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The Work of God is This

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Series: The Mind of Christ

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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Much of the New Testament was written simply to explain it. The writings of the great theological minds of the ages have basically endeavored to define it. Many of the great martyrs of days gone by have given their lives to confirm it. And yet it seems on the surface that most of us *simply cannot grasp it*. We can talk about it, sing about it, *even pray about it*. But the reality of living it on a day-to-day basis seems for the most part to escape us.

God living inside of a man? Physical people living in a physical world fighting spiritual battles on their way to another world that is eternal? *How can these things be?* The entire New Testament is filled with men and women confronting that issue and asking that question. Oh, they asked it a million different ways. So do we. But the bottom line was: they could not grasp living in two worlds at the same time. Can you?

One of the reasons God came to earth was so that we need never wonder again. He not only was going to teach us about it, He was going to demonstrate it for thirty-three wonderful years. He was going to live in a human body, a body buffeted by pain, sorrow, disappointment, and rejection. He would be misunderstood, persecuted, ridiculed. He would watch loved ones die, see His closest friends deny they ever knew Him. He would have so little of this world's goods, it would be said of Him, "He had no place to lay His head." He was going to walk among sinners and be exposed to temptations of every kind.

He was going to live in the same kind of body we live in, fight the same kind of battles we fight, and all the while *keep His focus on things eternal*. Never at any time was He going to forfeit even a fraction of one percent of any eternal reward for its temporal counterpart. Never was He going to confuse the two kingdoms. He would be alive, very much alive on planet earth. But never at any time would it become His home. His feet would be on earth, but His heart would be in heaven. His entire life would be lived in obedience to His Father. He would

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do always those things that pleased the Father. Never would He act independently.

Then He would return to His Father and leave these instructions for us:

Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus, who, being in the form of God, did not consider it robbery to be equal with God, but made Himself of no reputation [nothing], taking the form of a bondservant, and coming in the likeness of men.

And being found in appearance as a man, He humbled Himself... (Philippians 2:5-8a NKJV)

Let this mind be in you. Let this mindset be yours. Come to Him, you who are weary and heavy-laden, *and He will give you rest.*

It seems so simple on the surface. Have you ever wondered why we cannot seem to grasp it? If you read the New Testament carefully, you'll discover that man wants to interpret spiritual truth in the light of physical reality. We want to make that which is invisible visible, so we can see it, feel it, touch it, and control it. Promises of something eternal or internal are not enough. So we take the truth we receive from God and try to apply it to what affects us in this life. The result? The exact opposite of the real gospel.

Things God allows in order to produce character are misinterpreted, as we focus on the circumstances themselves rather than the Christ-life in us those circumstances will produce if we will but respond in the Spirit. Eternal rewards are laid aside in favor of immediate gratification, *even spiritual gratification.* We'd rather have recognition now, rather than wait for something we cannot see. Biblical promises in the spirit realm are misinterpreted as physical guarantees, and the benefits of heaven are accrued to earth. Spiritual progress is measured not by spiritual growth or eternal rewards or lives transformed and redeemed, but by numbers and dollars, by prosperity and good health, by the presence of comfort and the absence of conflict.

Our ultimate accomplishments are measured by immediate

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visible results rather than taken by faith that the deeper things of God which are not often quickly visible will ultimately bear fruit. So we opt for external evidences at the expense of internal transformation, and the church becomes a theater where Christians try to imitate the world to attract the world.

We measure our prosperity in temporal terms: how many people come, how much they give, how many buildings we can build, how many people we need to hire to perpetuate the program. In the process, we often miss the deeper messages that God is writing on the tablets of human hearts through failure, disease, death, disappointment, even discouragement. Instead of rejoicing over the character that is being perfected in us through our trials, we complain and become discouraged over the physical, tangible scars they are leaving on our lives, scars that often are necessary to give us the mind of Christ.

The problem is not new. We live in one world, but we are to be living for *that world which is to come*. The problem is, that unless we somehow gain and keep God's perspective, we will always gravitate towards that which is temporal and physical, and pride will seep into our spiritual machinery and cause it to produce wood, hay, and stubble.

It all became evident two thousand years ago when God came to earth to demonstrate that you can live in one world with your heart in another.

They killed Him for it. They simply could not grasp it. And so our study continues as we look at the mind of Christ, watching the Son of God as He lived on planet earth for those incredible years that changed the course of history. We have been watching Him humble Himself again and again, doing the impossible, while taking no glory for Himself.

He turned water into wine at a wedding feast, and created no fanfare at all. He healed the son of a king's courier and moved quietly on. He healed a man at the pool of Bethesda and did not even tell the man His name. He fed 5,000 with a handful of scraps, then even conserved that which was left.

The world was in awe. They wanted to be healed. They wanted to be fed. They wanted their imaginations set ablaze with wonderment at what miraculous thing this nobody from nowhere might do next. If he could do this much as a mere

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carpenter's son turned preacher, what could He do as a king? So they conspired to draft him and force Him to establish His kingdom of miracles here and now.

This was the breaking point.

This was the fork in the road.

This was the moment of truth.

Yes, God in human form had come to earth and turned water into wine, but He did it to teach men about Living Water. They missed it. He healed the courier's son, but He did it to teach men about faith. They missed it. He healed a crippled man at the pool side to teach men how to walk with God. They missed it. He fed 5,000 with nothing but scraps to teach men about bread come down from heaven. They missed it. Oh, how they missed it.

So the Living God withdrew. He called "time out" and left the playing field for a season. He went to be...by Himself alone. The crowds were everywhere. His popularity was exploding. They were loving the manifestation, but they were *missing the message*. So the Master went alone to pray. He had to keep it straight and so do we. Here is the message:

THE KINGDOM ISN'T HERE

The kingdom isn't here
And the kingdom isn't now
It must be borne in grief and pain
With thorns upon His brow.

"He couldn't be Messiah,"
The people soon would cry
"Why would God come down to earth
To suffer and to die?"

Oh, blessed one, be careful,
One day, indeed, we'll reign
But now, dear Christian, in His steps,
There often must be pain

The pain's but for a season,
To point us to the Son
Rejoice, and keep perspective, child;
The Kingdom soon will come.

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Indeed it will. But it isn't now. And it won't be here. As Jesus watched in agony, the cheering throng nominated Him "man of the year", totally misunderstanding who He was and why He had come. They spoke of a temporal kingdom here and now, and when they did, Jesus had to withdraw and be...by Himself alone.

It is there that we take up in our look at the Mind of Christ as it looks in the real world. The disciples went boating while the Master was praying. Like us, they had to do something. And a customary thing happened along the way. One of the storms of life began to rear its ugly head, and the harder they fought against it, the less progress they made. The story goes like this:

Jesus, knowing that they intended to come and make him king by force, withdrew again to a mountain by himself.

When evening came, his disciples went down to the lake, where they got into a boat and set off across the lake for Capernaum. By now it was dark, and Jesus had not yet joined them.

A strong wind was blowing and the waters grew rough.

When they had rowed three or three and a half miles, they saw Jesus approaching the boat, walking on the water; and they were terrified.

But he said to them, "It is I; don't be afraid."

Then they were willing to take him into the boat, and immediately the boat reached the shore where they were heading.

(John 6:15-21 NIV)

Do you catch the drift (pardon the pun)? They couldn't stand idly by and wait for God to catch up to them. They had to go on in their own energy. So God let them. And He let a routine storm, the kind so common to those parts, come upon them. Why would God let a storm interrupt the fellowship of His special called ones? To get their attention. Avoiding storms was not His plan. Enduring storms, however, was a part of His plan.

They did what we do. They tried to row harder to compensate. God did what He still does. The harder they rowed in their own energy, the less they accomplished. Suddenly, they looked up and saw Jesus (that's always the turning point). He was

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coming to them (He always does). But He wasn't swimming. Not because He couldn't, because He didn't need to. The waters were not His problem, the disciples were. He was above the circumstances. He walked atop the waves towards the ship. They were terrified. They never expected to see Jesus in a storm. They thought that wherever He went, fair weather followed. But there He was, walking on the water. Until His Word came forth, they were too frightened to even have Him come aboard.

He spoke those incredibly tender words that have echoed through the corridors of history as a reminder of God's love. He said, "It is I; don't be afraid." When they heard His Word, they were willing to let Him come aboard, and when He did, the boat arrived immediately where all their rowing could not take them. Getting to the shore was not a problem to God. Getting these thick-skulled disciples to understand the difference between fear and faith was His problem. The storm was only a teaching tool. Once again, they marveled at the manifestation, but they missed the message. The message was, "*Trust me and the storms of life will not go away, but you need not be afraid of them. I will take you safely to shore.*"

The message they got was, "If things get tough, just call on Jesus and He'll speak to life's storms and make them go away." Jesus was dealing with the spirit world, they were dealing with this one. They wanted a God who would, when storm clouds gathered, change the circumstances. They had so much more. They had a God who, when storm clouds gathered, *changed them*. But like us, they didn't understand.

As the crowd found Him, they began to question how He got there, and what He was doing.

Once the crowd realized that neither Jesus nor his disciples were there, they got into the boats and went to Capernaum in search of Jesus.

When they found him on the other side of the lake, they asked him, "Rabbi, when did you get here?"

Jesus answered, "I tell you the truth, you are looking for me, not because you saw miraculous signs but because you ate the loaves and had your fill.

Do not work for food that spoils, but for food that endures

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to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give you. On him God the Father has placed his seal of approval.”

(John 6:24-27 NIV)

Jesus tries to shift kingdoms again. They were focusing on their free meal ticket. He was trying to explain *why He fed them*. He fed them to teach them that there was a kind of bread that feeds the soul, and once you eat of that bread, you need never hunger again. Their antennas didn't pick up the signals. So they kept asking questions.

Then they asked him, “What must we do to do the works God requires?”

Jesus answered, “The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

(John 6:28,29 NIV)

There you have the most penetrating truth in this passage. They were dumbfounded. They wanted to know how He got where He was. He responded with, “That’s not the issue. The issue is: *you’re not tuned in. You want physical explanations of physical phenomenon, while God is trying to use the physical circumstances of life to teach you spiritual truth.*” Bread is not the issue. Life is. Eternal life. And you won't get it in a loaf of Rainbow thin-sliced at the corner grocery store.

Jesus told them He had in His possession a loaf of bread that you only ate once. It fed the soul and guaranteed you eternal life. They thought that was neat. They now assumed if they could just get a price list from His bakery, they could handle it from there. So they asked Him what they had to do to please God. The entire Jewish faith had degenerated into a legalistic system of works. They thought they had missed a page. What else did they need to do, anyway? They tithed, they fasted, they prayed, they sacrificed.

“What must we do?” they asked. Literally, the meaning is: “What precisely is God wanting us to do, and how do we do it?” Oh, what a powerful question. They had their steno pads handy. Their Bic pins were poised to take down the Master's list of “dos and don'ts”. They were ready for anything but what He said. He said,

“The work of God is this: to believe in the one he has sent.”

(John 6:29b NIV)

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Uh-oh. They hadn't bargained for that. That required *faith* and that was *not tangible*. That was, therefore, not practical. They wanted to know what they could *do*. Jesus was telling them what to *believe*. Wrong kingdom. Talk about a frustrated congregation. Here they were in actual conversation with the answer to their prayers, and it was as if He were talking a foreign language. Living water. Bread come down from heaven. The work of God is to *believe*? Who is this guy, and why doesn't He talk Hebrew like the rest of us? So they asked one more question:

So they asked him, "What miraculous sign then will you give that we may see it and believe you? What will you do?"

Our forefathers ate the manna in the desert; as it is written: 'He gave them bread from heaven to eat.'"

Jesus said to them, "I tell you the truth, it is not Moses who has given you the bread from heaven, but it is my Father who gives you the true bread from heaven.

For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world." (John 6:30-33 NIV)

They still didn't get it. Jesus was talking faith. They were talking sight. He was talking inner trust. They were talking outer signs. He was talking eternal food. They wanted more free groceries. He said, "Just believe." They responded, "Here's how much faith we have: prove yourself by more miracles, and we will believe you because of what you do, rather than because of who you claim to be."

They even had a test for Him. "Do this, Lord, and we'll believe you are who you say you are," they chided Him. Sound familiar? "How about another manna sandwich, Jesus. It's been years since Moses pulled that one off. Can you top this?" Jesus was grieved. "Moses didn't give you manna, God did." He answered. "And manna isn't what you need. You need something less tangible and more eternal. You need *living bread*."

Now listen to His next phrase: "For the bread of God is He..." Got it? Not a thing, a person. Not something someone does, something someone is. You don't believe in the manifestations of God's works to be saved, *you believe in the person of God*

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Himself, whatever He chooses to do (or not do). It would take no faith to believe in His works. No work of the Spirit would be required. If you see a sports star perform a great feat it takes no faith to like the way he plays. But if someone you do not know asks you to invest all you have in their career, and you've never seen them play, *that takes faith.* Here is their response:

“Sir,” they said, “from now on give us this bread.”

Then Jesus declared, “I am the bread of life. He who comes to me will never go hungry, and he who believes in me will never be thirsty.

But as I told you, you have seen me and still you do not believe.”
(John 6:34-36 NIV)

At this point, they were no closer to believing that when He began. They still wanted the bread. He told them once more He was the bread. He went on:

“All that the Father gives me will come to me, and whoever comes to me I will never drive away.

For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me.

And this is the will of him who sent me, that I shall lose none of all that he has given me, but raise them up at the last day.

For my Father's will is that everyone who looks to the Son and believes in him shall have eternal life, and I will raise him up at the last day.”

At this the Jews began to grumble about him because he said, “I am the bread that came down from heaven.”

They said, “Is this not Jesus, the son of Joseph, whose father and mother we know? How can he now say, ‘I came down from heaven?’”
(John 6:37-42 NIV)

Oh, boy! The chasm between faith and sight, between internal and external truth was about to loom on the horizon as never before. It was high noon between religion and reality. Jesus begins to talk in His foreign language again, the language of the Spirit. He was talking in stereo FM. All they had were AM receivers and their antennas were tuned to only one station. Oh, did they ever miss it! Listen to what He said:

1- Jesus informed them that the gospel is universal.

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Whoever comes to Him, He will not turn away (vs. 37). Soon it would be evident. Jew and Gentile, male and female, bonds slave or free man, all could come. God was humbling Himself and making Himself available to all men everywhere. The barriers were gone. Their exclusive rights to God were over. What a shock to the Jewish mind.

2- Jesus said “Of mine own self I can do nothing.” It would all begin and end with The Father. He would give us to Jesus as a gift (vs. 37). How humiliating.

3- Jesus came not to be a king or a hero, but to be His Father’s doulos (bondslave) (vs. 38). How weak from man’s perspective. He came with no agenda. His only reason for existence was to obey. So much for their “Make Him our King” campaign. This guy wasn’t His own man at all. He was a puppet, a slave, a hired hand of this “Father” of His.

4- In like manner, we would be totally dependent on Him as He was totally dependent on His Father. Even the job of staying in the Kingdom would not be ours, but His (vs. 39). How demeaning. *“He would lose none that were given to Him.”* We were a gift from the Father to the Son and the Son takes full responsibility to see that we make it to heaven. This was not a religion; it was a relationship. They were not sure that’s what they wanted.

5- He removed all the academic barriers to finding God. Finding eternal life would be so simple any child could understand it. He said, “Everyone who looks to the Son and believes in Him *has* (present tense) eternal life, and Jesus Christ Himself *will deliver them into his Father’s arms safely at the last day*” (vs. 40). No parenthetical phrases. No dependent clauses. Nothing. Look to the Son and believe on Him and salvation is a finished act. Nothing you do can add to it; nothing you do can take from it; *it wasn’t your doing in the first place*. Can you imagine why they were angry?

6- Jesus made only one claim about Himself; but it was that He was God. That claim drove them crazy. He didn’t claim to be a prophet. He made no effort to list His credentials as a teacher. He didn’t advertise His skills as a miracle worker. He was, in fact, none of those things or all of those things depending on how you view it. *He was simply God*. And until

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and unless they accepted that fact, they could not have eternal life. And neither can you. Once again, they saw the physical facts and they got in the way.

“Isn’t this Mary and Joseph’s little boy?” How could He be God? So because of what *they saw*, they refused to believe in what they *could not see*, and missed eternal life in the process.

Here is how the story (at least this episode) ends:

I tell you the truth, he who believes has everlasting life.

I am the bread of life. (John 6:47,48 NIV)

He was and He is. No one can come to the Father but by Him, but whosoever will, may come. Even your coming, however, is a gift from God, “it is not of works, lest any man should boast”¹. You are a love-gift from God the Father to God the Son, and should you say “yes”, you will *never perish*, because the Son who received you as a gift has sealed you with His Spirit and marked you, “Deliver to destination safely”. You don’t save yourself. You don’t keep yourself. Period.

Therein lies the simplicity of the gospel, but its sheer simplicity is its problem for many. If only there were something *we could do to earn God’s favor*, we might be able to accept it. If only *the keeping of our salvation were up to us*, we might be able to handle it. Us and God; that sounds like a good team. No, Beloved, *anything and God is not a good team*. When you add anything to God you take from God and thus deny His absolute deity.

Would you like to do the work of God? Would you like to please the heart of God? Then, Beloved, *take Him at His Word*. Stop struggling to please Him by what you do, and be willing to please Him by constantly acknowledging *who He is, then learning to rest in who He is*. To do that, you will have to tune in to the right kingdom. If you’ve never come to Jesus based on who he is (your Savior), you cannot inherit the kingdom of God. It matters not if your parents gave the church organ, or your granddaddy was a circuit-riding preacher, or you grew up in Sunday School. Unless and until you personally come to God as God and take Him by faith, you cannot find eternal life.

Won’t you come to Him today? Stop trying to make it

¹ Ephesians 2:9

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complicated. Just take Him at His word. If you must wait until He does something to prove Himself, you will wait for eternity. He did everything He ever needed to do at Calvary. That's all the proof you need. Take Him at His word and say, "*Dear Jesus, come into my heart. By faith, I believe. Thank you for keeping your word, Amen.*" Once you do that, no one can take you out of the Father's hands. You are His, and you ever will be. If you do that, please share that fact with someone immediately. It will confirm in your heart what has taken place, and God will be glorified.

And dear Christian, you who have once and for all taken God at His word and received Him as your Savior, have you in your frenzied search for spiritual truth lost sight of what it takes to please the heart of God? It isn't what you do. It isn't what you tell God you want Him to do. It's whether or not you learn to quietly, throughout each day, *simply believe and rest*. You may be in the midst of a horrible trial. What does God want from you? He wants you to believe that *whatever He does is best*. If He wants to deliver you from that fiery furnace that is enveloping you, praise Him. If He wants to deliver you *through the fire in order to glorify His Name*, praise Him. The work of God is this: *believe*. Believe what? Believe that God is who he says He is; therefore, whatever He does is good, and acceptable, and perfect. That, Beloved, is the Christian life. It is lived in this world, but its fruit is borne in the world which is to come. And that fruit is borne relative to our willingness to do what Jesus did. He humbled Himself and did not attempt to do anything for His Father. He simply let his Father live through Him.

This was not just a message for unbelieving Israel. It was echoed over and over to the child of God through the gospels and the epistles as well. The work of God is simple: *believe*. Not because you have seen His miracles. Not because He has promised to deliver you from life's trials. Just believe. Just learn to say to God,

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Dear, wonderful, loving Father,

You will never leave me or forsake me. What a joy. I can count on you because of who you are. May I do nothing to grieve your Spirit. And Dear Lord, grant me the ability to rest in your finished work. You don't need me to bring in the kingdom. You can do that perfectly well by yourself.

God, just allow me to trust and rest in who you are. You are the Alpha and the Omega; the beginning and the end. You called this world into being, chose us before the foundation of the world, and gave us as a love-gift to your precious Son who will keep us without fail unto the day of his appearing. Surely you are capable of living my life today.

It's all you. You created. You re-created. You saved. You keep. You love. You forgive. You cleanse. You use for your glory. May I stop putting demands on you to prove yourself and simply rest in who you are. Do whatever you want, Lord. You're God. I'm not. How thankful I am for that.

From this moment on, may I just concentrate on doing the work of God. Now I know what is the work of God. The work of God is this: only believe. By your grace, I do indeed believe.

In Jesus' Name,

Amen.

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