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Genesis 2:1-3, 15 – Work: Before It Was A Burden

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We've sadly made it to the end of another summer as signaled by Labor Day.

A time for BBQs, picnics, and soaking up the last bit of summer...

Labor Day usually just means a long weekend for us.

But it started out as a recognition of workers' rights at the end of the 1800s.

They were fighting for shorter work days and the right to unionize.

So, it being Labor Day weekend...

We're going to talk about work:

Work as we know it today, and work as it was originally created.

Turn with me to the first book of the Bible...

We'll be looking at Genesis 2:1-3 and v. 15.

Thus the heavens and the earth were completed in all their vast array.

By the seventh day God had finished the work he had been doing; so on the seventh day he rested from all his work. 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. [...]

¹⁵*The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.*

The Word of the Lord. (**Thanks be to God.**)

My first job out of high school I worked as a car porter for a Chevy dealership.

I would move cars from the service reception area into the repair garage...

And then back out when they were repaired.

Every now and again I would be asked to move new vehicles from the truck into the dealership.

One day I was approached by the manager...

He was fuming and got right up into my face.

I could see his crooked yellow teeth and smell his breath that was forever stained by coffee.

He was inches from my face and accusing me of taking one of the new cars for a joy ride.

There was a brand new Corvette Z06 that came in on one of the trucks...

It was supposed to have less than 5 miles on it...

But somehow it had over 20.

I was the one who drove it the 200 meters from the parking lot to the show room...

So *I* must have taken it on the street for an extra 15 miles. (PAUSE)

Let me tell you about my relationship with this job...

My first "real" job out of high school:

This job terrified me.

I would wake up physically sick every morning knowing that I was responsible for every car I drove—

Sting Rays; Lexus's; \$60,000 trucks, Cadillacs—

I was responsible for parking them in the most-cramped service area in America...

Parking cars for mechanics who weren't concerned with my fears or sensitivities...

Believe me when I tell you this...

I am the last person who would take a brand new corvette out for a joy ride.

But this was my job.

This was my way of making money for college.

Then fast forward not quite 10 years down the road:

I'm working in South Mississippi as an electrician...

Crawling around in attics where the outside temperature is 32C with 80% humidity...

Making \$8.22 USD per hour.

I used to get so hot in the summer that I would lose patches of hair.

But this was my job.

This was my way of making money to pay rent.

So what's your work story?

Are you employed by a boss or company who has it out for you?

Do you wake up despairing knowing that you have to go back to the same job for the foreseeable future?

Do you feel like your work is pointless?

Like it has no meaning and is completely disconnected from all you've been called to do?

Does it feel like you're just working for the weekend?

Punching the clock, waiting for Friday to roll around?

For me, these stories were just 2 quick snapshots of my almost 2 decades of being out in the working world...

And I can tell you from my experience that our work is broken.

Our work is broken.

The curse that Adam brings on himself and the rest of creation is recorded in Genesis 3.

After he sins against God, God says to him and to us:

“Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life. It will produce **thorns and thistles** for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground...”

“Thorns and thistles” is what we're told the ground will produce for us when we try to work it.

What are some thorns and thistles you've personally experienced in your work?

I know many of you are (or were) teachers.

You spend hundreds of hours with children whose situation frustrates you to no end...

You see so much potential in them if only their parents would just spend some time working with them;

If only the system slowed down with all of the mandatory testing;

If only you could just give a little more attention to that one boy who is craving an adult figure in their life...but you've got 28 other kids to worry about.

Or if you work in the construction industry...

What are some thorns and thistles that come up when you're trying to produce fruit?

Is it the fact that your company prioritizes productivity over quality?

You want to spend time making sure things are right and look good...

But your boss has the super intendent breathing down his neck asking when you'll be done.

So you speed through your work and it looks sloppy...

Not representative of your potential.

We all have ideas about how our work will/should go—

Whether it's in the home or outside of the home;

Volunteer or paid—

But more often than not we experience the curse of the fall in our work.

We're familiar with thorns and thistles.

So work becomes a burden.

It's something we have to do to survive and get by.

"How's work?" someone asks. "It's a paycheck" we say.

It's that dreaded 4-letter word after a summer that went by way too fast. (PAUSE)

People of God, this is not the way it was meant to be.

Look at the story we're given before Adam sins:

"By the 7th day God had finished the *work* he had been doing."

We all know how the story starts:

"In the beginning God..." worked.

He worked by creating:

The first day he *worked* to create light...day and night.

Day 2 he *worked* to create the expanse, or the atmosphere (sky).

The beautiful blue sky you see as you lay on your back and watch the white clouds roll by.

The air that supplies us with oxygen and the things we need to breathe to live.

Day 3 he worked to create dry ground.

He separated the rolling seas from one another by land.

The land that is firm under our feet and makes for good backdrops for our pictures.

It's this same land that he caused to produce plants.

Taber corn, and BC peach trees.

On day 4 God *worked* to create the sun and the moon.

The sun to warm us by day and the moon to light our path by night.

He worked to put those countless lights in the nighttime sky...

Those stars we gaze at on the clearest of nights that make us feel so small.

On day 5 God *worked* to create living creatures to fill the sky and the sea.

The birds to fly in flocks and bathe in the puddles left on the ground in the parking lot.

The sea turtle to gracefully swim in the warm currents off Maui.

On day 6 God *worked* to create living creatures to live on the land.

He made the cows to moo and to graze and stand in the same direction.

He worked to create the leopard that lazily sleeps in a tree on the African savanna.

And finally on day 6 he also made us.

He created us in his image...beautiful smiling faces.

By the seventh day God finished all the work he had been doing...(PAUSE)

And it was good!

God took delight in his work!

He enjoyed work!

We don't get the sense that it was a burden to him.

It was a joy for him to create.

And after creating, it was a joy for him to provide:

He made the man and put him in a lush garden.

He watered the plants and caused them to provide food.

He provided a helper suitable for the man...woman.

And he continued to provide for his creation.

And then the next part of his work was commissioning:

“The Lord God took the man and put him in the Garden of Eden to work it and take care of it.”

The Lord shared his work with us...

Not only to live in his creation but to work it and care for it.

Work was a part of paradise.

Work was a part of paradise.

In the beginning as we lived in perfect fellowship with God...

As we lived in perfect fellowship with each other and all of creation...

We were working.

Work was a part of God’s original, perfect design.

It was only after our sin that work was corrupted.

It was only after our sin that work became a burden:

Unreasonable hours;

Poor working conditions;

Bosses and companies who don’t value us—

Who let us go without batting an eye;

Organizations who put profit first and people last;

Mind numbing work that just drags on, hour after hour and day after day...

Organizations that could care less about our ideas and passion to make things better.

Or jobs that become our identity in unhealthy ways...

Jobs that become idols.

Or making unethical decisions in our jobs in order to keep it or make us look better.

It was only after sin was introduced into the world that work became a burden. (PAUSE)

But God says, “Behold I am making all things new” (Rev 21).

Ever since that first sin that introduced chaos and brokenness into the world...

God has been working to set everything right.

He's come to fix that which is broken.

That's what this story of the Bible is all about:

How God saved and is saving this broken world.

We see it culminate in the life of Jesus Christ.

Who took the sin of the world and the weight of guilt upon his shoulders...

He willingly went to the cross as was planned by the Father...

So that this world (so that we) might be saved...

So that this world might be set right.

Christ has defeated sin and death in his own death and resurrection...

But we are still waiting for him to finally assume his rightful place as king.

And to finally make everything new.

We live in the "already-not yet" kingdom of God.

This means that we catch glimpses of his work every day.

Even though this world is still subject to sin and death--

And even though our work is still under the curse—

We see the Lord moving and working his plan of redemption through us.

Once again he's inviting us to work alongside of him...

He's commissioning us...

He's using us to bring about *his* redemption in our homes, in our neighborhoods, churches, and especially in our work.

Just as he created the world and took delight in it...

Provided for the world and took delight in it...

And commissioned us to work and took delight in it...

So too is God inviting us to work for/with him, and to take delight in it.

So what does this look like?

Wherever God has called or commissioned us—

Whatever garden God has placed us in for this time in our lives—

We can be sure that our work will be patterned after our creator...

So we will see certain characteristics.

First, and perhaps most importantly, our work will be service.

Jesus Christ came into this world to serve.

He gave up his life and served those who didn't deserve it...

And those who didn't appreciate it...

And our work will be no less.

As sons and daughters of God our work will be service.

We may not always like the garden where God has placed us...

We may not always like the people whom we've been called to serve...

But we've been placed there by God for his purpose.

It is less about us and more about God and others.

In a fallen world, where work is a burden or an end in itself, our work is about ourselves:

“What will make me the most money?”

“How can I get the most power or status at my work?”

But work that's patterned after our Creator—

Work that is redemptive—

Asks the question: “How can I best serve God and my neighbor where God has commissioned me to work?”

God has placed us exactly where we should be at this moment in life—

Whether we're farmers, teachers, unemployed, raising children, firefighters, custodians, mechanics, students, nurses, engineers, or retired—

God is sovereign and has us where he wants us in this moment...

So the question becomes: “How can I serve where God has me?”

Redemptive work also brings about flourishing.

When God set us in the Garden of Eden and commissioned us to care for it...

He gave us a creation that was full of potential.

He commissioned us to care for it as gardeners. (see Tim Keller's, *Every Good Endeavor*)

And what do you do as gardeners?

Do you sit there and expect things to happen on their own?

No, you work the ground.

You dig up the earth and rearrange the raw materials God gives us.

You rearrange them in ways that sees the garden produce food, flowers, and beauty.

This becomes the pattern for all of our work:

We rearrange and work what God gives us and we draw out its potential...

In ways that help the world and people flourish...

In ways that participate in God's redeeming of the earth.

I'd like to point out where I see God working at my work...

Where I see redemptive work happening in a broken world.

I'm not talking about the "spiritual" work of the pastors either.

God has called (commissioned) certain people to serve in this place:

I see redemptive work happening in the office...

Where Hennie **always** greets people with a smile and drops anything she's working on in order to serve.

I see redemptive work happening in the building...

Where Clarence, Dave, Diane, and Cassie take pride in caring for the church week in and week out...

From the shiny toilets, to the clean floors, and clear windows...

Just like God did in the beginning...taking chaos after the Community BBQ and creating order...

A safe, clean place for us to gather together and worship.

And I see God's beautiful creation on the church grounds...

Where Harry has planted a colorful assortment of flowers and kept the grass teeming with life...

And John keeps the lawn well-mowed and trimmed.

I see all of these people working where God has called them...

Working to bring about beauty, order, and restoration...

All patterned after our Creator...

A glimpse of God's full plan of redemption. (PAUSE)

God is using your work for his glory.

He's taking a broken creation and he's fixing it...making all things new...

And he's using our work as a part of that.

So may the Spirit continue to empower us for this work...

And may we no longer see work as a consequence of sin...

But as an original piece of God's creation that he's making right once again.

Amen.