

CITY CHURCH-EASTSIDE WEEKLY WORSHIP GUIDE

March 22, 2009



Egyptian Workers
Making Bricks

Genesis: The Story of God, the Story of Us Conquering Chaos

Am I in the right vocation? I'm getting the sense that I work too much, how do I correct that? My job is terrible how do I get out? Genesis 1:26-2:3 doesn't specifically answer such vocational quandaries, but it does address one question. How do we work and rest amidst the chaos of life so that in the end we live out a life of meaning? The first step in the endeavor to find meaning in this life is to understand what this text means by chaos. At the beginning of creation we saw that God began with a formless void and while this void wasn't necessarily evil, God was not content for it to remain formless. God is pictured here taking this lump of formless void and forming a creation full of beauty and meaning. Even in it's first few lines, we can observe that the biblical narrative is very different from other Ancient Near Eastern creation stories such as the Enuma Elish & the Atrahasis Epic. Often in these narratives the world and humanity is a mere by product of a conflict between the gods. While certain elements of the Genesis account run

parallel to such creation myths this only confirms Moses' intent. He was writing in the style of the day in order to show how Israel's God was radically different from all other gods. In light of that God did merely create man, but empowered them to be stewards of the earth as he tasked them to be fruitful and multiple. This stewardship was amply resourced with food for both the present and future. God's original vision was that Adam and Eve would take this small garden in Mesopotamia and through cultivation extend this paradise to the ends of the earth. Furthermore, God desired that our first parents would multiply their descendants in such a way that this global garden would be filled with images of God, all of which would reflect His glory. This work was never the end game though. The goal was that man would literally dwell in the presence of God amidst this paradise. These two themes of fruitfulness and multiplication run throughout scripture even to the book of revelation where humanity finally dwells in the solace of God's

presence. But sin has skewed our understanding of work. Often we either overwork, seeking to appease the Pharaohs of our life, or underwork, seeking to escape the challenges of the wilderness journey. Either way we believe that living in these extremes will provide us with the meaning our souls' desire. But the biblical reality is that our work cannot have meaning if we're trying to find our meaning in either work or rest. When we do try to find our meaning in either work or rest Scripture identifies this as sin. But as we trust in the death and resurrection of Christ, our meaning is established as we enjoy the love, security, and forgiveness that only God can provide. Unlike the gods of this world, our God not only directs us in our work, but also in our rest. God set apart the seventh day and exhorts us to do the same. This should not result in 'rule-keeping', but rather sustains us in our work, prevents work from becoming deity, and restores our very dignity as we rest in the finished work of Christ and not our own.

Sermon Application

The questions and thoughts below can be used for further reflection this week. Seek to use a journal or discuss with a friend. Most of all use this to consider how the gospel of Christ can be transforming. Enjoy!

Application Questions: Genesis 1:26-2:1-3

Lent: A Wilderness Journey

by Jim Dolas

1. It can be observed that the creation narrative of Genesis contains features that are similar to other creation narratives in the Ancient Near East (e.g. the Enuma Elish & the Atrahasis Epic). Critical scholarship responds to this by saying that Genesis is obviously one narrative amongst many, but how would this run contrary to Moses' whole purpose? Consider the Israelite context when answering.
2. Identify and discuss a "formless void" or a "chaos" in your life right now. What has been meaningful as your work through this situation? How might God being calling you to shape meaning in this circumstance?
3. What are the two primary purposes for humanity seen at the end of Genesis chapter one? What is the end-game of these purposes for both Adam & Eve as well as ourselves? How does this shape your own view of work and the ultimate purpose of work?
4. What do you find to be your natural tendency regarding work and meaning? Do you find yourself overworking (my worth is tied to my vocation) or underworking (I just want to escape)? Are their influences you could point to in your own story that created this tendency in its present form? How does the work of Christ pull us away from either extremes? Furthermore, how does the work of Christ create meaning for our work?
5. Discuss the following tendencies that result when we try to find ultimate meaning in our work. With which tendency do you most identify? How does the work of Christ uniquely answer these scenarios?
 - a. *Playing It Safe*- "I don't want to put my value at stake."
 - b. *Taking Risks*- "I want to achieve my desires at any cost."
 - c. *Pastoring Community*- "I have trouble loving those around me because I need to be loved."
 - d. *Creative Challenges*- "My creativity is stunted because I'm worried about my peers, critics, or customer."
6. What has been your experience trying to understand the notion of Sabbath rest? How does Sabbath rest help us avoid the extremes of overwork & underwork? What relationship does Sabbath rest have to our dignity as images of God?

11 Then the devil left him, and behold, angels came and were ministering to him. (Matthew 4:11 ESV)

Over the past three weeks we have been following Jesus as he wandered in the wilderness, both to be tempted by the devil and to emerge on the other side as the obedient Israel. The devil has been baffled in all his attempts and must, for a time, leave the field of battle. Jesus was alone in the time of his temptation; but in his victory, he is attended by the host of heaven.

In a way, it is as if Jesus had entered a Sabbath rest at the end of his wilderness journey. Resisting temptation is arduous work. Anyone who says differently never really has been tempted. And so, coupled with the physical exhaustion of forty days of fasting in the desert, Jesus also bore the spiritual and emotional exhaustion of resisting every kind of temptation.

It was in the full context of that exhaustion at the end of battle that the heavenly attendants came to Jesus. Matthew Henry wrote that the angels were ministering to him "For his encouragement to go on in his undertaking, that he might see the powers of heaven siding with him, when he saw the powers of hell set against him." The task at hand was complete. Jesus had worked the thorny ground to bring forth bread, and now he could rest and prepare for the hard road ahead that would lead to the cross.

It is in his rest that we find our own rest, however brief that rest may be. As we wage war against our own temptation, we are reminded that there is no temptation that comes to us that Christ has not defeated. If we are in Christ, all of heaven is on our side even though all of hell should stand against us.

We stand here at the midpoint of the season of Lent. The wilderness road lies behind us; the road to Calvary lies before us. Temptation, when defeated, leads to the death of the self at the cross. The death of the self at the cross leads to resurrection in Christ. And resurrection in Christ is the full and final Sabbath rest. As our Lenten journey continues, may we find encouragement that our Messiah knew both the suffering of temptation and the comfort of rest.

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"It is not until we speak of "a beloved country"-a particular country, particularly loved-that the question about ways of use will arise. It arises because, loving our country, we see where we are, and we see that present ways of use are not adequate. They are not adequate because such local cultures as we once had have been stunted and destroyed. As a nation, we have attempted to substitute the concepts of "land use," "agribusiness," "development" and the like for the culture of stewardship and husbandry."

Wendell Berry
What Are People For?