

Wisdom of the Proverbs: Work and Diligence

Today we are looking at the subject of work and God's call to be diligent in whatever it is that God calls us to do.

In the beginning, when God created Adam and Eve, He gave them work to do and pronounced it to be good, very good. But then something went wrong. Adam and Eve made a decision that they would do life their way, not God's way. This decision led to death and alienation from God. As a consequence they experienced the curse of their fall from God's grace. One of those curses would be upon the work they would do.

God told Adam that the ground would be cursed because of his sin, and that it would only be through painful toil that his family would eat of its vegetation. The land would produce thorns and thistles and only by the sweat of Adam's brow would his family be able to eat food. (Gen. 3:17-19)

We who follow Adam still experience the effects of this curse. Studies today show that over half of the people in our country are not happy in their jobs. Their work is painful, full of thorns and thistles, and drenched in sweat, so to speak. Sometimes this is because it truly is not a good job but often times it is because of the way sin makes us discontent and think that if we just had a better job our life would be easier or have more meaning.

The Proverbs have much to say about the importance of work in our lives. The proverbs teach us that if we are sluggards and do not work then we will be stricken with poverty. They also teach us that we should not chase fantasies (winning the lotto) in order to meet our basic needs, but rather we should work in order to attain what we need in this life.

The illustration that Solomon uses in order to make his point is the illustration of an ant, perhaps the most industrious of all God's creatures in the animal kingdom. To observe ants building their kingdom is an amazing sight- the way they march in line from the place they are getting their stuff to the mounds they are building. I have seen some amazing mounds and tunnels in my yard throughout my life. Solomon says we should go to the ant and learn.

This morning as we think about work I want us to focus primarily on the most important work we could ever be involved in- the work of the Lord. And I want to do this mainly because of the new season we have just entered into as a new church in the Evangelical Covenant Order of Presbyterians.

The wonderful thing about the work of the Lord is that our Savior is always hiring. If you go for a job in his kingdom you will never get turned down. It is the desire of Jesus to redeem and restore everyone back into a right relationship with God through his work on the cross and then it is his desire to send you back into the world in order to be his worker so that God's plan to redeem the world may be fulfilled and carried out through your work in the Lord.

So when it comes to the work of the Lord there is never a hiring problem because the harvest has already been collected and the Savior is no longer taking applications. The problem is not that.

The problem- when it comes to the work of the Lord- is that the workers are so few. The harvest is plentiful as Jesus said, but few Christians and few churches are willing to do the work of the Lord. We get content and we get spiritually lazy.

The image that has been in my mind this past week is that of the Israelites exodus from slavery in Egypt during the time of Moses and their getting bogged down in the wilderness for 40 years.

In one sense our church has been released from a form of bondage in the PCUSA. A bondage of bad and ever eroding theological and ethical standards that did not represent this church and a bondage of bloated bureaucracy. We are now being released from that as we enter into ECO but now the danger lies that we could get lazy and wander in the wilderness and die.

Getting out of the PCUSA does not get us to the Promised Land, so to speak. Getting out of the PCUSA only gets us out of the PCUSA. The only way to get to the Promised Land is to do the work of the Lord. That's what we have to do.

This church will not automatically grow either in numbers or maturity just because we are now in ECO. Certainly I think our moving into ECO will help us by virtue of the fact that our denominational affiliation will no longer be an impediment in terms of representing us as a congregation. I also believe the Lord will honor the decision because we did make it in order to better align ourselves with the Word of God. But just because we got a new denominational logo on our sign does not mean that people are automatically going to flock to our congregation.

The only way for our church to grow in faith, maturity, and numbers is for us to do the work of the Lord. The Proverbs say that "he who works the land will have abundant food but he who chases fantasies lacks judgment." To think that ECO is going to make everything right at FPPC is to chase a fantasy. We must do the work of the Lord. If we will work the land we will get a crop, if we don't we won't.

One thing that ECO has encouraged all of her congregations to consider is to make sure that you are not just running from something but rather you are running to something. This seems to be the mistake that the Israelites made when they left Egypt. They were only focused on getting out of slavery and when they did they quit working and they got bogged down. They were not running to the Promised Land they were running away from Egypt.

Our church has done a lot of work these past three years in discerning issues regarding the PCUSA. In some ways it is a consuming and draining experience. Probably more draining than we might realize. And we definitely need some rest and renewal in the Lord. We need for the Lord to refresh us from the fatigue in this new beginning but at the same time we must get on with God's work. The mission was not completed last Tuesday. The mission just got started. Now we have been freed to go out into the fields and work the harvest. If we do it God will bless us with a crop.

But here's the kicker. We can't just do it so that we can get the crop. Growing our church can't be our goal; the goal must be doing the Lord's work and growing the Kingdom of God. If the motivation is right God will give us his share of the fruit but we must do the work for the right reasons. We can't do it for self-preservation or self-growth but rather for the glory of God, the love of the gospel, the love of the sinner, and the desire to obey our Lord.

The main thing that I would to encourage you to work on right now is you. You are the church, you are the body of Christ, not the building, and the church is only as strong as you are strong in the Lord. I would encourage you to pray with greater fervor that God would renew you and make you into a new creation in Christ. Pray that God's desires would become your desires. Pray for holiness in your life and always pray that God would show you your sin (which fouls up your relationship with the Lord) and help you to repent of attitudes and actions that do not honor God and His Word and do damage your relationship with the Lord. Pray that you would not quench the work of the Spirit in your life.

This fall I am going to do a Sunday night Bible Study on prayer. We will start after Labor Day. My prayer life has been growing in consistency as I have prepared for this study. I have been spending many mornings as of late on the back porch praying with fervor and consistency about things that the Lord would have us all to pray about. I am praying more with my wife. I am praying the Scriptures as I read through the whole Bible this year. God is speaking to me and in me in the Scriptures. Prayer is a conversation and I am hearing God speak to me in His Word. I am praying for those who are sick in the church. Praying for renewal in our church. Praying for the seven ECO churches and their pastors who are in our area. Praying for our elected leaders. Praying for my extended family. Praying for my neighbors on Forest Park Dr. Praying for my close friends. And praying for my extended family. I am praying for the world. I am specifically naming people, problems, and situations before God.

I do not say this to brag because truly my prayer life is still too weak and inconsistent but I say it to give testimony to some good work in the Lord that is taking place in my life. If we become a praying church and not just a church that prays I believe God can do great things in and through our ministry. The Lord can and will use us if we will do the work of prayer. Every other work the Lord will have us to do must be birthed from our life of prayer.

In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Amen.