

**AM sermon preached at Central Christian Church September 3, 2017
 “Let Us Labor For the Master” A Labor Day Weekend Message**

Well, this weekend is it you know...the unofficial end of summer. Labor Day weekend. I’m glad you’re here and that you included our worship service as part of your weekend plans. Now because I know it’s pretty typical for a lot of people to travel and take advantage of this three day weekend to go see family or to just have one last summer getaway---I thought it would be best if I started our next sermon series which will focus on prayer next Sunday instead of today. Today, I want to share some scripture and thoughts about our laboring, our work. And I’ve given this morning’s message the title “Let Us Labor for the Master,” which is a phrase I’ve drawn from the old hymn “When the Roll is Called Up Yonder” that I remember singing in church years ago. Those words “let us labor for the Master” just kind of popped into my head as I was thinking about this being Labor Day weekend.

I think across the board, generally speaking, Americans have a pretty negative view of work...I think they see work as more of a curse than a blessing, more of a have to than a get to--- more of a punishment than a privilege. To many Americans, “work” is a four letter dirty word. And I think most of you’d agree with me. Any of you ever seen a “TGIM” or a “I live for the weekdays” bumper sticker? I didn’t think so... I still haven’t seen any either--- but I’ve seen lots of cars with “TGIF” and “I live for the weekend” and “I hate Mondays” bumper stickers.

Dr. Tom Addington in a book he co-authored with Dr. Stephen Graves “A Case for Calling: Discovering the Difference a Godly Man Makes in His Life at Work” shared how he spent several years driving tractor trailer rigs and how it was interesting to sit in the driver’s lounge and listen to other drivers talk while their trucks were being unloaded. Dr. Addington writes, “Regardless of where I was in the country, the discussion revolved around four topics (the language he adds has been sanitized):

- 1. My dispatcher is incompetent; he is out to get me and I am out to get him.**
- 2. My job does not pay enough.**
- 3. My company always tries to cheat me out of what they owe me.**
- 4. No state trooper ever cuts me any slack.**

Addington continued “It only took five words to render everyone speechless, for a dead silence to descend on stunned men holding coffee cups. The words? “I like what I do.” “Whenever I uttered those words everyone sort of looked at the floor, cleared their throats, then announced that they needed to go check on when their trucks would be loaded. Conversation, as they knew it, was over.” The reason he gave later---they simply couldn’t relate.

You know we may fuss and stew sometimes about having to go to work, the way most of the truckers Dr. Addington met did...and we may have been telling our friends and family that we have been so-o-o looking forward to this weekend and the break from

work and that we're not really looking forward to Tuesday rolling around after the long weekend but friends I can assure you right now that there are thousands of people in Texas and some of the other Southern states hit by Hurricane Harvey's deluge that would love the idea of heading back to work on Tuesday or for that matter even tomorrow....

I'll tell you what I think, I think one of the biggest reasons so many Americans have such negative thoughts and views about work is because their definition of work is too limited. To many people work is seen only as the thing they have to do to get an income until they can afford to retire. But friends, I believe the Bible teaches us that our work is much more than that---and I believe that if we see our work the way God would have us see it---it will make a real difference in our attitude-- approach-- the way we act while working--- and even the way we talk about work to others.

The first scripture I invite you to look up in your Bible or Bible app is Genesis 2:2-3. I'm going to be reading from the New International Version. Again the first scripture is Genesis 2:2-3. It reads like this... 2 By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 3 Then God blessed the seventh day and made it holy, because on it he rested from all the work of creating that he had done.

Take a mental note if you will---Three times in those verses we find God describing His creating of the universe and the world we live in as work He did.

Now if you looked up those verses, jump down a little further to verse 15 of Genesis chapter two and read what it says there---it says... 15 The Lord God took the man (that's speaking of Adam, the first human God created---now check it out, the Bible says...) The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it. What I want you to see here is that God gave Adam work to do right after He created him. Before the first sin was ever committed---before Adam and Eve were kicked out of the Garden of Eden---before God cursed the ground---Adam was given work to do. Now the reason I'm telling you this is because I want you to see that God never designed or intended work to be a punishment. Rather God created work as a privilege. Work was given to us as a way of cooperating with God, a way of sharing in the things God is doing, a way of showing our love for God, a way of worshipping God. Now it is true that if you read on in Genesis you'll find that after Adam and Eve sinned God made their work harder to do---but work in and of itself was not and is not a punishment from God. To the contrary---far from being a form of punishment for having done something wrong, work is a privilege---and work is in fact something God Himself does.

Now let's look at a third scripture. Ecclesiastes 2:24-26. The words were written by Solomon, the second wisest man to ever walk the earth man, second only to Jesus. Solomon was inspired by God to write... "24 A person can do nothing better than to

eat and drink (and be merry--- no wait that's Dairy Queen that says that...the Bible here says...) A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, 25 for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? 26 To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind."

Now very quickly there are two things about work I want you to notice that those verses teach us. The first is that God wants us to find satisfaction, even happiness in our work. Solomon not only wrote that here he wrote it two more times in Ecclesiastes. Now the second thing these verses teach us is that the non-Christian, the person who lacks a relationship with God will find it very difficult, if not impossible to find real lasting satisfaction and contentment in their work. Solomon wrote how it becomes a chasing after the wind for that person. Put another way, I think these verses are telling us that while the person who doesn't believe in God may find some initial or temporary satisfaction in their work---that satisfaction usually gives way to discontentment and disillusionment and the feeling that their work is a chasing after the wind---a fruitless, unending and unsatisfying on the treadmill expenditure of their time and energy.

And I believe the Bible gives us insight into why that happens---in the way it summarizes David's life in Acts 13:36. We're told there "Now when David had served God's purpose in his own generation, he fell asleep (that's a nice way of saying he died...). What I want you to see there is that phrase "served God's purpose in his own generation." I believe serving God's purpose is what brings true satisfaction and contentment. Listen friends if we see the thing we do for pay only as a way for us to be able to buy things we want and pay the bills and nothing more ...then what we've done is we've made our work all about us and our purposes. Truth be told, that's self-serving and shallow---that's an Ebenezer Scrooge type of life...there's little joy to be found in that kind of life---and a life lived to that end eventually becomes a lonely and miserable life. That's the kind of life that drives a person to devote countless hours and effort to climbing the corporate ladder only to find when they've reached the top that their ladder was leaning on the wrong wall. It's no secret. And you don't have to look far to find stories of regret, stories of broken homes and messed up marriages that are the result of someone's making their work all about them.

Jesus once told a story to a crowd of thousands about a guy who worked hard his whole life and selfishly amassed a fortune in the process. You'll find it in Luke 12. There beginning at verse 15 we find Jesus saying... "Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions."

16 And he told them this parable: “The ground of a certain rich man yielded an abundant harvest. 17 He thought to himself, ‘What shall I do? I have no place to store my crops.’

18 “Then he said, ‘This is what I’ll do. I will tear down my barns and build bigger ones, and there I will store my surplus grain. 19 And I’ll say to myself, “You have plenty of grain laid up for many years. Take life easy; eat, drink and be merry.””

20 “But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’

21 “This is how it will be with whoever stores up things for themselves but is not rich toward God.”

I hope you caught that last phrase “but is not rich towards God.” That phrase, “but is not rich towards God,” reveals that Jesus didn’t teach that it’s wrong for a person to work hard and save for retirement. And neither here nor elsewhere did Jesus ever say it is a sin for a person to become wealthy. Jesus did however on several occasions warn against becoming greedy, because that is a sin. And here in the story we just read He reminds us that a life lived for self will end miserably. But what I want you to see here is that Jesus is teaching us that we need to maintain the right kind of balance in our lives. He’s reinforcing the importance of keeping our priorities straight. And He doesn’t leave us guessing as to what our priorities should be. God’s to be first. He’s to be given priority. Not all of us can become rich in the eyes of the world, but all of us can become rich in the eyes of God. Jesus tells us it’s important to be rich towards God. Jesus has also taught us that the most important commandment of all is to love God and that the second most important commandment is to love others.

Now when we take all of this and apply it to our work, and I’m talking about all our work, work we do for pay as well as work we do which we’re not paid for, what we find is that we should do our best to please God in all of it.

That may require a change in our perception of the work we do. If we normally make our work all about us---that is to say if we normally think of work we do in terms of meeting our needs and satisfying our wishes we’ll want to spend some time in prayer where we ask God to help us to see how our work fits into the bigger picture and how our work can be used to fulfill His purposes. If we pray along those lines---God may lay it on our hearts to think of our place of employment as a mission field---and He may whisper in our hearts “I put Adam in the Garden of Eden to work the soil and I put you where you are to work on the souls of the other workers by setting for them a good example of what it means to be a follower of Jesus.” Possibly God may lay it on your heart to be more than a co-worker to others at your place of employment. God may encourage you to become your co-workers’ friend. He may encourage you to reach out to them when you become aware of some need they have or some hurt they’re dealing with---or He may encourage you just to give them someone they can talk to. A word of advisement about talking to co-workers when you’re on the clock---

be careful that you don't allow your conversations to keep you or your co-worker from doing the work you've been hired to do (that could cost the both of you your jobs)--- and be careful if you're married not to do anything which might mislead the person you're talking to into thinking anything romantic. One way you can avoid that is to ask a co-worker who's shared some personal need or struggle with you---if it would be okay if you shared it with your spouse because you value your spouse's input and so the two of you can pray about it. That's one way to help the both of you avoid temptation.

It's also very possibly that God may encourage you to invite a co-worker to worship. Or He may encourage you to do something simple that can be an encouragement and make another co-workers day go easier. Most of you know that I work part time at Menards as a morning stocker. What some of you may not know is our drummer Kevin works there to---in fact we work together. And Kevin didn't know I was going to mention this and I don't want to embarrass him but the fact is pretty much every day when I arrive, I find that Kevin's done something to make my day go easier. He's located a pallet jack and brought it to where I can make use of it. He does that by arriving at work early enough each day to grab one before they're all gone. It's not a big thing, but I'm glad he does it. Because to be honest while I show up to work on time, I rarely get there early and before Kevin came there were lots of mornings I had to go on the hunt for a pallet or I had to work without one.

What about the level at which we throw ourselves into the work we do? Do we give it our best and are we a model worker---or do we go about our work half-heartedly? Have we been failing to see that ultimately we're not working for people but we're working for God and now that we've been reminded of that do we need to change the effort we put forth on the job so we will please God?

There's just no telling how God might answer your prayer to Him on how you can best please Him through the work you do.

And of course it needs to be said that if we've been making the money we make all about us, we should talk to God about that and we should ask Him to help us to develop a spiritually healthy mindset when it comes to our income---we should ask Him, is the way I'm handling my income the way You want me to handle my income? Same thing can be said friends of our free time and our retirement. If you are approaching that point or are already at that point in your life where having to make an income is no longer an issue, I would definitely encourage you to talk to God about what He wants you to do with your time. Does He want you to continue working for an income? Does He want you to retire? Does He want you to serve as a volunteer? Does He want you to pursue a second career? And as for the free time those of us who are still working for an income have---we should be asking God the same kinds of questions. We should be asking God what do you want me to do with my free time? Is

there anything specific You'd like for me to do on my next day off? What about the Labor Day holiday? What do you want me to do with that day God? Do you want me to visit family? Do you want me to kick back and relax and regroup? Do you want me to do something for someone else? Do you want me to spend some extra time reading scripture or praying for others?

Perhaps to do our best to please God in the work we do we'll need a change in our perception of that work---or possibly we'll need to change our attitude about our work. I've read a lot of leadership materials by John Maxwell in which he's shared a lot of great insights but the one thing above all else of his that has stuck in my mind is his comment that attitude is a choice. Maxwell says we can't always choose what happens to us but we can choose what kind of attitude we respond with. This in an area I know I sometimes struggle with. I think for the most part when I leave the house to go to work, I do it with a good attitude. But sometimes I don't respond to the things I encounter at work with the best attitude. I've sometimes allowed myself to get a little grumpy or testy or maybe even a little angry. I know when I do that I'm not at my best and I know that that's not what God would want from me. And this is something God and I have been working on. Maybe you can relate. Perspective, actions, attitude....Again the question is not what do we want but what does God want?

I think the best approach we can have to work, to recreation, to retirement, to life itself is summarized in the timeless words the Apostle Paul wrote to Christians living back in the first century. In the Message version of the Bible you'll find these words Paul wrote in Colossians 3:17 "Let every detail in your lives—words, actions, whatever—be done in the name of the Master, Jesus, thanking God the Father every step of the way."

Let's pray...