**Work and Keep**

(Genesis 1:26-2:2; 2:7-9,15)

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Our mission is to build God's kingdom on earth.  God has created us to worship and to work.  It is not only on Sunday that we worship the Lord.  Everyday can be meaningful for us to worship God.  Often we do not associate our faith with work.  However, we need to see work as an opportunity to worship.  For us, work is worship. However, we should not worship work.

INTRODUCTION

For many people, Monday is not a day they look forward to. They have to go back to the old grind at the office, where there is bureaucracy, unfair treatment, and gossip. There are incompetent co-workers, who only care about their own personal advancement. Their supervisor is critical and moody. Worse of all, work is boring and the morale is low. The days go by slowly. All we are looking forward to is Friday so that we can enjoy our weekend. Can you identify with some of those descriptions? Is work more than just getting a pay check? How can we look forward to work? How are faith and work connected?

Whether we realize it or not, God has designed work as a major purpose of our life. There is great value to work. Before I elaborate on that, I want to take a step back and look again at God’s creation. I want to point out three things that God did. First, God created man. After creating the universe, God created man as the crown jewel of His creation. We see God working hard as a worker. Not only did God work, but we see the second point that God rested. I will spend most of the message on the third point, where God gave man purpose. One of His purposes for man is to work. Let look at the first point: God created man by reading Genesis 1:26a. “Then God said, “Let us make man in our image, after our likeness.”

1. God Created Man
   1. In His Image (1:26)

We have been talking about the image of God for the last number of weeks. We have seen how God values us because we are made in His image. There are many implications because we are created in His image. It affects how we view race and abortion. Just like God values all people regardless of their race, we ought to value all people also: including those that are in the womb as well as those outside the womb. It does not matter if they have special needs or not, we are all valued because we are created in God’s Image. Unlike the angels and the animals, humans can have a very special relationship with God. He has given us an inner spiritual nature that enables us to know Him and worship Him.

[ Not only did God create man in His image, but in chapter 2, it gives us more details on God’s creation of man. Let us read (Gen. 2:7), “Then the Lord God formed the man of dust from the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life, and the man became a living creature.”

* 1. From the dust of the ground (2:7)

God’s name changed here in verse 7. Up to this point God is called Elohim, which speaks of God as the all-powerful God, who is the Creator. Here, He is called Lord God or Yahweh, which is the personal proper name of God, which focuses on His relationship with man. The word “form” describes the work of an artist. Like a potter shapes a vessel from clay with great care and precision, God formed man from the dust of the ground. The name Adam means “taken out of the ground.” Therefore, it coincides with the Lord forming man from the dust of the ground. In addition, we find in Genesis 2:15 that God put Adam in the Garden of Eden to take care of the ground.

* 1. By breathing life into man

In the second half of verse 7, God breathed into his nostrils the breath of life. God, who is the source of life, provided man life. The man became a living creature, which literally means “a living soul.” Adam became a spiritual being, with the capacity to serve and fellowship with God. Animals do not have the ability to serve and fellowship with God.

[ The first thing that God did: God created man. Secondly, God rested. Let us read Genesis 2:1-3, “Thus the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them. And on the seventh day God finished his work that he had done, and he rested on the seventh day from all his work that he had done. So God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it God rested from all his work that he had done in creation.” ]

1. God Rested

The word “finished” occurred twice to emphasize the point. God has finished his work. Creation is completed. God has created everything necessary to maintain life on earth. After God has finished creating the heavens and earth, He rested from all his work that he had done. Note that this is repeated two times for emphasis. Why did God rest? Surely, God was not fatigued. Isa. 40:28 says that God does not get weary. God is also omnipotent. He is all powerful with infinite authority. He does not need to take a breather. The word “rest” means “to cease from working.” The word “work” means a special task. He has rested from the special task of creating the heavens and earth. On the seventh day, God rested as He stood back and enjoyed His creative work. God has a deep sense of peace, satisfaction, and accomplishment over His creative work. God was very pleased with His work.

ILLUSTRATION: I take great pride in mowing and edging the lawn. After I am finished, I like to kick back and admire the beautiful lawn. I say to myself. I did good. I rested after finished mowing.

Although He has ceased His creation activity, He is still working. In John 5:17, “But Jesus answered them, “My Father is working until now, and I am working.” God ceased from creating but he works to sustain the world. God is the one, who holds the world together. [ We have covered the first two things that God did, God created man and God rested. The third thing is that God gave man purpose. Here I am going to spend the bulk of the time explaining that work is one of the major purposes of man. ]

1. God Gave Man Purpose

In last week’s sermon, Minister Stanley reminds us the bigger mission of our life is to build God’s kingdom on earth. Stanley identified two ways how we go about doing this. We are created to 1) Be fruitful and multiply 2) Rule over and subdue the land. Today, we will see a third purpose why God created us. We are created to 3) Work. Let us read Genesis 2:8-9 to get the background. “And the Lord God planted a garden in Eden, in the east, and there he put the man whom he had formed. And out of the ground the Lord God made to spring up every tree that is pleasant to the sight and good for food. The tree of life was in the midst of the garden, and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.”

After God created man, He provided Adam a home, where he would live. This place is called the Garden of Eden. The word “garden” means a place that is enclosed, protected, and sheltered. The word “Eden” means a place of delight, of pleasure. Eden means a paradise. The Garden of Eden was the most beautiful and bountiful paradise man could ever imagine. It is overflowing with an abundance of beauty and fruit. The Garden was a huge forest of trees, shrubs, and vegetation. It met man’s need for beauty and food. As we look at 2:15, God makes clear what one of His purposes for man is. “The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and keep it.”

The Lord God took Adam and put him in the Garden of Eden. He had been outside the Garden and God wanted him to be inside the Garden. God wanted Adam to experience the paradise that He had provided for him. This is where he would reside. Adam’s responsibility was to work it and keep it. [ I want to break it down and take a closer look at what work is. First, work is worship. ]

* 1. Work is worship; don’t worship work

The word “work” means to cultivate, dress, and serve. The word “keep” means to watch over, to guard, to keep, to look after, to take care of. The object of these verbs is the Garden of Eden. Man is to work by cultivating the ground and look after it.

The verbs for “work and keep” are also used in human service to God. This broader sense of the word is often connected to religious service deemed as worship (Exod. 3:12) And God said, “I will be with you. And this will be the sign to you that it is I who have sent you: When you have brought the people out of Egypt, you will worship God on this mountain.” In (Num. 3:8), both of these words are used at the tabernacle. 8 They are to take care of all the furnishings of the Tent of Meeting, fulfilling the obligations of the Israelites by doing the work of the tabernacle.” Work here can be seen as worship. Adam is to work or cultivate the ground and to keep it. However, at a broader understanding of this passage, it can refer to worship. Work is not just work, but work is worship.

Remember, our mission is to build God’s kingdom on earth. As Christians, we are called to serve God with our whole life. Most of us spend half of our lives at work. We might spend more time with our coworkers at work than with our family members. One of the best places to build God’s kingdom on earth is at our marketplace. Most of those that you work with might never enter a church. I as a pastor will never be able to reach most of your coworkers. You have that opportunity. It’s possible that you might be the only one that your coworkers know as a Christian. We often forget to connect our faith to work. What if we see work as an opportunity to worship?

Unfortunately, instead of work being worship, some of us worship our work. We have based our identity from our work. How well we do at work demonstrates our self-worth. If we advance in the corporate ladder, we are important. If we do not, then we are worthless. We have been deceived that if we are well recognized at work, then we are valuable.

Our identity is in a person and not in a position. We can only find worth in Christ. He values us so much that He died on the cross to pay the penalty of our sins. As we place our trust in Him, God forgives our sins and restores our relationship with Him. We become children of God. We can only find our identity in Christ. God has given us purpose in life. May we remember that our mission is building God’s kingdom on earth. J.R. Vassar said, “We do work not to establish identity, but to express it.”

ILLUSTRATION: Instead of being sent out to the marketplace as missionaries, Christians prefer to hang out with believers. We have our small group meetings, we eat with believers, and we go on outings with our Christian friends. We live in this holy bubble. The purpose of church is to equip the saints to do the work of the ministry. We need to put the gospel in the hands of the people and turn them loose into the marketplace because work is worship. Too often, we as Christians huddle at church and we stay in our huddle. We huddle for the purpose of executing the play on the field. We are not to stay in our holy huddle. Too often, we divide our lives into secular and holy spaces. We act one way on Sunday and we act totally differently the rest of the week. That is not to be the case. We are to serve God all week long.

[ The next two points show how we demonstrate work as worship. First and foremost, you must work for God. He is the boss and second, you work out of your rest. Let’s take a closer look at the first application: Work for God: He is the boss. ]

* 1. Work for God: He is the boss

What is most important about work is answering the question: who is our boss? Who do we seek to serve? Are we working to serve our supervisor or ourselves or for God? Let’s turn to (Col. 3:22-24) to see what God has to say about work. “Bondservants, obey in everything those who are your earthly masters, not by way of eye-service, as people- pleasers, but with sincerity of heart, fearing the Lord. Whatever you do, work heartily, as for the Lord and not for men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the inheritance as your reward. You are serving the Lord Christ.”

What motivates us to work hard is dependent on how God fits into our work. We work for God. He is the boss. Paul reminds workers that they were working for God and not merely working for their Roman masters. Paul said this 4x in these three verses. They were serving Christ through their work. It does not matter what kind of work we have, whether it is menial work, disgusting work, glamorous work, or daily work, we are to consider it Christ’s work. Not only slaves or employees work for God. Masters or employers are also to work for God. Note in Colossians 4:1, “Masters, treat your bondservants justly and fairly, knowing that you also have a Master in heaven.”

May we show the world who we represent. We are God’s representatives here to build God’s kingdom on earth. May we realize that work is worship. We work for God. He is the boss. God has given us skills and passion to work. When we do our job with integrity, excellence, and diligence, it is an act of worship.

ILLUSTRATION: There was a member from church that was working for a company that was doing unethical transactions. He felt really uncomfortable about what was going on. He decided to stand up for what is right as he confronted his supervisor about the immoral behaviors. His comments were disregarded. He decided to quit although he did not have another job lined up. He chose to please his heavenly Master over pleasing his earthly master. He had the courage to represent God well even if it cost his job. Shortly after he resigned, the Lord provided him with a better job.

ILLUSTRATION: There was another man, who was committed to build up God’s kingdom on earth at his workplace. He worked hard consistently giving his best every day. If his teammates needed assistance, he was glad to give them a hand. When there were heated arguments, he was the first one to step in to bring peace between his teammates. He pursued excellence in all that he did because he saw work as worship. It is common for him to ask, “What would Jesus do under these circumstances?” When it was time for promotion, he was bypassed. The one that was promoted in his team was not a team player. Instead of complaining, he congratulated the one that got promoted. His coworkers claimed that he got robbed. Although he was disappointed, he believed that God is in control. Because of his good example, one of his teammates approached him asking him what makes him tick. It gave him an opportunity to share about Jesus Christ. May we work for God and acknowledge Him as our boss. He is the ultimate person that we seek to please and honor. (Col. 3:17), “And whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through him.”

[ Another way how you can practice your faith at work is to work out of your rest. ]

* 1. Work out of your rest

Almost all of us have something in common. We are all busy. Many people are running frantically in a rat race of life. We say, “When things slow down, then I will rest.” Things will not slow down. We need to be intentional in setting aside time to rest. Just as God rested, we also need to rest. In the 10 Commandments, God said that we should keep the Sabbath, which literally means “to cease working to rest.” We are not to kill, not to steal, not to lie, not to covet, and to take a nap.

Many of us are workaholics, who work 60 or more hours a week. It is good to enjoy our work, but we are not to make work our idol. When we over extend ourselves regularly, we will burn out. Sometimes, we do not have a choice in the long hours. But many times, we do have a choice. God has made us where we need rest.

APPLICATION: We need to learn to say, “No.” Some of us in this sanctuary might have three or four major responsibilities. It is wearing us out. We need to understand that we are not indispensable. God can find someone else. If you take on too many responsibilities, you are robbing someone else the opportunity to serve.

When we are talking about work and serving God, we need to take the long view. It is imperative that we get adequate rest so that we can serve God well. Many people see the Sabbath as you rest from your work, but in reality, you need to work out of your rest. Let me explain. Instead of resting after you work, you rest so that you can work. This is a different mindset. How do we rest?

APPLICATION: We remember who God is and what God has done. He is the one who created us and loves us. He gave us a purpose to partner with him to work. Rest in who God is and what He has done for us and then carry out the work that he has entrusted to us. Take a day off to reflect and praise God so that we can be spiritually refreshed. May we rest physically by literally getting more sleep. Rest up emotionally by doing things that you do not normally do. It might be gardening, hanging out with friends, watching a movie or engaging in your hobby. I ask people, “What gives you joy? Go and do it.” May we be refreshed from our Sabbath so that we can go out to work and build up the kingdom of God on earth.

May we be intentional to take our Sabbath. We can rest because of Christ. (Matt. 11:28-30) “Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and lowly in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

God has created us with the purpose to work. In (Eph. 2:10), “For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them.” May we see work in like of our mission to building up the kingdom of God on earth. Work is worship; may we not worship work. For our identity is in Christ, who gives us rest. When we do our job with integrity, excellence, and diligence, it is an act of worship. May we look forward every Monday going to work with a clear mission of working for God because He is our boss.