

“Work” and “employment” are a big issue lately.

- You can't get your car fixed because there aren't enough mechanics;
- You can't get your house built because there aren't enough builders;
- You can't source the products you need because the factories can't get workers.
- Hospitals can't get enough nurses;
- Schools can't get enough teachers.

When it comes to work, our nation is at a place I've never seen it before. For most of **my** wage-earning life, the **unemployment rate has not been under 6%**, and for quite a number of years, it was over 10% and it almost made 11%.

The unemployment rate today is sitting at about 3.5%. And when unemployment gets that low, the only people who are **not** working, are either those who:

- **cannot** work (because of health issues etc); or
- do not **want** to work; or
- aren't willing to move to where there **is** work.

Employers are screaming out for workers – they just can't get them. And wages are climbing rapidly because workers are in short supply. And a good worker – you gotta pay him well to keep him. And because we're so short of workers, those who **do** work are working more hours than ever.

I've heard several news items over the last few months. Certain segments of the community and some unions are pushing to bring in a **4-day** working week so we can have a long-weekend every week; but workers **choose** to work long hours.

I couldn't find more recent data because it was all skewed by Covid, but in 2019:

- >19% of male employees worked 45-59 hours/week (these are not people looking for a 4-day working week); and
- nearly 9% worked over 60 hrs/week...

Now the thing is, some of us might be sitting here thinking, "60 hrs / week??? Ha. Wimps!!! Try 70hrs – that's what I work every week!!!"

In Australia, one of the most common greetings is: "How 'ya going? Busy?"

"Oh yeah, I'm busy alright..."

Who here was greeted in that way sometime during the week? It's become a badge of honour. – "Yeah, I'm busy."

A number of years ago, I decided to unpin that prideful badge of "I'm a harder worker than you". And from then on, whenever somebody would say "How 'ya going? Busy?" I'd answer "Only as busy as I want to be." And some folk don't know what to do with that because they're uncomfortable with any answer other than the expected prideful "Oh yeah, I'm busy alright."

Having said that, in any job, there **are** times when we do get busy. When I was farming, it's a normal thing, planting and harvest – you will be busy, but it's alright because it all evens out in the end. And even as a pastor, if I have a wedding or a funeral thrown into the mix of a normal week, I get busy. And

at those times my answer is “Yeah, I usually **try** not to be too busy, but I do have a lot on this week.”

But for some, it’s really hard, **not** be busy and for some it’s really hard to **not** wear that ticket of pride “Oh, I’m so busy”...

For some of us, it’s hard to **not** feel guilty because

- “There’s work that could be done and I’m not doing it”;
- or
- “I’ve actually got spare time at the moment... I should be **busy**.”

And if I’m not busy,

- are my mates going to think that I’m lazy because I’m **not** working today;
- is Dad going to think I’m a slacker because he didn’t bring me up to do nothing;
- Employees going to think I’m lazy – I’m the boss – I have to lead by example and work harder than anyone...

You know what, when a person approaches the end of their life, I **cannot** remember a time when someone has expressed to me:

- regrets that they didn’t spend more time working
- they wished they’d done more overtime;
- that they wished they had increased the size of their enterprise so that they could’ve been busier...

What **do** people regret?

- I didn’t spend more time with the family;

- I didn't take time out to enjoy the world that God created;
- I was always too busy for others when they needed me;
- I always kept myself too busy to serve God in the ways that I now wish I had...

But my task as a Bible teacher, is not to teach us about:

- sociology;
- statistics;
- Industrial Relations;
- regrets;
- how to find your best work/life balance

My task is to teach the word of God, because God's word clearly speaks into this major area of life.

So, the topic that is glaringly obvious in today's Bible reading is the Sabbath. So, let's talk about the Sabbath. Let's talk about resting from work.

BTW, I've heard quite a number of sermons with the topic, "On the 7th day you shall rest", and that's the message that many of us **need** to hear. But I haven't heard too many sermons given on "For 6 days you shall work". And maybe some need to hear **that** message. But I suspect more of us do need to be told to rest...

When God created the universe, He worked for 6 days, and on the 7th He rested. And so God blessed the 7th day **and made it holy**. The Lord sets the pattern right there in the first 2 chapters of Genesis (6 days of work; and a day of rest – a Holy day). But the first time a **commandment** is given in

relation to the Sabbath is after the enslaved people of Israel are led out of Egypt. They get hungry, and God gives them manna and quail to eat in the desert. And, on the 6th day they have to gather **twice** as much because they're not going to get any on the 7th.

And so the 2 things that the Sabbath reminds us of, is:

1. the creative work of God; and
2. the saving hand of God.

God rested on the 7th day – remember creationⁱ - keep that day holy for God.

God saved the Israelites from slaveryⁱⁱ. And as such, the Sabbath is a reminder that **we** are not slaves to work. And that's why in Mark's account of this same incident Jesus said **Mark 2:(ESV)27 ... , "The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath.** We should be no more slaves to the Sabbath than we are to work.

Now, in the Old Testament, the Sabbath was a sign of the covenantⁱⁱⁱ. It was a sign that "These are the people of God".

- Those people don't do any work on a Saturday.
- They rest and keep that day holy.
- They must be the People of God.

For **them**, it was the custom/tradition/Law/commandment of God to be obeyed. But Jesus is very clear: While the Sabbath **is** a commandment of God, the Sabbath is for us – it is not to rule over us.

To keep the Sabbath, is to keep it holy. The prophets of old preached against Israel because they profaned the Sabbath – they didn't keep it holy.

So, not having to work every day of the week, is a gift from God. Is that a gift we are thankful for? I hope so. God worked for 6 days, and on the 7th, he rested. Why is it then, that so many of us act as if we have the capacity to out-work God?

And it's not only the number of days we work – the **length** of days we work. The Lord regulated our days by giving us hours of light and hours of darkness. And yet, we want to work longer, and so we regularly start under lights and finish under lights.

It's as if we think, "Maybe God misjudged the length that a day should be."

BTW, we had a neighbour once, who would only employ workers in summer, because he paid them by the day, and in winter, the days were too short and he couldn't get enough work out of them.

But what drives us to work; and work; and work?

- Greed?– I want to earn more money, or I want to establish my business;
- Pride?– I can't leave things undone – it's not finished – I can't let my customers down – People can't be thinking I'm lazy;

- Or is it an expectation we're trying to live up to (real or perceived)?

Well, let me tell you, it's not God's expectation. And He **is** the only one Who matters.

- The Sabbath is a day of rest;
- The Sabbath is a day holy to the Lord;
- It's a day for worship;
- It's a day to enjoy fellowship.

And that's why it's no surprise that the early church began meeting on what they called "The Lord's Day" Sunday. You do know that the official Jewish Sabbath is a Saturday – it went from sundown on Friday through to sundown on Saturday. But throughout the world, most of the Christian church chooses Sunday as the day of rest.

And we're quite free to do that. The Apostle Paul tells us in Colossians that we have been made alive in Christ, and that our debt of sin has been cancelled, and that we are not to let asceticism trip us up (Asceticism is pedantic legal rule-keeping, just for the sake of rules). And he says:

Colossians 2:16-17 (ESV) ¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. (talking about the religious ceremonies and rules) ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the **substance belongs to Christ.**

So, the Sabbath is a gift, but sometimes it's used as a rule to oppress. (which brings us to our Bible reading)

I grew up on a wheat farm. So for me, around harvest time, nothing better than pull a few heads off, rub them out in your hands, blow the chaff out, and you're left with wheat. And I love chewing on fresh wheat. And if it's good hard, high protein stuff, it turns into a sorta chewing gum as you chew it.

And that's exactly what the disciples did. They just picked a few heads, rubbed them out, blew out the chaff and had a little snack... They weren't working – they were having a snack.

But by the man-made rules that the scribes and pharisees had built up around the sabbath, they had broken 3 rules. They:

- pulled the heads off the stalk – harvesting.
- rubbed the heads out in their hands – threshing.
- blew the husk out of it – winnowing.

They'd broken the rules – not God's rules – They'd broken the man-made **interpretation** of God's rules. **And** Jesus was also in strife for healing on the Sabbath.

When I was a minister in another church, one of my parishioners (a lovely man that I loved dearly) came to me and he was concerned because he'd seen me mowing my lawn on a Sunday and that I shouldn't be doing that, because it's work. And I explained to him that for me, mowing the lawn was relaxation. When I would spend my week in the office preparing; and visiting; and running church activities, getting out in the garden was my relaxation...

He disagreed.

When I was a teenager, after church, there was a bunch of us would go to the local primary school to have a hit of tennis. But there was one family who weren't allowed to do that, because "That was work."

Now, I could understand that if his kids were professional tennis players, making a living out of tennis, but it wasn't even fixtures – it was having a bit of a bash for fun...

That's just a couple of modern examples of how something that God gave us to be freeing, and to help us to enjoy life (as He designed it to be), gets twisted/legalised/weaponised to remove joy.

Let's come back to the Bible reading.

We're only up to chapter 6 of Luke, and the Scribes and the Pharisees are already starting to hate Jesus, and they're searching for evidence against Him. And they think they've got it:

"Your disciples have been harvesting, threshing and winnowing on the Sabbath – Guilty!!! Why do you do that???"

And Jesus' answer, is intriguing. Basically his reply is, "Well King David broke the law too."

What was Jesus' point? Was He saying "2 wrongs make a right"? No. Or was it an example of Case Law that had

become a precedent that applied in His situation too? Closer, but no.

What did David do?

David had been anointed as King, and he was having to flee Saul because Saul was trying to kill him. And David and his men were really hungry. They come to the priest at Nob and ask for some tucker. But the only tucker he had, was the holy bread in the tabernacle that gets replaced every few days. And because David and the men were ceremonially clean, he showed compassion and he let them eat it (even though by the letter of the Law, only the Levites {the priests} were allowed to eat it.)

So, when Jesus put that example before the Scribes and the Pharisees, they found themselves in a bit of a predicament. If they held the disciples as guilty (for having a snack in a wheat field on a Saturday), they would also be saying that King David and the priest were guilty.

Jesus was drawing on the example of the Priest's compassion to show that the Tabernacle – the holy place of God – had not been profaned... Likewise, the disciples rubbing out a bit of a snack, did not profane the Sabbath.

The Scribes and the Pharisees were experts in judgment, but in Jesus they met Godly compassion and a true desire for holiness.

And Jesus makes a statement (very important): **"The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath."**

That's a pretty big claim, and I don't know how the Scribes and Pharisees took that (it's probably one of the reasons they pursued His execution), but this is telling us 2 things:

1. That Jesus, the Son of God, is re-interpreting to us, the Sabbath, the way it was intended. We do **not** follow the rules of the Scribes and the Pharisees, because **The Son of Man is lord of the Sabbath.**
2. And I'm going to leave us hanging on the second point – because we're going to come back to that shortly.

Righto: Sabbath controversy:

- Jesus goes to a Synagogue;
- He's teaching there; And
- the Scribes and the Pharisees are watching carefully to see if He heals this man with a withered hand – They're looking for 'a gotcha moment'.

And Jesus knows their thoughts, and so He says to the man with the withered hand, "Come here". And with the very personal example of suffering, standing there before them, Jesus asks them a question:

is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm,,,,, to save life or to destroy it?"

If the purpose of the Sabbath is to keep it holy – to not profane the Sabbath, that's a very simple question:

is it lawful on the Sabbath to do good or to do harm – To do Good of course.

to save life or to destroy it?" – To save it of course.

The Son of Man, is re-interpreting to us, the Sabbath, the way it was intended. A day, not to be profaned by profiteering (of course), but also a day to enjoy; and to do good; and to give life...

How did the religious leaders react when the Lord of the Sabbath put them and their silly rules in place??? Well no surprises here: **they were filled with fury and discussed with one another what they might do to Jesus.**

And of course we know what it came to – what **did** they do to Jesus? Eventually they had Him crucified...

And this is where I want to pick up that 2nd point of what it means for Jesus to be the Lord of the Sabbath.

Colossians 2:16-17 (ESV) ¹⁶ Therefore let no one pass judgment on you in questions of food and drink, or with regard to a festival or a new moon or a Sabbath. (talking about the religious ceremonies and rules) ¹⁷ These are a shadow of the things to come, but the **substance belongs to Christ.**

How is the Sabbath, a shadow of things to come???

Hebrews 4:(ESV)⁹ So then, there remains a Sabbath rest for the people of God, ¹⁰ for whoever has

entered God's rest has also rested from his works as God did from his. ¹¹ Let us therefore strive to enter that rest, so that no one may fall by the same sort of disobedience.

The Sabbath rest, is resting from religious works – what Hebrews calls “dead works”^{iv}. We repent of Dead works.

BTW, Hebrews makes a distinction between “good works”^v (good thing) and “dead works” (bad thing).

Don't let anyone ever give you the message that doing good works is a form of legalism that denies the Gospel.

Rubbish!!! It's “**dead** works” – **religious** works that we are to leave behind.

Jesus died on the cross, to save us from our sin. No other sacrifice is going to do that for us. And so we rest from “dead works” – we rest from “religious works”. We don't try to get ourselves saved. Jesus did that on the cross.

And by faith and repentance, we enter the Sabbath rest, and we rest in Christ.

Our faith is in **Him**. Our confidence is in **Him**. There is no more work is required gain our salvation. Jesus has done it all. The work was done on the cross, and He is risen. We are now living in the 7th day – the day of rest.

That's why Jesus is Lord of the Sabbath. The Scribes and the Pharisees built up their own rules to enforce - - - what was only a shadow... But they missed the reality...

The Son of Man – Lord of the Sabbath, did His work of salvation, that we might rest...

When we repent and believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, we enter eternal life of rest – not just one day out of 7 – a permanent resting from dead works, alive in Him.

So, if the Sabbath was a shadow of the rest we now have in Christ Jesus – If the Sabbath Law has now been fulfilled in an age of grace, what now?

Well, Jesus is the Lord of the Sabbath. The command of God remains the same – Keep the Sabbath holy – Do not profane it. Jesus taught us that having a day off / week, is for our benefit – Why would we argue with that?. He also taught us to do good. He also taught us that it's not a legalistic rule – we're set free from that sort of asceticism...

But you know what? Something I've discovered, is that the Old Covenant Laws have a lot of wisdom that we disregard at our peril.

Psalm 127:2 (ESV)

² It is in vain that you rise up early
and go late to rest,
eating the bread of anxious toil;
for he gives to his beloved sleep.

God gives rest. It's our **vanity** that keeps us so busy.

“How Ya going? Busy?” – is like saying “How Ya going? Filled with vanity?” It’s empty/worthless to work and work and to not rest.

If our lifestyle, and the “standard of living to which we’ve become accustomed (or which we aspire to)” means that we have little or no time for:

- rest;
- relaxation;
- prayer;
- Worship
- doing good;
- fellowship

then there’s something fundamentally wrong with the lifestyle that we pursue.

It’s all in vain. It’s all worthless...

The Son of Man is Lord of the Sabbath.

- We rest from our dead works.
- We rest from our vain works. And
- every one of our days are to be Holy to the Lord.

It’s about the rest and the worship of the Saved.

Questions?

Let’s pray:

Heavenly Father,

much of what we do in life,

is vanity – it's pointless.

We thank You that through Your Son,
we enter the Sabbath rest,
where we rest from dead works.

We give you thanks for the forgiveness of sin
that comes in His Name.

And Lord, as we live day by day,
in this Sabbath rest,
Help us to discard all that is vain
- all that we strive to accomplish,
that is essentially meaningless.

Lord, help us to not only keep the **Sabbath Holy**,
but to live holy lives, every day of the week.

Give us wisdom, and a resolve
to prioritise our lives,
in a way that

- honours You
- does good;
- shows compassion; and
- is filled with worship

in the Name of Jesus,
the Son of Man,

who is Lord of the Sabbath.

Amen.

ⁱ Exodus 20:8-11

ⁱⁱ Deuteronomy 5:12-15

ⁱⁱⁱ Exodus 31:16

^{iv} Hebrews 6:1

^v Hebrews 10:24