workplace is competence!* That's right, your unfolding competence and care at work carries over into credibility for Christ. And, likewise, when someone is *not* competent and loving at work, they clearly have no credibility for authentic witness.

Real competence and care for others in the Christian's workplace supply chain represents Christ, too! And our everyday, steadfast track record of joy, peace, and love in relationships with others within our supply chain partnerships and customer relationships will...sooner or later...win us opportunity for direct witness—perhaps when workplace or personal tragedies and challenges engulf those around us. Now we know we wouldn't run up and down the corridors of our workplaces shouting about Jesus—we don't need to! Instead, we steadfastly bide our time and abide in Christ (John 15:4). In this very way—yes, in one of God's most ingenious tactics—His supply chain is always primed and ready—through us! 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) says this: "...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect."

The providence of God here is startling! Yes, believers are paid within their workplace supply chain—but eternal rewards are attached to delivering as part of God's supply chain in the very same places! *That's* the *where* and *when* of God's supply chain, manifested every day in countless supply chains worldwide. Yes, *through willing believers*, God intertwines His supply chain with those of Amazon and Target! Wow...

## *A&A: Application & Action*

1. Is the supply chain that you are inherently part of in your workplace one of demonstrable, laudable excellence? Regardless of the level of excellence of the entire supply chain, are you executing your personal fulfillment of your specific role at a level that honors the Lord? Be specific.
2. What is your local church's posture towards participating in God's amazing supply chain that's spelled out in the Great Commission? What actions (or inactions!) can you cite as evidence of that posture? Discuss.
3. 1 Peter 3:15 (ESV) says this: "...in your hearts honor Christ the Lord as holy, always being prepared to make a defense to anyone who asks you for a reason for the hope that is in you; yet do it with gentleness and respect." Are you fully prepared to share your faith? And are you (first) astutely cultivating the soil of relationships in your workplace? Discuss.