

## Magic Doesn't Work (Part 1)

**Grace is a Work of God**

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What is it about magic that captivates so many people? Have you ever wondered about that? Why do so many people wish that they could do magic?

Think about it. From its earliest history, people have been enthralled by magic. The earliest human religions as far as we know, other than the true religion, all employed some kind of magic at some level. Shamans claimed to be able to communicate with the gods of nature. Priests and priestesses could supposedly do the same either by getting into a trance of some sort, or by taking some sort of hallucinogenic drug, and then being able to "communicate with the gods."

Some, as part of the rites that they went through, could perform illusions of some sort, or use some sort of secret knowledge that the priests had, maybe some form of astronomy, or other learning, so that they could predict phenomena like eclipses and therefore making the people believe that the gods were with them.

Deuteronomy 18 shows that God recognizes magic, sorcery.

Deuteronomy 18:10-11 "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire (idolatry), or one who practices witchcraft, or a soothsayer, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who conjures spells, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead.

Now these are all forms of magic of one type or another, and the Bible acknowledges them as almost as real phenomena, and they are "real" because the demons have an ability to do things that people *think* are magic. They have powers beyond human powers, and anything that is paranormal we think of as a kind of magic.

So, God mentions here witchcraft, soothsaying, and interpreting omens, and sorcery, spell casting, communicating with the dead, or with demons, and necromancy. You can read about the story of Saul and the witch of Endor in I Samuel 28. This is when "Samuel" appeared and "spoke from the dead."

Even among the Israelites, the lure of magic and witchcraft long persisted, and it still does today. If we would go back through the Old Testament, we would find mentions of sorcery in the books of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Nahum, and Malachi—all through the Old Testament period.

Back in the New Testament, early on in His ministry Christ was doing great miracles, healing many and it says:

Mark 3:10-11 For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him. And the unclean spirits, whenever they saw Him, fell down before Him and cried out, saying, "You are the Son of God."

So, He was able to cast out demons.

Mark 3:22 And the scribes who came down from Jerusalem said, "He has Beelzebul," and, "By the ruler of the demons He casts out demons."

And so, they are essentially accusing Jesus of using demonic sorcery to heal and cast out demons—that He was performing magic.

Now I am sure that a good percentage of the crowd who came to see Him, and hear Him speak, were there to see Him perform some sort of miracle. He was a miracle worker. He did wonders and signs. He could heal people with a touch, or a word.

Demons would flee from Him. People would say the strangest things like, "You are the Son of God!" as they were suddenly released from a demon.

Even Herod was interested in Jesus only because he thought he might see Him perform a miracle. We will see that in Luke 23 during His trial. Pilate had heard that Jesus was from Galilee, and he said, "Well, He doesn't need to see me, I have no jurisdiction over Galilee. Send Him to Herod." So,

Luke 23:8 Now when Herod saw Jesus, he was exceedingly glad; for he had desired for a long time to see Him, because he had heard many things about Him, and he hoped to see some miracle done by Him.

"Hey! This is the Great Conjurer, the magician Jesus, the One who heals. Everybody says so. I haven't seen it yet. I want to see this for myself. I want to see the parlor trick. I want to see Him heal somebody of the palsy, or blindness." He just out to see a show.

In addition, just after the church began, we find that it attracted a man named Simon, the one that we know of as Simon Magus, who had practiced sorcery before, and was well-known in the area for it. And he tried to buy the Holy Spirit from the apostles when he saw the miracles and the signs that they were able to do by it. And of course, Peter rebuked him severely in no uncertain terms. (Acts 8)

Paul in his travels tangled with Elymas the sorcerer on Cyprus (Acts 13), and he rebuked him, and all his powers went away and he was also blinded. And then, later at Ephesus, God through Paul's preaching lead many practitioners of magic to repent. And there were so many of them, and so large was their library that when they burned their magic books, it came to a value of 50,000 pieces of silver! Do you think that the ancient world was not full of supposed magic, sorcery, necromancy, and all kinds of strange, paranormal things?

And it continues unabated up until our day today! Especially now. There has been a significant uptick in the interest in magic and other sorts of spiritism. A lot of modern literature deals in magic. And this is not just kids stuff, such as the Harry Potter series. But it is in just about all the genres of fiction for children, teens, and adults. Television and movies are full of magic shows. Even back into the sixties, there was the American television show, "Bewitched." And then on forward to the 1990s and later, there is the show, "Charmed." And then of course, there are movies like "X-Men." That one is about magic. "Star Wars" is about magic. What do you think the "Force" is?

Disney has made *billions* of dollars on magic. Why do you think that they call their theme parks, "The Magic Kingdom?" Because magic built Disney. Think of it. Their classic movies all have magic in them—"Cinderella," "Sleeping Beauty," "Pinocchio," "Mary Poppins," "Beauty and the Beast," "The Little Mermaid," "Aladdin." And, I could go on and on. "Bedknobs and Broomsticks!" All of these, and other of their projects, all contain magic of one sort or another.

What is the fascination? Why do people feel like they need to do magic, or they want to do magic? Why is magic so interesting to them?

Frankly, many today have become too secular to think of magic in terms of good and evil spirits. They do not think of it that way any more. To them, magic is not a good thing, or a bad thing. It is not a thing of angels, or demons. In fact, they have secularized magic by using advanced science or evolutionary changes as their source of magic or super-human ability, like the abilities of the X-Men.

For instance, the kid who can do fire. There it is in his hand. He can throw fire balls. Anyplace else, that would be magic. But in the X-Men, it is not. It is because he has "evolved." He has mutated into this being who can suddenly ignite something—not his hand, though! Of course, there is the next kid who can do ice in the same way. And then there is the telepaths, and you name it. They can do all sorts of neat, magical, super-human things—but it is offered as science. It is not anything primitive as nature magic, like witches.

And Heroes—the TV show. This is the same thing. All the heroes are advanced human group of people who have powers—to heal themselves, to fly, to stop time—it is all part of science, and evolution.

"Beam me up, Scotty!" At one time, I was told that the amount of energy it would take to beam a human being, like in a fax machine type of thing, from one spot on earth into space would take roughly all the energy that this world has ever produced. The physics are just impossible. So what does it become? Science-fiction magic. It is a conjurer's trick. They have to show it to you through special effects because it cannot be done. It is adult magic.

The Force in "Star Wars" mentioned earlier, is a bridging of the science and the evolutionary. These little beings (midi-chlorians) inside of people give them special powers. And he can do all sorts of things like lift Yoda, and lift his x-wing fighter. Who know what Anakin could have done, but he became bad.

You see, those things that are in him are neutral. They can be used for good, or for the dark side. And, it all comes down to not that magic is something evil, or good, but it is neutral. And it

all comes down to how you use it, not what it is in itself.

So if people today do not desire magical abilities for spiritual reasons, and I would say that most people fall into that category these days, why do they covet these powers? (I am beginning to get to the crux of things here.) The answer is really simple. The reason people covet magic, the reason why people want to do magic is because they believe it would give them the ability to get immediate and effortless results. It does not matter what the results are, that they want to do, they just want to be able to say, "Shazam!" and what they command will be done (snap) just like that.

A snap of the finger, the wiggle of the nose, a flourish of the wand, say a few words in some arcane language, and "poof," one has what one wants. And what effort did they have to do? Very little. How much effort does it take to flourish the wand? Or snap the fingers? They want magic to be to them the definitive labor-saving ability. They want the ultimate power of instant gratification.

They want to be King Midas who all he had to do was touch a thing, and it would turn into gold. Now, of course, that backfired on him, but the power—they want the power to be able to do so. And do it quickly, and do it without work. They want something for nothing. They want the means to fulfill every desire without paying the price. Being able to perform magic, to have things at will, would mean the end of all care, and all fears. They would be set for life.

After all of this, believe it or not, this sermon is not about magic. Magic is human nature's dream solution to solving its problems and reaching its goals. It is what every human, if he had the opportunity, would grasp immediately, if he could just do whatever he wanted by fiat.

Imagine the power. Imagine the easy street that you would walk down for the rest of your life.

However, magic is *human nature's* solution to solving its problems and reaching its goals. It is not God's solution—not at all. In a large part, God, who has this power, does not even use them to solve problems and reach goals. Do you think that God just sits up there all day, kind of leaning back on His throne, and while rocking away, things get done? That is kind of the idea that people have, though, do they not? That God just sits there and watches things, every once in a while, He will yawn, and grab some lightning like Zeus, doing what He has to do, and then He goes back to doing something.

That is the idea some have of God. But God does not do that. The Bible does not show Him doing that. I do not know where people get that idea, unless it is what I alluded to, the people's conception of what the gods—Zeus and company—did.

What does God do? What does He have us to do?

Here are some words we are going to be using quite a bit: work, strive, toil, labor, make effort, nose to the grindstone, overcome, grow, and bear fruit. Do you notice a theme running through all those words? They all have to do with that first word, work. Nothing good is ever produced without work. And especially not without hard work, usually.

Thomas Edison, perhaps the greatest inventor who ever lived, said that his most wonderful achievements were only one percent inspiration, and 99 percent perspiration. This does not

mean that he was dumb, but rather that achievement is done through work.

So today, I will be speaking not about miracles, not about magic, but about work. And not our work, but about God's work, because God is a God of *intensive* work.

You also need to remember where we are within the year. We are within a week of Passover. Passover is all about our redemption, and the work that Jesus Christ did on our behalf, and the sacrifice that He made for our justification by grace. And we have been justified by grace because of the sinless, selfless sacrifice of our Savior Jesus Christ.

Now many people seem to think of grace as tantamount to God waving a wand—"I forgive thee," "I forgive thee," "I forgive thee." But grace is the result of a huge amount of hard work on God's part over centuries and millennia. Do we realize that? Grace is not magic, because *magic does not work*. Magic is fiat in the way that we usually think of it. But grace is not fiat. Fiat implies just saying something and it is done.

In terms of grace, God does not work that way. God can give us grace, because of what He has *done* to make it possible. Grace is not free, despite what people tell you. He gives it freely, but it is not free. This is different from the fact that there was a price to be paid. There was work to be done. It requires work once it is given. Grace is effective because it is the work of God.

What kind of work is this? We need to define some terms here. It is always good to do that.

Generally we think of work in its regular definition—physical or mental effort or activity directed toward the production or accomplishment of something. That is a pretty standard definition. Now, there is a scientific definition of work, and if you have taken the physical sciences or physics, you usually have to memorize this—work, scientifically, is the result of force applied to an object over a distance. It is a transfer of energy from one thing to another to make it move—to make it go—to cause something to happen.

So, if I were to take a ball in my hands, I would use force, apply it to the ball, and I would send it flying over your head. I have just done work—scientifically that is. So generally, work is any kind of effort used to produce a result. Work does not necessarily have to be slaving away in the mines, or laying track across the desert, or digging ditches and filling them back up again. Many of us work by sitting in comfortable chairs in air-conditioned offices, but we do fatiguing work of a mental variety, organizing, or selling things. That is work! Just ask any salesman that you know. They put their all into it usually, especially if they are on commission. If they do not, they starve. Work is done in a variety of ways.

House wives not only do house work, but they also do a great deal of mental and emotional work with their children helping them through the ups and downs of life, bringing them to maturity. Work comes in many forms and many guises, and many different intensities. Sometimes it is physical, sometimes mental, spiritual, and sometimes emotional. We cannot pigeon-hole work into just one or another of these things.

Now in the Bible, the main Hebrew word for work is "melakah." And, this word is very general. It can refer to creative work, labor, craftsmanship, or any kind of business like a merchant. It is very similar to our word "work" because we use it all the same way. Now in Greek, it is the word "ergon." This word means just like "melakah"—labor, task, business, deed, or act. It is work.

Work is a very big idea.

The first mention of work in the Bible is in Genesis 2. Obviously, Genesis 1 is the Creation story, and chapter 2 is a re-telling of the story. And between them are these three verses:

Genesis 2:1-3 Thus the heavens and the earth, and all the host of them, were finished. And on the seventh day God ended His work which He had done, and He rested on the seventh day from all His work which He had done. Then God blessed the seventh day and sanctified it, because in it He rested from all His work which God had created and made.

How many times does it appear here? Three times. Work! Work! Work! That is what I want you to get out of that. What God did in the first six days was work, work, work! He was busy working in creation, working in making things, and giving things life. The first instance of a word in Scripture often gives us the proper perspective for understanding that word as we continue on through the entire Bible. This gives us the basis for work. Biblical work shows God Himself finishing His creation, His work of creation, and memorializing the seventh day, Sabbath, as the day that God rested *from* His work. It does not mean that He necessarily stopped working, but that He ceased the creative work that He had been doing. So He stopped, and He rested.

The emphasis here is not only on the fact that God rested, but equally on the fact that He had done so much work. He had done so much work—which is what we are supposed to realize and reflect upon all the work that God had done—that even the Almighty God felt the need to rest. He did not need to rest physically, but He did need to rest, to stop His activity, to take some time off, as well as to make an example for us.

Turn to Exodus 20 and see the Sabbath commandment because this idea is repeated. We often look at those verses in Genesis 2 simply in terms of the Sabbath, but we have forgotten that the fact that there is a Sabbath because God worked and He decided to memorialize His resting from work for us as an example.

Exodus 20:8-11 "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days you shall labor and do all your work, but the seventh day is the Sabbath of the LORD your God. In it you shall do no work [The implication is the work of the other six days. You are not supposed to do those kinds of work on the 7<sup>th</sup> day]: you, nor your son, nor your daughter, nor your male servant, nor your female servant, nor your cattle, nor your stranger who is within your gates. For in six days [here is the example] the LORD made the heavens and the earth, the sea, and all that is in them, and rested the seventh day. Therefore the LORD blessed the Sabbath day and hallowed it.

So, we are commanded in this fourth commandment to model our lives after God's example. He worked hard for six days, and rested on and hallowed the seventh day. That is an example and

pattern for all time. This is what God did. God does good things, and He gives us those good things as an example and pattern.

This is the basis, then, for the Judeo-Christian work ethic—the biblical work ethic. God is a working God. The first thing we see when we see God in the Bible is God working—He is creating. And then, He rests on the seventh day.

So, if God is a working God, He expects His people to be working people. He plans, and creates, and builds, and maintains—and so should we. We are to follow His pattern. Now the difference between us and Him is a matter of scale. He has a greater mind, greater skill, and greater power, but we are made in His image. We also have minds, skills, and powers, but lesser ones.

So we are to put forth a respective amount of effort to accomplish and build, and make things grow. That is what God wants us to do. Why? Because that is what He does. He is the pattern—He is a working God.

Turn back to Genesis 2, this time verse 8, and I want you to notice the timing. Now verse 7 flashes back to God's creation of Adam, breathing into him the breath of life, and he became a living being.

Genesis 2:8 The LORD God planted a garden eastward in Eden, and there He put the man whom He had formed.

Genesis 2:15-17a Then the LORD God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it. And the LORD God commanded the man, saying, "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat.

Man is created in verse 7, sometime on Friday, the sixth day. Verse 8 says that God planted the Garden after Adam was created.

Man is created, God breathes into his nostrils the breath of life, and then God plants the Garden. Who was with Him? Adam. Adam watched God work. That is the first thing Adam saw. You get the impression that Adam took his first breath, God says, "Oh, good you're awake! Let's go. I've got work to do." and off He went and He planted a garden eastward in Eden. And Adam was there watching Him, seeing what the Creator did. The Creator works. He brings His plans to pass. So God planted, and tended, and watered, He cultivated, and He made the Garden a beautiful place—the Garden of Eden.

Then in verse 15 God says to Adam, "You see what I've done, I want you to live in this garden, and I want you to tend it, and I want you to keep it." That is, He wanted Adam to maintain and embellish, and protect it, just as Adam witnessed God doing Himself. And, Adam's wages as it were was free access to all the produce of the Garden, except one tree—the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil—that tree God kept for Himself.

He said, "Look. I've planted the Garden. I have given you this great set up here. I want you to live here. I want you to keep the Garden. Tend it. Make sure no weeds grow. I want you to prune all the trees. I want you to till, plant, and cultivate. I want you to reap the harvest. It's

all yours. You can have whatever is produced in this Garden, just not this tree. This one's mine. I am keeping that one for Myself."

But, the keeping, tending, embellishing, and beautifying would require a great deal of work. If any of you have tried to grow a garden, or to have an orchard, you know that it takes a lot of effort. You are kept on your toes. Farmers know that they are up from sunup, and work until sundown, and they have got a lot of work in between to get the earth to produce. Now, I am sure that the Garden of Eden would not have been all that hard, like it is today.

Remember that Adam is the proto-typical man. He is the first Adam. He is a type. That is, he represented all of us at the time. All mankind both in general, and individually, he represented as a whole. So what God instructed him to do, is a pattern for what He wants us to do. He wants us to tend and to keep.

Now keep in mind, also, that this is before Adam sinned. We are still in chapter 2. Sins rears its ugly head in chapter 3. God's command to tend and to keep applies best to a Christian among all the peoples of the world, because Christians have had their sins wiped away by the blood of Jesus Christ, and in a sense, they have been taken back to a time before sin, and given a clean slate.

So, we are to tend and keep God's Garden. The original one is no longer there in physical form. It is not something that we can see and go to and tend and keep. But in the metaphor, we are God's Garden. Do you remember what Paul said in I Corinthians 3: 5-9? He said that, "I planted, and Apollo watered, but God gives the increase." And then he goes on to say, "You are God's field." Tend and keep.

There are also echoes of this garden of God in the Song of Songs, particularly in chapters 5, 6, and 8. It says there that the Beloved goes to His garden—He goes to tend His garden. You will find Him in His garden. Where is His garden? It is His church, and the people in it. Another metaphor is that we are the temple of His Holy Spirit in which He dwells. So our work is tending and keeping, maintaining and beautifying, embellishing and guarding.

Now we have to introduce the bad guy. Satan comes in, deceives the woman. Adam, not being deceived, goes along anyway and sinned. This is not to say that Eve did not sin also, but at least she had the excuse of being deceived. Adam did not.

So, God comes in. They hide. And He calls out to them in chapter 3, "Where are you? Why are you hiding from Me?" He knew that they had sinned, obviously. Otherwise, they would not have hidden from Him. And so, He starts pronouncing these curses. They are not exactly curses; they are pronouncements of what normally happens as the result of sin. But, He does pronounce them upon the specific characters that are involved here.

Satan, of course, bears a great deal of the blame for his sin of deception. So God tells them what is going to happen because of all this. And then He tells Eve of the consequences of what she has done, and then God tells Adam a few things:

Genesis 3:17-19 Then to Adam He said, "Because you have heeded the voice of your wife, and have eaten from the tree of which I

commanded you, saying, 'You shall not eat of it': "Cursed is the ground for your sake; in toil you shall eat of it all the days of your life. Both thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you, and you shall eat the herb of the field. In the sweat of your face you shall eat bread till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to dust you shall return."

Once sin entered the scene, man's work becomes harder, more painful, more wearing, more all-encompassing. God always intended men and women to work, because He works—He is a God of work. But, sin makes work into life-long drudgery. Sin engenders curses, troubles, obstacles, and various other impediments. Sin inflicts weakness, debilitation, degeneration, and destruction. Ultimately, sin causes cruel, painful death.

The picture that God paints for Adam is working like a slave in sweat and grime until he simply collapses and dies in the furrow from exhaustion. His whole life would be filled with backbreaking, painstaking labor, and he would die while doing it.

Sin causes man to hate work, unlike the sinless God who loves work and receives great satisfaction from it. Man *hates* work, and all he gets out of it is maybe the feeling that he has accomplished something in his life, but then he is bowed over and broken at the end.

Now, these early chapters of Genesis show us that God works long and hard. His nose is to the grindstone until He accomplishes what He purposes. But with God it is a joy. And He takes rest, and enjoys that too.

We often go to Isaiah 55:10-11 to talk about God's work, about when God says something, His Word goes out, and does not return to Him empty. Notice God's work here. I want to read verse 10 because it is important.

Isaiah 55:10-11 "For as the rain comes down, and the snow from heaven, and does not return there, but waters the earth, and makes it bring forth and bud, that it may give seed to the sower, and bread to the eater, so [in the same way] shall My word be that goes forth from My mouth; It shall not return to Me void, but it shall accomplish what I please, and it shall prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

Now, if you just read verse 11, it sounds like it says, "I want this person to be converted," and he is. Or, "I want this act to be done," and it is.

But that is not the case if you read verse 10 first. Verse 10 says that it is like the process of rain or snow, watering the earth. The water comes down, it waters the ground, the seed receives moisture and it grows, and shoots out of the earth, puts down roots, and over time it puts out leaves and buds; and after some cultivation, it produces fruit.

These two verses together show that God does not do things by fiat. It is rather like the process of rain on the ground to produce a crop. God's work is something that He labors at. It is something that He does over long, extended periods of time. It is a long and involved process.

It is not a snapping of the fingers, or some magical incantation, or some sort of instantaneous act. It is not like the painting in the Sistine Chapel, where all God does is touch Adam's finger. The painting presupposes a lot, and assumes a lot.

There was a lot of work that had to be done before God got to the point to where He could breath into his nostrils the breath of life. It was a long and involved process taking millions of years, most of it in the planning.

So God, through His Word, does *intensive* work over *extensive* periods of time. God is one of those people who believes that to produce a perfect product, one must take his time, and one must put in the effort. Lord Chesterfield said the truth, "Whatever is worth doing at all, is worth doing well." God believes in hard work.

So what is God doing? What is His work?

Turn to Psalm 74. Here is another passage that we often just pull right out of context.

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

Wonderful verse! It tells us what God is doing. So, we know that this job He has given Himself to do is to save, to deliver, to redeem, to buy us back, to make us into His sons and daughters.

But have we ever read the wider context? This is written by Asaph, and it is during a time when Israel is being destroyed by its enemies.

Psalm 74:3b The enemy has damaged everything in the sanctuary.

Does this mean this is post-Nebuchadnezzar? I do not know. However, whenever this was, this was a time of great national calamity for Asaph.

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.

"We are kind of blind, here, God! Where are you? You haven't sent us a messenger, and nobody knows what's going on. We don't know how long we have." It sounds a bit like today.

Psalm 74:10 O God, how long will the adversary reproach? [How long will we be in this situation?] Will the enemy blaspheme Your name forever?

"Are we going to have these leftists over us until the end of time? Are we going to have to endure all this godlessness? And, all this trash in our culture?"

Psalm 74:11 Why do You withdraw Your hand, even Your right hand? [That is the strong hand that He works with.] Take it out of Your bosom

and destroy them.

It is like He has folded his arms and put His hands in His bosom. He is not doing anything. "Please pay attention to us!"

Then verse 12 is the key to this entire Psalm; the keystone, and the pivot. Asaph suddenly gets the light bulb above his head. He figures it out.

Psalm 74:12 For God is my King from of old [leadership, and power throughout history], working salvation in the midst of the earth.

See that light bulb coming on in Asaph's mind? This is not done without a cause, he says. God is not responding for a *reason*. God is the sovereign. He has total control. He has had this control forever, from of old, he says.

What is He doing? He is not sitting back with His arms crossed refusing to do anything! What is He doing? By seeming to not be doing anything, He is actively working out salvation in the midst of the earth. Things are going according to His plan. He is moving and acting and working. We just cannot always see it. That is why Asaph goes on and talks about, "Oh yeah, God was the one Who got Israel out of Egypt by dividing the sea. He's the One who destroyed Leviathan. He's the One who brought Israel through the entire wilderness wanderings."

So, by the end of this Psalm, Asaph has gone from complaining, to pleading, to praying. "God, You know what's going on around here. You know what's best."

Psalm 74:22-23 Arise, O God, plead Your own cause; remember how the foolish man reproaches You daily. [Who is he talking about? Himself.] Do not forget the voice of Your enemies; the tumult of those who rise up against You increases continually.

He does not say, "God come down and strike these people!" By the end of this psalm Asaph is saying, "God, remember and act, whenever You think is best. And, please forgive me for being so rash earlier."

So, even when God seems not to be working on our behalf, He is hard at work trying to save us, even though we do not see any of it.

Isaiah 40:9-11 O Zion, you who bring good tidings, get up into the high mountain; O Jerusalem, you who bring good tidings, lift up your voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid; say to the cities of Judah, "Behold your God!" Behold, the Lord GOD shall come with a strong hand, and His arm shall rule for Him; behold, His reward is with Him, and His work before Him. He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young.

(This, by the way, is a very famous part of "Handel's Messiah.")

This is a prophecy of Christ's second coming. But, it applies in principle to His first coming, as well as His work with the church. Notice in verse 10 it says that He comes with a strong Hand. That means that He comes in strength. I am applying this to His first coming. Jesus was no weakling. He came with all the strength and power of the Great God. Of course, He had limitations being a man. And He had a certain work and purpose to fulfill. So, He was not just going to come and starting smiting left and right, hip and thigh. But He came with strength.

Matthew 8, near the end of the chapter, it says that He spoke with authority, and not like one of the scribes. He came and taught with strength.

And it says that His arm shall rule for Him. That is speaking about His leadership abilities. He had the ability to rule and govern men. He had the ability to lead them where they needed to go. And He had a work to do, it says, "His work is before Him."

Verse 11 describes the kind of work He does, and puts it in terms of a shepherd, which is very reminiscent of what Jesus Christ Himself said about His own work. He said in John 10, "I am the Good Shepherd," probably thinking about these verses because it says, "He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom, and gently lead those who are with young."

This is the kind of work that He did while He was with us. He feeds His flock—He gives them knowledge and understanding, and wisdom.

He gathers the lambs in His arms, it says. This is a picture of protection and care for those who are new in the faith, and need to be brought along slowly, needing protection from the ravenous wolves out there.

He will carry them—He helps them along in every situation, oftentimes carrying them around obstacles, or over them. Carrying them and nurturing them when the enemy is about and they need to be comforted.

He will gently lead those with young. I think this is the most interesting idea, because it is talking about pregnant ewes. He directs. He governs. He helps. He aids. He gives whatever is needed for those who are growing and producing fruit, if you want to use that metaphor.

This is speaking about His care for the church. Is not this descriptive of what He did in His ministry? And what He is doing now? All of this is part of His working salvation in the midst of the earth. He was hard at it during His ministry.

Mark is a special book in this regard. Mark often brings out instances where Jesus is shown doing hard work. He is shown working like an ox in the traces, pulling His burden, and just going, and going, and going, and going, until He was ready to fall right there in the traces.

Mark 1:32-34 At evening, when the sun had set, they brought to Him all who were sick and those who were demon-possessed. And the whole city was gathered together at the door. Then He healed many who were sick with various diseases, and cast out many demons; and He did not

allow the demons to speak, because they knew Him.

Mark shows the whole city showing up, and He spent many hours healing, and casting out demons. He is basically giving up all His time to help the people.

Mark 3:7-10 But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; and those from Tyre and Sidon, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him. So He told His disciples that a small boat should be kept ready for Him because of the multitude, lest they should crush Him. For He healed many, so that as many as had afflictions pressed about Him to touch Him.

Mark 4:35-38a On the same day, when evening had come, He said to them, "Let us cross over to the other side." Now when they had left the multitude, they took Him along in the boat as He was. And other little boats were also with Him. And a great windstorm arose, and the waves beat into the boat, so that it was already filling. But He was in the stern, asleep on a pillow.

He was exhausted, I am sure. Not even the windstorm and waves woke Him up. He gave Himself entirely to the people. And when He was done, He collapsed in the boat and slept because He was just about wrung out.

Mark 6:53-56 When they had crossed over, they came to the land of Gennesaret and anchored there. And when they came out of the boat, immediately the people recognized Him, ran through that whole surrounding region, and began to carry about on beds those who were sick to wherever they heard He was. Wherever He entered into villages, cities, or in the country, they laid the sick in the marketplaces, and begged Him that they might just touch the hem of His garment. And as many as touched Him were made well.

And we know from another place, that every time they touched Him, He knew virtue was going out of Him. This was not something that He did without effort. He felt it, every one of them.

This next passage is right after James and John were angling for positions.

Mark 10:42-45 But Jesus called them to Himself and said to them, "You know that those who are considered rulers over the Gentiles lord it over them, and their great ones exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you shall be your servant. And whoever of you desires to be

first shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."

So, He came knowing that He had a work before Him to do, as Isaiah says. And, He did it. And, He gave His every last ounce of strength to get it done.

Turn to Isaiah so we can go forward in the life of Jesus Christ because He gave Himself unto the end.

Isaiah 53: 3-12 He is despised and rejected by men, a Man of sorrows and acquainted with grief. And we hid, as it were, our faces from Him; He was despised, and we did not esteem Him. Surely He has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows; yet we esteemed Him stricken, smitten by God, and afflicted. But He was wounded for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His stripes we are healed. All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned, every one, to his own way; and the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He opened not His mouth; He was led as a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so He opened not His mouth. He was taken from prison and from judgment, and who will declare His generation? For He was cut off from the land of the living; for the transgressions of My people He was stricken. And they made His grave with the wicked—but with the rich at His death, because He had done no violence, nor was any deceit in His mouth. Yet it pleased the LORD to bruise Him; He has put Him to grief. When You make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the LORD shall prosper in His hand. He shall see the labor of His soul, and be satisfied. By His knowledge My righteous Servant shall justify many, for He shall bear their iniquities. Therefore I will divide Him a portion with the great, and He shall divide the spoil with the strong, because He poured out His soul unto death, and He was numbered with the transgressors, and He bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors.

Not only did Jesus Christ toil in preaching and teaching, and healing, and casting out demons, His manner of death took great effort of body, mind, spirit, and emotion. Jesus did not slip through all this without feeling, as if some sort of miraculous power or a kind of magic protected Him from the agony and embarrassment of it all. He suffered excruciatingly as it says here, "pouring out His soul to death," to cover our sins.

(For those of you who did not hear the sermonette today, I recommend you listen to Ronny Graham's sermonette because it fits in here so perfectly.)

So, recognizing this, the work of God from of old—the work of God with the patriarchs, the work

of God with the Israelites in bringing them out of Egypt, and then the work of God with Israel through their whole existence up until their fall. And then not only that, He brought the Jews back, the Levites back, and the priests back; and He worked, and He worked, to bring all the conditions about so that He could send His Son to Judea to be born in Bethlehem, and to be raised in Nazareth, and to do a ministry teaching and preaching and healing and of course proclaiming the good news of the Kingdom of God, and then to die as our Savior. There is a great deal of work that was contained in all of that.

So, God's forgiveness and His grace are not free at all. They were purchased for us with great effort by Jesus Christ and the Father because they both did great amounts of work to make it possible. Their planning, the Bible tells us, began before the foundation of the world. He was the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world. They knew that it had to happen that way. That was all part of the plan, so they worked for all this time to bring about the conditions for all that, and then, beyond that, to bring about the conditions for our being able to enter into this Family, and the Kingdom of God, because of that.

Grace is a *fabulous* work of God—not magic. Not abracadabra. We need to give thanks to God that He was willing to work out our justification through grace, paid for by Christ's very life.

I would like to end in Colossians. This brings us into it in our response.

Colossians 2:11-15 In Him you were also circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the sins of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ, buried with Him in baptism, in which you also were raised with Him through faith in the working of God, who raised Him from the dead. And you, being dead in your trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, He has made alive together with Him, having forgiven you all trespasses, having wiped out the handwriting of requirements that was against us, which was contrary to us. And He has taken it out of the way, having nailed it to the cross. Having disarmed principalities and powers, He made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them in it.

Colossians 3:1-4 If then you were raised with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God. Set your mind on things above, not on things on the earth. For you died, and your life is hidden with Christ in God. When Christ who is our life appears, then you also will appear with Him in glory.

And now, the point I am getting at:

Colossians 3:5-11 Therefore put to death your members which are on the earth: fornication, uncleanness, passion, evil desire, and covetousness, which is idolatry. Because of these things the wrath of God is coming upon the sons of disobedience, in which you yourselves once walked when you lived in them. But now you yourselves are to

put off all these: anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy language out of your mouth. Do not lie to one another, since you have put off the old man with his deeds, and have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him, where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.

So, what does Paul say here? To put it in a nutshell, he says, "Seeing the great work done by God and Christ in our behalf, your response should be this: Seek God. Set your mind on spiritual matters. And get to work cleaning out the filth of sin that has become habitual in our lives."

This is why the Feast of Unleavened Bread follows the Passover. First comes redemption and justification, then comes overcoming sin and sanctification. There is no magic formula.

We have got work to do.