

**“What Are You Working For?”**

**(John 6:24-35)**

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Grace to you and peace from God our Father and from our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen. When Jesus fed the 5000 men plus women and children, the people – at least the majority of them – had misinterpreted the miracle which pointed at Jesus’ true identity as the divine Messiah. In this morning’s Gospel, these same people are presented as having been looking for Jesus. Christ had impressed them just enough for Him to be perceived as a source for earthly desire...the people believed – in accord with *their* terms – that they could get something out of Him! Furthermore, while Christ was being grossly misunderstood, the people were more than willing to perpetuate their false religion: they want to know what they have to do, to get the miracle worker to keep performing! Jesus was to these unbelievers like a circus dog, who if receiving enough applause, might jump through the hoops set before him.

Luther described the people in this text as follows: *“The learned and the work-righteous always know better [than God]. They love God as lice love a tramp; far from being interested in his welfare, their one concern is to feed on him and suck his blood.”* (AE 23, p. 30)

How familiar this popular approach to God really is. When people really want something, what kind of advice do they usually get? “Just follow your heart!” That is, just assume that whatever you want, must be what you should possess. We are taught that you can have and do whatever you want...you only need to want it bad enough. This might be true for certain civil realm endeavors, such as earning a college degree, or perhaps landing a certain job, or perhaps even winning the affections of someone you love, but this philosophy does *not* apply to Christ. We cannot become bloodsuckers towards God and believe that our religion is based on coaxing God, or impressing Him so as to get from Him what we want. There is nothing we can do to “work” God into tickling our fancies. When it comes to Christ, our entire approach dear brothers and sisters in Christ must be different. For starters, we must know that there is no approaching God unless God draws us to Himself (John 6:44).

It is monumentally important for us to understand that being a Christian does not know its emphasis in living in terms of trying to please God, but to contrary,

emphasizes that in Christ, God is already pleased with you. Being a Christian is not so much about striving for good as it is knowing that in Christ you *are* good. Being a Christian is not for those who come to church to do “what is right,” but for those who desire to taste and see once again that God makes them right in Christ.

If what I just said seems confusing, then allow me to put it this way: being a Christian is not based on your work/what you work out; but based on God’s work/what God works out. Just consider Christ’s earthly ministry. When He healed the sick, the sick did not heal themselves. When He gave sight to the blind, the blind did not give sight to themselves. When He fed the hungry, the hungry relied on His work to feed them. The LORD’s *modus operandi* has not changed in 2012. God is after-all immutable. He still comes today and He still works His work.

Sometimes even the best Christians forget this vital fundamental truth of the saving faith, but we cannot afford to forget it! But how often do we become preoccupied with our works, even those Christians who reasonably know that they are saved by grace alone? Though we know this intellectually, how easy it is for Satan to grab hold of our consciences, and when he does, we become focused not on the work of God, but with our work. And then we naturally become overwhelmed in a cycle of guilt and shame going beyond merely confessing our sins, but then insisting that our working things out is the answer to our sins and so the sins themselves become all we see as we assume that we must work them out: *“I have not performed well enough for God; I have not been a good husband or wife; there is more that I must do; I have not been a good son or daughter; there is more work I must do; I have not done this; I have done that; [and of course], I am a work in progress and there is more work for me to do!”* We are addicted to work and we allow our work to define our lives. And in time, the operative pronoun becomes “I” or “we” ... *“I have not read my Bible enough; I must work this out and work that out; I have been failing in my marriage; I have been a poor child; a poor parent; a failing Christian; I have to fix this; I have to fix that!”* We cannot stop with the first-person singular language: “I, I, I.” This is our cycle, our flesh, the world, and when this happens, the devil smells victory against us as the dark strategy begins to work: when we take our eyes off of the work of Christ and become preoccupied with our own.

Now, let me show you something absolutely grand in our Gospel this morning: this is what is said at John 6:28-29:

***<sup>28</sup>"Then they said to him, 'What must we do, to be doing the works of God?' <sup>29</sup>Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"***

In one swift declaration, Christ corrects the false belief of the people busy rejecting grace and so, so busy assuming that they are the ones who must work, work, work. They came with their question, and did you notice how self-centered it was? Note the question precisely: ***"WHAT MUST WE DO, TO BE DOING THE WORKS OF GOD?"*** (v 28) Notice again their preoccupation with self. They certainly had a general belief in God, but they were nevertheless completely blind to God, because they had insisted that their salvation and benefit from God had to be self-accomplished.

In our sinful nature, we too look at circumstances, our lack of peace, our frustration, our inner voids, but how interesting that we are more willing to struggle with the tenacity of a bulldog assuming that WE must find a way; "work it out," while we often neglect to simply ask God to work it out for us. To be still and rest in Him and in the grace of God in Christ while calling on the Name of the Lord, let God do the work. To confess and to walk in such a way as to trust that He is the only One capable of working it out, because the more we try to fix things without Him, the more we seem to botch them up. The work, however, is the LORD's...He creates, He sustains, He nourishes, He kills, He raises...He does it all. One of my favorite Scriptures is the scene in Exodus when Moses and Israel are trapped between Pharaoh's chariots and the Red Sea...they are helpless, and yet they are panicked to try to figure out what to do and then God speaks:

***"The Lord will fight for you, and you have only to be silent." (Exodus 14:14)***

But we must return to John 6:28-29. We have already mentioned the self-centered, self-work attitude of the people, but now notice the answer of Christ:

***"Jesus answered them, 'This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.'"*** (verse 29)

**Let me share with you a little bit about how the word "God" is written here in the original language: "of God" is in the genitive case...why is that important? Because the genitive case means that the "work" belongs to God or comes from God. This is God's work. So, listen closely to the precise meaning as Christ leaves the false understanding far behind! *"This is the work coming from God/belonging to God, that you [are given or caused to] believe in Him whom He has sent."***

**In other words, the work which saves you dear Christian is the work which God works in you, namely saving faith in His Son and the life flowing from this faith is the work of God in and for you! The work of God for you is accomplished through the work of God sending Christ. And He did! For you...Christ was sent! For you...Christ is sent even now! For you...Christ will come! And who's doing the working? Christ is!**

**Think about the work of Christ. He worked fulfilling and keeping the Ten Commandments which you have broken. He worked the shedding of His blood to cover your sins. He worked rising from the grave for your eternal life. He works this morning in this service, by putting His Word – this Word – into your ears; and then putting His Word – the Sacramental Word – into your mouth...He is working right now, the Living Bread from Heaven coming to you right now, working faith in you!**

**So, I ask you the question, "What are you working for?" Well, when it comes to receiving all good things in Christ, let us answer: "Nothing, but Jesus Christ is working these things for me!"**

**Once again dear brothers and sisters in Christ, Christ prepares to work for you...when you come to this altar, He will come to work...and His work is to feed you with His body and blood. Rejoice! It is a work He gladly does; He loves doing it and wants you to know that He will never tire doing it for you. That is how precious and important you are to Him! With this revelation, let us be so thankful, so joyful, that we go forth with faith knowing that what follows is not our work, but His work in and through thankful, born-again hearts, trusting in Jesus...**

***"for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure." (Philippians 2:13)***

**Such a life does not come from our desperate, busy, and powerless works that dig us deeper into our pits of anger and fear; but from the work that you are receiving here and now: the forgiveness of your sins. Believe in this work and as one made right with God through the work of Jesus, then what you do will also be God's work...the work of walking not with the attitude that life depends on your work; but that the work of God has given you life!**