

# Septuagesima

*And the LORD God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.*

From the beginning of the world, mankind has been arguing about relationship between good works and salvation.

Some argue that by working, we earn our way into heaven.

Others argue that working is not necessary to live a godly life.

Both are wrong.

If only we would pay attention to these opening verses of the Bible.

For here, the matter is so simply stated that it brooks no confusion.

Here, before sin ever entered into the world, God put man into the garden to work.

The implications of this verse are enormous.

First, it makes clear that works were not a pre-condition of entry into paradise.

Adam and Eve didn't earn their way into the garden by working.

They were simply put there by God--and by God alone.

So much for working your way to heaven.

But this verse makes equally clear that heaven is not some eternal sitting-room.

God created Adam and Eve not only to BE, but to DO.

Their existence is for a purpose. Likewise you are called to a place and a task.

And the task is not of your own choosing any more than your place is of your own choosing. But both place and task are given from God.

Given, I say, as in a gift not a penalty. Not a punishment. Not a curse.

Never forget that both place and task were given before sin--not as a result of it.

Therefore, work is not a curse. It is, rather, part and parcel of our life--not death!

To believe Christ, is also to believe this attitude toward work.

And, of course, unbelief holds and expresses just the opposite attitude.

And such unbelief is the aim of Satan.

Satan would have you see work in just the opposite way.

Rather than seeing it as God's gift to you--a gift of place and purpose.

He would have you see it as your gift to God.

"See what I have done? Now what will you give me in return?" Nonsense!

Because we have fallen into sin and death, such a statement seems to make sense.

But you can easily see the folly of it when you place it into the mouth of Adam.

After God created the garden and put him in it to till it, will they now say, "What will you give me if I till it? Some allowance, perhaps?!"

It makes even less sense after the fall.

For part of their punishment was to be driven out of the place.

"God drove out the man; and he placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life.

Will we now bargain with God and say, "What will you give me if I go back in?!"

So you see how topsy-turvy is our view of work?

And yet, the whole world thinks this way.

And so Jesus teaches you today: *"The kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard..."*

This is usually called "The Parable of the Vineyard Workers." But many would rather rename it as "The Parable of the Unjust Owner!"

This parable shatters our world-view.

Because our fall into sin is so complete, we can't even fathom that work is its own reward. That labor in the garden is its own gift.

Instead, Satan has convinced us that labor is laborious....an evil to be avoided

So instead of finding joy in serving our fellow man, we constantly ask: What's in it for me?

Or maybe we stick our toe in the sand and say, "No one has hired us."

Both sentences are ways of excusing yourself from the vineyard.

I mean, come on! With an employer so generous as to call you into the vineyard at the 11<sup>th</sup> hour, are you really going to say that he left you standing in the square.

Isn't it, rather, that you heard his invitation be failed to respond?

"I don't know what God wants me to do." That's one oft-heard excuse.

"Should I be in Zimbabwe doing medical-missionary work?"

"Or should I, perhaps, be looking for a cure for cancer?"

With such lofty dilemmas, we while away the time doing nothing.

Why not start by saying a kind word to your brother?

So, whether it is works righteousness or outright refusal to do the 10 Commands...

Or, whether your excuse is a feigned uncertainty and confusion...

The real problem is a heart that hates the place and task which is God's gift.

What you really need and desire is a completely new heart and attitude.

But until Jesus spoke, you didn't even know that you needed this.

Much less have you desired this.

So what is the solution? How can you learn again to love work when it has become all toil and sweat now that we are cast out of the garden?

The answer lies in Christ alone.

He loves the place and the task that God has given Him.

And that place is in your flesh.

The task is to sweat in the garden.

He worked the full day long--from the first hour trial before Pilate.

...to the third hour scourging and mocking.

...to the sixth hour nailing and hanging up a cross.

...to the ninth our darkness and forsakenness.

...to the eleventh hour death and burial...

Jesus took up His task with joy and vigor.

He earned the eternal wage -- a way back into the garden.

And so, He was taken from the cross and laid in a tomb in the garden.

And by entering again into the garden, Jesus brings you back in with Him.

All who believe on Him have a return into the garden of paradise.

All who believe on Him have a new heart and a new mind.

A heart and mind that once again sees your place and task as a gift from the crucified God.

A heart and mind that shares in the joy of Christ by loving your place and task.

A heart and mind of faith that you will receive the full eternal wage which has been won by Christ.

Whether you were first called into the vineyard years, months or only days ago.

For the certainty of your wage is found in Christ's full day and not in your own.

So also, the joy of your labor is Christ's joy and none other. AMEN.