

Welcome to the Sabbath. The title for today's sermon is *The Choice to Work*.

We recently took a trip to Florida, down to a place called St. George Island. It is in the panhandle or the gulf side of Florida, and anytime you are on a beach like that - well for myself anyways and for our family, because I know there are some that don't like it - but for us, we really enjoy it and there is just so much natural beauty there. I actually think it was rated the #3 beach in all of the U.S. So it's just really gorgeous, peaceful, relaxing, not a huge tourist spot, just very laid back, and so it was just really nice and we had a good trip down there, but there is also something kind of unique about that island and that is the fact that it is also one of the best places in the U.S. for stargazing. I believe it is 70 miles or so from the nearest metropolis and so the artificial light is very low there and every night the sky just lights up. The place we were staying had a nice little deck off the side of it where we could sit outside and try to take in all of the stars. I truly have never seen anything like it. It was just absolutely gorgeous and what was really cool about it was that you could actually see the Milky Way Galaxy. It is crazy to think about it, that you can actually see the galaxy that you are a part of. Wrap your mind around that one for a minute. But it is just this big cluster of stars that are so closely grouped together that it gives them an almost cloud-like, or milky, appearance. Actually, the first night we were there we thought they were clouds until we used one of those apps that allow you to see the constellations, and sure enough there it was.

But anyways the point of all this is just to say that anytime you find yourself gazing up at the stars - out into space - David always comes to mind and what he wrote in the Psalms when he said, "When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, The moon and the stars, which You have ordained, What is man that You are mindful of him, And the son of man that You visit him?" That is Psalms 8 verses 3 and 4 if you'd like to note it. But it's good from time to time to really just take a step back and go outside and look up and really just be in awe of God's creation. Sometimes it can be a bit overwhelming when you really consider all that is out there, the vastness of it all, and I think David was having one of those moments, of seeing how small and insignificant he was in the scheme of the things and so he asked, "What is man that you are mindful of him?" Well we know the answer to that and it is awesome and powerful and a tremendous blessing.

God says that the creation He is creating in us is far above any creation. That includes the physical creation as well as the angelic realm. Called to be Elohim! How awesome is that? What is a star, a galaxy, or the entire universe for that matter in comparison to the God family? There is no comparison. It doesn't stack up. Yet that is what we are being offered...truly amazing! But this is not something that will just naturally happen. God has to call us and open up our minds and

give us the ability to see and then we must WORK for what God is offering us. Not that we can “earn” it or obtain it by how well we do things, but it’s about wanting God and Jesus Christ living and dwelling within us. It’s about desiring to grow and conquer and overcome self and our sinful nature, and it is about producing fruit in our lives. And that takes work! There is no other way to produce fruit in our lives than to constantly be working in our spiritual lives and that means fighting and staying in the battle against self day-by-day-by-day-by-day. It never stops until the day you die. Well, I should say until your change takes place, because guess what? If you are resurrected in the 100 years, it is not a free pass - you still have to work!

So to begin today let’s turn over to Genesis 2 and we will read verses 1 to 3. We will be looking at a point in time when God completed an aspect of the physical creation, and in doing so He made possible the way for the spiritual creation. I for one, have the tendency in my thinking to concentrate more on the “spiritual” aspect of things, if you will, and I tend to minimize the physical side of it. But as is so often the case, these things go hand-in-hand, the physical with the spiritual. We often see this in prophecy where a physical act or event will point to a spiritual act or event in the future, but it is even more prevalent when you frame it in the context of working in our spiritual lives. So often, things in our physical lives can point to, or show, or reveal where we are in our spiritual lives. In other words, our physical lives can be the evidence, or the proof, of the work that is taking place in our spiritual lives and vice versa. It goes both ways. Our spiritual lives can also be the evidence, or proof, of the work that is taking place in our physical lives. So this example here in Genesis is one of a physical work that God was doing in order to complete a spiritual work. It was a necessary part of the process. You could not have one without the other.

So in **Genesis 2** and starting in **verse 1— Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.** So you go outside, look up at the stars, try to take it all in, and yet here it is summed up in one verse: **Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished.** There is so much that we don’t know, so much out there that we don’t understand about God and His creation. That is why the learning never stops; there is no end to understanding. The God family is truly a beginning in many ways.

And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. So we see here that God completed His physical work and then rested on the seventh day. But what’s awesome to understand is that God, when He sets out to bring about or accomplish something, it is as though it is already complete. There is no wondering with Him, there are no “ifs” with God. What He says will come to pass and it will happen exactly the way He wants it to. No more and no less. As human beings, we often refer to someone’s intentions. Well, his intentions were good, or she had the best intentions, and so on and so forth. And so we use this as a way to account for our shortcomings, but God does not have intentions; He has absolutes and for Him it is not about “what if” but it is about what is.

Verse 3—Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

So God's work is about creating Elohim, His family, and so at whatever point in time God decided this, before any creation, when He decided to bring about His family and the means by which He would accomplish it, it was done. God knows the end from the beginning. He may not choose to know every little detail along the way, but He knows of a certainty that His family will come about, that the work He is doing in us will be accomplished, because He is the one in control, but God is also showing us something here about the way He works, and the way He works in our lives, the physical with the spiritual. God is using a process to bring about His family, and that process starts with His physical creation and then, as a result of that creation along with the spiritual work that He does in us, His family will be accomplished. So in other words, the spiritual creation is dependent on the physical creation and in order to be accomplished, it requires both a physical work as well as a spiritual work. So I hope that makes sense to you. I think I know what I am trying to say, but I am not sure if I am conveying properly, but the point being that everything works together to bring about God's family.

So now let's turn to **John 5** and we will break into the middle of a story flow here. This is the account of Jesus Christ healing a man by the pool of Bethesda and after he had healed him he told him to take up his bed and walk. I think we are all familiar with this particular story, so let's pick it up in **verse 10— The Jews therefore said to him who was cured, "It is the Sabbath; it is not lawful for you to carry your bed."** He answered them, **"He who made me well said to me, 'Take up your bed and walk.'**" Then they asked him, **"Who is the Man who said to you, 'Take up your bed and walk'?"** But the one who was healed did not know who it was, for Jesus had withdrawn, a multitude being in *that* place. **Afterward Jesus found him in the temple, and said to him, "See, you have been made well. Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."**

So we see that Jesus charged the man saying, **"Sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon you."** Now, let's consider why would he say that to a man that he had just healed. Well, there are a couple of reasons. Number one is that he wanted the man to have a healthy fear of sin. It says that this man had a certain infirmity for 38 years. Can you imagine? Can you imagine having a debilitating illness for 38 years of your life and then all at once being healed? It is incredible and a tremendous blessing and one that should not be taken lightly. This individual should have been overflowing with gratitude and truly willing to do whatever was necessary to continue to receive that blessing of healing in his life and in order to continue to receive it he had some work to do. It wasn't just going to always be there. He had to want it and work for it. So we too should have a healthy fear of sin, of turning against God in our lives, and we too should have a want and a desire to work in our lives, to do whatever is necessary to receive what God is offering to us.

Secondly, by making this statement, Jesus Christ was laying before this man a choice. He could either go back to his same old way of life and continue to think and live like he always had, or he

could make changes in his life and begin to live better, to be productive, and to turn from sin. Either way there would be consequences. He could continue to receive the blessing of healing in his life, or he could go on to have an even worse illness than he did before, since as Jesus said, “lest a worse thing come upon you.” In the end, it comes down to the choices he makes and where he places the greater value... on the healing or on the sin.

So we know that this physical healing that took place pointed to a spiritual healing that would take place in the future...a healing of the mind. When God calls us and opens our minds to the truth He is laying before us an opportunity to be healed in the inner most parts of our being. He is laying before us the ability to choose His ways over our own carnal ways, to choose repentance over pride, to choose sacrifice over selfishness, and to choose healing over sickness because our minds are sick! They need to be cleansed from all of the filth and garbage and swill that we put into them and mostly they need to be cleansed of our stinking rotten pride, of thinking we know what is best for ourselves or for others. We really don't know anything! God Almighty knows how to mold and fashion and work with His people, with His creation. He made us, He knows what we need, but sometimes we think we know better. That's a mistake and one that we should fear to make.

So before God calls us we don't even have the ability, of and by ourselves, to choose healing. We are like the man by the pool; we can't even make it down to the water, but through our Passover and the great mercy that God has shown us we can be healed, not instantaneously like this man was, but over a lifetime of prayer and repentance and battling. And as far as God is concerned it is ours, eternal life, we just have to make the right choices, to stay in the fight, to want it, to desire it, and to work for it.

So continuing on in **verse 15— The man departed and told the Jews that it was Jesus who had made him well.** Obviously he had a healthy fear of the Jews and he was not too keen on the persecution he would face for breaking the Sabbath, as they saw it. He was all too quick to pass the blame onto Jesus Christ, rather than take the responsibility for his own actions. He was basically saying, “It's not my fault, blame this other guy for what I am doing!” You know, kind of like Adam when he said, “The woman, she gave it to me!” Mankind has always been the same. We seek to justify our actions and ourselves and we fail to take accountability for our own choices in life. There is always some reason, or some excuse or someone else to blame for what we do in life; it's sad really. We should be careful to not let the fear of the world outweigh our fear of God, to not let outside influences affect our thinking. You know, who is in control? But sometimes we let these things become bigger in our minds than they should be, and we can let down in a moment of weakness. We have heard before in sermons that we should be faithful until the end, no matter what, even if it means losing our lives. Well, that is most certainly my hope and desire and I yearn to have that mind and that spirit and that strength and that resolve. But I also know myself, so to sit here and pretend that it would be easy would be wrong on my part. I think of Peter and I think, “I am not better than Peter.” None of us are! And look what he did in a moment

The Choice to Work

of weakness, when the fear of losing his physical life outweighed his fear of God. Now he learned from that tremendously and grew from that tremendously and it taught him something about putting his life in God's hands. That is where we all should be in our thinking. "My life is in your hands, God. My life is yours to do with what you will." Just as we told him at baptism: "It is yours." And then we spend a lifetime trying to yield to and submit to that, but it is not easy and it is not meant to be. We get in the way! So I think of situations like this and I think, "Man, I wish had the resolve of Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego when they were being thrown into the furnace." You know? That is what we want - that mindset. We want to be able to say to God, "My life is in your hands. You are able to deliver me, and if not, so be it. My life is still in your hands." Anyways, I think I may have gotten a bit off track here. What this man did wasn't even a matter of sin, only according to the Jews and their interpretation of the law, but it helps to serve a purpose and to show a mindset that we must have.

So continuing on— **For this reason the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath. But Jesus answered them, "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."** So the Jews wanted to kill him for working on the Sabbath but Jesus answered them by saying, **"My Father has been working until now, and I have been working."** Well, they couldn't understand what he was talking about, they could only see physically and they wanted to kill him even more, not only for working on the Sabbath but also for making himself the son of God. But Jesus Christ was conveying something spiritual to them and he went on to say, "The son can do nothing of himself." He was letting them know that He was doing the works of God. It is like what we have been hearing recently in sermons, when Mr. Armstrong would say, "Get back of this thing!" Well, Jesus Christ was definitely in back of this thing, of the work that God was doing and the purpose God had given him in his life. His life was one of complete and total sacrifice to God and to His plan and to His people and he yielded and submitted to that work.

You know, something that I have learned through this sermon series on Mr. Armstrong is that my focus has been wrong. I have always thought, "Well, if we all just worry about ourselves, take care of what we need to take care of, and be willing to change and grow and conquer and overcome spiritually then everything else will fall into place." Well, that is true to a point, and we all must have that, but that is what everyone will come to in time, no matter what age or period of time that they lived in. So it wasn't until this sermon series that I really started to change and to shift my focus away from self and onto the Church and the work that is ahead of us in this end time. Not that I haven't always supported what the Church was doing, and sought to yield to the process and to sacrifice my time, my thoughts, my efforts for others, but if you can see it, that is still a focus on self. It's about me and what I can do and how I can grow spiritually in my life. It is much needed but it is also lacking. Our focus, our desire should be on the work that God is doing right now, in our lives, in His church, in this end time, through the books that have been written, through his two witnesses and the work that is set before them, and it is about preparing for God's kingdom. The world is getting ready to go through a mighty and much

The Choice to Work

needed transition and we are blessed to live in that time. So we have to be behind it, behind the work that God is doing and that requires work on our part. We have to be invested in this and take ownership of our calling, and realize that we have been brought into a church, a family and an opportunity. So if you are thankful for what you have been offered then respond to God in gratitude and work to continue to receive those blessings.

Okay, let's drop on down really quickly and pick up verse 36— **But I have greater witness than that of John, referring to John the Baptist, for the works which the Father hath given me to finish, the same works that I do, bear witness of me, that the Father hath sent me.**

So we see the symbiotic relationship of works with the witness, or evidence, or proof of God in our lives. Christ's works bare witness that he is from God just as our works must bare witness that we are of God. So how does this take place? How is this manifest in our lives? It can be in a number of ways, but in our spiritual lives it is about the fruit we are producing. The changes that we make in our lives are a result of the work that we are doing on a spiritual level and those changes, or fruit, are the witness, evidence, proof that God is working in our lives. But it is a choice. As Wayne Mathews would say, we have to "choose to desire" to work in our lives, and then we look to God to give us the ability to work because we cannot do it on our own.

So for our next set of scriptures let's turn to Mathew 25 and we will look at verses 14 - 30. This is the parable of the talents, as it is called, so I think we are all familiar with it. So **Mathew 25** and beginning in verse 14: **For *the kingdom of heaven is* like a man traveling to a far country, who called his own servants and delivered his goods to them. And to one he gave five talents, to another two, and to another one, to each according to his own ability; and immediately he went on a journey. Then he who had received the five talents went and traded with them, and made another five talents. And likewise he who *had received* two gained two more also. But he who had received one went and dug in the ground, and hid his lord's money. After a long time the lord of those servants came and settled accounts with them. So he who had received five talents came and brought five other talents, saying, "Lord, you delivered to me five talents; look, I have gained five more talents besides them." His lord said to him, "Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." He also who had received two talents came and said, "Lord, you delivered to me two talents; look, I have gained two more talents besides them." His lord said to him, "Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord." Then he who had received the one talent came and said, "Lord, I knew you to be a hard man, reaping where you have not sown, and gathering where you have not scattered seed. And I was afraid, and went and hid your talent in the ground. Look, *there* you have *what is yours*." But his lord answered and said to him, "You wicked and lazy servant, you knew that I reap where I have not sown, and gather where I have not scattered seed. So you ought to have deposited my money with the bankers, and at my coming I would have received**

The Choice to Work

back my own with interest. Therefore take the talent from him, and give *it* to him who has ten talents. For to everyone who has, more will be given, and he will have abundance; but from him who does not have, even what he has will be taken away. And cast the unprofitable servant into the outer darkness. There will be weeping and gnashing of teeth.”

There is so much in here that we can look to and learn from. It really is full of lessons, but let's start at the beginning. We see that the servants were given a different amount of talents to start with, each according to their own ability. We see that the ones to whom more was given, more was expected. We know that this is a spiritual principle that we can apply to our own lives, but we can even see this on a physical plane in terms of a workplace. Generally speaking, the employees who are given more, in terms of compensation, are asked or expected to produce more, or in other words, they have more work to do because they have been given the ability to do more work. In our own lives, this is about taking advantage of the opportunities God has placed before us. It is about serving God to whatever degree He asks of us, no more, no less. To do more would be to take on a prerogative that is not your own, and it would involve pride and a lifting up of the self. To do less would be to become lazy or slothful in our service toward God; it would reveal a lack of zeal and it would render us useless to God because God can't use that which is lukewarm, that which is unwilling to work.

The next point we will consider is that the same thing was said to each of the profitable servants, “Well *done*, good and faithful servant; you have been faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord.” So even though the first servant gained five talents and the second only gained two they were both given the same reward, because it is about making the most of what God has given to you. In this case five is not greater than two, they are equal, just as the spirit and attitude of these two servants are equal. They both had a right mindset and desire to serve God, to take what they had been given and work to increase it, to produce fruit, because they valued what was given to them. This is something I think we lose sight of sometimes within the church. We can create these little hierarchies in our heads of who we think is quote, unquote “better” than others, and that can be based on our own ideas of what we think is spiritual. But really, as with this example, we should understand that it comes down to our attitude and our desire to serve God to the best of our ability.

It is like we, the church, are all in one giant boat. That is, we are all heading in the same direction, moving toward the same goal, and we are all in this together. Everyone on the boat has a different job to do, some steer, some row, some scrub the deck etc., but we are all moving and functioning together as one, and the simple fact that we all have different roles or functions that we are performing does not mean that one is above another. On the contrary, no one is better than anyone else and we all have the same task before us of growing and fighting and conquering in our lives. I think this analogy is especially true when you put it in the context of the work of the church and the direction we are headed in this end time. We all have a part to play and the work we do in our individual lives lends to the collective work that we are doing as a church. The

ship must be well maintained and have a clear heading. So we should each be willing to contribute to this overall effort by doing our part and performing the work that God has set before us, and doing our part means that we recognize our flaws and weaknesses and try to change them, however, if you hold anyone in the church or in the ministry to a standard of perfection, you will find that all fall woefully short. But that is the point, isn't it? Striving for perfection, recognizing that we can't get there, striving for it anyway. And of course, we know that God works with imperfect instruments. We are human beings after all, subject to the flesh and carnal in thinking.

So let's move on now and turn to James 2 and we will look at verses 14 to 26. The purpose of going through this next set of scriptures is so that we can see the importance of working in our individual, spiritual lives. So **James 2** and beginning in **verse 14— What *does it* profit, my brethren, if someone says he has faith but does not have works? Can faith save him?** Well, the answer is no. We cannot be saved by faith alone. Many people have come along who would probably say that they have faith, that they believe the teachings of the church, but they are no longer here, no longer in fellowship, because they do not have works. Works are about the spiritual work that God is doing in our lives, and that is often manifest in how we are living in our physical lives, and it is this work that we must agree to, commit to, and take part in, in order to continue in this way of life. The purpose of working (laboring) is all about producing an increase (fruit) in our lives. Without work, there is no fruit. Without fruit, there is no evidence of growth. Without evidence of growth, there is stagnation, lethargy, and lukewarmness - all of which leads to a separation from God and His holy spirit. So true faith requires work, otherwise, it is a false faith and therefore a lie.

Continuing on: **If a brother or sister is naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you says to them, "Depart in peace, be warmed and filled," but you do not give them the things which are needed for the body, what *does it* profit? Thus also faith by itself, if it does not have works, is dead.** So this is about putting our words into action. Telling someone to be warm does not make them warm, giving them a coat makes them warm. The work is the actual giving of the coat and the fruit is the warmth it produces.

But someone will say, "You have faith, and I have works." Show me your faith without your works, and I will show you my faith by my works. So again it is about work. You are what you do, not what you say. Your actions reveal your true mindset and thinking. Your convictions and faith are revealed by the way you live your life.

You believe that there is one God. You do well. Even the demons believe—and tremble! Belief is not enough! It says the demons believe and tremble, but what good does it do them? None! So saying you believe but failing to work puts you in the same boat as the demons - in opposition to God!

But do you want to know, O foolish man, that faith without works is dead? Was not Abraham our father justified by works when he offered Isaac his son on the altar? Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect? That was a beautiful sentence. We should read it again, “Do you see that faith was working together with his works, and by works faith was made perfect?” So his faith was made perfect by his works. This entails that faith, of and by itself, is lacking, and in order to be made whole or complete it must be accompanied by works. It’s really awesome to see how this works together so seamlessly, truly, hand-in-hand.

And the Scripture was fulfilled which says, “Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness.” Because he acted on what he believed. He was tried and tested on a physical level in order to reveal where he was on a spiritual level. God brought him to that point of sacrificing Isaac to reveal to him what his true motives, intents, and beliefs were. It was to serve God, to put him first, and that’s precisely what he did.

And he was called the friend of God. You see then that a man is justified by works, and not by faith only. Likewise, was not Rahab the harlot also justified by works when she received the messengers and sent *them* out another way? For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also. So again, it’s not enough to just believe something, but it requires an action. Rahab acted upon what she believed and she was blessed because of it. Her actions revealed her intent. Her works revealed her faith.

Okay, moving on now let’s turn to Luke chapter 9 and we will see what kind of responsibilities we have when it comes to working in our lives. **Luke Chapter 9** and starting in **verse 57**— **Now it happened as they journeyed on the road, that someone said to Him, “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.”** That should be the end of it right there. That should be our mind and our focus at all times in our lives: “Lord, I will follow You wherever You go.” Do we say that on a daily basis to God and Jesus Christ? Or do we sometimes feel like the way is just too hard? Well, it’s a choice. We are either following God and the way of humility or we are following Satan and the way of self.

Going on: **And Jesus said to him, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has nowhere to lay His head.”** Then He said to another, **“Follow Me.”** But he said, **“Lord, let me first go and bury my father.”** So this guy wasn’t as eager as the first one. There was something holding him back and he hesitated a bit, but we cannot be hesitant when it comes to serving God. There will always, always, always be some reason or excuse of why not, or why we can’t, but how many reasons do we need to love and serve our loving and merciful heavenly Father? The one who made us and created us and gave us life to live and opened up our minds to the truth, how many reasons do we need to serve Him?

Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and preach the kingdom of God.” And another also said, “Lord, I will follow You, but let me first go *and* bid them farewell who are at my house.” Here’s another one, hesitating: “But Jesus said to him, “No one, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God.”

What a powerful statement! Jesus Christ is saying that once we begin this process, this work, there is no turning back! It never ends, not for one second. Rather, it is a journey, a lifetime of fighting and battling and conquering and overcoming that eventually leads to the transformation that we are all seeking. Putting the hand to the plow is all about working. It starts at baptism and it doesn’t end until we are in the God family and there can be no looking back. If we look back we are not fit for the kingdom of God! That is the example of Lot’s wife. She looked back and was made into a pillar of salt because instead of being focused on God and doing things exactly as He said, she looked back and yearned for what she was leaving behind. Well, that can’t be in God’s church. We have to continually be focused on God and moving forward and that can’t happen if we are looking back. To live this way of life we have to have a right focus and without that focus we will lose our way. This makes me think about different times when I have been walking around with a group of people. Well, maybe you are straggling along toward the back of the group and you aren’t really paying too much attention to what is going on, and maybe something catches your eye so you stop to take a look at it. And when you look back up you realize, all at once, that you have lost your group and you have no idea which way they went. Well, the same thing can happen to us spiritually if we are not focused on the work that is in front of us, and it is only by God’s great mercy that there is even a chance of us finding our group again. We have choices in this, all along the way. If we lose focus, that is a choice. If we stay focused, that is a choice. If our motive and intent is right God will give us everything we need to stay focused, to stay in the fight, and to continue to work in our lives.

Mathew 20. **Mathew chapter 20** and we will start in verse 1— **For the kingdom of heaven is like a landowner who went out early in the morning to hire laborers for his vineyard. Now when he had agreed with the laborers for a denarius a day, he sent them into his vineyard. So this is like the agreement we make at baptism. We agree to enter into a work, to labor in our lives, and if we are productive workers we will receive a just reward.**

And he went out about the third hour and saw others standing idle in the marketplace, and said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right I will give you.” So they went. Again he went out about the sixth and the ninth hour, and did likewise. And about the eleventh hour he went out and found others standing idle, and said to them, “Why have you been standing here idle all day?” They said to him, “Because no one hired us.” He said to them, “You also go into the vineyard, and whatever is right you will receive.” So we see now that he has went out and gathered various workers at different times of the day, some right at the very end of the day, and he has agreed with each of them the same - work in the vineyard and receive a reward.

So when evening had come, the owner of the vineyard said to his steward, “Call the laborers and give them *their* wages, beginning with the last to the first.” And when those came who *were hired* about the eleventh hour, they each received a denarius. But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more. Now why did they suppose that they would receive more? Well, it was nothing but pride. They felt like they were owed more than what they had agreed upon. They felt like they deserved something above these other workers as we will go on to see.

But first I’d just like to stop here and interject a story of when I working in a particular factory. This factory was a supplier for Toyota. We made a bunch of various parts that would ship directly to where these cars were being assembled. Well, as most of you know Toyota is a Japanese based company (although, side note, they are the biggest automotive manufacturer in the U.S.) and this was the period of time when the tsunami had just taken place, so early in 2011. Well, the previous year, as some of you may recall, Toyota recalled around 9 million cars for an accelerator issue that had led to multiple deaths. Needless to say, it was a lean time for Toyota and its employees. As a result of this we were on kind of a freeze in terms of pay raises and end of year bonuses. As you can imagine, no one took this news too well and several of my coworkers would complain about it every chance they got. One day we were on break and one of my coworkers, who I had become friends with, was just going on and on about how unfair this was and how people depended on these raises and bonuses etc. Well, frankly I was tired of hearing him complaining and this particular parable came to mind, and so I asked him, “How much do you get paid per hour?” And he responded, “13 dollars and some change.” I really don’t remember for sure. Then I said, “When you agreed to work for this company, doing the same job you have now mind you, how much did you start at?” He replied, “11 dollars.” To which I responded, “So let me get this straight. This company is paying you 13 dollars and some change per hour to do the same job you agreed to do for 11 dollars an hour, and somehow you think this means that you deserve more or that they owe you something? You should probably just be thankful that you still have a job, because they could be laying us all off.” Well, I think he said something along the lines of, “I hate you.” He was joking when he said this, but he really was mad at me for making him realize how selfish and ungrateful he was being. That’s really what this all boils down to in the end - greediness and pride versus thankfulness and humility.

Anyways, going on: But when the first came, they supposed that they would receive more; and they likewise received each a denarius. And when they had received *it*, they complained against the landowner, saying, “These last *men* have worked *only* one hour, and you made them equal to us who have borne the burden and the heat of the day.” So now we see them complaining against the landowner, just as my friend had done against the company, because they had a certain expectation that they should be paid more than what they had agreed upon. So the last being paid first helped to create in them this attitude of deserving more, since they had worked so much longer, but when the time came they received the same and they were upset

about it. They had let their pride cloud their vision and they had fallen into the trap of putting their own expectations on the landowner. They saw what others were being paid and they let themselves believe that they were going to receive something else, something more, even though they had agreed with the landowner for a denarius and even though there was never a mention of possibly receiving more. It was all a result of what they had worked up in their minds and they found themselves in a position of judging the landowner for not doing what they felt should be done. Sound familiar? Have you ever been guilty of putting your expectations on God, of finding yourself in a position of judging what God is doing? You most certainly have. At one time or another in your life you have made a judgment based on your own expectations that was not in agreement God Almighty. That is a fearful thing and a place that you should not wish to find yourself.

This last verse also helps to bring out another point and that is one of the jealousy and envy that can come about as a result of seeing what others have been given. You know, we have something so sick and so twisted in our nature and that is how we just love to tear down others. Our nature does not like to give credit to others; we somehow take personally the accomplishments of others, because we feel that we deserve whatever it is that we think they are getting. So we set out to undermine and discredit others, in all areas of life, just as these workers did. “Well they’ve only been working for one hour, why should they get that? I’ve been working so much longer, shouldn’t I deserve more than them? Don’t you see how much I’ve accomplished? Don’t you see how great I am?” It’s sad and it’s sick and when we see those things in our lives we should seek to fight it and get rid of it quickly because if we let it take root it will consume us. It is not our place to judge others. It is not our place to question God or what He is doing with and in His people. God’s church will continue on with or without us. It doesn’t need to be in agreement with us, we need to be in agreement with it. So if God wants to give something to someone what is it to you? Who are you to question God? It shouldn’t affect you one bit, but sometimes if we are not careful we can let it affect us, and that just shouldn’t be. We should be fearful to do such things, especially if we are truly understanding of the fact that it is God that does it.

Going on: **But he answered one of them and said, “Friend, I am doing you no wrong. Did you not agree with me for a denarius? Take *what is yours* and go your way. I wish to give to this last man *the same* as to you. Is it not lawful for me to do what I wish with my own things? Or is your eye evil because I am good?” So the last will be first, and the first last. For many are called, but few chosen.**

Many are called but few are chosen. How thankful are we for what we have been offered? These first workers lost sight of that, they took their eyes off the prize and decided they wanted more, that they deserved more and we can lose sight of it too. Unless we are constantly alert and on guard to the pitfalls that are out there we too will lose focus and we will lose the gratitude that we must always have in order to continue in this way of life. God works with the humble, and to be humble means to be grateful. So again, how thankful are you? Just for your calling alone - 1 in

The Choice to Work

14 million - how much does that mean to you? Are you willing to fight for it? Are you willing to work for it? Are you willing to put your hand to the plow and never look back? And to not worry about how much or how little the person next to you is plowing? Or how fast or how slow they are doing it? Or how crooked their lines are and “look how nice and straight my lines are, see how much better I’m doing?” But just to work, to do your job, to do your part in the overall work of plowing the field. But those are choices. It is always, always, always about our choices.

Okay, so for our final set of scriptures please turn to Joshua 1. **Joshua Chapter 1** and we will read **verse 9— Have I not commanded you? Be strong and of good courage; do not be afraid, nor be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.** So it is God that gives us all things. He gives us the strength. He gives us the courage. He is with us wherever we go if, if we are choosing to work, to fight, to battle, to overcome our selfish nature, if we are choosing God and putting Him first above all else, if we are truly wanting and desiring Him and His way of life and His mind and His spirit living and dwelling within us, if we truly want and desire what He is offering us - a way out of the abyss, the black hole of human suffering that consumes this world, and to come into His church and eventually His family through this awesome, amazing, wonderful, trying, testing, and terribly difficult process that is transformation. We know of a certainty that God’s family will be comprised of people who have fought the fight. That is the opportunity that is in front of us. So what is stopping you from reaching that goal? What is holding you back? Nothing but your own choices! So take comfort in the fact that God is with us in this fight and walk forward with the great boldness and confidence that comes with knowing that we are the work of God.