

A CHRISTIAN CELEBRATION OF LABOUR DAY

Text: Matthew 22.34 - 40 (in pew Bible p. 980 / in large print Bible p. 1524)

Intro: -review of my work experience:

- snow shoveling, 3 summers on farm, Central Meat, Kitchener Printing, B.F.G.,
- pastor 2 churches, teach in 2 Bible colleges,
- Boehmers, pastor 3rd church, 16 yrs @ C.P.C.
- 6 years @ L.A.C.C.

-at different points in my life, I have benefitted from the labour laws and social gains made by trade unions.

- tomorrow I get a paid 8 hour holiday!!!

-history of Labour Day celebration *is interesting*:

- celebration of improved working conditions.
- 1st Labour Day rally held in Toronto on April 15, 1872 to protest the arrest of 24 union leaders who had argued: "Eight hours for work, eight hours for rest, and eight hours for recreation."
 - by end of that year Ottawa released the imprisoned union leaders.
 - ten years later the first Labour Day parade was held in New York City.

-as I worked to get ready for this worship service, I wondered if there was a special way for Christians to celebrate Labour Day.

-today's text helps us to understand how followers of Jesus can celebrate Labour Day:

- Jesus' teaching in Matthew places earthly labour in the context of God's kingdom.

-Ben Witherington III's new book *Work: A Kingdom Perspective on Labor* (Eerdmans, 2011) deals with the theological importance of our earthly jobs.

- Witherington points out that our main vocation is to love God supremely and to love others sincerely.
 - all ages: pre-employment, in the work force, and retirement.
 - all occupations: must support this major goal of the Kingdom.

Take Home Point:

-the work that we do in the world is connected to our witness as followers of Jesus.

- two helpful points for followers of Jesus to use as we celebrate Labour Day.

1. LOVE GOD SUPREME (v. 37)

-Jesus is quoting Deuteronomy 6.5 – part of the *shema*:

“Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one! You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deuteronomy 6.4, 5).

- basic and essential creed of Judaism.
 - this sentence opens every Jewish service.
 - first text that every Jewish child commits to memory.
- means that love for God:
 - dominates our emotions, directs our thoughts, and is the dynamic of our actions.

-loving God supremely is “job one” for all followers of Jesus.

-Christian work flows from “job one”:

- a necessary & meaningful task.
- that God calls and gifts a person to do.
- which glorifies God and helps others.
- foreshadows the new heavens & new earth.
 - all Christian work is a means of glorifying God.
 - e.g. Reformers priesthood of believers.
 - full-time Christian ministry is not superior to other vocations.
 - professions are not superior to the trades nor to home-makers.

-love God supremely in your work:

- influence of salt & light (Matthew 5.13):

You are the salt of the earth. But what good is salt if it has lost its flavor? Can you make it salty again? It will be thrown out and trampled underfoot as worthless.

- illust. B.F.G.
- Glorify God with your good works (Matthew 5.16):

In the same way, let your good deeds shine out for all to see, so that everyone will praise your heavenly Father.

- illust. South African magistrate

2. LOVE HUMANKIND SINCERELY (v. 39)

-second commandment which Jesus quotes - Leviticus 19.18:

You shall not take vengeance, nor bear any grudge against the children of your people, but you shall love your neighbor as yourself: I *am* the LORD (Leviticus 19.18).

- our love for God must result in *love for humankind*.
 - this proves *that we love God*.

If someone says, "I love God," and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? (1 John 4.20).

Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, *and* to keep oneself unspotted from the world (James 1.27).

-it is only when we love God that humankind *becomes loveable*.

- humankind is made in *the image of God* (Genesis 1.26, 27).

-without God's love:

- we can become angry at man *the unteachable*.
- we can become pessimistic about man *the unimprovable*.
- we can become callous toward man *the unchangeable*.

-illust. The Next three Days.

Do unto others as you would have them do unto you (Matthew 7.12).

And if you come to the state that, when [God's] inward consolation is withdrawn, you can move your heart to suffer still more, if God so wills – not considering it an injustice for you to suffer such great things, but acknowledging the justice of all My decisions – and still praise my holy Name, then you walk in the true way of peace and may hope without doubt to see Me face to face in everlasting joy in the kingdom of heaven (Thomas A Kempis in *The Imitation Of Christ*. New York: Catholic Book Publishing Corporation, 1993, p. 152).

Conclusion:

1. Know what God wants.

-we are called as followers of Jesus to love God supremely and to love others sincerely.

- all the Law and the Prophets “hang” on these two commandments (v. 40).
 - stand together – one without the other is impossible.

-the work that we do in the world is connected to our witness as followers of Jesus.

- **illust.** Leaf by Niggle.

-our main vocation is to love God supremely and to love others sincerely.

- not optional – our calling is connected to the work we do in the world.
- this is how followers of Jesus celebrate Labour Day - do your work well.

2. Know how to do what God wants.

-work on eternity.

- it is our honour to make disciples of all nations.
 - love humankind sincerely.

Through Christ, God has given us the privilege and authority as apostles to tell Gentiles everywhere what God has done for them, so that they will believe and obey him, bringing glory to his name (Romans 1.5).

-work of God.

- read, know, and do the Word of God.

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent” (John 6.29).

-work as good stewards in the church & the market.

Moreover it is required in stewards that one be found faithful (1 Corinthians 4.2).

-work consistently in the church & the market.

So take a new grip with your tired hands and strengthen your weak knees. ¹³ Mark out a straight path for your feet so that those who are weak and lame will not fall but become strong (Hebrews 12.12, 13).

-work in the church & the market only after you’ve rested in Jesus.

Then Jesus said, “Come to me, all of you who are weary and carry heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you. Let me teach you, because I am humble and gentle at heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy to bear, and the burden I give you is light” (Matthew 11.28 - 30).

3. Know that you will do it.

-**Closing Hymn:** #452 Make Me A Blessing (all verses).

The Next three Days

The Next Three Days is a 2010 movie, starring Russell Crowe & Elizabeth Banks. In it, Lara Brennan (i.e. Banks) is arrested for murdering her boss with whom she had an argument. It seems she was seen leaving the scene of the crime and her fingerprints were on the murder weapon. Her husband, John (i.e. Crowe) would spend the next few years trying to get her released, but there's no evidence that negates the evidence against her. And when the strain of being separated from her family, especially her son, gets to her, John decides to break her out. So he does a lot of research to find a way.

Dilemma = shooting drug dealers for money or leaving wife in prison for life.

Leaf by Niggle

A long time ago, J.R.R. Tolkien, of *Lord Of The Rings* fame, wrote a short story called *Leaf By Niggle*. Niggle was an artist who lived in a society that did not much value art. He labored on a canvas of a great Tree with a forest in the background. He invested each and every leaf of his tree with obsessive attention to detail, making every leaf uniquely beautiful.

However, various chores and inconveniences kept Niggle from finishing the painting to his satisfaction. His next door neighbor, a lame gardener named Parish, always barged in whining about the help he needed with his garden. Parish's wife was ill and honestly needed help. So Niggle, having a good heart, takes time away from his vision of the Tree to help.

Niggle caught a chill doing errands for Parish in the rain and is forced to go on a trip that he cannot get out of. He unfortunately ends up on a kind of an institution, in which he must perform menial labour each day. Finally, he is paroled from the institution but dies with his masterpiece unfinished.

When he was called out of this life, he discovered that the leaves he was painting were embedded in the forests, mountains, and streams of heaven. Tolkien's story about vocation perfectly expresses the Bible's teaching that a worthy vocation contributes not only to our own financial well-being but to new creation (cited in Scot McKnight "Working On Eternity" in *Christianity Today*, June 2011, p. 71).