

We Serve!

A sermon based on Revelation 7:9-17.

Grace and peace to you from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.

What's your perfect day? As kids, maybe it's going to an amusement park – or the Tanana Valley State Fair, riding some rides, playing some games, winning some prizes, stuffing yourself with the yummy fair food. Or, what about going to the beach, getting to splash around in the water, build sand castles, enjoy the sun all day?

For adults, that might sound fun, too...minus the sand castles and splashing around in the water. Maybe just lying around in the warm sand, getting a good tan, or taking the boat or jet-ski or canoe out on the lake sounds pretty great right about now.

Think about it. What would be your perfect day?

Ok, be honest, how many of you thought about mowing the lawn, pulling weeds, washing toilets, doing the laundry? Or, whose perfect day includes getting up early, going to work, having all of these commitments zapping your time and energy afterwards, and then still getting home and having dinner to cook or a house project to work on? Or, doesn't spending almost your entire day here, cleaning the cobwebs or working on the ramp...doesn't that sound like perfection to you?

I wouldn't blame you if those thoughts didn't even cross your mind when you heard perfect day. Those wouldn't be my choices, either. For most of us, I'm guessing your perfect day probably includes a bit of relaxing and not a whole lot of work.

Well, this Labor Day weekend, a time to remember and be thankful for the contributions so many workers throughout the years have made to the strength, prosperity, and well-being of our country, we're going to celebrate work...a different kind of work here with our Volunteer Sunday. You think the timing's a coincidence? Oh, it definitely, actually is. But, anyways, today, Volunteer Sunday, or maybe better yet, let's call it Service Sunday (I like the alliteration), we get some insight into heaven, the ultimate vacation-site.

Do you ever stop and think about what heaven will be like? We're never told a lot about it, but our verses from Revelation give us a glimpse, ***"they are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple; and he who sits on the throne will shelter them with his presence. 'Never again will they hunger; never again will they thirst. The sun will not beat down on them,' nor any scorching heat. For the Lamb at the center of the throne will be their shepherd; 'he will lead them to springs of living water.' 'And God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.'"***

Did you catch it? When I was younger, I used to think, "I get my mansion (right, the KJV says Jesus is preparing us mansions), I'll fill it with a pool. I'll just hang out in my room, be anti-social, play my Super Nintendo all day, grab some junk food out of my mini-fridge, relax without a care in the world."

And maybe you've had similar thoughts. Or, maybe you've imagined heaven as a boring place with nothing to do but play harps. But then, we see that one phrase, here in our verses, ***"they (referring to you and me) are before the throne of God and serve him day and night in his temple."***

Did you hear that? The greatest place we will ever be, and we're going to be working. You heard me right. We'll be spending eternity working, serving God day and night. What exactly that service is like, we don't know for sure, but we know our time in heaven will be filled with serving Jesus.

What do you think? Does that throw you off a little? Why do you think that is?

Well, Jesus does say, ***"Come to me all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest."*** Even Revelation itself, in chapter 14, says, ***"Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord...they will rest from their labor."*** Rest, work...those are on complete opposite ends of the spectrum.

I don't think that's it, though. I'm not so sure any of you went directly to those passages. I'm guessing where your mind goes is where mine goes, which is where our culture today goes. I know we finished up our Christ Culture sermon series last week, but here's another area of life where our attitudes are often lined up together.

Let me ask, "How many of you like your job?" "How many of you love going to your job every day?" "How many of you wish you could be at your job 24/7, 365 days a year?"

I didn't think so. You're not alone. Right, how do we talk about work? Someone's got a case of the Mondays. "Everybody's working for the weekend." Wednesday is hump day, meaning the work week can be a slog – a climb - and freedom is just over the horizon. Rejoicing in the 3-day weekends. The laments when summer vacation – or even just vacation - is over. For so many, work is necessary, but it's not always enjoyable. And I'll admit as much for me, too.

And that's not even including work outside of work – house work, lawn-care, house projects, volunteering, helping out at church. Again, not always enjoyable. We're not always jumping at the chance to get involved in that...these service opportunities.

Why not?

Well, what do you know about service here? It takes effort. It wears you out. It takes away time from me...or at least, time from what I'd rather be doing. It's work.

And it's no surprise if it feels that way for you...that it feels that way for you...when it's late Saturday night and you realized you're up for treats this week or potluck is tomorrow and you haven't even thought about what you're making, and now you have to make an extra trip out to the store. Or, when you see your name up for cleaning, but you feel like it was just last month that you cleaned. Or, when Pastor keeps asking you if you want to participate in this or that work day or service opportunity – why doesn't he ask someone else, who's maybe not that involved?

Again, it's no surprise...do you know why? Do you remember how God described work after Adam and Eve fell into sin? Do you? He called it "painful toil." So, not fun, not enjoyable, too much effort, hard work. Nothing like it is in heaven. Romans tells us, ***"So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all to the glory of God."*** That's how and why the saints serve in heaven...to give thanks and praise and glory to God. The effort doesn't matter; it's in glory to God.

Be honest...how often is that your mindset? If that's what it's like in heaven, should we want to have the same attitude here? When your work and your service here seem to go unnoticed...certainly un-

thanked, but it's to the glory of God! I forget that far too often, and it's my motivation to serve far less often than it should be. What about you?

Even if we had the right mindset 99% of the time – we're not perfect – our service still isn't good enough. As toilsome and unnoticed as our work may be, the real kicker and huge deterrent is all of our work does nothing for us. Our deeds don't get us anywhere. Isaiah 64 says, ***"All our righteous acts are like filthy rags."*** None of the work we do, even if it's for the church, does anything for our relationship with God because it's not perfect. We can't win or work our way into God's good graces.

And yet, in spite of all of that, we serve. And it's not because of the way the saints in heaven are serving God right now. It's because of Jesus, who came to this earth to serve God with his life, death, and resurrection. You see, it's really not at all about our work and our service. It's all about Jesus' work for us. In absolute selfless service to sinners, God sent his dearly loved Son, Jesus, who came to serve and give his life as a ransom for all people, including you and me.

And the saints in heaven get that. Listen to some of their praises, "Salvation belongs to our God...and to the Lamb." Salvation belongs to God...meaning, the power and victory of sin, death, and the devil belongs to God. And he's given it to us. All of our acts that are like filthy rags, covered in sin, were taken by Jesus, the Lamb, and were washed clean, made white by his blood shed on the cross. Jesus, through his life, death, and resurrection, served God's purpose for his life and won salvation for us...both for now and for eternity.

Could there be any more perfect work than that? And so our cry, even today, echoes that of the saints, ***"Amen! Praise and glory and wisdom and thanks and honor and power and strength be to our God for ever and ever. Amen."***

But we can't stop there. We can't be satisfied to merely thank Jesus for his loving, perfect, self-sacrificing service for us. We won't. Today is about our volunteers and how we can say thank you. The greatest 'thank you' is to serve and to keep serving. We don't have to wait for heaven. We believers can and will find fulfilling service as we live for God here.

Now, I'll tell you, the word for serve here, in the Greek language, it's a word associated with worship and religious service. Think about that. Serving God, working for God, that's the way I truly worship God. Does that change the way you think about your service?

I hope it does. Romans reminds us, ***"Therefore, in view of God's mercy, offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God – this is your spiritual act of worship."*** This is our way to praise God. This is the way we say 'thank you' to God.

Of course, that means our very lives – our entire lives – are a way to worship God. So, going to your job and the level of effort you put into your work, cleaning and maintaining your home – being God's manager, caring for your children as God's gift to you, and so on, those are opportunities to serve God.

And those opportunities continue and extend to this place. Scrubbing toilets at church – cleaning the house of God, is there a greater honor? Mowing the lawn here to let outsiders know we care about the outside presence of our church, which might lead them to see inside how we care about the God of the church even more, so important. Shoveling and plowing snow so people can come and here God's life-giving message, what an incredible blessing. Building a ramp so we can take away obstacles for some

from coming and being here, what a way to praise God. Singing in the choir with voices that are just as lovely to God's ears as the choir of angels in heaven, or being eager to hit the pavement to share the simple, sweet message of the gospel with precious souls, beautiful. Serving treats or making a dish for the potluck to feed God's servants' bodies after they've been fed with his Word, both enabling us to go out and serve him with our lips and our hands, thank you!

"His commands are not burdensome." That's what our Verse of the Day reminded us. Serving God isn't a burden; it's the way we thank God for his selfless service to us. It's a foretaste of how we'll fill our time in heaven. There, it'll be great. It'll be our joy to serve the victorious Lamb then. But his salvation victory is ours now, too. So, now, gladly we serve. It's our joy. Amen.