TITLE: Work

TEXT: Gen. 3:17-19; Ro. 8:19-21; Ps. 116:15; 2 Co. 5:8; Gen. 6:3-5; Colo. 3:22-24

INTRODUCTION: Labor Day is the first Monday in September, observed as a holiday in the United States and Canada in honor of working people.

We celebrated Labor Day a little over a week ago.

This morning I want to talk about what many in our world perceive as a dirty little four letter word…..WORK!

When Monday morning rolls around how many of you have dreaded the thought of what Monday represents for most people… The beginning of the work week? Back to the old grind..

Even those who are fortunate enough to love the work that they do most probably have times when their work can be a real drag.

It is surprising to me that those who seem to have the lowest opinion of the workplace are a lot of times Christians.

Often the thought is: If I didn’t have to be here I could be out doing all kinds of good stuff for the Lord…

And, there may be certain since of truth in that statement.

But it also often shows a lack of understanding about, not just the importance of work, but the essential nature of work to fulfill Gods purpose and plan..

To really come to an understanding about work we need to go back to its origin.

The concept of work is first found in the Bible in Genesis chapter 3.

Now what we need to understand is that, as created, work was not in God’s plan for man any more then pain in childbearing or death was in Gods original plans for mankind.

All these things came about after man disobeyed God and sin entered the picture.

In the original design of creation man was placed in the Garden of Eden. Eden was perfect in every way.

Perfect temperature, perfect climate control, it never stormed---God watered the garden by the dew that would come in the morning hours.

And God had provided fruit bearing trees for man to eat from.

Think about this? There were no weeds or thorns or thistles. No harmful insects. No death, disease or decay. The climate was perfect.

Man was told that he was free to eat from any of the trees in the garden. (All but one, anyway).

What is the significance about fruit trees as the food source in a perfect environment like this?

There would be no labor involved! No need to spray herbicide or pesticide.. No pruning would be necessary.

Fruit bearing trees bear their fruit perpetually.

The only thing that man had to do was to pick and eat.

The rest of the time man would have to just fellowship with God and enjoy the wonders of God’s creation.

This was Gods original plan for man. Work, labor, was not a part of Gods original design.

But then man disobeyed God. Man became a sinner and subjected all of creation to that sin and everything changed.

God had to implement changes in creation that were not necessary within creation before man’s fall to sin, but now they would be extremely necessary. Work, toilsome labor, is among those things.

The first mention of the concept of work is found in:

**Genesis 3:17-19 (NIV) 17To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat of it,’“Cursed is the ground because of you;  through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.**

**18It will produce thorns and thistles for you,**

**and you will eat the plants of the field.**

**19By 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.”**

This is part of what theologians call the curse.

God said: Because you have done what I told you not to do this is what will now happen.

**“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.**

The Apostle Paul in talking about a future day of restoration for the children of God, when we will receive our glory at the return of Christ and everything will be made new---actually everything will be brought back to what God originally intended… Paul has this to say with regard to that time in:

**Romans 8:19 - 21 (NIV) 19The creation waits in eager expectation for the sons of God to be revealed.****20For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it, in hope****21that the creation itself will be liberated from its bondage to decay and brought into the glorious freedom of the children of God.**

When man sinned we brought Gods cruse upon all creation! **Creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it!**

Man subjected creation to frustration.

What frustration?

**18It will produce thorns and thistles for you,**

**and you will eat the plants of the field.**

Thorns, thistles, weeds, and every other harmful thing is a result of man’s sin.

**20For the creation was subjected to frustration, not by its own choice, but by the will of the one who subjected it!**

And as a result of creations being subjected to the frustration of man’s sin ….

**19By 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.”**

There are some keynote words used in these sentences--Painful toil! Sweat of your brow!

What do these words imply, what do they speak of? WORK!

I don’t necessarily agree that “the curse” is a good theological title for these passages of Scripture.

The word curse is used several times within chapter 3 but when we hear that word I think it gives us a negative impression.

What the curse represents here is the changes in creation that God had to make after sin entered the picture.

And every one of these curses pronounced by God, are not just necessary things, but beneficial things to man once sin entered the equation and altered Gods perfect creation.

Pain in childbearing, Submission, Toilsome labor, even death is something that is necessary and even beneficial to us in a world that has fallen to sin.

How can pain in childbearing be a good or positive thing?

After mankind sinned perfect fellowship and relationship with God was broken. Man was separated from God by his sin. In a messed up and sinful world pain is often a thing, sometimes the only thing, that will penetrate our thick and sinful skulls and put our focus back upon God.

Just think about it? When is it that we rely most upon God? When things are going perfectly well or when things are going not so well? Do you reflect and rely upon God most when you are 100% healthy and feeling fantastic or do you reflect and rely upon Him most when you are going through a painful time that you just can’t handle on your own?

Example: when our first child was born I wasn’t much of a Christian. But I remember as Pam was going through hard labor I was praying. I have always been a “I can fix it myself” kind of guy and I couldn’t fix this myself. So I prayed, I cried out to God.

If childbirth would have been as easy as blowing your nose I probably would not have even thought of God through the process.

Pain in childbirth was meant, I believe, to help keep us mindful of sin and its consequence and help us recognize our need for God.

God new that once fellowship with Himself was broken by sin that in a sinful world man would now need a line of order established.

Submission was not needed in Gods original creation because both the man and the woman lived in intimate fellowship and relationship with God. God literally directed their lives through that intimate fellowship and relationship.

Once sin entered the world a line of authority became necessary. Can you imagine what an army would be like if everyone had the same rank?

It wouldn’t make any difference if everyone was a private or everyone was a general, if all where the same rank, if there was no submissive line of authority, there would be total chaos. God established a needed line of authority that would now be necessary in a world that had fallen to sin---Husbands over wives- parents over children….

Even death has a positive purpose. Without physical death we would live forever in the state in which we now exist. Separated from the intimate fellowship and relationship with God that He originally designed for us.

That is why Scripture says in:

**Psalms 116:15 (NIV)** **15Precious in the sight of the LORD  is the death of his saints.**

Why is the death of a saint precious in the sight of the Lord?

Because death is what forever unites a saint with their God and puts us back into a place of true fellowship and relationship with Him.

It is at death that we will drop this body of sin that keeps us from being in the literal presence of God.

Or as Paul says in:

**2 Corinthians 5: 8 (NKJV)** **8We are confident, yes, well pleased rather to be absent from the body and to be present with the Lord.**

And can you imagine what this world would be like if men like Nero and Hitler and all the other evil men of this world would never die?

In fact, it is for this very reason that God changed the lifespan of man after the flood from an average of 800 years to a new high max of 120 years!

**Genesis 6:3 -5 (NIV)****3Then the LORD said, “My Spirit will not contend with man forever, for he is mortal; his days will be a hundred and twenty years.”**

**5The LORD saw how great man’s wickedness on the earth had become, and that every inclination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil all the time.**

Death is one way that evil men are removed from their evil practices. If it were not for death just think how much evil they could do!

And in a world that has fallen to sin work, toilsome labor, is beneficial to man and has become a necessary thing to fulfill Gods purpose and plan.

Just what are some of the benefits of work in a world that has fallen to sin?

#1. In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth---Then God created man in His own image and His own likeness.

Man was created with the knowledge of God, the knowledge of good and was then given dominion over the earth that God had created.

Man spent His days in close and intimate fellowship and relationship with God. Adam and Eve spend their time hanging out with God and enjoying the wonderful creation that He had made. God had all the animals pass before Adam and allowed Adam to name them.

Every day was a new adventure exploring what God had made.

When man disobeyed God and ate from the tree that he was commanded not to eat from, that intimate fellowship with God was broken because man had reached out and received something that he was never intended to have---the knowledge of evil.

Sin entered his being and severed the relationship that he had with his creator.. God had to leave man’s presence.

Now man had three very destructive and potentially dangerous things---a knowledge of evil, a nature to sin and two much time on his hands to allow those things to grow.

Man had spent his days being nurtured in the very presence of God.

Now God had to remove Himself from man’s presence or man would be destroyed in that presence. God is all holy and sin, in any fashion, cannot exist in His literal presence.

After God departed from man, man would have a lot of time on his hands, absent from personal fellowship with God, and now with the knowledge of evil and a nature prone to sin he needed something to fill those hours.

Something productive to help keep his sinful nature from dwelling upon evil.

There is an old proverb that says: *The person who rows the boat usually doesn't have time to rock it.*

EXAMPLE: What happens most often when you have a group of people, let’s say unsupervised teenagers, with nothing to do, with too much free time on their hands? Most often it seems they will find a way to get into trouble.

You have a teenager that seems to get into a lot of trouble? Then try getting them a job.

It gives them a way to focus positive energy. It is something that can take up their time in a positive way.

It can give them something to fill too much free time with.

After fellowship with God was broken we had too much free time on our hands that God knew needed to be filled with something that would keep our minds off of its new found propensity to sin.

So God said now you can go to work!

#2. Once man sinned he lost his immortality. Do you realize that, as created, man was created immortal?

Death is a result of sin. If man never would have sinned he never would have died because death is the result, a consequence of sin.

God knew that work would be beneficial to a body that was now subject to death and decay. I don’t know how important exercise was before the fall of man but after the fall of man exercise became very important to a body in which the death process had started.

Work does two things in this regard…. It keeps us more physically active and it keeps us more mentally active.

And both of these things have been proven helpful in promoting better health.

Have you ever know a pretty vibrant person who retired and then just seemed to age almost overnight?

I have known guys who retired and where dead within a couple years!

I have known people who have been retired for a decade or more and are doing very well.

Almost without exception, the ones who retire and are doing well are the ones who have found something else to keep them busy. Something to keep them physically and or mentally active.

Too much time on your hands can literally kill you if you fill that time with nothing.

God new that a mortal body would need something that an immortal body didn’t need---WORK, something to keep the body and mind active.

-- Charles Kingsley once said: *Thank God every morning when you get up that you have something to do which must be done, whether you like it or not. Being forced to work, and forced to do your best, will breed in you temperance and self-control, diligence and strength of will, cheerfulness and content, and a hundred virtues which the idle never know.*

#3. And most importantly I believe that God was looking into the future. To the New Testament dispensation of Grace, the time in which you and I live today.

As a Christian, do you know another primary benefit of Work? Most of the time the workplace is a place of interaction with other people. Our Bosses, other employees, customers…

Whatever your job is it will bring you into contact with other people.

Why is that an important aspect of work for a Christian?

It gives us a way to fulfill our primary calling!

What is our primary calling as a Christian?

To go into all the world with the Gospel message of Jesus Christ!

I want you to understand this one truth this morning if you understand nothing else.. Your workplace, your job is the mission field that God has assigned you for this time in your life.

Whatever your job is, housewife, farmer, factory worker, banker, government employee, soldier, volunteer worker, whatever your job may be it is your assigned mission field that you have been placed in by God.

A Mission field is simply a place where we can live out our faith in Christ in front of others and be an influence to others for Christ.

Example: One of the things that I really admire and appreciate about my wife, admire as her husband and appreciate as her pastor, is that she sees her job as her mission field and treats it as such, and I believe, that she has had a big impact for Christ there!. Her simply consistently living out her faith in front of others and always being willing to give a reason for the hope that she has to anyone who asks, has probably impacted more lives for Christ then she will ever know this side of eternity.

When she goes to work she is aware of the presence of Christ that she takes with her and she has and is making a difference for God in her work.

If you consistently live out your life, in a Christ like fashion, in front of others you don’t have to bludgeon them with the Gospel…But it will create an atmosphere where they will approach you about the hope that you have and want to know more about it.

As you live out your faith in front of them it will draw them, not toward you, but toward Christ.

**Colossians 3:22 - 24 (NIV) 22Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord.**

**23Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men,****24since you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving.**

How much of an impact would this have upon our individual attitude at work if we grasp its truth?

**23Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men….**

**It is the Lord Christ you are serving.**

As a Christian if you go to work just for the paycheck that you receive and don’t see your workplace also as your assigned mission field then you are not doing God service and some of those that God has entrusted to you to witness His love to may never come to know the love that Christ has for them..

-- Linda Clare, Eugene, OR

My long hours working as a childcare provider often tempted me to complain about my job. Although I didn't know what work God wanted me to do, I was sure it must be something other than "just" babysitting. Then one day, a father who came to pick up his toddler commented, "You taught Kasey to pray. She says grace at home now, and my wife and I are thinking of attending church.

She said; " God's direction suddenly became clear. Now, when others ask what I do for a living, I smile and say, "I 'just' babysit for the Lord."

**23Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men….**

**It is the Lord Christ you are serving.**

Will this become your motto for the workplace?

**23Whatever I do, I will work at it with all my heart, as working for the Lord, not for men….**

**It is the Lord Christ I am serving.**

Church, work is not a curse from God but is really a blessing of God.

Work is an extension of God’s grace and mercy to a world that is fallen to sin.

Within it God has a plan and a purpose.

It is an instrument that can be used to win a lost world to Christ.

Do you see your workplace as your assigned mission field for this season of your life? Are you allowing God to use this area of your life to reach the lost of this world?

Grasp this and it will give you real purpose in your labor and you will find that, more and more, your work will become less and less of a drag on your life.

Even the most mundane of a job can take on great significance and reward if we approach it as the God given mission field---which it is..