

Scripture Reading: Ephesians 6:5 “Bondservants, be obedient to those who are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in sincerity of heart, as to Christ; 6 not with eyeservice, as men-pleasers, but as bondservants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart, 7 with goodwill doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men, 8 knowing that whatever good anyone does, he will receive the same from the Lord, whether he is a slave or free. 9 And you, masters, do the same things to them, giving up threatening, knowing that your own Master also is in heaven, and there is no partiality with Him.”

"The Importance of Vocation and Dominion"

This morning we come to the final set of instructions from the Apostle Paul that are all to be seen as part of submitting to one another in the fear of God and as practices reflected in the Creation order that we find in Genesis. This has not been a good month for California, nor for our nation and as I pointed out as we began to consider all these instructions some months ago...

- **The solution to these problems can only be found in the obedience of God’s people when it comes to men & women, husbands & wives, children & parents and now slaves and masters, or employees and employers in our modern world.**

To drive this home, I plan to conclude this morning with the instructions that the Prophet Jerimiah sent to the captives during their exile in Babylon as an example of how God wants us to respond to such trials: I trust you will see how similar they are.

Having seen Jerusalem destroyed and now captives in Babylon, I am sure they thought their state was pretty desperate. Some may have thought, ‘What is God thinking’ when all He did was send practical advice about planting fields & vineyards, getting married and having children: How could that possibly be the right way back from the mess they made?

- **Having the benefit of history, we can be encouraged as we consider these lessons in light of our current state of affairs!**

We know that wicked Babylon, along with all the other mighty Gentile nations mentioned in Daniel chapter two are now in the dust bin of history.

- **And we know that God’s people did return to their land, God used them to bring forth His Messiah at His appointed time and now know it is His Kingdom filling all the earth!**

So, returning to our text, we are left this morning to consider what is often called vocation...

- **First we must remember that our vocation, our calling to work is rooted deeply in the dominion mandate...**

Work is NOT a part of the fall...

- **But rather it is one of the major areas where we bring glory to God!**

This does not mean that the fall of man into sin has not affected work:

It surely has: just as man’s sin stains our relationships, our own individual lives and even the creation around us. There is now an unnatural element of toil in our work, and we struggle against the weeds that choke out and try to destroy the labor of our hands.

However, just as we don’t give up on marriage and love because sin will rear its ugly head at times...

- **So we should not disparage work and earning an honest living.**

So we should be greatly encouraged when we read in Genesis one that, “God blessed them, and God said to them, “Be fruitful & multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over the fish of the sea, over the birds of the air, and over every living thing that moves on the earth.”

- A mandate repeated to Noah after the flood so we know it was not canceled by our fall into sin!

The concept of honest work is pictured as a blessing throughout the Old and New Testaments:

All of the laws given to God's people or wisdom found in Proverbs regarding our labor, honesty, property rights, and other economic principles are intended to help us do well in our vocations, so we can bring Glory to God. *[Mention tapes]*

We are told in Proverbs to look to the ant as an industrious creature for our example and to avoid the sluggard... Warnings given with some of the best images we have from Scripture...

- The man on his bed...
- The man afraid to go outside...
- The man who can't lift his hand...

So, we are called to be honest, hard-working and ready to provide for a family and to help the poor!

- What came to be known as The Protestant Work Ethic!

Here an important question is just how does one know what his calling will be?

- We are not stamped at birth with plumber or engineer on our forehead, and God has not given your Pastor a vocation list for the congregation.

It is very similar to the challenge of finding the right helpmeet that God intends for you to marry... **First & foremost, we must be trusting God!**

- He has given wisdom which we are to learn; rules we are to follow; and there are people God will bring into your life to help you make wise decisions!

For example, with marriage, despite what the world would like us to think today, you young men will have to marry a woman!

- And she has to be a Christian woman who loves God and has given her life to serving Jesus!

The same applies in finding a vocation that will provide for your family:

- You can't be a bank robber nor a burger flipper at McDonalds.

I think the bank-robber restriction is pretty self-explanatory...

But, I want to make sure you understand that I am not saying that all menial jobs that pay a very low wage are wrong.

They can often be how someone learns a trade and lead to better jobs!

- In fact if we get back to the Biblical concept of apprenticeship you might have a young man working for nothing for an extended period of time as he learns a trade!
[just imagine how many state and federal regulations you would be breaking by doing such a thing today!]

So our young men and boys are still left with some personal questions:

- What is God calling me to do... What will my vocation be?

There is no magic formula, but I have seen over the years some of the ways God often reveals such things...

To those who seek His guidance!

- First as you grow older you will see that you have talents in particular areas which are often tied to a love for doing certain things.

Someone who loves and understands animals could well grow up to be a very good veterinarian.

There may also be some areas where you have some restrictions in talent or even health *[tell my story]*

I mentioned that your talents might be tied to something that you love, but the two may not always go together:

- **Sometimes you may have a love for a certain thing, say wood-working, but find it difficult to do.**

Your love of that craft may cause you to work much harder than others who have more talent and thus you might well end up being the better carpenter.

- **If they have talent and love in a particular area, then I would heartily encourage a young person to pursue that area as a vocation.**

As you grow older the dreams you may have for a vocation & early training you have received must be matched with productive opportunities.

Your study of history may have given you a great love for buggy whips & you may have begun to make some as a hobby & found you are very good at it.

- **The problem with thinking about this as a vocation is the fact that the market for buggy whips has greatly diminished in the past hundred years!**

Matching you talents and your loves with a vocation where you will have an opportunity to work is where prayer & wisdom must have a greater role...

- **And it is very important for you to turn to the wisdom of others to help make the right decisions!**

And finally, as you grow older you encounter the need to have work...

This can come at a younger age if the family has need as was the case with many of the parents of my generation!

- **It will certainly be a reality once you are married and responsible to care and provide for your family.**

- **You may also have changing vocations over time *[my example]***

The goal should be to have all of these things come together...

- **To find a vocation that has you working in a job or business that meets the needs of your family while allowing you to do something that you are talented at and love doing.**

However, we must remember that the effects of the fall will still be felt even in these ideal circumstances:

- **You will toil at times, frustrated even by the work that you love.
There will be weeds, interruptions and conflicts that keep you from doing all you could do in this field.**
- **This is where we must learn that hard lesson about being anxious for nothing and to trust that God knows what He is doing in our lives!**

As I mentioned, there is much for us to learn about vocations in the Old Testament. In the New Testament, we see the great examples of Jesus who practiced as a carpenter, Peter & Andrew or John and James as fishermen, and the Apostle Paul as the tent-maker.

Along with these examples we find many instructions to servants and masters and the command for men to provide for their families.

And of course the Apostle Paul concludes his list of practical things in life with instructions for slaves and masters, telling both that they are to serve and lead as unto Jesus!

I mentioned the Protestant work ethic which has given us prosperity that the world has never seen...

But we must remember that it is not about just getting rich and having lots of stuff! It is remembering that we all submit to one another under the fear of God remembering that the Spirit of God is filling the earth with the Kingdom of Jesus. And as we have seen in all of these lessons, we each do our part as the Spirit takes history where he wants it to go.

- **Each of our vocations are vital to his work!**

Whether the woman making and caring for a home, a young laborer learning a trade or taking whatever work he may need to provide for his family or the President of a major corporation. None should think their part is too small, NOR should they think they are who is really important.

As I prepared this message I was reminded of a classic essay by Leonard Reade called, "I Pencil." It is usually used to study economics and to demonstrate why central planning has always failed where it is tried.

- **In parable like format, Mr. Reade has the pencil ask an interesting question which can help us to see the importance of ALL vocations!**

So here is a simple pencil, one of the 14 BILLION that will be made this year, and yes that is a big number: Laid end to end they would circle the world 62 times!

In his short essay, the pencil asks who can make him, [anyone here?] and then it makes an incredible assertion claiming that no single person on the face of this earth knows how to make one?

He has the pencil point out that in fact millions of human beings have had a hand in his creation, no one of whom even knows more than a very few of the others. *[discuss who is involved]*

The pencil points out that giving credit to all of them is not an extreme position. He stands by his claim saying, "There isn't a single person in all these millions, including the president of the pencil company, who contributes more than a tiny, infinitesimal bit of know-how. From the standpoint of know-how the only difference between the miner of graphite in Ceylon and the logger in Oregon is in the type of know-how. Neither the miner nor the logger can be dispensed with, any more than can the chemist at the factory or the worker in the oil field—paraffin being a by-product of petroleum."

- **The pencil then gives us something important to ponder when we consider the importance of our vocations:**

"Here is an astounding fact: Neither the worker in the oil field nor the chemist nor the digger of graphite or clay nor any who mans or makes the ships or trains or trucks nor the one who runs the machine that does the knurling on my bit of metal nor the president of the company performs his singular task because he wants me. Each one wants me less, perhaps, than does a child in the first grade.

Indeed, there are some among this vast multitude who never saw a pencil nor would they know how to use one. Their motivation is other than me. Perhaps it is something like this: Each of these millions sees that he can thus exchange his tiny know-how for the goods and services he needs or wants. I may or may not be among these items."

And here in Ephesians 6, the Apostle Paul challenges ALL of these various slaves & master to work as unto Jesus!

Stepping back we must see the Apostle's instructions and our general understanding of vocations in this light: If we are instructed about the Biblical work ethic and all do well in our various vocations there will be results, and God plans those result to bring Him glory!

- **We can think about it each week as we are instructed from God's Word and then commissioned to obey God's Word.**

We are given the Great Commission and as we each do our part the Great Commission is accomplished and man has dominion over all the earth in Christ as God intended from the beginning!

So with that in mind I want to turn as promised to the message that God sent via Jeremiah AND the King of Babylon to the captives in Babylon: Keeping in mind the various instructions the Apostle has given these past few weeks.

Jeremiah 29: “4 Thus says Jehovah of hosts, the God of Israel, to all who were carried away captive, whom I have caused to be carried away from Jerusalem to Babylon:” *[can our situation be any worse?]*

5 Build houses and dwell in them; plant gardens and eat their fruit. 6 Take wives and beget sons and daughters; and take wives for your sons and give your daughters to husbands, so that they may bear sons and daughters—that you may be increased there, and not diminished. *[mention negative view of children]*

7 And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to Jehovah for it; for in its peace you will have peace.

- **The letter then warns against false prophets, like some of the end-times madness we see today and then reminds us that despite the dire circumstances, God is still in control...**

10 For thus says Jehovah: After seventy years are completed at Babylon, I will visit you and perform My good word toward you, and cause you to return to this place. 11 For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says Jehovah, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope. 12 Then you will call upon Me and go and pray to Me, and I will listen to you. 13 And you will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart.”

We are to remember that God is in control and that He knows the end from the beginning and just where He wants His people to be at any point in history: Our job is to rightly submit to one another in the fear of God walking in the light as children of the light!

- **Remembering that whether we are slave or master, whether worker or boss, we are to work or manage as under Jesus!**

-- May we be those who hear & obey!

Communion Meditation: Zachariah 1

“18 Then I raised my eyes and looked, and there were four horns. 19 And I said to the angel who talked with me, What are these?” So he answered me, “These are the horns that have scattered Judah, Israel, and Jerusalem.” 20 Then the Lord showed me four craftsmen. 21 And I said, “What are these coming to do?” So he said, “These are the horns that scattered Judah, so that no one could lift up his head; but the craftsmen are coming to terrify them, to cast out the horns of the nations that lifted up their horn against the land of Judah to scatter it.””