

Works Of God

God's Work Is Salvation

Richard T. Ritenbaugh

Given 13-Nov-04; Sermon #692

Over the past few months I have given a series of six sermons all linked to the same theme of works. I do not know if you knew that this was a series. I do not announce my series. I usually do not name them with part one, part two, part three. I usually do not think that far ahead. I give one sermon, and then think—hmmm, this leads to something else, and then I prepare that. Then my line of thought will take me somewhere else, and now, suddenly, I have given six sermons on this theme of works.

Before the Feast of Tabernacles, I gave two sermons. The first one was about making sure that we understood the foundation of everything is Jesus Christ, and I named that "Christ Our Rock." This led to the sermon just before the Feast of Tabernacles called, "Building on the Foundation," where we looked at the verses in I Corinthians 3 to some extent.

During the Feast, we then studied into Revelation 2 and 3, and the phrase, "I know your works," and what God is seeing from our works—from what we do. ("I Know Your Works").

Then, on the Last Great Day, it was, "Judgment According to Works" because that is what He says that He judges the people on who come up in the second resurrection. We found that that is how He judges everyone, not just them—but all people.

And then last time, we looked into Galatians 5 and "The Works of the Flesh."

This line of thought on works, concludes today with this sermon. We started with God with "Christ Our Rock," and now we will end with God—His works.

Now, if you say the work of God to anybody who has been in the church of God, you are likely to get the response, "preaching the Gospel." There is a very obvious explanation about why if you say, 'work of God,' preaching the Gospel will come up within the next sentence or so.

Herbert W. Armstrong hammered that into us for so many years—that the work of God is to preach the Gospel. Now, I am not criticizing him because the fault lies in the hearing, not in the speaking, in this particular case.

Works of God by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

The continual equating of the work of God being the preaching of the Gospel is unfortunate. My reason for saying this is that this emphasis has led to a great deal of misunderstanding.

I know that most of us like to simplify things and get things down to something that we can grab onto and use. But, the idea that the work of God is preaching the Gospel—a one-on-one correspondence, as if they are equivalent to one another—leaves out so much that God does that it is almost criminal.

Now, if you read other churches of God literature, you will find out that this idea is still with most of them. The work of God equals preaching the Gospel. "It must be done!" They will point you to Matthew 24:14:

Matthew 24:14 And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come.

That is it. That *is* the work of God. But, you know, it says in Psalm 78:

Psalm 78:41 And [Israel] limited the Holy One of Israel.

We do not want to make the same mistake of limiting God merely to preaching the Gospel around the world as a witness to all nations. That is a very dangerous thing to do, to limit Him to one thing.

His works, as we will see, are manifold. It is not just one thing. It is my intention to show that the works of God cover a far broader range of activities than merely preaching the Gospel. In a way, you could say that is our work with His help.

But, in this broad range of works, I also want you to understand that we are involved with Him in doing these works, even the greatest works of all! We are in partnership with Him. We are going to read Psalm 111 in its entirety because I think that it is a good introduction to the works of God.

What it does is that it puts us into the proper attitude for appreciating what He has done. If nothing else, if we do not get anything else out of this, we would at least come out with some gratitude and praise to God for what He has done.

Psalm 111:1 Praise the LOORD!

Right away he gets you into the proper mind set for this. This is a psalm that is talking about praises to God.

Psalm 111:1 I will praise the LORD with my whole heart . . .

This gives us another indication. This is something that we have to be in to with all of our being. His reasons for this come along.

Psalm 111:1 . . . In the assembly of the upright and in the congregation.

For those of you who like a bit of detail about these kinds of things 'the assembly of the upright' and 'in the congregation' is not a parallelism—these are actually two different places. One is in secret: the assembly of the upright; and the other is public. This is something that we are supposed to be full of both in private and in public. This is something that should take up our whole life. Our whole life is both private and public, and the praises of God are supposed to be right there too, at the very top of our list of things that we should do.

Like I said, this is getting us in the proper attitude and mindset for understanding God's works.

Psalm 111:2 The works of the LORD are great, . . .

Now, that says it all! They are vast, not only in multitude, but in scope and magnitude. They are awesome—awe inspiring. They envelop everything. And that is the way to think of it.

Psalm 111:2 . . . Studied by all who have pleasure in them.

This means that we really investigate them, and examine them, because they give us pleasure and pleasure is not what you and I normally think of in terms of pleasure. This means those who are successful and satisfied because a goal has been accomplished.

So, you can stick that back in there that they are examined by all those who are successful in this endeavor, or who want success in this endeavor. What is the

endeavor? We will get to that, shortly.

Psalm 111:3 His work is honorable and glorious, and His righteousness endures forever.

All of these things are adding little bits of understanding to us about His works—honorable, glorious, righteous, enduring, forever—all these things tell us about God's works in one way or another.

Psalm 111:4 He has made His wonderful works to be remembered . . .

Is not that interesting? The things that He does are certainly memorable! I mean, just think of Matthew 17. Do you think that those three disciples ever forgot the Transfiguration? That was a huge work of God that took place at that time.

Peter was writing about it even just before he was about to die there in II Peter. He remembered it, and it basically paved the way for his entire ministry. It founded it, might be a better way to put it. That vision of the Transfiguration gave him what he needed to do as an apostle. It was constantly on his mind. He saw Christ in His glory. That was the goal. It was also the foundation.

You can go through the other works of God, any of them from what God did with Adam and Eve, to the Flood, to the things that He did with the patriarchs, to the great miracles of the Exodus, and on, and on—every one of these works is memorable.

Do you think Joshua, and all those with him, ever forgot that the sun stood still so that they could finish the fight?

His works are memorable! They plant themselves in your mind. They make you remember so that you can react properly and make the right decisions—planning your journey with Him properly.

Psalm 111:4 . . . The LORD is gracious and full of compassion.

All of these things are part of His works. His graciousness, His compassion are in His works, especially when you come to understand what His greatest works are.

Works of God by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Psalm 111:5 He has given food to those who fear Him; He will ever be mindful of His covenant.

These are also works; His providence. He puts food on our tables as well as gives us all the other things that we need for the maintenance of our lives.

And then, He has given us a covenant which He promises right here that He is going to be mindful of it, meaning, He is faithful to His covenant. That is a work that He does every day. He remembers His covenant and is faithful to it.

Psalm 111:6 He has declared to His people the power of His works, . . .

This is very similar to that portion above about being memorable.

Psalm 111:6 . . . In giving them the heritage of the nations.

God showed His power, in this case, in giving Israel the land of Canaan.

Now to just raise that up to a spiritual level, He is going to show His power to all the world in giving His spiritual Israelites the earth—the inheritance of all the nations the Kingdom of God which will be on this earth.

People who are going to be alive when Jesus Christ returns are going to see that power, because they are going to see the work that is done by God.

Psalm 111:7 The works of His hands are verity [truth] and justice; all His precepts are sure [reliable].

These are parts of His works. As I said before, He does not do works that are lies. He does not do works that are unjust. He does not do works that we cannot rely on. It is just the opposite. He does all these works so that we can see the truth, know what true justice and true judgment are, so that we can rely on them—and that He will do them again if the need arises.

Also in terms of His precepts we know that His law always works, and so we can trust in it. We can rely on them. If God tells us to do something then we can be sure that if we

Works of God by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

do it, it is going to end up working out well for us and for all who are involved.

Psalm 111:8 They stand fast forever and ever, . . .

Not only His precepts, but in the greater picture, His works are eternal.

Psalm 111:8-9 . . . And are done in truth and uprightness. He has sent redemption to His people; He has commanded His covenant forever: Holy and awesome is His name.

Of course, redemption, and the covenant that guides us along the way to the glories of the Kingdom, and all that are beyond that, are something to really praise Him for! "Holy and awesome [or tremendous, or greatly to be feared] is His name," because He can bring all these things about. All these things that the psalmist has just written are true. They all reflect on God. They show His holiness, and they show His (as we would think) terrible nature. I do not mean that in terms of evil, but being terrifying—that He is so far above us, so far stronger than us, so able to do everything, that it should put us into the right frame of mind in terms of godly fear.

That is exactly the next thing that He gives us in a memory scripture:

Psalm 111:10 The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; . . .

See? What He is doing here is He is giving us a stir to action! What we have seen in all these works and understanding all these characteristics of them brings us to this point.

What are we going to do about it? If we have the right attitude and come to the proper understanding of God, and what He is able to do, what is produced? The fear of the Lord; reverence, and godly fear for Him.

That, then, is the foundation of wisdom, which is proper decision making, and right actions that we take because we understand God, and His works, and what He is able to do.

We have the right foundation for this, and come to the right conclusions, meaning God is great, and greatly to be praised, and greatly to be feared, then, we will align ourselves with that, and start walking in wisdom.

Psalm 111:10 . . . A good understanding have all those who do His commandments.

Because, walking in wisdom is to do His commandments—to live by the rules that He set out for us to live by.

Psalm 111:10 His praise endures forever.

It ends where it began—praises to God again, forever, for all these wonderful things that He is done for us.

So, even from these ten verses we should be able to see that God's works are far more expansive than simply preaching the Gospel. That is only an infinitesimally small part of what He is up to. He is into far more than just motivating His servants to preach His Word.

We know this. I am not telling anything that you did not already realize. It is just that we have been so trained to think of the work of God being the preaching of the Gospel that we have put these other things out of our minds and do not think about them quite as often as we should.

But, we need to see God's work in everything.

This goes back to my dad's signature sermon, "Do You See God?" Do you see God working in every part of your life? From the food that you eat, to the trees in your yard, to the trials that beset us? Do you see God in your trials? Are His works before you all the day?

They are everywhere. We have to learn to open our eyes to see them, and to understand them, and to realize that those works are for our benefit every single time.

Psalm 104 is a psalm extolling the things that He did primarily in creation, and in His providence.

I am going to read this straight through. I do not think I will be stopping very often. I want you to get the feel of this psalmist's attitude, emotion, sense of history, and his sense of God's present activities.

Psalm 104:1-23 Bless the LOORD, O my soul! O LOORD my God, You are very great: You are clothed with honor and majesty, who cover Yourself with light as with a garment, who stretch out the heavens like a curtain. He lays the beams of His upper chambers in the waters, who makes the clouds His chariot, who walks on the wings of the wind, who makes His angels spirits, His ministers a flame of fire. You who laid the foundations of the earth, so that it should not be moved forever, You covered it with the deep as with a garment; the waters stood above the mountains. At Your rebuke they fled; at the voice of Your thunder they hastened away. They went up over the mountains; they went down into the valleys, to the place which You founded for them. You have set a boundary that they may not pass over, that they may not return to cover the earth.

He sends the springs into the valleys, they flow among the hills. They give drink to every beast of the field; the wild donkeys quench their thirst. By them the birds of the heavens have their home; they sing among the branches. He waters the hills from His upper chambers; the earth is satisfied with the fruit of Your works. He causes the grass to grow for the cattle, and vegetation for the service of man, that he may bring forth food from the earth, and wine makes glad the heart of man, oil to make his face shine, and bread which strengthens man's heart. The trees of the LOORD are full of sap, the cedars of Lebanon which He planted, where the birds make their nests; the stork has her home in the fir trees. The high hills are for the wild goats; the cliffs are a refuge for the rock badgers.

He appointed the moon for seasons; the sun knows its going down. You make darkness, and it is night, in which all the beasts of the forest creep about. The young lions roar after their prey, and seek their food from God. When the sun rises, they gather together and lie down in their dens. Man goes out to his work and to his labor until the evening.

God is involved in all these things.

Psalm 104:24-35 O LOORD, how manifold are Your works! In wisdom You have made them all. The earth is full of Your possessions—this great and wide sea, in which are innumerable teeming things, living things both small and great. There the ships sail about; there is that Leviathan which You have made to play there. These all wait for You, that You may give them their food in due season. What You give them they gather in; You open Your hand,

Works of God by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

they are filled with good. You hide Your face, they are troubled; You take away their breath, they die and return to their dust. You send forth Your Spirit, they are created; and You renew the face of the earth.

May the glory of the LOORD endure forever; may the LOORD rejoice in His works. He looks on the earth, and it trembles; He touches the hills, and they smoke. I will sing to the LOORD as long as I live; I will sing praise to my God while I have my being. May my meditation be sweet to Him; I will be glad in the LOORD. May sinners be consumed from the earth, and the wicked be no more. Bless the LOORD, O my soul! Praise the LOORD!

When we finally figure out how awesome God's works are our only suitable reaction is to praise Him, and fear Him. The idea in Psalm 104 is that *nothing* happens on this earth that is not one of His works.

Of course, that has to exclude the things that we do on our own. Those things end in sin, destruction, and death. But, He is certainly there doing all these works among the creation, and providing man with the food, clothing, and all the other things he needs for his sustenance. All these are works of God.

As the other psalm said, this should lead to wisdom, obedience, and devoting ourselves wholeheartedly to His purpose, because God is working.

Now, recall from the previous sermon that works need not be a deeply theological subject. They are simply actions, practices, doings, accomplishments, efforts, or deeds. Works are what we do. God's works are what He does. It is as simple as that.

We have to understand, though, that God's works are *always* holy, righteous, just, equitable, true, and faithful—all those things that were mentioned there in Psalm 111.

They are different from our works. Our works often end up as works of the flesh, because they are motivated by our flesh, and we give into them.

But, God's works are never motivated by such small and insignificant reasons like ours are. God's works are always on the highest level of good, love, faithfulness, righteousness, and all those things that we think of when we try to pin God down with words that contain no stain of evil or wrong.

Even when God's works lead to destruction, there is no stain of evil or wrong, because

He has a purpose that He is working out.

There are plenty of places in the Bible, if you would care to look for them, where His works were things like punishing Israel for her sins; or punishing the Assyrians; or doing His work among the Babylonians and bring them down, killing hundreds of thousands of people; destroying great cities, and empires. But, they were works of God, and they moved His purpose along, and therefore, they were good in the long run.

Because He is God, He can always raise those people up from the dead in the second resurrection and make good on those things.

On the other hand, our works tend to be evil, fleshly, carnal.

But God's works are good. And they are eternal, that is that they have eternal consequences. His works are always aimed at the long term fulfillment of His purpose.

Here we will see another work or two of God taking place:

II Corinthians 4:16 Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day.

There is one of the works. The inward man is being renewed day by day. Most of this is done by God Himself. We have a small part to play in it. We have to make ourselves available to be renewed day by day through prayer, study, etc., and the interaction that we have with God through His Spirit. But, it is a work of God being done in us.

II Corinthians 4:17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

Even the things that we consider to be bad for us—curses, or trials, and temptations—Paul says here that they are working for us, because God sent them to us, a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.

II Corinthians 4:18 While we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary [that is what men see], but the things which are not seen are eternal [what God sees].

Now, how many of you have seen God do a miracle?

Most of us probably thought we have seen a miracle, but we have not seen God **do** a miracle like those people in the first century who had God in the flesh, where someone came up to Him and asked to be healed, and He healed them right there! The withered hand opened up, or the man was able to take up his bed and walk who had been crippled.

I use this illustration to show that the miracles that have been done that we may have been witness to have been done **invisibly** by God. He did not come down and do the miracle in front of us. The miracle was just done. It was a work of God, but it was unseen in its doing.

Now, the works of God are generally not seen by the human eye—by the human, carnal eye; the kind of eye of a person who is looking entirely at physical things, walking (living) by sight, we often say.

But, those who have their minds and eyes trained to see God at work see God at work all the time. So, they see the invisible at work. They see eternal things happening to them, around them, for them, and for others.

So, God is one of the players that seems to be working, as we might say, "behind the scenes." He is invisible and His works often go unnoticed, and unappreciated, even by us whose eyes have begun to be trained to see the invisible works of God.

Nevertheless, these works are constantly being done in our behalf. They never stop. God is always working. So, we should not confuse invisible with inactive. God loves us so much that He is constantly active in our behalf.

Let us go to John 5 and we will see Jesus Christ tell us this point blank. This is one of those times where the Jews accused Him of breaking the Sabbath. Look at Jesus' reaction:

John 5:16-18 For this reason [he had just done a healing] the Jews persecuted Jesus, and sought to kill Him, because He had done these things on the Sabbath.

But Jesus answered them [notice this], "My Father has been working until now, and I have been working [poor translation]." Therefore the Jews sought all the more to kill Him, because He not only broke the Sabbath, but also

Works of God by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

said that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God.

It was not that He said so much that God was His Father, but rather the equal part that really got to them. Because, basically He said, "Just like the Father is always working, **I never stop working.**" That is what got the Jews all riled up. Not that He claimed God as His Father, any Jew could call God his Father. Any human being can call God his Father.

The thing that got them upset was that He called Himself "God" because one of the primary characteristics of God is that He never stops working. And Jesus just said, "Just like Him, I never stop working." Basically, "I am God. I do the same things God does."

This ties in with the Sabbath because Genesis 2:1-3 says that on the seventh day God created the Sabbath by resting—He ceased His creation. But, God never stopped working and the Jews knew that. If God stopped working, everything would stop. God cannot stop working. He has a universe to run.

What Jesus did here was to say that He was on God's level. "I do the same works that God does. And, I do them all the time." This was sheer blasphemy to the Jews. They did not understand who they were talking to.

So, if God stopped working, we would all just merely—poof—cease to exist.

Do you know how I know this? Do you know how I know that if God just put His feet up and rested like we do that the whole universe would come apart, just like the snap of your fingers? Because the Bible tells me so!

Hebrews 1, and specifically verse 3, where some of the best writing in all the Bible is right here in this three or four verse opening here (at least the translation of the Greek to English).

Hebrews 1:1-3 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, has in these last days spoken to us by His Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; who being the brightness of His glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high.

That is what this phrase "upholding all things by the word of His power" means. God established physical laws for the operation of matter in this universe, but they must be maintained and sustained constantly. They are backed by His power and will. If He should choose at any time to withdraw them from the natural laws of the universe, the whole, vast, spectacular creation would fall to pieces in a jiffy.

He is way beyond awesome!

This might give you an understanding of the difference between man and God, and maybe gives you an inkling of what we will become—why Jesus was so excited about receiving all His power back again, and why He had joy set before Him and was willing to take all that He took to get back to the Father. He was the only One that has ever really appreciated the difference.

It is just amazing to think that He gave it up in the first place! Going from upholding all things by the word of His power, to being fleshly like us, a worm by comparison. I could probably say that He was eager to get back, especially when He started going through the things that we go through.

Now we can suppose that these laws that God made—all the physical laws of the universe—have been put on a kind of auto-pilot by now. But, even if He does do this, it does not take away from the fact that He is constantly working to provide us a suitable environment for abundant life.

He is constantly making sure that we can continue to live, to grow, to learn, and to make those strides that will lead to the Kingdom of God. Now these laws are not His first priority by any means. They were made simply for our benefit because He has got a greater work going.

Let us go back to Psalm 74. This is a psalm that is intended to be sung or remembered in those times of oppression and persecution that God's people frequently face. It might be a general persecution, or it can be individual. It does not matter. But, it is something to remember for the great time that is coming just ahead of us when there will be the greatest time of oppression and persecution that this world has ever seen. And I think that this is what this psalm was intended by God to reflect. Let us just read these five verses:

Psalm 74:1 O God, why have You cast us off forever? Why does Your anger smoke against the sheep of Your pasture?

This could obviously be Israelites, but it works a lot better when you are talking about His spiritual Israelites, the church of God.

Psalm 74:9 We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet; nor is there any among us who knows how long.

Does this sound familiar?

Psalm 74:10-11 O God, how long will the adversary reproach? Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever? Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? Take it out of Your bosom and destroy them.

And then he reminds God about what He is:

Psalm 74:12 For God is my King from of old, working salvation in the midst of the earth.

It is easy for human beings—short-sighted as we are, and fearful as we are—to conclude that God has stopped working on behalf of His people, especially when we see people dying on one hand, being persecuted on the other; having to go through severe trials; losing loved ones; losing their shirts in the financial troubles of the day; not being able to get a job; this, that, and the other thing. Verse 12 is a reminder, though, that God's number one job is working salvation in midst of the earth.

Everything that He does, including the sustaining of the physical laws of the universe, is designed to further the process of salvation. If He had a resume, it would be right near the top—Savior—along with the other ones, like Creator, Sustainer, Life-giver, Law-giver, etc., etc., etc.

But, all of those are designed to bring us salvation. You could say that He is in the salvation business. Again, we can see this in Jesus Christ. Please go to John 4, particularly verse 42 because that puts a capstone on it.

Here, He is talking to His disciples because here He was, He had been weary, and they had gone to find Him something to eat. In the meantime He had this talk with the Samaritan woman; and when they came back, He looked full of energy again, and ready

to go! But, He had not eaten. He might have had a drink because He had asked the woman for one, but that was it. And then He explains:

John 4:34-38 Jesus said to them, "My food is to do the will of Him who sent Me, and to finish His work. "Do you not say, 'There are still four months and then comes the harvest'? Behold, I say to you, lift up your eyes and look at the fields, for they are already white for harvest! "And he who reaps receives wages, and gathers fruit for eternal life, that both he who sows and he who reaps may rejoice together. For in this the saying is true: 'One sows and another reaps.' I sent you to reap that for which you have not labored; others have labored, and you have entered into their labors."

John 4:42 Then they [the Samaritans in the city] said to the woman, "Now we believe, not because of what you said, for we ourselves have heard Him and we know that this is indeed the Christ, the Savior of the world."

I read that last verse to give you an idea of the impression that He made upon these people. His zeal for doing God's work marked Him as Savior! Because that is God's job. They recognized it. These half-breed Samaritans who only had a little bit of real understanding through their own version of the Pentateuch were able to recognize from what He said and did that He was Savior of the world. They recognized God in Him. And, they did it just about sooner than anybody else!

The zeal He had was eating Him up! They could see it. He was just so consumed with doing God's work. And was it preaching the gospel? Yes, that was part of it. But, overarching above all that was that He was the Savior of the world! He had a lot of things to get done to make that happen.

And so, He tells the disciples, here, that they have been called to the same effort, and that the fields were ripe for harvest. There are people out there who need to hear this message; but not just hear it. They needed to be reaped as well, and the reaping comes along after a long growing season.

There is a lot that happens between the hearing—the sowing, that is—and the reaping.

Jesus was sowing here, in this case, and He is telling them that they would have to reap what others had sown. So, it is not just preaching the gospel.

Maybe Mr. Armstrong used that in an overall sense. But, God, as we have seen here in

Works of God by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

Psalm 74, and as is said here in John 4:42, His job is salvation—not just the preaching, but the saving. That work has never stopped, because God never stops working!

Turn to Isaiah and we will read bits and pieces of chapters 61 and 62. These two chapters are part of a longer prophecy. I picked these two because they talk a great deal about salvation. But, they intertwine physical deliverance with spiritual salvation. There is a lot of physical and spiritual going back and forth. It is for a purpose. There is a good reason why He did this.

You will recognize the first couple verses of Isaiah 61 because this is what Jesus quoted and said His own work was when He began His ministry. But if you go back to Isaiah 61 and read the rest you will find there is more work left to be done!

There was only so much work that He could do while here on earth during His first coming. The remainder is left for His second coming.

This is what I mean that there is a great deal of intertwining of the physical and the spiritual—things that happen with His first coming, things that happen with His second coming, things that happen near, things that happen far—we call it type, and anti-type; there is a lot of that going on in these two chapters. But, I want to pull out several verses because I want you to see God's work—what He says that He is going to do.

Isaiah 61:1-2 The Spirit of the Lord GOOD is upon Me, because the LOORD has anointed Me to preach good tidings to the poor; He has sent Me to heal the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to those who are bound; to proclaim the acceptable year of the LOORD, .
..

That is where Jesus stopped there in the book of Luke. Look! It was right in the middle of a verse. That is when He said that these things have been fulfilled in your hearing—today. But, the verse continues on.

Isaiah 61:2-3 . . . And the day of vengeance of our God; to comfort all who mourn, to console those who mourn in Zion, to give them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness; that they may be called trees of righteousness, the planting of the LOORD, that He may be glorified."

What is He talking about here?

It sounds to me like after He goes through the vengeance of our God, He is talking about the first resurrection: Comfort the mourners, beauty for ashes, joy for mourning, praise for heaviness, planted trees of God of righteousness. That sounds like what our reward is.

Now down to verse 10 (This is the same speaker):

Isaiah 61:10 I will greatly rejoice in the LOORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for He has clothed me with the garments of salvation, . . .

Who is clothed with the garments of salvation in this particular sense? I think we are talking about Christ still.

Isaiah 61:10-11 . . . He has covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decks himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorns herself with her jewels. For as the earth brings forth its bud, as the garden causes the things that are sown in it to spring forth, so the Lord GOD will cause righteousness and praise to spring forth before all the nations.

That is what He is up to.

Isaiah 62:1-3 For Zion's sake I will not hold My peace, and for Jerusalem's sake I will not rest, until her righteousness goes forth as brightness, and her salvation as a lamp that burns. The Gentiles shall see your righteousness, and all kings your glory. You shall be called by a new name [Revelation 3:12], which the mouth of the LOORD will name. You shall also be a crown of glory In the hand of the LOORD, and a royal diadem in the hand of your God.

Notice specifically verse 1, He says, "I will not rest," until these things be accomplished. God is at work. Jesus Christ is at work bringing salvation to His people.

Isaiah 62:11-12 Indeed the LOORD has proclaimed to the end of the world: "Say to the daughter of Zion, 'Surely your salvation is coming; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him.'" And they shall call them The Holy People, The Redeemed of the LOORD; and you shall be called Sought

Out, A City Not Forsaken.

Now, you noticed because I pointed it out, the strong theme here is salvation, and glorification (if you want to take it that far). That is what He was sent here and anointed to do. Then He says that He has been clothed with the garments of salvation—is that not true? He is the only One that had it! Like a Bridegroom who decks himself with ornaments.

He then says that He will not rest until He brings His brothers and sisters to the same state that He is—the holy people, the redeemed of the Lord. That is His job. He is hard at work, constantly at work doing it.

Now, God has given us the entire Old Testament to show us how impossible it is for a physical people to become holy on their own.

Do you know that two-thirds of this book are examples of doing it the wrong way? Most people try to do it on their own. That is what the Jews ended up doing when Jesus came to them. He had to correct them and got killed by them for trying to show them the right way. But, that was His job as our Redeemer to come and set the example, and to preach the Gospel which includes all of the things that we need to be saved.

Remember what Paul says there in Romans 1 that the Gospel is the power of God unto salvation. The Gospel surely needs to be preached, but then it needs to be lived unto salvation. It is the Gospel that gives us the power to get us there because it contains all that we need—all the instruction that we need—to make it, as it were.

So, God endured 1500 years of Israel's bellyaching and rebellion to give us an example of how not to do it. Then He sent His Son to show how it can be done, and as well to take the necessary steps to bring others to salvation. Even so, He gives us the entire New Testament, and has taken another 2000 years to bring to salvation a relatively miniscule 144,000 before the end.

It sounds like a great deal of work goes into producing just a few of the redeemed.

He is hard at work. He is not sitting on a cloud strumming a harp! He is setting the example for us so that by the time that we are changed, we understand what it takes to be God, and the work that we are going to have to do throughout the Millennium and the Great White Throne Judgment to bring our other brothers and sisters to glory as well.

John 6 has another answer to a question. The people had seen that He would feed them, that He could give them bread, and He had been talking about it, "Do not labor for the bread that perishes," you should be going for the food that endures forever to everlasting life as it says there in verse 27. And then they said unto Him:

John 6:28 Then they said to Him, "What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?"

What do we have to do to get on board, to help in this great work that He is doing?

John 6:29 Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

John 6:40 And this is the will of Him who sent Me, that everyone who sees the Son and believes in Him may have everlasting life; and I will raise him up at the last day."

Jesus defines the work of God in terms of believing in Him. That sounds simple enough, does it not? He said in verse 40 that this believing in Him will lead to the resurrection of life—eternal life; salvation in other words.

But this belief in Him is not as simple as it sounds. Believe is a verb. It is not an emotion. It is an action. It is a simple word that hides the sum of the Bible's instructions to God's people—all those who desire salvation and eternal life.

It is like a nutshell term that contains so much more than merely believing as we tend to think of it. I believe that the sun shines. But, what do I have to do because I believe that the sun shines? Nothing. It does not do me any good to believe that the sun shines. I know that it is there.

But, to believe in the Son of God requires my life. Do you get the difference? I do not have to do anything to believe that something is. But, I have to do a great deal if I want to **be** what I believe in.

Pat Higgins wrote an article in the September/October 2004 issue of *Forerunner* called, "Faith—What is it?" It explains this idea of what belief encapsulates very well. "Faith," he said, "is believing God's words, and doing what they tell us to do." Oh, so simply said!

Works of God by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

If God's words tell us to keep the Sabbath, we keep the Sabbath. If God's words tell us to put to death the deeds of the flesh, well, we put to death the deeds of the flesh. If they tell us to render to Caesar what is Caesar's, then we render to Caesar what is Caesar's. If they tell us to flee fornication, then we run like Michael Johnson in the other direction.

That is faith! You are believing God's words. And then, of course, like believing the words, we do what they tell us to do. Where does it lead you if you believe God's words, and do them?

Protestants tell us that it leads to legalism. What a crock that is! This is God telling us what to do to have salvation. Do you think that He is going to lead us into legalism? Do you know where His words lead?

John 6:63 The words that I speak to you are spirit, and they are life.

They lead to eternal life and salvation, not legalism.

The only reason that they get that is because people who do not have God's Spirit have tried to live by them, and that is where it leads in some cases.

But, with the Spirit of God the understanding of how to keep God's words can be understood. If one puts them into practice it can be done properly. However, doing it merely on our flesh, minds, and strength is not going to work. But, with God's Spirit in us because He has called us to do these things, the keeping of God's words whether commandments, principles, precepts, statutes, or whatever, if God says it, it can be done, and they will help us to have salvation.

Living faith—that is faith plus obedience—leads not to legalism, but to holiness. That is God's work today! He is bringing people to holiness, and therefore, to salvation.

Believing God's words, and putting them into practice, instills in us the very holy, righteous, character of God Himself. Mr. Armstrong understood this. He preached it for how many years? How many times did we hear him say the phrase, "holy, righteous character." That God was creating holy, righteous character within us and reproducing Himself?

He just said them in a different way that I just have today. He understood that. That is why I said in the beginning his idea that preaching the Gospel is the work of God, and the way that it has worked out these days in many people's minds, is a fault of the

hearing, and not of the speaking. He knew what He was talking about. We did not understand.

So, this is the work of God. This is what God is doing. He is recreating Himself by bringing us to holiness. That is why on the seventh day of creation He did not stop working. He just ceased working the way that He had been in doing the physical creation. He continued right on creating, and right on working. And it is the same work that Jesus picked up in the New Testament, and it is the same work that we have been called to help do.

Let us go to II Corinthians 6 to emphasize this. Paul had just finished telling them that they needed to get away from the world, Belial, lawlessness, and darkness, and all these other things that he just went through, like "what agreement do we have with unbelievers?, what agreement does the temple of God have with idols?, etc., etc., etc." This is his concluding statement:

II Corinthians 6:17-7:1 Therefore "Come out from among them and be separate, says the Lord. Do not touch what is unclean, and I will receive you. I will be a Father to you, and you shall be My sons and daughters, says the LORD Almighty." Therefore, having these promises, beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

We are right back where we started there in Psalm 111:10. We have come around in a big circle.

It is God's works, and the fear of God that puts us in the proper mindset to get His work done.

That was Paul. This next verse is from Peter, and they are united in what they are teaching the church of God.

I Peter 1:13-19 Therefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and rest your hope fully upon the grace that is to be brought to you at the revelation of Jesus Christ; as obedient children, not conforming yourselves to the former lusts, as in your ignorance; but as He who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, because it is written, "Be holy, for I am holy." And if you call on the Father, who without partiality judges according to each one's work [in cooperation with Him], conduct yourselves throughout the time

Works of God by Richard T. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

of your stay here in fear; knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot.

So much has been done for us already, we owe it to God to help Him do His work in us, to bring us to holiness, and therefore, in time, to be glorified as His sons and daughters.

The question we have to ask ourselves is, "Are we up to the task?" Like I said, God is constantly working. Are we up to the task of trying to do the same amount and effort of work that He puts into it?

Here, He was about to heal this man who had been blind from birth.

John 9:4 I must work the works of Him who sent Me while it is day; the night is coming when no one can work.

In this little parable that He gives, day equals life, and night equals death. "I must work the works of Him who sent Me while I have life. Death is coming when no one can work." Think of this personally.

Day is life, and a finite time. We know that the end of the day—the end of our lives, night, is coming. Death is when a man cannot do anything.

If you go back to Ecclesiastes 9 you will find that Solomon says that very plainly, that there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge—nothing—in the grave where we are all going.

If you want to work, it has got to be done while there is light—life. While there is life, there is hope.

So, we only have a finite amount of time to use in doing the work of God. It is time to get to work!