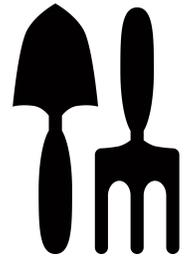


Genesis: Foundations of our Faith

“What is Work?” (Genesis 2:4-15)

This is the account about the development of the heavens and the earth when they were created, in the day that the Lord God made the earth and the heavens: No bushes that grow in the field were yet on the earth, and no plants of the field had yet sprung up, since the Lord God had not yet caused it to rain on the earth. There was not yet a man to till the soil, but water came up from the earth and watered the entire surface of the ground. The Lord God formed the man from the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living being. The Lord God planted a garden in Eden in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. Out of the ground the Lord God made every kind of tree grow—trees that are pleasant to look at and good for food, including the Tree of Life in the middle of the garden and the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. A river went out from Eden to water the garden, and from there it divided and became the headwaters of four rivers. The name of the first river is Pishon. It flows through the whole land of Havilah, where there is gold, and the gold of that land is good. Incense and onyx stone are also found there. The name of the second river is Gihon. It is the same river that winds through the whole land of Cush. The name of the third river is Tigris. This is the one which flows along the east side of Assyria. The fourth river is the Euphrates. The Lord God took the man and settled him in the Garden of Eden to work it and to take care of it.



It was a Monday morning. Joe woke up at the same time he usually does. He rolls out of bed and begins his normal routine, not just for Monday, but the same routine almost every day of the week. He pours his cup of coffee, eats breakfast, showers, gets dressed, puts his shoes on, grabs his keys, kisses his wife and kids goodbye, and then he's off to work for the day. When the day is done, he comes home, takes his shoes off, eats dinner, maybe spends some time with his children, watches some television, and then goes to bed all to begin the same routine in just a few hours. Joe's daily routine might sound familiar to you. Maybe you have or have had something similar.

Whether you work days, evenings, nights, a combination of shifts, or are now retired there is a sense of routine when it comes to work. Over time that routine can become mundane, burdensome, and even exhausting as work becomes nothing more than an obligation. So when asked the question, “What is work?” answers are often given that reflect those thoughts. Yes, in this sinful world work can be difficult and exhausting. We face our own inadequacies at our tasks and responsibilities. Work can be frustrating at times. For a Christian though in light of what God's Word tells us in Genesis, we see a much different picture when God created mankind. So today as we answer that question defining what work is, we won't look at it from sinful man's perspective. Instead we view it from a perfect God's perspective first of all as a gift given to mankind whom he created in his image and made in a unique way.

We have spent the last two weeks in Genesis chapter 1 seeing the creation of the world. The world God had made was like the background of the painting as he took the brushstroke of his powerful word to create it. The world and everything in it was created for the centerpiece, the crown jewel of God's creation - mankind. Last week we talked about man being created in God's image and what that meant. Man's will was in perfect harmony with God's and he had a perfect ability to carry it out. Today as we look in chapter 2, God in his Word takes us back to the week of creation. He wants us to view one part of day six a little closer. It's kind of like God is holding a magnifying glass up to the center of his painting so that we see the particular artistry involved in his creation of the first man.

Everything else in his creation God spoke and it came into being. Yet man was created in a special, unique way. God was like a potter taking clay in his hands, working it with his fingers, molding it and shaping it into exactly what the potter wanted to make. God took dust from the ground shaping it into the physical form he desired. There was personal interest and care in how the Lord God fashioned the human body. Then after forming and shaping the man, God gave life to what he had formed as he breathed that breath of life into him. He was formed from dust, but God had made him into a living being. Not only did God give him life, God also gave him a home with a purpose.

God settled Adam (which means “man”) in a special garden which he caused to grow. Moses describes for us it’s location and the splendors of the surrounding areas. We get a general sense of where it was. We don’t know exactly where this garden was located. Yet it doesn’t matter. The Garden of Eden would serve as man’s first home. It was a perfect home in which God would give his special creation a special task taking care of this garden.

What that work entailed is not explained. We have a hard time visualizing this since everything in creation is perfect where wearisome and burdensome toil were not involved. Since we don’t have that understanding, we are forced to focus on this fact: The Lord God gave man, even when man he was still perfect, an assignment in his wonderful home. It gave Adam satisfying activity and an opportunity to put all of his God-given faculties of body and mind to use. Man was not doomed to pointless idleness.

Work and responsibilities even in this sinful world that we live in now is not a curse. Having worthwhile work to do, assignments in life, challenging tasks to perform where the abilities that God gave are put to use is a great blessing for man. God has given each one of us a variety of work as a gift for our blessing. As I think about you there are a lot of different types of work represented within our congregation. All of them are not the same, but all of them are still a gift of God. Think about the jobs you and I have. Pastor, teachers, factory workers, medical professionals, direct care personnel, public safety, construction workers and builders, computer experts, retail and grocery workers, lawyers, office personnel, farmers, electricians, financial advisors, custodians, real estate work, homemakers, and even students. What a wide variety of work God has given us to use the abilities he has given us.

That work given is not just the profession you are in or the jobs you have. It includes other various roles you have in your home and families. On this Father’s Day weekend, maybe we consider especially the work of fathers who daily care for, teach, train, and nurture their children. Yet we can’t diminish the importance of mothers too who do the same.

Work includes the various roles you might serve within the church. Church leaders use their gifts working to make decisions with the best interest of the congregation in mind. Musicians use their abilities and work by helping us to praise our Creator. Volunteers work using their abilities so that the work of the church runs as smoothly as possible. Yet we can’t forget the volunteering done for other service organizations outside of the church.

The jobs and professions we have, the specific roles we play in our families, the voluntary service to the church or other service organizations - all of these we could call work in its broadest sense. All of these are from God. Just as God gave the gift of work to Adam, the first man, he gives it to you and I. As we use the abilities God has given us to carry out that work, those are just opportunities day in and day out for meaningful, purposeful service to him who made us and gave us the gift of work.

In the Garden of Eden, work was more than just a task. It was Adam's meaningful service to the God who had so wondrously formed him from the dust and gave him life. You might even say it was also an act of worship and praise as Adam carried out his calling to care for his beautiful garden home.

With the presence of sin all the work we have been given and do may at times feel more like a curse and a burden. Despite the presence of sin, the work is not a curse. It still remains a gift that God keeps giving to us. It is meant to be opportunities for meaningful service out of love and gratitude to God who made us and has saved us through Jesus. It doesn't matter what your job is or if it is work carried out at home in the roles you have there or working in a church or some other service organization, the purpose of that work remains the same. It is an everyday chance to serve God, to worship him and praise him with our life as everything we do gives him glory.

Viewing any and all work from that perspective, it changes our outlook and how we go about the various work God has given to us. We carry out that work faithfully and to the best of our abilities keeping in mind that even though we may be working for others, we really are working for God. That was the encouragement Paul had for the Colossian Christians. **“Slaves, obey your human masters in everything, not just when they are watching you, like people-pleasers, but with a sincere heart, out of respect for the Lord. Whatever you do, keep working at it with all your heart, as for the Lord and not for people, because you know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as reward. Keep serving the Lord Christ!”** (Colossians 3:22-24)

Work is meaningful service to our Creator and Savior done with a servant heart not only for our blessing but for the blessing of others. Through our jobs, whatever they may be, people are blessed because they benefit from the results of that work. Yet how we go about that work and the words that we speak also serve as a confession of our faith. In our homes working faithfully as fathers and mothers, your children are blessed not only for life in this world, but also in their own life of faith. Serving in the church or other organizations others are blessed by your willingness to serve the Lord in that way.

In the Garden of Eden, work was simple. Adam didn't face inadequacies at his task. He didn't encounter frustration. He didn't get tired and exhausted from doing work. It was sin that adds all of that to work. Adam himself learned that after his fall into sin. Working in this sinful world may not always be easy. We do face our inadequacies at the tasks in front of us sometimes. We do get weary from work. However our view of work and its routine changes when we see it as a gift from God and an opportunity every day for meaningful service to the God who made us and saved us. Every day that we carry the work God has placed in our life is a chance to worship and praise him with our life doing everything to his glory.

