

It Worked when I made It

We are studying the book of Genesis, and some of you may be surprised that we have spent almost no time discussing the “hows and how longs” of creation. The reason for that is simple, that is not what we need to know. We need to know the why’s and how does it work questions – and that is exactly what the bible tells us.

At wedding showers I occasionally opened gifts, and had no idea what I was holding. I remember a spoon rest, some Jefferson cups, and one antique shaving cream cup. In each of those instances, I held something that someone thought was important. I stood in front of someone with a gaping grin on their face, and had no idea what to say. In none of those cases did I say – how long did it take to make this.

The matter is even more severe when things break. Going to Austin and Natalie’s wedding we had a blowout. Chris Carper was kind enough to stop, but we could not get the tire off. I was late, on the edge of the highway with four children, in my suit, and had to call the Mazda dealership. When I finally got service on the line, I asked – what factory built this car? How long was it on the assembly line? Was it made by robots or human workers? Of course not. I asked how to get the danged wheel off.

What is it? How does it work? What does it do? These are the questions we need to know the answers to, and these are the questions Genesis answers for us. Last week we saw that humans exist to bring Glory to God. That fact is in our very makeup, we have dignity, freedom, responsibility, communication and love. We are images of the king, but only images made of clay. Thus we have honor enough to erect the head of the poorest beggar, and shame enough to bow the shoulders of the greatest emperor of earth. Be content.

Now we are going further into the reason for our existence, and seeing something that on the surface looks mundane – we were created to work. Our first parents were given a two-fold mandate: subdue the earth and fill it. We subdue the earth in our work, and fill it with our relationships.

Of course, both of these chores have been made extremely difficult by the presence of sin. Because we live in a fallen world, work has become a labor, and relationships have turned into wars. Work has turned into slavery: to debt, to greed, to laziness, to perfection. This week I want us to see that Jesus has come to bring us rest and thus allow us to work without being slaves.

1. Why do we Work

1:28 And God blessed them. And God said to them, “Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

2:15 The LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it.

We were created to bring beauty and order into this world. When we do that we reflect our creator, and we get back in touch with what is good about us.

God put us in a world filled with wonder, and as we work, we bring that wonder out.

Turning Mississippi Mud into fine pottery
Turning spider webs into rifle sites

Though very few of us get to experience it on that level, we all have that desire to want to make something beautiful. It is that desire that gets satisfied when we look upon something as a job well done.

This is why men love yardwork – when their headlights hit that well-groomed yard on Saturday night, they feel right, they feel that sense of correctness that says yes, I did something today. That is the pleasure God experienced after everyday of creation – It is good – you were created to enjoy that.

When you look upon your children sleeping, hit a golf ball just right or hear a beautiful piece of music

This core idea of the holiness of work is a hallmark of the reformation. In school you may hear of the protestant work ethic, but few modern scholars know what it is. They will tell you it is the idea that if you are a Christian and work hard, then God will make you rich. That has never been what it was. It is this truth, that work itself is valuable, and beautiful.

In R.C. art the saints were pure and clean, with halos and slightly effeminate faces. In Reformation art they were working people,

The farmers praying over their crops,
The older man praying over his meal with calloused working hands.

These are the saints of the day, normal people who work. It is not somehow less than holy to get your hands dirty, but work has dignity, and in every step we should glorify God.

The Return of Christ – here I was doing this for you.

2. What's Wrong with Work

2 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. **3** 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.

But the nature of work has been corrupted hasn't it? We seldom enjoy that godly pleasure of a job well done. Instead we know the feeling of labor, and of slavery. The bible often refers to our salvation, as the work of redeeming us from the yoke of bondage, the yoke of slavery. God even commands us to rest:

Deut 5:15 You shall remember that you were a slave [3] in the land of Egypt, and the LORD your God brought you out from there with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm. Therefore the LORD your God commanded you to keep the Sabbath day.

You must understand that God not only offers rest, he gives rest:

Matthew 11:28 Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. **29** 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. **30** For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”

I want to examine 4 different ways our work has become a slavery, and then we can see how Jesus has freed us from them all.

Poverty – slaves to our debt

Some of us live caught in a vicious cycle. The cycle of the working poor keeps people trapped between making too much money to receive governmental help, and too little to get the bills paid. These people live in fear of one set-back that might cost them their house, or even their health. For many can not afford the costs of health care.

For those people our message is the most practical – come lay your burdens on the body of Christ. I don't just mean receive him by faith, I mean share your burdens with the gifted people in the wider body. I have been so encouraged by this community's willingness to help – let us help you.

Maybe you need us to help you examine where your money is going, or show you how to get out of the debt spiral. Or maybe you need help with childcare until your debts are down, or you may need a better paying job.

Laziness – Slaves to our Fear

A second major problem of our culture comes from the opposite problem. Many of us grew up in a life of ease, and did not have to work. As a result we kind of got scared of it, we slowly became de-humanized, and lost our dignity, and never grew up.

America and Europe are now over-run with post-adolescents who simply won't leave home, afraid to work a hard job, unwilling to do anything that they feel is beneath them.

In college ministry I noticed a problem, my boys would not grow up. They were not getting married, because they were nowhere near ready for marriage. But a certain group was different – they were grownups – the boys who grew up on the farm.

Jim Holland – they grew up producers, not consumers. They have always known they were not too good to shovel manure, so they did it, and now they are not afraid to get a job and work.

Jeff – afraid to work as a coach, cause he had told people he would be a doctor.

For you, Jesus comes alongside and says, I love you so much, you are so secure in me, that it is okay to fail. It is okay to work. It is okay to take a job waiting tables even though you have a college degree. It is okay to move up to manager, and actually have some responsibility you will enjoy. It would even be better than waiting for someone to give you a job where you are paid more to do something you hate.

Greed – Slaves to the race

Some of us feel no pleasure in work, because we simply work for the money. Not the money we need to survive, the money we need to succeed. How much money is that? More than everyone else has.

Lowes – most returned item – marble grills the days after the Fourth of July

This mentality never satisfies, because the target is always moving. You have a pool, I need a pool, etc. etc.

We are like people crowding on a plane – I have to get on before everyone else – why?

To you, Jesus says trust me. I have given you myself, I have died for you, what do you think I will withhold from you? God has given you his own son, how will he not with him give you all things? You can trust him.

Obsession/Perfectionism

A fourth and final way our work turns into slavery comes when we define ourselves by what we do. Then success becomes not necessary to put food on the table, but it becomes the justification of our existence.

We see this lightly when we ask someone what they do – and they tell us who they are. In doing that, they tell us why they work so hard. Many people work ridiculous hours not because they are afraid of going hungry, they fear being a failure as a person.

Rocky to Adrian – I want to know that I wasn't a bum – thus he kept making movies...

Best illustrated in Chariots of Fire

Harold Abrams – I have a four-foot lane, and ten seconds to justify my existence

Eric Liddle – When I run, I feel his pleasure

Do you feel rest at the end of the day? Are you working to feel God's pleasure, or to justify your existence, only one of those reasons will ever lead to rest.

Maybe you have the medicine, but you never take it. And maybe you don't have the right medicine at all. As a matter of fact, many of you may have been given a form of Christianity that only makes you feel worse, gives you more to do. Come and find rest.

I don't love you cause you win, you are important because you are mine.