

“DIRTY JOBS”
Genesis 3:19
Labor Day Sunday - September 2, 2018

And God said:

By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return. Genesis 3:19

INTRODUCTION:

I can't imagine God's disappointment with us as we exited Eden.

After all the effort it must have taken -

- even for God -

- to bring all the heavens and earth into existence.

After calling into being

vegetation, seed-bearing plants and trees that bear fruit.

After filling the seas with living creatures

and calling into existence creatures to roam the earth

and birds to fill the sky.

After all this creating,

God pronounced it *all* “good.”

And then . . . God went one step further.

God created humanity -

- for companionship

- and to tend God's creation.

Specifically, God put us in the Garden of Eden

“to work it and take care of it.” Genesis 2:15

There weren't a lot of strings attached.

The job description wasn't extensive or difficult to understand.

- 1. Be fruitful and increase in number**
- 2. Subdue the earth**
- 3. Rule over the fish in the sea, the birds in the sky and every other living creature that moves on the ground.**

Basically, God said:

“Here you go!

Make yourself right at home.

It's yours now; take care of it.”

“Oh, there is one more thing,” God said.

**“Keep your cotton-picking hands OFF
the fruit from the tree of knowledge!”**

And what did we do?

Uh-huh!

Couldn't resist, could we?

Just had to try that forbidden fruit!

And just look at what it cost us!

When God found out . . . and God *always* finds out,

God said:

“You're outta here!”

And from that moment on . . .

**“By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until
you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for
dust you are and to dust you will return.”**

And from *that* moment in time

work has ceased to be a *response* TO God

and we see it as a *curse* FROM God.

ANCIENT EXAMPLES OF WORK:

Generations later,

we found ourselves in slavery in Egypt.

Forced to work!

With no union to deal with our grievances!

And not just work,

because Pharaoh didn't like it that we were worshipping God.

It was cutting into our production quotas.

We were falling behind Pharaoh's schedule.

Pharaoh decided to make our work even harder!

⁶ That same day Pharaoh gave this order to the slave drivers and foremen in charge of the people: ⁷ "You are no longer to supply the people with straw for making bricks; let them go and gather their own straw. ⁸ But require them to make the same number of bricks as before; don't reduce the quota. They are lazy; that is why they are crying out, 'Let us go and sacrifice to our God.'" ⁹ Make the work harder for the men so that they keep working and pay no attention to lies." Genesis 5:6-9

Well, you know the story.

God took pity on us.

And under the leadership of Moses,

God led us out of bondage and into the promised land.

And God gave us another commandment.

Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed. Exodus 23:12

Notice that God gave us a day of *rest* -

- a day to be “refreshed.”

**A day to remember how it felt to be slaves;
and to extend a day of rest to everyone in our employ.**

Well, being the humans we are . . .

. . . with the free will we have . . .

. . . we eventually messed things up again.

**Enough so that we were taken from our homes
and into Babylon and Assyria -
- slaves again!**

**And, after a time, God arranged for us to return to Jerusalem.
And, of course, it was in shambles!
And under the direction of Nehemiah, rebuilding began.**

**It would have been hard enough to rebuild the walls and the city.
But we had enemies who didn’t want to see us rebuild.
They threatened to attack us as we worked on the walls.**

**Nehemiah came up with an ingenious plan.
Half the men were to work on the walls
and the other half were to stand guard.**

**After the walls were rebuilt, the city restored,
the great Temple that Solomon built to honor God
was restored to its greatness once more.**

**You would think life would get better at that point.
Not so.**

**Even with everything he had,
Solomon still felt the curse of work.**

Here's what Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 2:17-18:

¹⁷So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. . .

The curse of work was heavy on Solomon's shoulders.

At some point,

we began to grow used to having to work.

**We began to find out that hard work
actually produced something.**

**We discovered if we worked really hard,
we could gain a little wealth.**

And with a little wealth came a little power.

With more wealth came more power

and we were on a spiral

that would lead to our spiritual destruction.

We began to see work as a tool to gain wealth and power.

**Then we began sacrificing more and more to "work"
until it was hard to tell *which* was actually our god:**

The God of the Universe . . . or our work.

God sent prophets to us -

- to teach us**
- to help us put our lives in Godly balance**
- to warn us not to place our faith in things of this world**
- to help us escape the slavery of the bright and shiny glitter**

Through the prophet Micah, God said:

I will destroy your carved images and your sacred stones from among you; you will no longer bow down to the work of your hands. Micah 5:13

NEW TESTAMENT WORK:

Well, as you would expect, things progressed to the point that we even turned *religion* into work!

We made so many laws and rules and regulations that it was becoming impossible to keep all of them and hope to achieve heaven.

**We grew more and more confused as we began to blend requirements of religion with the rewards of work . . .
. . . and vice versa.**

It even got to the point that we - mistakenly - believed that somehow we could *earn* our salvation.

**It was about that time that God decided to pay us a visit . . .
. . . a visit in the form of human flesh.**

**His name is “Jesus.”
And He came *specifically* so that we could enjoy an abundant life.**

**His message was filled with hope,
His method was peace-filled and peaceful.
He offered forgiveness w/o strings attached.**

There were those who wanted to know more.

**This was an entirely new way of looking at things
and it raised questions.**

John says that someone asked Jesus:

²⁸ . . . “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

²⁹ Jesus answered, "The work of God is this: to believe in the one he
has sent." John 6:28-29

It seemed too simple.

**It was just too simple to say that salvation comes by faith
and not by works**

because everyone knows that *nothing* comes without effort.

For many of us,

it was beyond our understanding.

For some of us, it still is.

If we interpret the message correctly,

Jesus is willing to pay our spiritual debts for us.

Jesus was willing to take all of our sins upon Himself -

- to risk the wrath of God -

- to die the death of a common sinner - in our place.

**And all that is required for us to claim the prize of forgiveness
is to accept the gift.**

Mind-boggling!

Preposterous!

Too cheap!

Too easy!

PAUL'S TWO CENTS:

And then, along came a theologian named Paul.

Paul was much like you and me . . .

**. . . God's offer of salvation didn't make much sense to him
and for the longest time he rejected it.**

Then the day came that he was directly confronted with the truth.

And his life was forever changed . . .

**. . . and his changed life led to hundreds of thousands of people
"coming to see the light," in a manner of speaking.**

**And Paul began to preach about the place of work
in the process of salvation.**

And he began to make sense of it all . . .

**. . . at least for those willing to listen
and wrestle with the truth.**

For instance, Paul said - or someone influenced by Paul:

**⁸For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith - and this not
from yourselves, it is the gift of God - ⁹not by works, so that no one
can boast. Ephesians 2:8-9**

Now, as you probably know,

Paul was a tentmaker -

**- that was how he earned his living -
- primarily by making tents.**

Paul worked with his hands

and when the opportunity arose

he preached the Gospel . . .

. . . with the power and conviction of one anointed by God.

Paul never advocated that we cease working

and simply live on spiritual things alone.

Consider this advice to the Thessalonian church:

1 Thes. 4:11 (NKJV) 11 that you also aspire to lead a quiet life, to mind your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you,

2 Thes. 3:10-12 (NKJV) 10 For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat. 11 For we hear that there are some who walk among you in a disorderly manner, not working at all, but are busybodies. 12 Now those who are such we command and exhort through our Lord Jesus Christ that they work in quietness and eat their own bread.

Paul was pretty much an advocate of worshipping God through our work - not in spite of our work.

Here's how Paul said it:

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men . . .” Colossians 3:23

Years later,

a simple monk by the name of Brother Lawrence would echo that same thought by saying:

God does not regard the greatness of the work, but the love by which it is performed.

CONCLUSION:

And just as it seemed the pendulum
would swing too far in the other direction,
God spoke through James and warned us:
¹⁸But someone will say, "You have faith; I have deeds."
Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my
faith by what I do. James 2:18

Well, the awful truth is -
- we still suffer from an imbalance between work and faith.

Basically,
we don't exercise near enough faith in our work
and we want to put far too much work in our faith!

Bless our hearts!
Adam and Eve stumbled . . .
. . . and we are still trying to find our balance
between faith and work.

Way back at the beginning of this sermon, I quoted from Exodus -
"Six days do your work, but on the seventh day do not work, so
that your ox and your donkey may rest and the slave born in
your household, and the alien as well, may be refreshed."
Exodus 23:12

Tomorrow is Labor Day.
A day set aside - and celebrated - as a day of rest.
Me and God we're going fishing.

PRAYER: Bless us, Loving God, with a greater understanding of
how our faith should inform our work. Bless the work of our hands
and the faith in our hearts. And bless us with merciful rest. AMEN