

Title: Work and Rest for the glory of God
Text: Exodus 31.1-18
Theme: God's great plan for life and worship
Series: Exodus #47
Prop Stmtnt: What can happen when God's people trust God so much that they follow his plans from the heart.

Read Text:

Intro. – Recovering a God-centered view of all things

Today is Reformation Sunday. It was in October of 1517, that a Roman Catholic priest in Wittenburg, Germany, by the name of Martin Luther, publicly posted 95 points of disagreement that he had with the official state church. The reason for posting these on the castle door was to start a debate in order to determine what the Bible really said about some of these topics such as: justification by faith alone, the selling of indulgences and the teaching about purgatory. Luther's public challenge was certainly not the only factor in the movement that was associated with his name, but the public discussion, sermons and lectures about these topics were originally given by Luther and others in hopes that it would lead to a reforming of the official church. Instead, it led to a split, because those who recovered the gospel were at odds with the official position of the state church. In the ensuing years, Luther's Lutheran movement in Germany and Calvin's Reformed church in Switzerland, and the Puritan movement in England were all part of the historical foundation and heritage upon which we stand. Our doctrinal statement was influence by the New Hampshire Confession of Faith, which was influenced by the 1689 2nd London Confession of Faith, which was a slightly modified version of the Westminster Confession of Faith. We can trace our theological roots right back to these great works and the wonderful gospel-loving theologians whom God used to craft them.

The Reformation was first and foremost a recovery of the gospel. But, since the official state church had lost the gospel (which was the most important), it had lost many other things as well. Therefore, when the gospel was recovered, there were many other things that were also recovered. One of those recoveries was the teaching known as the priesthood of every believer. That is, there is no such thing as a professional class of Christians who possess all of the secrets and through whom you have to go in order to be able to have your sins forgiven. Every person who has come to faith in Christ now has direct access to God through Christ and does not go through a priest. This teaching was part of a larger issue that separated not only the clergy from the laity, but it constructed a huge wall of separation between the secular and the sacred. The holy people were those who were devoted exclusively to God while everyone else was merely common or profane. The impression that was given was that the common people were supposed to do just common, ordinary and earthy things, like working, getting married, raising families while the upper class of believers would do the more holy things like figuring out all of the secrets of the church and controlling everyone else. The result of that, for example was that the common person did not read the Bible himself. It was only read for him in church. He could not be trusted with such holy things. People were told basically,

“Don’t try this at home – you could hurt someone.” Just come to church and we’ll tell you what to say, when to stand, and what to think. Well, the reformation (and providentially along with the enlightenment) helped change much of that. The printing press was invented and now the Bible became available and education became encouraged by the reformers so that the people could read. So now they could have a Bible and they could read the Bible and know the gospel. The recovery of the gospel along with the recovery of the Word brought about a recovery of a God-centered view of life. Instead of viewing life as being separated into the holy and the profane; now people began to understand that for the believer, everything is holy. So that whether you are eating or drinking or whatever you are doing, you are to do that to the glory of God. For the follower of Christ, the daily activities of life take on a gospel-view. Luther used to champion this truth; that it is just as holy to preach the gospel as it is to flip burgers at McDonalds if you are doing it to the glory of God.

God made us and God made all things. Therefore, God made us to have a God-made and a God-centered view of all things. So, what does it mean to have a God-made and God-centered view of all things? It means that we are to see all of creation, and all of mankind’s creative abilities as having originally been given to us by God in order to put him on display by extolling his many attributes. We are to see all people and all things as a means to put God on display. And I believe that is precisely what is going on in Exodus 31. God has given to Moses all of the instructions for the tabernacle. Now, Moses is told that God has prepared the craftsmen for this sacred task. Bezalel is described by God as having been “filled ... with the Spirit of God, with skill, ability, and knowledge in all kinds of crafts – to make artistic designs for work in gold, silver and bronze, to cut and set stones, to work in wood, and to engage in all kinds of craftsmanship.”

This is what I find so fascinating. In the ancient world, and in many places of our world, life is divided up into compartments and there are gods assigned for each of those compartments. There is the god of weather, the god of fertility, the god of the seas, the god of the land, the god of the mountains, the god of the valley, the god of work, the god of war, the god of peace, the sun god, the moon god, etc. The Hindu religion has millions of gods. Remember that the children of Israel were coming out of a polytheistic culture in Egypt and were learning that there is only one God. This God is the God over everything and involved in everything. The tabernacle was designed to sit in the middle of the people, because God was to be seen as the center of all. The tabernacle was a reflection of the garden of Eden, when the human race (2 people) lived before the face of God and enjoyed him daily. The tabernacle as a microcosm of the universe looked forward, to not only Christ and the church, but ultimately to the new creation, when the people of God will live forever with a God-centered view of all things. While, we do not have quite the polytheistic background, we have an equally pagan setting that seeks to ignore the reality of God in all things. We do not realize how influenced we are by our surroundings. Just as Israel brought their polytheistic thinking with them, which as we will see next week was an enormous problem, we bring our culture’s pagan ideas with us into our view of Christianity. For example we are raised surrounded with consumerism. We are consumers. We consume goods and services. We demand that everything be

made our way and on our schedule, after all the consumer is king – right? Actually that is not right, only God is king, but when you grow up as a consumer, surrounded by advertising, you fail to realize that. Take food as an example. We are food consumers.

Have you ever noticed how much emphasis God places upon food? God created us in such a way that we are dependent upon food. The first and last chapters of the Bible talk about food. The fall of the human race into sin involved food. The Passover meal and the institution of the ordinance of communion involved food. Jesus turned water into wine, fed thousands of people with a bit of bread and fish, etc. And to be sure, there are people, particularly in our culture who abuse food. In some cases, people rely upon the pleasure of food as their God. They deal with problems by turning to food. I will often joke that I have never met a problem that a good bowl of ice cream does not help. I don't really mean that. Food is not God and is not our Savior. However, neither is food evil. A God-centered view of all things helps us to see that food is a gift from God that is designed to help us enjoy him. In *Ratatouille*, (a movie about a rat who wants to be a chef), Remy's (the main character) father captures the thoughts of many when he says, "Food is fuel. You get picky about what you put in the tank, your engine is gonna die." But Paul says, "Whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do all to the glory of God." (1 Cor. 10.31) How do you eat to the glory of God? In our consumerist culture we often see food as something to simply consume in order to keep us going so that we can get our work done, get our deals made, get our tasks accomplished, earn our pay, so that we can get what we want out of life. We consume food so that we have energy to earn more money so that we can consume more. Hold the phone? How does that square with eating to the glory of God? Does it really matter? Does God really care about how we eat or what we eat? I say Yes!!! In this text, God cares so much about craftsmanship and artistry that the Spirit of God fills men to work with metals and material, wood and stones and to be able to do designs for his tabernacle. It was all part of this pattern to see that God is at the center of all. Workmanship is for God. Eating is for God. Resting is for God. The craftsman, the artist, the leader, the priest – all serve for the glory of God. Life is for God. Robert Farrar Capon wrote, "To be sure, food keeps us alive, but that is only its smallest and most temporary work. Its eternal purpose is to furnish our sensibilities against the day when we shall sit down at the heavenly banquet and see how gracious the Lord is. Nourishment is only for a while; what we shall need forever is taste." There is nothing common or ordinary about your life. Everything that you do – even eating and drinking has an eternal purpose to it; and is to be enjoyed, not consumed; appreciated, but not worshiped.

We need a reformation. We need a recovery of the gospel. That is we need a recovery of the God-centeredness of the gospel so that we can see the God-centeredness of all things including labor.

1. God values skilled workers and is worthy of our finest God-dependent efforts. (1-11)

Does this make sense to you? Relationships, work, play, rest are all from God and to be done for God. God created the entire universe in 7 days. He certainly did not need

Bezalel and Oholiab and the rest of the craftsmen to make the Tabernacle. God did not need them, but God called them, gave them instructions, gave them the ability and gave them the job. God did not look around heaven and realize he was out of gold, silver, bronze, and acacia wood so he needed to take an offering. God commands even what he does not need because this was all part of his grace to allow his children to experience his pleasure and to put him on display. God is the master craftsman and greatest giver and here is a way we can experience the pleasure of him. It is also interesting to note that God gave these men and their craftsmen skills that God did not give to Moses and Aaron. This had to be a team project. God does not gift people equally with the same abilities, but he does place upon all of his people the responsibility for the whole. By means of their labor these men were able to magnify God in a profound way. They were given an opportunity to build something that would stand as a testimony of the fame of God for the nations. What kind of a God do you serve? We serve a God who is holy. We serve a God who is righteous. We serve a God who is powerful. We serve a God who lives with his people. But how can this be? How can a holy and righteous God live with such sinful people. The answer is put on display in the tabernacle. We serve a God who made a way to be able to live with his people by providing a sacrifice for our sins. We serve a God who is excellent. We serve a God who is perfect. We serve a God who is immanent and is intricately involved in every detail of life and this same God is transcendent and governs the entire universe. Inside this little room, is the God who is holding this entire universe together, and who has ordained and controls the solar systems and the flight patterns of comets. And here is Bezalel and Oholiab and their craftsmen making designs and pieces of furniture and material in such a way that it reflects all of that. That is how you and I are supposed to work. We are supposed to do our work in such a way that it reflects the excellency of God! This is a foretaste of Pentecost and a foretaste of glory – that is, people who work and live together in such a way that everyone can see what God originally created the world to be and will one day become.

By the way, when God informs Moses that Bezalel and Oholiab were set apart for this task, I do not take that to mean that these two guys were lazy slobs, who in one moment were transformed into skilled craftsmen. Just as Moses was educated in the finest school of his day in preparation for his calling as leader of this nation and human author of the first five books of the Bible, I believe that Bezalel and Oholiab had spent years learning their skills and honing their abilities, which was ordained by God to be used for this glorious purpose. For those of you in school, in college, in trades preparation; your training is NOT so that you can become skillful so that you are successful and compensated so that you become a bigger consumer. NO, NO, NO, your training is so that you can reflect a God-centered view of all things, particularly in your work in such a way that you reflect even the perfections of God by your insistence on things being done right and your devotion to quality and integrity.

This was for the Lord. He called for the finest materials and for the finest craftsmen. The children of Israel were living in the middle of their world for the purpose of providing their world with a picture of what the people of God looked like. They were there in order to be an advertisement to the world of what all of creation was supposed to be like. The rest of the story of the Old Testament is the story of their failure to do that.

Read the history of Israel as recorded in 1 Chronicles and you see a phrase that is repeated; “they broke faith”. What they failed to do, God raised us up to do. But rather than concentrate all of his people in one place, he spread us all over the world in order to show the entire earth what is in store for the world when he redeems all things and puts all things back in order. We are here to show the world what God created people for and what he redeems people to become. We are an advertising campaign for a God-centered view of all things and a God-centered existence. Now, how does that work here in Detroit?

As believers, we have to divorce work from consumerism. We are worshippers not consumers. We are not here to consume and live for ourselves, we are here to put God on display in all things. Therefore, we work, primarily not so that we get things. We work to reflect God. If you are an accountant preparing tax returns, a teacher in a classroom, an electrician, a linesman, a housekeeper, or mechanic, your effort should be exemplary and you should always pursue greater skill.

How do you explain that in less than 150 years, this country became the dominant world power? I maintain that it goes all the way back to the Puritans who helped settle in New England and brought with them a God-centered view of all things, including work. It became known as the Protestant work ethic. But what is an ethic? It is a moral value. The Protestant work ethic, was a God-centered, gospel-based view of work reflected in hard work, quality and proper rest. The result was material blessing. And instead of being worshippers, we became consumers. Now, we worship the gifts instead of the giver and we fight for the power to consume, because we love things and we use God and we use people only as a means to get more things. I am sickened when I hear the stories of management who because people are so desperate for jobs see this current situation as an opportunity to squeeze the life out of every worker until nothing is left, and then kick them to the curb because someone else is always there to take their place. I am also sickened when I hear the stories of workers who deliberately sabotage their work and punish those who work harder than they do, in order to protect and preserve incompetence and laziness. I expect the world to live like that. But we are the people of God. Management is called to reflect the shepherding and leadership character of God and workers are to reflect the excellence, thoroughness and honesty of God in their labor. Bezalel and Oholiab make it clear that God is worthy of skill, artistry, and diligence.

Do you have a God-centered view of work?

How can you work in such a way that you are putting the multi-faceted attributes of God on display?

But the rest of the chapter makes another point related to this one.

2. **Work for God is always done in obedience to God.** (12-17)

Why are the instructions about the Sabbath repeated here? I believe that God repeated these for Israel so they would know that even the construction of the tabernacle, as important as that was, was not to be done on the Sabbath. God’s work has to be done

God's way to receive God's blessing. Even work that is done for God has to be done in obedience to God. Here is the tension. God allows us the privilege of participating with him in his work, not because he needs us, because he has graciously allowed us to be able to join him. However, because we are so prone to self-centeredness, it is so easy for us to think that I am the only one who can do this job. God needs me. God has to have me. And "for God" we can work, work, work and not rest because if we do not do it, the job will not get done. The construction of the tabernacle may have gone faster if they worked seven days a week, but it would have been a very denial of the purpose of it.

God commanded his people to rest so they could stop from their God-centered labor and enjoy a God-centered rest, and God-centered relationships. A dad in our church was talking with one of our elders a few days ago. The elder said, "I haven't seen you around that much lately." And the dad said that he was working seven days a week, and figured that if he did this for about 3 more years, then he would finally get to where he wanted to be and could slow down a bit. The elder said, "three more years?" That's just in time for your kid to go off to college. Hey dad, hey mom, we're not consumers. We are worshippers. If we work instead of worship, we lose sight of what our very lives are about.

Conclusion: (3 points)

1. What does this have to do with Christ?

Bezalel and Oholiab were skilled craftsmen who worked with their hands to produce things of such excellence that they reflected the glory God. Christ did the same thing. When he turned water into wine, the wine was so good, that the master of the banquet was surprised thinking that the host had saved the best to last. Everything that Christ does, he does well. And you are part of his work. Isn't that encouraging? And of course everything that he did, he did in obedience to the Father. He came to establish his kingdom and Satan promised cooperation and capitulation if Christ would take a short-cut. But Christ would not and he fully and completely obeyed his Father's mission all the way to the cross. All of the items in the tabernacle that the craftsmen made were done to point to Christ and his life and death on the cross. Christ had to complete his mission without cutting corners or taking the easy road. He went the hard way. He went the long way. He went the right way – for you. When you come to faith in Christ, you become part of his people, his nation. That means that you are part of the battle. We are like the underground resistance working to build the people of God in preparation for the Return of the King. The way we love, forgive, work, and do every thing is to show people what that will be like. God has decreed it. Christ is accomplishing it. We participate!

2. What can we learn about the church?

God gave jobs to more people than Moses and Aaron.

3. What should we do about this?

Do your work as worship, but do not worship your work, neither think that your worship is based on your work. Remember that work for God should never replace the enjoyment of God. So, with that in mind, work for the Lord this week in whatever job that you have, do it with excellence unto him, remembering that today, you/we are the tabernacle of God. We are the living stones in which he lives. You are holy, set apart to put him on display and make him known. You need to think as a priest, and as a part of the tabernacle this week. How do you do that? Be in the Word! The reformation helped recover the Bible for everyone. What some of these people died for is neglected by many of you. Let's make this week a week of the Word. Read the Word, so that you think the Word, so that you live the Word.

1 Peter 2.1-10