

WE MUST WORK THE WORKS OF GOD (Labor Day Sunday Message)

John 9: 1-41, preaching on John 9: 4—Pastor Richard P. Carlson

It's Labor Day Sunday. Since labor is another word for work, I want to speak to us today about the works of God and how God wants to co-labor with us in doing His work. Paul wrote to the church in Corinth in I Corinthians 3: 9, saying, "For we are God's co-laborers, laborers together with God, God's co-workers, God's fellow workers. The Greek word is **sunergos** which literally means to cooperate in working with God. God has directed my heart to John 9: 4, specifically to Jesus words to His disciples immediately after He listened to the Jewish leaders in John 8:39-41, 44, after they told Jesus, "Abraham is our father." Jesus' reply was, "If you were Abraham's children, you would be doing the works Abraham did, but now you seek to kill Me, a man who told you the truth that I heard from God. This is not what Abraham did. You are doing the works your father did... You are of your father, the devil, and your will is to do your father's desires." Then Jesus added in John 8: 56-59, "Your father, Abraham rejoiced that he would see My day. He saw it and was glad. So, the Jews said to Him, "You are not yet fifty years old, and have you seen Abraham? Jesus said to them, "Truly, truly, I say to you, "Before Abraham was, I am." (You remember "I AM!" is Jesus' Messianic Name, His Name forever.) So, the Jews picked up stones to throw at Him, but Jesus hid Himself, and went out of the temple." That is the setting of our text.

Now outside the temple, as Jesus passed by, John 9:1-4, He saw a man blind from birth. And His disciples asked Him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man, or his parents that he was born blind?" Jesus answered, "It was not that this man sinned (pre-natal sin in the womb) or his parents, sin before his conception or during his nine months of prenatal days, but that the works of God might be displayed in him." Then Jesus said these words I am called of God to preach about. Jesus said, "We must work the works of Him who sent Me, while it is day; night is coming, when no man can work." Whatever the works of God are, being in yoke with Jesus, His works with us, and in us, and through us are works "at any cost." Richard Wurmbrand, the founder of Voice of the Martyrs, rightly has said, "A person believes not what he recites in his creed, but only the things he is ready to die for." When we live in God's Word, in prayer, in worship, and when we gather together with other brothers to worship and witness for Christ, nothing will stop us from doing the bidding of Jesus, and doing His will with glad and willing hearts.

Some years ago, I attended a funeral when the pastor said of the woman of God, "She worked herself to death serving Jesus." I think I know what he meant, "that this woman of God died serving Jesus." I trust all of you want to do just that. But I tremble when we feel like we are carrying the whole load of our work, when Jesus has called us to be in yoke with Him, where His yoke is easy, and His burden is light. (Matthew 11: 30) I was reading recently about an evangelist conducting meetings in North and South Carolina some years ago. Here's his story! The evangelist was scheduled to stay with friends in Asheville, North Carolina on the edge of the Great Smoky Mountains. The evangelist had finished the services in Greensboro, NC, and he was taken after the service three hours west to Asheville.

They got to the host home at midnight on this winter night. The driver had to drive back to Greensboro, 172 miles away, so the evangelist said goodbye to his driver, saying, “You better hurry back home—it’ll be 3 AM before you get back. Then the evangelist walked up to the house of his host, and tapped gently on the door. No answer. He knocked louder and louder. It was freezing cold. He beat on the door, the kitchen window, the side windows, and still no answer. This house in Asheville was a few miles outside of town. Freezing, the evangelist started walking toward town. No one was home. As he walked in the dark, no streetlights, no moonlight, it was hard to make out the road. Tragically, he slipped over a bank into two feet of water in a ditch. Now soaked and nearly frozen, he crawled back up to the road and walked to a motel on the edge of town. He woke the manager, who let him use his phone. The sleepy host answered, “You are where?” “Yes,” the evangelist said, “I couldn’t get anyone to wake up. I’m at the motel here at the edge of town.” His host replied, “Oh my, don’t you remember I gave you the key? You put it in your overcoat? The evangelist felt for the key. There it was, all the time in his pocket.

Jesus said, “We must work the works of God while it is day.” Jesus didn’t say, “I must,” as it is translated in a few translations. Jesus said, “We must.” There is the key I want to preach about today. It is one of the oldest falsehoods that thousands of believers believe, that “we have to work for Jesus.” No, rather He requires, John 9: 4, “that we work with Him.” We must work the works of God.” John 15: 5 is so clear, as Jesus said, “Whoever abides in Me, and I in Him, he it is that bears much fruit, for apart from Me, you can do nothing.” On this Labor Day Sunday, I ask each of us, have we found the key to laboring for Jesus, which is co-laboring with Him? Have we been frantically doing all we can do for Him? That is an ever-increasing pace, pushing ourselves, and forgetting the key. I see in our text today three lessons Jesus wants us all to learn and re-learn about His key to our labor which is laboring with Him. What are these three lessons in co-laboring with Him?

CO-LABORING WITH JESUS IS THE COMPELLING NECESSITY OF OUR LIVES.

(I.) Jesus said, “We must work the works of Him who sent Me-- Jesus—(that’s the Father in heaven who sent Jesus) Notice what Jesus didn’t say. He didn’t say, “You’d better work, it would be wise if you worked, it would be expedient if you worked, it would be advisable if you worked—No! Jesus said, “We must work the works of Him who sent Me.” We must work with Jesus to get His work done. Some of you may have a translation that reads, “I must work,” as if Jesus was talking to the disciples about only His task. The Greek is not “I must,” but “we must.” Leon Morris in his epic commentary on John wrote, “Both “we” and “must” are important. Jesus is not speaking only what He must do. His followers share with Him the responsibility of doing what God directs, (Jesus...said “it is the work of God for men to believe on Him whom God sent.” And “must” reminds us that this is God’s compelling necessity.” Jesus said in John 4: 34-35, “My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to accomplish His work. Do you not say, “There are yet four months, then comes harvest. Look I tell you, lift up your eyes, and see the fields are white for harvest.”? Jesus knew He only had a short time to work, but that is also true for me and for you too. If we expect to accomplish anything for God, we must do it **with Him**, not for Him. It is

only in connection with Jesus that we can do anything. Last Friday, I called Jinny and told her that I had had one crisis after another all day. It was a little before 3 PM on Friday. I asked her to pray that God would help me complete my message. She prayed, and in walked three travelers. The one man had his truck stolen and now he needed gas to get on to Pocatello, because the police retrieved his 2001, 2500 Dodge Ram. I began to help them as the husband said he was wrestling with God after spending 30 years in prison. I told him God definitely knew how to box him in so he would listen to His voice. At that moment, the phone rang, and it was my youngest brother Chuck whose daughter, Kirsten King in Bonita Springs, Florida died from diabetic shock. What a shock for Chuck and then for me. I began crying. I tied the knot for Kirsten years ago to Tim Peters. Now this 40-year-old daughter, Kirsten was Home with Jesus. Her daughter, Freedom, a senior at Liberty University had just been called, and they contacted her son, Journey, who is in the Marines. As I was crying and praying with my brother, Chuck, I saw these three people in my office crying with me. God used my tragic news. Robert and Thomas both received Jesus into their lives. Robert's wife, Gloria knew the Lord and she was rejoicing. They needed gas and some mechanical help. I called Bart Rukstalis to help them buy and put on a needed serpentine belt, Bart did the job, and God used us both as His co-laborers on His team to see the two men, one 71, and one 51, to come into His kingdom and to be back on their way rejoicing headed for Idaho. God also used the Homegoing of my precious niece as His catalyst to draw them to Himself. Secondly,

COLABORING WITH JESUS BRINGS HEAVEN-SENT MIRACLES. (II.)

Look in this context at this pitiful scene, even as there are millions of pitiful sights and scenes all across our world; here was a grown man born blind. To the disciples, he was only a curiosity to them, someone to stare at, and his situation, a puzzle they couldn't unravel. Notice when Jesus spoke about Abraham, it infuriated the Jewish leaders, they picked up stones to stone Jesus to death. These Sanhedrin leaders hated the truth. Yet, what a challenging opportunity this blind man was for Jesus, to demonstrate doing the works of God. Jesus was just passing this blind man's way, but He was ready to work. The disciples asked how he got blind. Jesus answered rather, saying, "What shall we do for him? How do we look at our circumstances? How do we look at circumstances that just happen? When we surrender to the Lord, He uses what we do, say, how we answer others, what we give, and what we give up. In the midst of our co-laboring, God uses us and others to send His heaven-sent healing, reconciliation, and restoration.

We often put God in a box, stonewall Him, be stubborn, bull-headed, resolute, and unwilling to follow His commands, His promptings, and directions. Jesus couldn't co-labor with the Jewish leaders that day because they dishonored Him. They picked up stones to stone Him, and they wouldn't believe in Jesus even after Jesus healed this blind man. How many years have many of us been arguing with God about His instructions, His promptings, and how He wants to co-labor with us to bring us healing to our family, our spouse, or one of our brothers or sisters? Think about how we argue with God's designs for us to be healed or His designs to use us or to help each other? Why do we argue with God? How do we do it? We

say, “If this prompting was of God, He would direct a different method, He would do it in broad daylight, not behind closed doors. God may have the right method, but it’s the wrong timing. Like Moses, we declare God is asking the wrong person by asking us. We may start to follow God’s unconventional promptings, but over-analyze them, and back away from obedience. We may simply close our eyes, ears, and hearts to the pleadings of God through His servants, maybe our spouse, our children, our friend, or our pastor. When any of us fail to co-labor with God, we will feel lonely, on our own, because we are on our own—using earthly logic to keep us from being co-laborers in His heaven-sent miracles.

Remember Naaman angrily refusing to dip seven times in the muddy Jordan to be healed of leprosy. What if the widow would have refused Elisha’s direction to borrow many vessels, or if she would have refused to shut the door? No, Naaman finally listened to the entreaty of his servants, dipped 7 times, and was healed. The widow obeyed Elisha and with only a small jar of oil, and shutting the door, she poured out that little jar that kept filling every borrowed vessel. If you can immediately look back on this year, or the past years, and remember that you have purposely refused to follow a prompting of the Lord, just know you have been missing a heaven-sent miracle God is still calling you to participate in. But you say—God’s instructions, if they are His, are not logical, wise, or understandable.

Put yourself in this blind man’s shoes. After saying, “we must work the works of God,” Jesus spit on the ground, and made mud with saliva. What value is spit mixed with clay to make mud? Then Jesus anointed this blind man’s eyes with the mud he made with His spittle and the dirt. Does spit have healing properties, and Jesus, don’t you know mud in our eyes is dangerous and unhealthy? Then Jesus sent the blind man to the Pool of Siloam, a few hundred yards away—2008 feet away. But the man was blind. How was he going to get there to wash the mud out with the dirty water in the Pool of Siloam? How will that make this blind man see, but it did! Six times dipping in the muddy Jordan didn’t heal Naaman. Someone says, “Go back, obey your vows, and do what hasn’t worked before.” Go ask the elders to anoint you with oil for your heart trouble, cancer, or kidney failure. If you say, “It won’t work; I tried it,” I promise—Go do the same thing again by faith, the thing that hasn’t worked before. Join Lillian. 3 days before Tom McMartin died, he received Jesus. What she did obediently for so many years paid off.

When you say, “God’s way won’t work, look who you are arguing with—the One who died to save you. Here was a blind man that didn’t even know who Jesus was yet, but he obeyed the Lord, and he made it to the pool, and he now could see. God’s promptings and His calls to us to co-labor are on the surface, things the world calls foolish and stupid. We can dig in our heels, be on our own, or co-labor and receive God’s heaven-sent miracles. I ask you—when will we surrender to co-laboring with Jesus, and quit leaning on our own understanding? Thirdly,

CO-LABORING WITH JESUS IS OUR HOURGLASS OPPORTUNITY THAT IS FLEETING TODAY. (III.) Notice John 9: 4. Jesus said, “We must work the works of Him who sent Me, while it is day; night is coming, when no one

can work. None of us know when our working days are over. Yesterday, I returned a call to Pastor Greg Donnelly. He came here in 1978 and he co-labored with me as an intern to begin Valley Evangelical Free Church in Kemmerer. He is 70 years old today. His wife, Jan died in Alexandria, MN two years ago, and people told Pastor Greg to retire. God led Greg to keep shepherding. Greg has a younger brother, age 67, Kim, who with his wife, has said no to Jesus all through their marriage. When Greg has tried to witness to Kim, over the years, his wife won't listen to him as his brother, Kim also has refused to listen. Yet, August 16th, God prompted Greg to drive a few hours and witness one more time to Kim. His wife was not home. Kim opened his heart to Jesus, and he received the Lord. Two weeks later, four days ago, on August 30, Kim dropped over dead. Obeying Jesus and co-laboring with Him is time sensitive. Often when we keep turning down a prompting of the Lord, we find now it is too late. Jesus has told us we are the light of the world, but that is while we are in the world. The sands of time are marching fast. Night is coming.

No one knew the truth of this word about co-laboring and its fleeting days more than Charles Thomas Studd, better known as C. T. Studd, was a British missionary, born Dec. 2, 1860, in Spratton, England, he graduated from Trinity College, Cambridge, and in 1885, he entered the mission field with Hudson Taylor in China. C.T. Studd spent his life in dedicated service to the Lord, serving in China, India, and finally in Africa in the Congo. In 1913, he formed the World Evangelization Crusade. In 1888, C.T. married Priscilla Stewart, and they had four daughters and two sons. She died in 1929, and C.T died on July 16, 1931, at the age of 70, co-laboring in the Congo. C.T. is best known for his words,

“2 little lines I heard one day, traveling along life’s busy way; Bringing conviction to my heart, and from my mind would not depart; Only one life,’twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last. Only one life, yes only one, soon will its fleeting hours be done; Then, in ‘that day’ my Lord to meet, and stand before His Judgment seat; Only one life,’twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last. Only one life, the still small voice, gently pleads for a better choice, bidding me selfish aims to leave, And to God’s holy will to cleave. Only one life,’twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last. Only one life, a few brief years, each with its burdens, hopes, and fears; Each with its work I must fulfill; living for self or in His will; Only one life,’twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last. When this bright world would tempt me sore, When Satan would a victory score; when self would seek to have its way, then help me Lord with joy to say; Only one life,’twill soon be past, only what’s done for Christ will last.” I close with the song written by Ira F. Stanphill, (1946) “Jesus and Me.” “I traveled alone upon this lonesome way, my burdens were heavy, and dark was my day; I looked for a friend not knowing that He had all of the time been looking for me. Now it is Jesus and me for each tomorrow, for every heartache and every sorrow; I know that I can depend upon my new-found Friend, And so to the end, it's Jesus and me. The road may be long to Heaven’s pearly gate, I know that it’s narrow, I know that its straight; But Jesus is there, through eternity, we'll travel along, just Jesus and me. Forever I'll sing of His great love to me, Forever I'll tell it, on land and on sea; I'll stay by His side, contented I'll be, For all of my life, it's Jesus and me.”