

"The Work of the Christian"
Sermons on Subjects of the Day sermon 1
St. John Henry Newman
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"Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour until the evening." Ps. civ. 23.

1 [Note] THOUGH God created the heavens and the earth in six days, and then rested,
2 yet He rested only to begin a work of another kind; for our Lord says, "My Father
3 worketh hitherto," [John v. 17.] and He adds, "and I work." And at another time He says,
4 concerning Himself more expressly, "I must work the works of Him that sent Me, while it
5 is day: the night cometh, when no man can work." [John ix. 4.] And when that night
6 came, He said, "I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do." "It is finished."
7 [John xvii. 4; xix. 30.] And in the text we are told generally of all men, "Man goeth forth
8 unto his work and to his labour until the evening." The Creator wrought till the Sabbath
9 came; the Redeemer wrought till the sun was darkened, and it was night. "The sun
10 ariseth," and "man goeth forth," and works "till the evening;" when "the keepers of the
11 house tremble, and the strong men bow themselves, and those that look out at the
12 windows are darkened, and desire fails, because man goeth to his long home, and the
13 mourners go about the streets," when "the silver cord is loosed, and the golden bowl is
14 broken, and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the spirit returns unto God who
15 gave it." [Eccles. xii. 3-7.] In the evening man returns to God, and his works, whether
16 good or whether evil, "do follow him."

17 This solemn truth, that we are sent here to do a work, is in various ways set before us in
18 the Service appointed for this day. First, we read, in the beginning of Genesis, of
19 Almighty God's work in the creation of the world, which is the archetype of all works
20 which His creatures are able to do through His grace unto His glory. Then we read of
21 Adam, placed in Paradise, the garden in Eden, "to dress it and to keep it." [Gen. ii. 15.]
22 Soon, alas, did he fall, and become subject to heavier toil, the earth being cursed for his
23 sake, and bringing forth unto him thorns and thistles. God, however, in His mercy, did
24 not desert him; and, accordingly, we read in the Gospel of the householder going out
25 from morning till evening "to hire labourers into His vineyard." [Matt. xx. 1.] He went out
26 early, and then about the third hour, and about the sixth and ninth, nor stopped till the
27 eleventh. Such were His dealings with the race of man till the fulness of time was come,
28 and in the last days, even at the eleventh hour, He sent His Son to gather together
29 labourers for His work from all parts of the earth. And the history of those fresh Gospel
30 labourers is presented to us in today's Epistle, in the pattern of St. Paul, who "went a
31 warfare;" [1 Cor. ix. 7.] who planted a vineyard; who ploughed, and thrashed, and trod
32 out the corn; for necessity was laid upon him, and it was woe unto him if he preached
33 not the Gospel. Nay, moreover, who kept under his body, and brought it into subjection,
34 lest after he had preached to others, the end should come, and he should be a
35 castaway.

36 Thus the Service for this day carries us from the creation of all things to the judgment,
37 and that with this one thought—the work which is put upon us to do. Adam had to dress

paradise; fallen man to "eat bread" from the blighted ground "in the sweat of his face;" the labourers worked in the vineyard, some through the "heat of the day," others in the eventide; and the Apostles and their followers ploughed, and sowed, and planted, in a different field, but still in their Master's service, as it was at the beginning. Thus the lesson put before us today contrasts with that of the Epiphany. We have ended the feast of grace, and are now come to the work-days, and therefore we read of man going forth to his work and to his labour from sun-rising unto the evening. Or we may connect these two seasons with Lent, which is to follow; and whereas our Lord, in His Sermon on the Mount, speaks of three great duties of religion, prayer, almsgiving, and fasting—our duties towards God, our neighbour, and ourselves—we may consider the Epiphany to remind us of worship in the temple, Septuagesima of good works, and Lent of self-denial and self-discipline.

Now the lesson set before us today needs insisting on, because in these latter times men have arisen, speaking heresy, making much of the free grace of the Gospel, but denying that it enjoined a work, as well as conferred a blessing; or, rather, that it gave grace in order that it might enjoin a work. Christmas comes first, and Septuagesima afterwards: we must have grace before we work, in order to work; but as surely as grace is conferred on us, so surely is a work enjoined. It has been pretended by these teachers that works were only required under the Law, and grace comes instead under the Gospel: but the true account of the matter is this, that the Law enjoined works, and the grace of the Gospel fulfils them; the Law commanded, but gave no power; the Gospel bestows the power. Thus the Gospel is the counterpart of the Law. Christ says, "I am not come to destroy, but to fulfil." The Gospel does not abrogate works, but provides for them. "Man goeth forth unto his work and to his labour" from the morning of the world to its evening. All dispensations are one and the same here. Adam in paradise, Adam fallen, Noah in the morning, Abraham at the third hour, the chosen people at the sixth and ninth, and Christians at the eleventh—all, so far as the duty of work, have one religion.

And thus, says St. Paul, "Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid. Yea, we establish the law." [Rom. iii. 31.] Again, he tells us, "that as sin hath reigned unto death, even so" grace reigns "*through* righteousness," not without righteousness, "unto eternal life." And again, "The righteousness of the law is *fulfilled* in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit." And to the Ephesians, "We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works." [Eph. ii. 10.] And to the Philippians, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling; for it is God which worketh in you, both to will and to do, of His good pleasure." [Phil. ii. 12, 13.]

But here an objection may be drawn from the parable of the labourers which requires notice. It may be said that the labourers, who represent the Jews, complain that those who were called in the evening, that is, Christians, had worked but a short time, and in the cool of the day. "They murmured against the good-man of the house, saying, These last have wrought but one hour, and Thou hast made them equal unto us which have borne the burden and heat of the day." Hence it may be argued, that Christians have no irksome or continued toil, but are saved, without their trouble, by grace. Now it is true,

81 we are of those who have been called when the day was drawing to an end; but this
82 neither proves that we have a slight task to do, nor a short time to labour, as a few
83 words will show.

84 For what is meant by "the burden and heat of the day"? I have explained it already. It
85 means that religion pressed heavily on the Jews as a burden, because they were
86 unequal to it; and it was as the midday heat, overpowering them with its intensity,
87 because they had no protection against it. "The sun," says the Psalmist, "goeth forth
88 from the uttermost part of the heaven, and runneth about unto the end of it again, and
89 there is nothing hid from the heat thereof." And he continues, "The law of the Lord is an
90 undefiled law, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, and giveth wisdom
91 unto the simple." [Ps. xix. 6, 7.] What is so bright and glorious as the sun? yet what so
92 overpowering to the feeble? What so pure and keen as the law of the Lord? yet what so
93 searching and awful to the sinner? "The word of God," says the Apostle, "is quick and
94 powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword;" [Heb. iv. 12.] and therefore it did but
95 probe and wound those who were unprepared for it, and they could but cry out, "O,
96 wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" [Rom. vii.
97 14-24.] This was the burden and heat of the day: to have a perfect law, and an
98 unregenerate heart; the thunders of Sinai, yet the sovereignty of the flesh; Moses with
99 the tables of stone, and the people setting up the golden calf. At best they could but
100 confess, "The law is spiritual, but I am carnal, sold under sin; for that which I do, I allow
101 not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I." But for us, on the other
102 hand, Christ hath redeemed us from the burden and heat, and the curse of the law, by
103 being made a curse for us; and we henceforth may say, with the Apostle, "What things
104 were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ; ... not as though I had already attained,
105 either were already perfect; but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are
106 behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark,
107 for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." [Phil. iii. 7-14.]

108 Do you wish to see how little the Christian is saved from toil by his being saved from
109 "the burden and heat of the day?" consider the Epistle for this Sunday, and the whole
110 chapter of which it is part. It is one of those passages in which St. Paul speaks of
111 himself and his brother labourers in the vineyard; and from this instance you will be able
112 to decide how little Christ has saved those whom He loves from toil and trouble. Christ,
113 we know, is the second Adam, and has restored us to a better paradise. He, for that
114 river which divided into four heads and watered the garden, has given us "a pure river of
115 water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb;" and
116 for "every tree of the garden" of which Adam might eat freely, has He given "the tree of
117 life, which beareth twelve manner of fruits, and yieldeth her fruit every month, and the
118 leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations." [Rev. xxii. 1, 2.] Yet compare the
119 state of Adam in the second chapter of Genesis with that of St. Paul in the ninth chapter
120 of his first Epistle to the Corinthians, and it will be plain that our blessedness under the
121 Gospel is not the removal of labour, but the gift of strength; that the original paradise is
122 not yet restored to us with its repose and security, and that our duties still are not those
123 of Adam innocent, but of Adam fallen.

124 Adam, for instance, was surrounded by his subject brutes, but had no duties towards
125 them; he was lord of the creation, and they ministered to him. God Almighty brought
126 them to him, and he gave them names; and he was free to accept their homage, or to
127 dispense with it, as pleased him, ranging through the trees of the garden at his will. But
128 what says the blessed Apostle? He makes himself one of those who are even like the
129 brute ox that treadeth out the corn, and only claims that their mouths be not muzzled,
130 but their hire secured to them. He speaks of himself as an Apostle, or one sent unto his
131 brethren; as ministering about holy things; as having necessity laid upon him; and as
132 making himself "servant unto all, that he might gain the more." "And unto the Jews," he
133 says, "I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews; to them that are under the law as
134 under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law; to them that are without
135 law, as without law, ... that I might gain them that are without law. To the weak became I
136 as weak, that I might gain the weak: I am made all things to all men, that I might by all
137 means save some." And Adam, though in a state of quiet and contemplation, was not
138 solitary; for when there was no help meet for him, "the Lord God caused a deep sleep to
139 fall on Adam, and he slept; and He took one of his ribs, and closed up the flesh instead
140 thereof; and the rib which the Lord God had taken from man, made He a woman, and
141 brought her unto the man." But St. Paul tells us that he reversed in his own case this
142 ordinance of God. "Mine answer to them which do examine me is this, Have we not
143 power to eat and to drink? Have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as
144 other Apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?" He might have been as
145 Adam, and he would not be. And Adam's task was to dress the garden, no heavy labour
146 in Eden; to subdue the ground, which needed not much discipline, but obeyed without
147 effort. But what was St. Paul's culture? what was the ground on which he worked? and
148 did he treat it gently, or was he severe with it, to bring it into subjection? Did he indulge
149 in its flowers and fruits, or did he watch against thorns and thistles, and subjugate it in
150 the sweat of his brow? Hear his own account of it: "Every man that striveth for the
151 mastery is temperate in all things: now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown, but we
152 an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth
153 the air: but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means,
154 when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway." It cannot be said, then,
155 because we have not to bear the burden and the heat of the day, that therefore we have
156 returned to paradise. It is not that our work is lighter, but our strength is greater.

157 Nor, secondly, can we argue that our work is shorter from the labourers' complaint,
158 "These have wrought but one hour." For we are called, as is evident, in the world's
159 evening, not in our own. We are called in our own morning, we are called from infancy.
160 By the eleventh hour is not meant that Christians have little to do, but that the time is
161 short; that it is the last time; that there is a "present distress;" that they have much to do
162 in a little time; that "the night cometh when no man can work;" that their Lord is at hand,
163 and that they have to wait for Him. "This I say, brethren," says St. Paul, "the time is
164 short; it remaineth that both they that have wives be as though they had none; and they
165 that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not;
166 and they that buy, as though they possessed not; and they that use this world, as not
167 abusing it, for the fashion of this world passeth away." [1 Cor. vii. 29-31.] It was
168 otherwise with the Jews; they had a grant of this world; they entered the vineyard in the

169 morning; they had time before them; they might reckon on the future. They were bid "go
170 their way, eat their bread with joy, and drink their wine with a merry heart, and let their
171 garments be always white, and let their head lack no ointment, and live joyfully with the
172 wife whom they loved all the days of the life of their vanity: ... for that was their portion in
173 this life, and in their labour which they took under the sun." [Eccles. ix. 7-9.] But it is
174 otherwise with us. Earth and sky are ever failing; Christ is ever coming; Christians are
175 ever lifting up their heads and looking out, and therefore it is the evening. We may not
176 set our hearts on things present; we may not say to our soul, "Thou hast much goods
177 laid up for many years, take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry:" [Luke xii. 19.] and
178 therefore it is the evening. We may not think of home, or brethren, or sister, or father, or
179 mother, or wife, or children, or land; and therefore it is the evening [Mark x. 29.]. The
180 evening is long and the day was short; for the first shall be last, and the last first. What
181 seems vigorous perishes; what seems ever expiring is carried on; and this last age,
182 though ever-failing, has lasted longer than the ages before it, and Christians have more
183 time for a greater work than if they had been hired in the morning.

184 O may we ever bear in mind that we are not sent into this world to stand all the day idle,
185 but to go forth to our work and to our labour until the evening! *Until* the evening,
186 not *in* the evening only of life, but serving God from our youth, and not waiting till our
187 years fail us. Until the *evening*, not in the daytime only, lest we begin to run well, but fall
188 away before our course is ended. Let us "give glory to the Lord our God, before He
189 cause darkness, and before our feet stumble upon the dark mountains;" [Jer. xiii. 16.]
190 and, having turned to Him, let us see that our goodness be not "as the morning cloud,
191 and as the early dew which passeth away." The *end* is the proof of the matter. When the
192 sun shines, this earth pleases; but let us look towards that eventide and the cool of the
193 day, when the Lord of the vineyard will walk amid the trees of His garden, and say unto
194 His steward, "Call the labourers, and give them their hire, beginning from the last unto
195 the first." That evening will be the trial: when the heat, and fever, and noise of the noon-
196 tide are over, and the light fades, and the prospect saddens, and the shades lengthen,
197 and the busy world is still, and "the door shall be shut in the streets, and the daughters
198 of music shall be brought low, and fears shall be in the way, and the almond-tree shall
199 flourish, and the grasshopper shall be a burden, and desire shall fail," and "the pitcher
200 shall be broken at the fountain, and the wheel broken at the cistern;" then, when it is
201 "vanity of vanities, all is vanity," and the Lord shall come, "who both will bring to light the
202 hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts,"—then
203 shall we "discern between the righteous and the wicked, between him that serveth God
204 and him that serveth Him not." [Mal. iii. 18.]

205 May that day and that hour ever be in our thoughts! When we rise, when we lie down;
206 when we speak, when we are silent; when we act, and when we rest: whether we eat or
207 drink, or whatever we do, may we never forget that "for all these things God will bring us
208 into judgment." [Eccles. xi. 9.] For "He cometh quickly, and His reward is with Him, to
209 give every man according as His work shall be." [Rev. xxii. 12.]

210 "Blessed are they that do His commandments, that they may have right to the tree of
211 life, and may enter in through the gates into the city." Blessed will they be then, and only

212 they, who, with the Apostle, have ever had on their lips, and in their hearts, the
213 question, "Lord, what wilt Thou have me to do?" [Acts ix. 6.] whose soul "hath broken
214 out for the very fervent desire that it hath alway unto His judgments;" who have "made
215 haste and prolonged not the time to keep His commandments;" [Ps. cxix. 20, 60.] who
216 have not waited to be hired, nor run uncertainly, nor beaten the air, nor taken darkness
217 for light, and light for darkness, nor contented themselves with knowing what is right,
218 nor taken comfort in feeling what is good, nor prided themselves in their privileges, but
219 set themselves vigorously to do God's will.

220 Let us turn from shadows of all kinds,—shadows of sense, or shadows of argument and
221 disputation, or shadows addressed to our imagination and tastes. Let us attempt,
222 through God's grace, to advance and sanctify the inward man. We cannot be wrong
223 here. Whatever is right, whatever is wrong, in this perplexing world, we must be right in
224 "doing justly, in loving mercy, in walking humbly with our God;" in denying our wills, in
225 ruling our tongues, in softening and sweetening our tempers, in mortifying our lusts; in
226 learning patience, meekness, purity, forgiveness of injuries, and continuance in well-
227 doing.

228 Note

229 Septuagesima