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The Washington Institute

Vocation Is Mission:
CONSUMMATION-Our Work in the World to Come
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Autumn Series
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The following is transcribed from Part 4 of the Fall "Vocation Is Mission" lecture series delivered in the Historic Church of The Falls Church on Wednesday, December 14, 2011

Welcome everybody, this is lecture 4 of 4. It was very much a conscious decision to have this final lecture during the holiday season. We originally planned to do a Fall series, and then we came to December and we thought, "Well you know, there are Christmas parties, people are busy, do we still have a lecture in December? Do we not? The answer is yes of course, we have to do it. It is Advent! Advent is when you talk about these things, actually. While we look back at the first coming of Jesus, Advent always in the history of the Church has been the season where we specifically look forward to the next coming of Jesus, to the second Advent. Consummation, when Christ comes back the second time. There is no better time to have a talk like this one tonight than in this season of Advent. In fact, it is probably safe to say that this is the most Advent-y presentation you will actually hear this month because we are actually looking forward. We are actually waiting. We are not simply looking back. This season is a time of waiting, of longing, of looking forward to the new creation, the new heavens and the new earth from Revelation 21. John says:

"Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. And I saw the holy city, New Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, 'Behold, the dwelling place of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people, and God himself will be with them as their God. He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.'"

Maranatha, amen! Maranatha of course means, "Lord Jesus, come quickly." Maranatha is the cry of Christmas. It is our song in this Advent season.

VOCATION IS MISSION

We have been tracing vocation through the lens of Creation, and Fall, and Redemption, and now Consummation. We have been chasing the question for these last four months, can we, and why do we assert so boldly that your work matters to God? At The Washington Institute, we are fond of saying that vocation is integral not incidental to the mission of God in the world. We believe that our work in the world, rightly understood and rightly practiced, is as important to God in the world as pastoring, as missionary work, as evangelism, and so called "full-time Christian ministry." So the question we have been asking is—the most important question—does the bible teach this? Does the bible teach this? And I think that three lectures into this we can already say, "Yes! Yes! The bible does teach this." It teaches it in the text, it teaches it in the stories, it teaches it in the great metanarrative of biblical theology, and it teaches it through Jesus Christ Himself, that our work matters to God, and what does not matter nearly as much is the form that our work takes. What matters is how we do it, and who we do it for. Painters, architects, software developers, janitors, mechanics, lawyers, doctors, mothers, fathers, priests, teachers, politicians, policemen, nurses, business people, government workers, fire fighters, garbage collectors, plumbers, clerks, carpenters, talking heads, truck drivers, pastors, musicians, and so on, and so on—it is a very long list of all the work that matters to God.

WORK IN THE NEW TESTAMENT

A couple days ago I was driving in from the country up 81, and—sorry to be a bit graphic—I passed by this massive blood stain on the side of the road. It was vibrant red, and so I knew it had not happened that long ago. The stain was from a deer, and yet there was no deer there. I thought to myself, “I bet in the next few minutes I’m going to pass some truck that has a bunch of dead deer in the back.” And within a mile, there was a guy who was crossing the road with a bag of trash, and there was another guy who was throwing a deer carcass on the back of a truck. VDOT—your tax dollars at work. And I thought to myself, “How does that guy’s work fit into the Kingdom?” because I know it does. I know it does, but that is one of our questions for discussion. How does the guy throwing deer carcasses off the side of the highway into the back of a truck—how does his work matter? We will come back to this question, but it does matter! It especially matters if he does his work because that is the work God has given him to do, and if he somehow uses his work to worship the one who gave him the work to do. The list of work that matters to God is a very long list. Work is of God. Work matters to God. God is a worker, and we are made in His image, and we get to work.

Last time we let Jesus show this when we considered vocation through the lens of Redemption. Jesus demonstrates this in two ways. First, by being a carpenter and second, by going to the cross. We considered last time that Jesus dignified work by working and secondly, that Jesus does the larger work of confronting the Fall through Redemption, and everything gets touched including our work. We considered Ben Worthington, who writes:

“Work, from a Christian perspective, is not just viewed in light of the original creation order, much less in light of the Fall. It is primarily viewed in the light of the Christ event, and it looks forward to the completion of that event when Christ returns.”

So let me rephrase that just a little bit. Work looks forward to the completion of the Christ event when Christ returns. In other words, like everything else, work looks forward to the completion of what Christ started when Christ comes back. That is what we considered last time. Of course, after Jesus rises from the dead, we have a New Testament. We have inspired letters—inspired writings from God that give us a host of insight and instruction about how to live. Let’s see what those writings have to say about work. Let’s see what the New Testament has to say about work. This is what the New Testament does not say: it does not say that because the end is coming soon, give up your job, quit working, and evangelize. It does not say, “This world is not going to last forever, so your work in it really doesn’t matter that much except for paying your bills.” It does not say, “Find what you are good at, figure out a way to get paid for it, and then you will be happy. That’s what work is for.” These are not New Testament messages. No, the bible assumes after Jesus that we will work and that we will work hard.

The Apostle Paul in Acts 20:34 says, “You yourselves know that these hands ministered to my necessities and to those who were with me.” In other words, “I worked while I was among you.” Paul adds, “In all things I have shown you that by working hard in this way we must help the weak and remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he himself said, ‘It is more blessed to give than to receive.’”

1 Corinthians 15:58 says, “Always [abound] in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain.”

Colossians 3:17 says, "Whatever you do, in word or deed, do everything in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God." This is amazing in Colossians! Paul is writing to slaves, and by no means is he upholding the institution of slavery. What he is doing is telling us how to survive it as long as we are in it. And this is what he says in Colossians 3:23-24, "Whatever you do, do your work heartily, as for the Lord rather than for men; knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance. It is the Lord Christ whom you serve." I guarantee nobody in this room has a harder job than the slaves that Paul was writing to. And yet he says, "Work hard; do it as to the Lord. Know that your reward is coming. In fact, know that you are even serving Jesus himself." How can this be?

Ephesians 4:28 talking about a thief, "Rather let him labor, doing honest work with his own hands, so that he may have something to share with anyone in need."

1 Thessalonians 4:10-12 says, "We urge you...to aspire to live quietly, to mind your own affairs, and to work with your hands, as we instructed you, so that you may walk properly before outsiders and be dependent on no one." Then in 2 Thessalonians 3:7-8, again reflecting on their own example of hard work, Paul says, "We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone's bread without paying for it, but with toil and labor we worked night and day, that we might not be a burden to any of you," and then he goes on to reflect about people who, frankly, are lazy, and basically he says that if they do not work, then they do not eat. They need "to do their work quietly and to earn their own living" (verse 12).

Now taken together, these New Testament passages explicitly about work give us quite a bit of guidance on how to work now and even some guidance on the why. So, how do these New Testament passages tell us how to work now? First, work to provide for yourself. Second, work hard. Third, work hard to provide for others. Work to help the weak. I know this spiritually relevant; it might be politically relevant as well, that one of the reasons Paul says to work is so that we can help weak people. Fourth, do your work as for Jesus. Fifth, work in the name of Jesus. Work thankfully. Work humbly, even quietly, and know that your work in the Lord is not in vain.

This is quite a list. It is quite clear, and this is a much better mindset about work than the mindset that some have about their work. It is a much better mindset than an unarticulated implication of a certain theology that says that we work for about half of the hours given to our lives, whatever our jobs or vocations are, but when Jesus comes back, the whole world is destroyed by fire. The world is annihilated and destroyed with no remainder or trace of our work because everything is annihilated, and the only things that matters are our acts of holiness or our explicit obedience or getting others into the Kingdom through evangelism or ministry.

Now Luther Webber is sitting with us tonight. He is an architect. If this mindset is true, this is bad news for his legacy. All those nice buildings that he builds—who cares? And frankly, this mindset is not very motivating. Tom Nelson picks this up in his book *Work Matters*:

"If we believe that the earth—everything about it and everything we do on it—is simply going to one day be abolished and disappear, then the logical conclusion is that our work is virtually meaningless. Why should we work hard, make a tasty meal, learn a new skill, run a business, write a piece of music, or design a building if everything one day will be destroyed by fire? It would make sense to work only enough to survive and get by."

Not only is this view not very motivating, it is not very biblical either, and that is the real problem. Nelson goes on:

"But if our daily work, done for the glory of God and the common good of others, in some way carries over to the new heavens and the new earth, then our present work is overflowing with immeasurable value and eternal significance."

This is better, and this is what we want to explore. In one of Jesus' parables, the parable of the talents, the master gives five talents to one guy, two to another, and one to another, and then what do the three men do with it? They work with it. They invest it. Two of them did, one of them not so much. And Jesus' point is, "What you do with what I have given you has eternal implications.

So let's consider this question, "What is the end of our work?" What can we expect of God's new creation, the Consummation, the new earth, and how our understanding of these things impacts our work? To get at this quite focused question, we need to step back just a little bit and consider the broader topic of resurrection. Resurrection is the great promise of the bible, not simply eternal life, but specifically resurrection with eternal life. And not just the resurrection of our bodies and those of our loved ones in Christ, but the resurrection of all things because of Jesus—the renewal and the transformation of the cosmos. Henri Nouwen observes:

"Our final homecoming involves not just ourselves and our fellow human beings but all of creation. The full freedom of the children of God is to be shared by the whole earth, and our complete renewal in the resurrection includes the renewal of the universe."

RESURRECTED BODIES

God's promise of the resurrection has at least three dramatic implications. The first one is the resurrection of our bodies. The bible is clear that there is a resurrection of the body after death. It is clear through Jesus' teaching, then through His experience, and then through the New Testament witness after that. And the resurrection of the body is the major point in 1 Corinthians 15. In 1 Corinthians 15:35 Paul entertains the question of what kind of bodies we will have post-resurrection. He says, "Some of you wonder what kind of bodies we will have," and you read his tone in the text—he is exasperated and frustrated by the fact that the recipients of his letter do not already know the answer. He calls their question foolish. "The answer is so obvious that I'm surprised you even had this as a question," he is saying. "So what do you expect, some sort of ghost?"

This is Paul in 1 Corinthians 15, and the reason he says these things is because the simplest way to know what we can expect of our resurrection bodies or the resurrection bodies of our loved ones in Christ is very, very simple. We look at Jesus' body. That's it. Paul calls Jesus the first fruits of the resurrection. He is the first one to be raised. He is the first one to demonstrate what resurrection looks like. There is much wonderful theological language that describes this that we will not discuss tonight, but Jesus is the first one to reap the rewards of death's power having been defeated as a result of his own death. He is the one who goes first; he is the pioneer into resurrection life. If you want to know what your resurrection body is going to look like, look at Jesus'.

And so Paul begins 1 Corinthians 15 by listing several of the post-resurrection appearances of Jesus and talking about what happened, and as we go back in the New Testament into the Gospels, we find out

what it was like. What we see when we look into the Gospels and even into Acts, is a living example of a resurrected body. This is not an old body with new life put into it, still subject to the same laws that govern the old. No, this is a body transformed; this is a new body with new life in it. It is recognizable but it is also different. There is some continuity with earthly experiences—the scars of Jesus, a visible familiarity of Jesus—but there is also discontinuity. This body has very different capacities; it can walk through walls. This body can all of a sudden be present and then vanish. When Jesus rose from the dead and appeared, His was a body of real flesh, recognizable, but different. This is a body that can exist in the physical world, but one that is no longer bound by physical laws, and that is exactly the kind of body we will have if Christ is the source of our salvation. Do you know the person sitting next to you? If you are a believer and they are a believer, look at them closely because they will be familiar to you in Heaven as well. And what will they feel like? Well, probably not that dissimilar to what they feel like tonight—living bodies, embodied, fleshly, material.

One of the things that confuses people about 1 Corinthians 15 is this whole interchange in verses 42 and following where it talks about the natural body and the spiritual body. People see the word “spiritual” and all of a sudden they think “spirit,” but that is not actually the implied meaning. The word “natural” and the word “spiritual” are both adjectives. They are only describing the “now” which is body. So you have the natural body, *psychikos soma* and then you have the spiritual body, *pneumatikos soma*, but they are both bodies. They are both physical. So perhaps a better word than spiritual—it is not more technically accurate, but it is probably more helpful for us in our day and age—would be something like supernatural, but it is not immaterial. It is very material. Our resurrection bodies are exactly that: they are embodied. And the new creation is also material as well.

A RESURRECTED EARTH

Let's look at the second implication of the resurrection: the new earth. Where will all these resurrected bodies live? Where do we expect to be? The answer is very simple: on this earth made new. This is important. Resurrection bodies will not inherit the earth the way it is now, but rather the way it will be when it too has been refined and restored and been made to function the way it was designed. That is the day when Jesus comes back to complete what He set in motion at His own resurrection: the new creation of all things, including us. N.T. Wright, the famous Anglican theologian, says:

“The New Testament picks up from the Old the theme that God intends, in the end, to set the whole creation right...God's plan is not to abandon the world, the world which He said was ‘very good.’ Rather, He intends to remake it. And when He does, He will raise all His people to new and bodily life to live in it.”

This is what Romans 8 says of course. Now what N.T. Wright argues theologically, Randy Alcorn argues a lot more popularly in his writings, and he is prolific, but both Wright and Alcorn are pointing out essentially the same realities. Alcorn is just a lot more accessible on these topics in some ways. He writes in his book *Heaven*:

“The New Earth will still be Earth, but a changed Earth and recognizable as such. Just as those reborn through salvation maintain continuity with the people they were, so too the world will be reborn in continuity with the old world...If we want to know what ultimate Heaven, our eternal home, will be like, the best place to start is by looking around us...the present Earth is as much a valid reference point for

envisioning the New Earth as our present bodies are a valid reference point for envisioning our new bodies. God doesn't promise us a non-Earth. He promises a New Earth."

Alcorn so deeply desires us to understand this and to understand the continuity of the old earth to the new earth and the physicality of the new earth, that he often refers to it in his writing as a place as real as New England. We know New England is there even though we are not there. Maybe we have ideas of what it is like, but we know that it is there. In this new earth there will be rivers and mountains and wide open fields of prairie grass, and some of those things will be vaguely familiar to us. There will be oceans and animals, homes and cities, and cities that work, and there will be a great capital city called the New Jerusalem that comes down out of Heaven. Where does it come down to? To earth, of course. And there will be Jesus and there will be people that you will know and people that you will get to know, but you and they and everything else will be perfect and everything will function perfectly with no brokenness and no tears and no evil and no sin and no loss—only gain. We will love perfectly then, and we will be loved perfectly then. All that we longed for here—justice and relationship and beauty and spirituality, these things that Write addresses in his book—there they will be satisfied. There they will be operative far as the curse is found. That is as far as it goes; it cannot be found after that point.

Now we can understand the written corpus of N.T. Wright and C.S. Lewis and J.R.R. Tolkien, and now we can understand the very famous last couple of chapters of the last book of the series, *The Chronicles of Narnia*. Many of you have read this and have probably already thought about this. You may be thinking, "Oh yes, that is what C.S. Lewis was saying actually, that the old Narnia had gone away but only because the new Narnia had taken its place, and the new Narnia was kind of like the old Narnia but better." So Edmund and Lucy and the others are all going to Narnia, and it seems vaguely familiar to them. They think it kind of looks like Narnia:

"Like!" cried Edmund after a moment's silence. "Why they're exactly like."

In response:

"And yet they're not like," said Lucy. "They're different. They have more colours on them and they look further away than I remembered and they're more...more...oh, I don't know..."

"More like the real thing," said the Lord Digory softly.

Diggory goes on:

"Listen, Peter. When Aslan said you could never go back to Narnia, he meant the Narnia you were thinking of. But that was not the real Narnia. That had a beginning and an end. It was only a shadow or copy of the real Narnia which has always been here and always will be here: just as our own world, England and all, is only a shadow or copy of something in Aslan's real world...All of the old Narnia that mattered, all the dear creatures, have been drawn into the real Narnia through the Door."

All that really mattered in the old Narnia is being drawn through the door. This is going to be a nice hook for us to talk about our work. A man named Sean Connolly wrote a wonderful book called *Inklings of Heaven: C.S. Lewis and Eschatology*, in which he takes Lewis' work in his fiction and also in his non-fiction and argues that this is what Lewis seems to be suggesting. Of course, *The Chronicles of Narnia* is

a children's novel and we do not want to base anything on it, except I think that is what Lewis believed actually.

Alright, so where is the objection? This question has come up each of the last three lectures. The bible says all things will pass away—everything is going to burn, dissolve, and melt, right? Revelation 21 says, “Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more.” Sounds like passing away to me. 2 Peter 3 seems to say this even more so, and this is the passage that usually is cited. This is *the passage* for this perspective, and in verses 6 and 7 it says, “The world that then existed was deluged with water and perished. But by the same word the heavens and earth that now exist are stored up for fire, being kept until the day of judgment and destruction of the ungodly.” It goes on in verse 10, “But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed.” The passage goes on to talk about heavens being set on fire and dissolved and the heavenly bodies melting as they burn. We have to deal with this passage. This is a passage of scripture; it matters. It really matters, so we want to address it.

The way I want to address it frankly is to let better hearts and better minds than mine do so. So I have given you a lot of quotes about this in your notes, and we are not going to read all of them at this time, but I have given them to you for your own study. I will reference them along the way, and some we will engage. So let's look and see what some folks have to say about this. Tom Nelson has this to say:

"Many translations of this text emphasize the earth being burned up. While this translation can be supported, this particular rendering tends to project the idea of a fiery judgment and complete annihilation and destruction rather than one of purification and healing...Rather, Peter's point is that the present earth and heavens will be purified from the ravaging effects of sin. Like fire and its purifying affect on precious metals such as gold or silver, so too will God's original creation be purified...The fiery judgment of our world, as well as our individual works, seems to suggest that there will be considerable carryover from God's original creation to his new creation of the new heavens and new earth. God's original creation will not be wasted, it will be purified."

Wait a second, you mean fire does not necessarily mean destruction as in annihilation. It might also mean destruction as in refinement? Okay, that is what Tom Nelson suggests. The next quote we will consider is from Douglass Moo, thanks to John Murdock who sent this along to me. This is a very academic treatment of this passage in particular, but this whole article, about ten fine print pages, is a very academic treatment of this very question about the language of destruction and annihilation by fire in the New Testament more generally. This article was published in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, and I found it on the Wheaton College ethics website. He says:

"A close look at the passages suggests that what is envisaged is not annihilation but rather radical transformation. There is some truth in this observation, since Peter parallels the destruction of this present world to the destruction of the former world through the flood of Noah's day. Clearly the flood brought judgment upon humankind; equally clearly, the Flood did not annihilate the earth."

This is huge! There is a huge exegetical key there to what Peter means. If he is referencing the flood annihilating all things, then clearly he does not mean complete annihilation because it was not all annihilated. Moo later continues:

“Destruction does not necessarily mean total physical annihilation, but a dissolution or radical change in nature...The parallel with what God did when he “destroyed” the first world in the Flood of Noah suggests that God will “destroy” this world not by annihilating it but by radically transforming it into a place fit for resurrected saints to live in forever...Both texts indicate a radical and thoroughgoing renovation of the world as we now know it. But I do not think the texts require us to believe that this world will be destroyed and replaced.”

This next point by N.T. Wright is emphasized magnificently and often in his books *Surprised by Hope* and *Simply Christian*, and also in a little booklet called *New Heavens, New Earth* where he says, “There is continuity between our present work and God's future kingdom, even though the former will have to pass through fire to attain the latter.”

John Paul II in his encyclical *Laborem Exercens* also makes this point. So does John Stott who says, “It is important to affirm that our Christian hope looks forward not to an ethereal heaven but to a renewed universe that will be related to the present world by both continuity and discontinuity.” He adds, “So the new heaven and the new earth will not be a replacement universe, but a regenerated universe, purged of all present imperfection.” This is John Yates' position. This is also what John Piper argues when he refers to “catastrophic purging and supernatural transformation of creation as God reverses the curse and makes all things new.” This is what the reference to Noah suggests. Piper is using the same exegetical key to make a decision. This is what Randy Alcorn argues as well as Steven Bouma-Prediger in *For the Beauty of the Earth*. This is what Andy Crouch argues in *Culture Making* as well as Richard Mouw. This is what Ben Worthington argues. For Heaven's sake, this is found in the Catechism of the Catholic Church. Who has been living with bad theology? The Catechism states, “The visible universe, then, is itself destined to be transformed, so that the world itself, restored to its original state, facing no further obstacles, should be at the service of the just.” It continues later:

“When we have spread on earth the fruits of our nature and our enterprise...according to the command of the Lord and in his Spirit, we will find them once again, cleansed this time from the stain of sin, illuminated and transfigured, when Christ presents to his Father an eternal and universal kingdom.”

I list these long writers and speakers to say, this is not an abnormal position, nor is it even necessarily new, nor is it Protestant or Catholic or Orthodox. Nor—and this is very important—nor is this Bill Haley. No, this is a loud chorus here saying that the earth will not all be annihilated. Rather, it will be transformed, and there is continuity between how we live now and what is coming later for all aspects of our lives. Yes there is certainly discontinuity, but more wonderfully there is continuity. Do we go to Heaven when we die? Yes! Yes, if by that you mean a renewed earth functioning in the way it was designed to function at Creation with the addition of the New Jerusalem, the presence of Jesus, and no curse with which to contend.

RESURRECTED RELATIONSHIPS

So, we have discussed the implications of the resurrection on the body and on the new earth, and then finally there are the implications of the resurrection for our relationships with others. We do not have nearly as much time to explore this tonight except to say that the implications of the resurrection are that finally we will love each other the way that we want to love each other. Finally in this new earth, full of resurrected bodies that are ours—Lord have mercy—we will finally love and be loved the way we have always wanted to. The reason why—and this is just lifted from the theology of Jonathan

Edwards—the reason why there is no marriage in Heaven is because everything that marriage points towards will be our experience with everybody else, loving and being loved perfectly.

CONTINUITY OF OUR WORK IN THE WORLD TO COME

So then, what about the continuity of our work? That is the hanging question. Well, if there is continuity of our bodies and our relationships on earth and our acts of God and the earth itself, so also there is continuity with our work for God, and this can include our actual work. J.R.R. Tolkien wrote a wonderful little story called “Leaf by Niggle” in which this is his main point. Matthew Mason, a pastor in downtown D.C., does a great job discussing this story briefly. He talks about this little painter, Niggle, and Niggle paints leaves, and he paints lots of leaves. And he is working on this great painting called “The Tree,” and he is painting all the little leaves on the tree. It is supposed to be lifelike and life-sized with birds nesting in it and the forest marching away into the distance with the hills glimmering far away. The major center piece of the painting is this big, beautiful tree, but Niggle is never happy with it. He never quiet finishes the painting. He always gets interrupted, and he never gets to spend the kind of time that he wants to on it, and then there are all sorts of diversions he pursues because he is frustrated with the work.

Eventually Niggle goes on this long journey, and it is Tolkien’s way of saying that Niggle is actually going to have to die. Niggle knows this, it bothers him, but eventually he does go on his long journey. He does die, and he dies frustrated because the tree is not done. The tree is far from complete, and it was not actually that good of a painting anyway. It was his life's work, and it is not that good, and he was frustrated. But then, at the end of this story, there is a flashback to Niggle's town after he is dead and gone. What happened to his painting? What happened to the tree? Well, there was this storm in town and some roofs caved in and Niggle's tree that was painted on a canvas ended up being used to cover somebody else's roof. So the painting was destroyed and pieces of it had been ripped up, but one little leaf had been found. They thought this leaf was nice. They thought this was a little piece of local history, so they put it in a museum in a frame, “Just One Leaf by Niggle.” But then the museum itself burned down, and that was lost too, and Niggle had nothing to show for his life on earth.

Now, we should let this story settle in our own hearts about our own fates. How many people can you name from the 1700's? A few? Quite a few less than there were! So Niggle's life is just gone. It only took a generation and it was done. Niggle goes on his journey and he is forgotten. His paintings are destroyed, but then Tolkien shows us what happens to Niggle at the end of his long journey. He takes this long journey, and he is getting closer and closer to his destination. Finally he comes to it:

“Before him stood the Tree, his Tree, finished. If you could say that of a Tree that was alive, its leaves opening, its branches growing and bending in the wind that Niggle had so often felt or guessed, and had so often failed to catch. He gazed at the Tree, and slowly he lifted his arms and opened them wide.

“It's a gift!” he said. He was referring to his art, and also to the result; but he was using the word quite literally.

“He went on looking at the Tree. All the leaves he had ever labored at were there, as he had imagined them rather than as he had made them;”

—That's encouraging!—

“And there were others that had only budded in his mind, and many that might have budded, if only he had had the time.”

Wow! What Tolkien is saying is that even our best efforts fall short of our desires, but somehow they get completed. And somehow what we are always hoping for but can never actually attain, we get to find in God's economy. Both N.T. Wright and Andy Crouch, each of them in their own various ways list cultural artifacts they expect to see in Heaven. These cultural artifacts are the best of human culture that continues to exist forever because they are so good—they are so transcendent. These are the things that even when we experience them now, we feel transcendent. Both of them list the Pieta, the sculpture by Michelangelo, and both of them list the B-minor Mass. For both Michelangelo and Bach, these works were their own personal offerings of devotion. Both of them applied all their skill to a final project that would be their perfection. Bach in his B-minor Mass labored for 15 years in his spare time knowing that it would never be played in his lifetime because he was Lutheran and he wrote a Catholic mass. He trained all of his energies and all of his skill into this thing which he knew was for God alone. Even the secular commentators who try to figure out why in the world Bach did this come to the same conclusion which is that this was his personal offering of devotion. It was his personal act of worship.

So as we start thinking about this, as we start letting the implications of this dawn on us, the question becomes, what will be our Pieta? What will be our B-minor Mass? What work can we do with all that we have for the sake of God. Who knows whether or not the Pieta or B-minor Mass are going to be in Heaven—I don't of course. Who knows what of our work will last, but I guarantee you the more we do for God in the spirit of God, the more likely it is that it will last.

John Paul II, in *Laborem Exercens*, “On Human Labor,” says:

“In work, thanks to the light that penetrates us from the Resurrection of Christ, we always find a glimmer of new life, of the new good, as if it were an announcement of ‘the new heavens and the new earth’ in which man and the world participate precisely through the toil that goes with work. Through toil—and never without it. On the one hand this confirms the indispensability of the Cross in the spirituality of human work; on the other hand the Cross which this toil constitutes reveals a new good springing from work itself, from work understood in depth and in all its aspects and never apart from work.”

Randy Alcorn, talking about the continuity of work, says, “Because there will be continuity from the old Earth to the new, it's possible we'll continue some of the work we started on the old Earth. I believe we'll pursue some of the same things we were doing, or dreamed of doing, before our death.”

Now, let's reconsider the guy picking up deer off the side of the road. Let's not forget him. Why will he have a different job in Heaven? Because there will not be dying deer on the side of the road. Randy Alcorn quotes Victor Hugo, the novelist, who says, “...For half a century I have been translating my thoughts into prose and verse: history, drama, philosophy, romance, tradition, satire, ode and song; all of these I have tried. But I feel I haven't given utterance to the thousandth part of what lies within me.”

How many of us can relate to this? How many of us feel like we are not even scratching the surface of all we want to do or say? Most of us. That is typically how we live. When I go to the grave, I can say as others have said, my day's work is done, but I cannot say my life is done. My work will recommence the

next morning. The tomb is not a blind alley; it is a thoroughfare. It closes upon the twilight but opens upon the dawn. Wow!

This is a long passage by N.T. Wright from *Surprised by Hope*, but it is quite worth while, so I want to read it. I did not give you this one because it is too long to type, and clearly my choosing not to type it is not an aspect of my own work that will last into the new earth. Starting at page 208 of *Surprised by Hope*, he says:

"But what we can and must do in the present, if we are obedient to the gospel, if we are following Jesus, if we are indwelt, energized, and directed by the Spirit, is to build for the Kingdom. This brings us back to 1 Corinthians 15:58 once more: what you do in the Lord is not in vain. You are not oiling the wheels of a machine that's about to roll over a cliff. You are not restoring a great painting that's shortly going to be thrown on the fire. You are not planting roses in a garden that's about to be dug up for a building site. You are—strange though it may seem, almost as hard to believe as the resurrection itself—accomplishing something that will become in due course part of God's new world. Every act of love, gratitude, and kindness; every work of art or music inspired by the love of God and delight in the beauty of his creation; every minute spent teaching a severely handicapped child to read or to walk; every act of care and nurture, of comfort and support, for one's fellow human beings and for that matter for one's fellow non-human creatures; and of course every prayer, all Spirit-led teaching, every deed that spreads the gospel, builds up the church, embraces and embodies holiness rather than corruption, and makes the name of Jesus honored in the world—all of this will find its way, through the resurrecting power of God, into the new creation that God will one day make. That is the logic of the mission of God. God's recreation of his wonderful world, which began with the resurrection of Jesus and continues mysteriously as God's people live in the risen Christ and the power of his spirit, means that what we do in Christ and by the Spirit in the present is not wasted. It will last all the way into God's new world. In fact, it will be enhanced there.

"I have no idea what precisely this will mean in practice."

—It's nice to hear him say that—

"I am putting up a signpost, not offering a photograph of what we will find once we get to where the signpost is pointing. I don't know what musical instruments we shall have to play Bach in God's new world, though I'm sure Bach's music will be there. I don't know how my planting a tree today will relate to the wonderful trees that there will be in God's recreated world, though I do remember Martin Luther's words about the proper reaction to knowing the Kingdom was coming the next day being to go out and plant a tree."

And he goes on. He later adds, "Jesus calls his followers to live in him and by the power of His spirit and so to be new creation people here and now bringing signs and symbols of the kingdom to birth on earth as it is in heaven." Isn't that powerful and encouraging?

Now we do not have time tonight to get into the whole concept of rewards in Heaven except to say and to make very explicit that the bible is crystal clear that there is some sort of reward economy in God's economy. I would not say that if I did not believe the bible taught it, and it is only because of the 30 times you see it referenced in the bible that I believe there is a reward economy. It is in the New Testament, and from Jesus Himself in the Sermon on the Mount. Now is not the time to talk about it

except we can say this: know that anything we do in the Lord will be rewarded in Heaven. It's just true. It is part of the good news.

CREATION, FALL, REDEMPTION, CONSUMMATION...CREATION

So friends, we have now come back full circle. We have seen God's purposes in Creation. We have seen that He created the earth to reveal His character and to create a place for His character to be revealed, and that He created people to reveal Himself and to steward this creation He had made and to be in relationship with Him. We have seen that He made us in His image, and that part of being made in His image is being made to be one who works because God is a worker. We have seen that the Fall derailed it. We have seen that Jesus gets it back on track. And we have seen that we get to participate in His getting it back on track. And when He comes back, all of these purposes of Creation will be completed, and even more so, because they will include the glorious Redemption.

Now after about four lectures, I feel like we can talk about what the gospel is in its fullness. Remember the full rainbow gospel that we talked about last lecture? I gave you my thoughts last time. This time I am going to share what Andy Crouch says because he and I are saying essentially the same thing. Andy and I worked very closely together for a very long time, and it seems both of us were maturing in our understanding of these things, and so when I encountered him writing this for the first time, I thought to myself, "Oh yes, yes, yes, that is what I believe too." So Andy says:

"Our Eternal life in God's created world will be the fulfillment of what God originally asked us to do: cultivating and creating in full and lasting relationship with our Creator. This time, of course, we will not just be tending a garden; we will be sustaining the life of a city, a harmonious human society that has developed all its potentialities hidden in the original creation to their fullest. Culture [what we make of the world]—redeemed, transformed, and permeated by the presence of God—will be the activity of eternity."

How many times have you heard somebody say, "I expect Heaven will be boring?"

How many times have you thought it? A good half of us. I have heard people say it. I mean, just a bunch of singing? No, no, no, not singing, not singing. Creating! We will be creating without the constraints that we live with now, with all of God's resources at our disposal with people who we love very dearly, making things that are beautiful and enjoyable. Not bad!

So what do we do? Well friends, let us let theology drive our anticipation, and then let our anticipation drive us in how we work. C.S. Lewis writes:

"If you read history you will find that the Christians who did the most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next. It is since Christians have largely ceased to think of the other world that they have become so ineffective in this one."

I am convinced one of the reasons for the anemia of Evangelical witness and satisfaction in the United States is because of an underdeveloped eschatology. We do not know what we are looking for. Therefore we do not know how to live. And we do not know what it is worth sacrificing for that reality. We must remind one another constantly of this beautiful vision. Whenever it comes alive in us we will find new energy to live it out. My prayer for us tonight has simply been that we will be able to see.

Please help us to see, because if we can see how beautiful this vision is, that is its own motivation. We need to remind ourselves of this beautiful vision of the new heavens and the new earth coming. Instead of making us escape real life, this beautiful vision gets us involved in real life actually.

So again, John Paul II says:

"Let the Christian who listens to the word of the living God, uniting work with prayer, know the place that his work has not only in earthly progress but also in the development of the Kingdom of God, to which we are all called through the power of the Holy Spirit and through the word of the Gospel,"

Do you catch that? Let the person who listens to the word of the living God, know that his work is not only about whatever you can do on Earth, but actually he is developing the Kingdom of the Lord. As N.T. Wright would say, we are not building the Kingdom, we are building for the Kingdom. We are waiting for God to come back and do it, and in the meantime we are doing our little piece to point in that direction. So our work matters.

I will let 1 Corinthians 15 have the last word and tell us explicitly what to do. 1 Corinthians 15:58 says, "Therefore, my beloved brothers (and sisters), be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that in the Lord your labor is not in vain."

So what is the work of the Lord? Here it is: it is the life of a Christian. That is the work of the Lord. Let me say it again, the work of the Lord is the life of a Christian. Our love, our relationships, our vocations, our service, our witness, our work, everything we have to give is the work of the Lord that we are being called to abound in, because nothing about it is in vain. So friends, let us abound in it—all of it. None of it is secondary. Vocation is integral to the mission of God, but it is not the only thing. The whole life of a Christian is integral to the mission of God in the world. A couple of times we have let Gungor the band lead us in worship, and we are going to let them do that tonight. I played them two months ago, and you may remember their album which traces Creation and Fall and then Redemption and points in the direction of Consummation. Well, this is near the end of their album. Somehow it seems to be a fitting conclusion to this part of our series:

"This Is Not the End" from *Beautiful Things*

This is not the end
This is not the end of this
We will open our eyes wide, wider

This is not our last
This is not our last breath
We will open our mouths wide, wider

And you know you'll be alright
Oh and you know you'll be alright

This is not the end
This is not the end of us
We will shine like the stars bright, brighter