

Good work! Trust Jesus... now enjoy some rest.

Exodus 20: 9-11, Matt 11:28-30

Well friends, last week we wrapped up our Green Worship series and we looked at how we can experience God in and through our work.

So it's somewhat fitting that the message that I'm sensing God wants us to hear and respond to this week is all about rest.

And in our scripture passage this morning we read that God worked for six days and on the seventh day He rested... and this sets a precedent, and gives us justification, that our times of work should be followed with a time of rest.

And the scriptures have a particular word for the rest which needs to follow our times of work – maybe you've heard it before – it's called a "Sabbath" and it's where we get our word "sabbatical" from, which is when someone takes an extended break from their work...

And the most common form of Sabbath in the bible was the weekly routine of working six days and then breaking from work for one day – as part of worshipping God.

And that biblical routine has played a major role in shaping Western society's work week where most jobs go from Monday to Friday with Saturday and Sunday off.

And perhaps you can remember back a few decades to when it was actually against the law to keep your business open on Sundays – and pretty much everything except for gas station convenience stores, movie theatres, bowling alleys was shut down – there was no Sunday shopping, no working on Sundays, no banking on Sundays...

So you could pretty much count on people being available to get together for gatherings, going to church, meeting for youth group or just going for a Sunday drive.

It really was a day of rest...

And I remember what that was like when I was a kid. Sundays were not like the other days of the week, not only was everyone off work, most people went to church – twice!

And I remember church being rather boring, formal, and hard to sit through without fidgeting and getting in trouble for that...

But there was always the possibility of convincing your parents to let you go over to your friend's house after church and you could play there for the afternoon until it was time to go to the evening service.

Then you'd meet your parents at the service and go back home after evening church was done, and when you would see your friends at school on Monday – you would have all sorts of great things to talk about from playing on Sunday afternoon.

So yes there things we couldn't do on Sundays – like go to the movies, or go out for dinner because it was supposed to be a

day of rest and by doing that we were making other people work...

And we had to sit through a boring church service twice on a Sunday – but this provided a framework to arrange spending time with your friends on Sunday afternoons and to get out to play in a way that just wasn't possible during the week.

Maybe you can relate... and you have your own memories about what you could or couldn't do on a Sunday when you were growing up - because Sunday was supposed to be a day of rest.

“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God”

Because the truth of it all friends is that is that if God rested after creating – after working... then we need to do so as well.

First and foremost because while there is enjoyment and pleasure that comes from working and doing work - the

purpose of our work is to be able to step back and admire it... to benefit from it... to enjoy it and so on. That's what God did on the seventh day.

He just made this awesome creation and man and woman in His image, and He gave them their covenant responsibility to rule over the creation and develop it... and now He's going to rest from His work - and let the man and woman do theirs.

"Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground." (Gen 1:28)

God didn't rest because He was tired – He rested because "the seventh day" is the period of time in which the task and responsibility of working with His creation is given to us!

And God blessed the seventh day and said it was Holy! *(Yet another reason why we experience God in our work – but that was last week's sermon.)*

And this task was to be a partnership – because while we are made in God's image we are not God - and so God reserved the right to say what was good and not good.

Adam and Eve were not to eat from the tree of the knowledge of Good and Evil – deciding what was good or not good was God's prerogative and God's alone.

So – you probably know what happened next... Eve was tricked into thinking that it was ok to eat from this tree, Adam went along with it and the creation was cursed because of their Sin.

And as we learned last week - the work... the task of multiplying and developing the creation that God had given to Adam and Eve would become painful toil, and the occasion for opposition and frustration - because of the curse and the consequence of their Sin.

And yet God in his mercy and grace would still allow them to continue their work and benefit from it to a certain degree.

So they multiplied and filled the earth and worked the ground to produce their food and life went on – albeit without that intimate connection with God that they had before the Fall.

And over time the people who came to fill this world began to believe that the work they were doing, the food they were growing, the tools they were making, the cities they were building, the culture they were creating was in itself enough to give them life and sustain them and determine their purpose and meaning – and that they didn't need God.

That's the point of the story of the Tower of Babel - where human beings build an impressive tower which it represents their belief that through their own efforts and skills they are able to sustain themselves and find life and they don't need God's help.

And so our work, our ability and skills to do our God given task – they become idols that we pursue as individuals and as a group, to show that we don't need God – that we are self-sufficient on our own – and we may not even be aware that

we're doing this... we just think we're living life and doing what comes naturally.

But the truth about idols friends is that they enslave us don't they – and that is often where we find ourselves with our work isn't it?

Our jobs, our responsibilities, the things we do to earn a living, to provide for ourselves and our families become oppressive and demand all our time and energy.

And instead of giving us life – they drain us of it – we're exhausted and worn out and we want to rest but we can't because our work won't let us. There's always someone who wants our time, a crisis that we have to solve, maintenance and chores that are piling up and need to be done – the work never stops.

So Exodus 20:9-10 is good news... *“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God”*

And if you think about it – God purposely allowed Abraham’s descendants to go and settle in Egypt and multiply and become a nation there and then experience firsthand how a kingdom, an empire which does not know the one true God builds “towers of Babel” as expressions of its greatness and life giving power against the one true God - and how in the end that enslaves and oppresses instead of giving life.

The people of Israel were slave labourers for the Pharaoh – building projects and monuments which proclaimed the Pharaoh’s divine greatness as ruler and provider for his empire until God freed them from their slavery and then told them *“Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is a sabbath to the LORD your God”*

What good news that would have been for them to hear!

And it should still be good news for us today too – except that we tend to dismiss it...

We usually say *“oh yeah I wish that was possible – it would be nice to be able to take a day off work but I can’t, it’s just not feasible!”*

And if someone presses the fact that this good news is actually a command from God and that taking a day of rest and not working isn’t really optional... then we try to sidestep this command by saying *“well, that was an Old Testament law and Jesus changed all that and now it’s not about obeying rules but it’s about loving other people instead...”*

And I’m thinking why do we fight this?

Here we have permission from God himself, a command actually that we take a day of rest and we’re coming up with excuses to avoid doing it or complaining that it’s not really possible???

I guess the theologians are correct – Sin doesn’t make sense. Because that’s what’s behind our refusal to take a day off – sin...

And it is so subtle and tricky that even though we say we believe that God is our provider, that God is in control, that all things are possible with God... our sinfulness makes us work like that isn't true.

Instead we work like we are the provider, and so we have to stay in control, because things are only possible through our efforts. We hang on to our work as our lifeline – but it becomes the rope by which we hang ourselves...

You see friends we need to understand that God's command about the Sabbath is really about us letting go of our work and handing it back over to God - to let Him take care of it for a day.

Just as God created this world and then handed over the responsibility to us to steward it for Him – we need to partner with God by fulfilling our responsibility for six days and then handing it back to God for one day.

This is what it really means to take a Sabbath rest and when we are intentional about doing this it shows that we truly believe in God, and that we trust Him.

What's more, if our work is in danger of becoming an idol or if it already has and it's enslaved us... then taking a Sabbath will set us free and help prevent our work from becoming what it's not meant to be.

By refraining from our work for a day...

and you know best how that has to happen; by not going in to where we work, by not taking our work home with us, by shutting off the smart phones so you're not available to work – by finding something else to think about instead of work...

we hand over our work to God and let him handle things and we trust that He will sustain our work and even further our work by the power of the Holy Spirit.

And perhaps the best way to handover our work is to make a list of all the things you want God to look after while you're resting and give them to Him through prayer before you start your Sabbath.

Then you are free to take the time to be renewed and recharged so that when our Sabbath is over we can go back and continue to the work to which we are called.

And this isn't being lazy, it's being intentional about experiencing our work as a partnership with God; where we do our part and God does His.

Leaving things in His hands shows that we trust He can keep everything from falling apart and that it doesn't depend solely on us.

But if things don't go as we expected or as we like while we're not watching the shop - we need to trust that God is really in control and that as Romans 8:28 says *"And we know that in all*

things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

Remember – God is God, we work for Him, we are His stewards – He doesn't work for us...

So if you hand your work over to God for a day and things go south... its part of God working in your life to help you grow.

Maybe to challenge you to become a better leader, maybe to give you the opportunity to ask Him for more help, maybe to get you to react badly - so that you become aware of how you still need to be transformed by the Holy Spirit...

So do you understand why God gave the Sabbath command to the nation of Israel?

This is why Jesus says *"The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath."* (Mark 2:27)

And the only thing Jesus changed about the Sabbath Law was to show people how God intended for it to bring them life as opposed to how the Pharisees had turned it into work...

This is why Jesus can say, as we read this morning *“Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest.”* (Matt 11:28)

Friends, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath, he says so in Mark 2:28, and this means he can free us from our sin – specifically from how our sin makes us turn our work into an idol which enslaves us, causes us to neglect the Sabbath, and all that it can do for us and our relationship with God.

And so what I believe God wants us to hear this morning is this *“Good work... trust Jesus... now enjoy some rest!”*

Friends – by God’s grace and by the power of His Spirit we’ve done some good work this past year, and we’re doing good work now – at our jobs, in our families, in the ministry here at

Valleyview – and we need to know that God sees that and commends us for it.

Good work!

But if our work is to remain good friends, then we need to hand it over to Jesus – the Lord of the Sabbath, and make sure that we are taking our Sabbath.

So trust Jesus with your work, with your livelihood, with business, with the things that He has given you responsibility for – and take your Sabbath, go and be free for a day!

Use that freedom to enjoy God’s creation, to rest, to catch up on some sleep, to be distracted by something delightful, to spend time being quiet and learning more about God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit and giving Him your worship.

Enjoy some rest friends – it is God’s gracious gift to us and we need it.

Our Lord Jesus has things well in hand, nothing will happen that will catch Him off guard, nothing will happen that He cannot handle.

So rest let go of your work for a day... and let your rest speak of your confession of faith and trust in Jesus our Lord and his Holy Spirit fill you anew as you rest.

So friends - Good work! Trust Jesus – and enjoy some rest!
Amen.