



FINISHING OUR WORK

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Acts 20:24

It is this thought of finishing things that I think God wants to speak to us about today. We are finishing, this morning, our ministry in this place; at least, we are gathering this Sabbath morning within these walls for the last time. For two years and one month the Lord has permitted us to labor in this place that was built for the worship of God, afterwards given to secular business, and finally, desecrated in the devil's employ. It has pleased Him by a miracle of providence to give us, just at the time we needed it, this place for His work; and for twenty-five months He has permitted us here to do as much work, perhaps as many churches do in five or six years a good deal more than I ever did in six or seven years before, even counting by the number of services. We have had about 1,100 religious services in this place within the time I have mentioned. Many of them were for the comfort of Christians and the building up of God's Church and people, and therefore have not had the same visible results in the way of salvation; but almost every evangelistic service that has ever been held here has been followed by the conversion of souls.

I have made no attempt to keep record of these names, but I should judge that at least as many as a thousand souls every year of our work here—which is only about twenty a week—have been awaked and talked with on the subject of their salvation sometimes a great many more and very recently, in connection with our mission work, this number has been more than doubled. The Lord has permitted us, during these two years, to bring perhaps many souls to the feet of Jesus, whom we have not been able to follow afterward. God only knows; and I am sure that tens of thousands have come in here once or twice and passed on, having heard the word of eternal life.

I shall never cease to thank God for the wonderful providence that opened this place, and the still more wonderful grace that made it a perfect delight to minister and serve Him here. I thank Him also for the dear people that have gathered, for the laborers that have been always willing to lead souls to Christ, for the way in which He has raised, I think, at least \$25,000 in these two years and met the needs of the work without our going to man. I don't speak at all of the money given for the new tabernacle; I don't speak

of the money given to establish a home and sustain a training college; I don't speak at all of the work done in connection with the work for which the Lord has made me personally responsible, but for the work of this church God has put in into the hands of you simple people to sustain. I thank Him the more because there has been nothing on our part to cause it; there has been nothing of human ability, but simple dependence in Christ. You know very well the truth given here has been very simple, and wholly designed to lead sinners to Christ and to lead Christians closer to His side. You know there has been no great business capacity in the management of things, no ecclesiastical experience; we have been simply humble instruments of Christ, and He has seen fit to lead us on and to bless us; and we do this morning give Him all the praise and glory, place ourselves at His feet in great humility, and ask Him to use us. still.

Now, this is a most serious thought, this thought of finishing our work, finishing even this stage of our work. How much it means for this work, and how much it suggests for our whole Christian life and work. There is nothing, I think, in Christian life so sad as unfinished work. There is no memorial in the cemetery that brings the tears to our eyes more quickly than the broken column which tells of a life broken in the midst; and as I look around me, I see so many broken columns in human life. Someone said to Napoleon, in one of his pageants in Africa under the shadow of the Pyramids, as his veterans were marching in review: "Emperor, what is lacking here?" "Nothing, nothing," said he, "but continuance." He knew that in a little while these squadrons would dissolve and life itself be perhaps a bitter disappointment. And so, in the work of God we have seen so much that was incomplete. I have seen so much in my own work that I have cried to God, that, even if He gave me a very little work it would all be clear work that it would be all finished work.

I remember that when, five years ago, this work began, how delightful it was that there were only a dozen or twenty members, and to feel that we were all on a Scriptural foundation; and the desire has never left me that whatever we do may last until the Master comes, even if it be humble work. As I look over the work of God, I see this curse incomplete, workstrewing the way all along with miserable wrecks. I find the book of Judges telling us of five hundred years of declension because God's people did not complete their work when they were in possession of Canaan. They conquered Jericho; they conquered thirty-one kingdoms; they divided the land among twelve victorious tribes; but they left here and there little strongholds that were not subdued, little tribes that could not or would not be driven out; and it was not long until they brought Israel under subjection, and neutralized all the work of Joshua's conquest. I look again at the life of poor Saul, and I see that the one turning point in his life was where he stopped short of finishing God's work, where he let his own fleshly heart control him, and left God's work unfinished, and the curse of God's rejection fell upon him.

I look at the ministry of Elijah, and never has the world seen anything

more sublime than his victory on Carmel; but, O, who has not wept at the reaction of the morrow, when at the shaking of a woman's finger he fled into the desert and left the field in possession of God's enemies; from which Israel never again recovered, but went down and down, until it passed away, not in captivity, but in extinction.

And so, it is not enough to go on for a while. It is the last step that wins. O, may God put on our hearts, as we leave here, this great thought, "that I may finish my course with joy and the ministry that I have received of the Lord Jesus to testify the Gospel of the grace of God." How this has often been brought to my own heart, until it seemed to me that I could see nothing but just the closing days of life, the thought when it would all be finished and handed over to His hands and there were the two pictures; the one the thought of much accomplished, but much lost; something done, but something undone; and the sad bitterness of the thought: O, it is almost better not to have lived than to have failed to complete my one life, and yet to know that I can never live it again, and that something is left out forevermore. And then came the other picture; the soldier pressing on until the last hour unflinching, unwearied, afraid even of the thought of weariness; and, at last, looking back and saying; By the grace of God there is nothing left out that the Lord had in His heart to give me to do; I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course; henceforth it is all victory. And, as you go forth in this spirit, you will find that while you keep your eye on the end, it will give impulse and power to every step of the way.

Then, as we look at finished work, how much of it do we find in the work and Word of God.

We find, in the first chapter of Genesis when God began the work of creation, He left nothing undone. So, God finished, as we are told, the heavens and the earth, and God saw everything that He had made, that it was good, and then He sat down and rested on His own Sabbath day. There was nothing left undone. Take the most finished work of art and compare it with God's smallest creations, and you find the sting of the bee is superior to the most perfectly wrought needle that ever came from the factories or the tools of man. You find that the most perfect polished surface under the magnifying glass seems like a great mass of hills and valleys compared with the surface of your hand. The wing of the smallest insect is all spangled and shining with burnished, radiant splendor, and no matter how carefully you inspect it, there is no flaw, is all perfect. You find the little blade of grass is made as carefully as the immense pine tree. All God's work is well done, and myriads of things seem to be made that produce no adequate return. On every side of us there are things that we do not seem to understand the use of. Everything is done with a prodigal bountifulness, and yet all are perfect.

We read again about Moses, that he finished his work. In the last chapter of Exodus, we have this description, "So Moses finished the work as the Lord commanded. So did he." His work was all done, and then God came in and took possession, and made it His dwelling place.

God does not want to come in and dwell in unfinished things. If you build a house and put no roof on it, it will fall to pieces, and so unfinished work will fail.

Again, we find that Joshua finished his work, and that was the secret of his power. "So, Joshua took the whole land, according to all that the Lord said unto Moses. There was not a city that he did not take and there failed not one word of any good thing which the Lord had spoken unto the house of Israel." He finished his work through and through, and all his life God's blessing was on that work and on the people; and it was when Joshua passed away that they began slighting the work and then came the declension and ruin of the period of the Judges.

Again we read of Nehemiah, that he finished his work. The prophet Haggai had said about this restoration, "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of His house; his hands also shall finish it, and ye shall know that the Lord hath sent me unto you." So, we read about Nehemiah, "So the wall was finished on the four and twentieth day of the month." There was no gate left out, no hinge broken, no breach in the walls that was not completed, no unfinished work; but every little thing, every bar, every hinge, every river, was all secure; then God blessed and established the work.

We read about the dear Lord Jesus, He finished His work. "I must be about My Father's business; I must work while it is day;" or, as it is in the original: "I must work all the day long, every hour of the day, for the night is coming; My meat and drink are to finish the work, which My Father has given Me to do." And the hour came at last when He could say, "I have glorified Thee on earth; I have finished the work Thou gavest Me to do, and now I come to Thee." His last word on the cross was just one little word, "finished." And when He rose from the grave there was such a wonderful quietness and deliberateness about Him, such an evidence of everything being orderly and completely done, that even the napkin was found wrapped together in a place by itself, and His grave clothes were all folded up in order; there was not a trifle left undone. The Lord did everything perfectly, easily and well. We read about Paul that his one mission was to finish his course; and the time came when, within the sight of the Ostian gate where he died, he could say, "I have fought a good fight, I have kept the faith; henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord shall give to me in that day and not to me only, but to all them who love His appearing." He finished his work, and, had he His life to live over again, perhaps there is nothing more he could add to it.

And now, dear friends, how about your work and mine? Let us look into it today. You are standing within a few steps of a border line, when this period of your life will close up forever. Have you accomplished that which you set out to do? Have you finished that which you began? How is it about your Christian character—is it entire, or is it incomplete? "I pray God to sanctify you, wholly, entirely, and that your whole spirit, and soul and body may be preserved blameless unto the coming of the Lord Jesus."

Is that fulfilled, or are you only saved in spots, only cleansed here and there, and great blotches of sin are upon you like a moth-eaten garment? That is not God's plan. God's idea for you is entire wholeness of character—your spirit, your soul, your body all sanctified unto Him. Why not? It is because you have not taken God's Word. It is because you have not been willing to enter into God's blessing and God's will. If you have not entered into here, it is not going to be any easier to enter into it anywhere else. O, before this day shall close, just go to Him to give you that complete transformation. It is not a thing that you grow into; it is a thing that you take from Him as the free gift of His grace. May God help you today not to seek human perfection, not to say there is no room for progress, but to take and have the perfect Christ reaching every part of your life and going ever in your complete being, a perfect child, perhaps, but just as perfect as a perfect man. You know what it is to be a perfect babe. It is a poor, weak little thing, but it is perfect. Now, God wants you to be a perfect child to be complete, to be finished in all your parts, although with room for boundless expansion in the growth of your future life. The dear Saviour has it for you, and you are slighting His costly purchase if you do not receive it.

Again, have you entered into the complete plan and purpose of God for your life. Paul prays for the Thessalonians that they may know all the good pleasure of His goodness, and that the Lord will fulfill in them His perfect will. Are you reaching out to that for which you were apprehended by Christ, or is God all the time having to drive you forward and press you on. God calls you to a complete conformity to His will that you may be holy and please God, and He will give you the grace to do it.

How about your work; have you finished that? Have you started, and then got tired and dropped it? Have you been sent to some service, and at some little discouragement put it aside? Have you brought some soul to Christ and then left it again—never prayed for it, never sought to finish the trust that God gave to you? Have you promised anything and never fulfilled it? God calls us today, before we leave this place to balance all our accounts with Him, and to go away with the blessed thought that we have nothing more to do that could have been done; and He does not call us to anything unreasonable, extreme or impossible.

And then, as a church, have we finished that for which God sent us to this place? When we have passed away from Twenty-third Street to return, perhaps, in this sense, no more, shall we be able to say, "I am pure from the blood of all men. I have not shunned to declare the whole counsel of God; I have held up Christ before His coming to all I could reach; I have done all that I could do in these meetings to bring souls to Christ; I have finished the work that Thou gavest me to do."

Even Sampson, in the last moment of his life, accomplished a life's work in an hour. May God help you to accomplish the trust that has been committed to your hands, to leave nothing at least, undone.

So, in this special enterprise as a church, let us finish our work. We

have started to secure our new church home let us finish it. We have given our honor before God and man that we will independently, even at great sacrifice, purchase a house for God. Have you finished your part? Have you done what God has called you to do? Is it finished? Shall we go there with no raveled ends, with no loose, unfinished work, but with that promptness and that obedience which God loves, and on which He pours out His perfect blessing, even in financial matters, for He blesses His Church for generosity quite as much as He does for faith and prayer and Christian work, and I am sure that the blessing has come to this people, because we have been liberally meeting the claims of Christ in these past months.

And then our life work, dear friends, O, is that going to be a completed scroll, or is it going to be a torn parchment, unfinished? I don't believe God wants it to be so for you or for me. O, what a precious life yours and mine is. Only once can it be lived; never again can we traverse this ground. O, remember as you go forth: "I shall never pass this way again;" and so let every earnest fiber of your being be laid at His feet, and do it as you would wish it done in that day when you shall look back upon the life that shall come no more. I say this for myself I say it for you, dear friends. Someone has said,

For at my back I always hear
Time's swift-winged chariot hurrying near;
And onward, all before, I see
Deserts of vast eternity.

And Dr. Bonar reminds us:

Not many lives have we but one.
One, only one!
How precious should that one life be
That narrow span!
Day after day filled up with faithful toil;
Year after year still bringing in new spoil.

I heard, somewhere, of a poor fellow dying on the railroad track; and, as they picked him up all mangled, his face pale and blood flowing from every wound, he just had strength to say one sentence; "O, if I only had." Nobody knew that terrible regret that came surging up in his memory; something he had meant to do and just put off that day; something he had promised God to do but he did not, and never could it be done again. "O, if I only had." O, it speaks to me as the signal of an unfinished life saved, perhaps, but not what God saved it for; coming in, but coming in to lose the crown God would have given. Happy, I hope. O, yes, in heaven you will have happiness even in the lower place, but the one that could be content to take the lower place has got a mean soul and cannot be very happy anywhere.

It is said that one of the old translators of the Bible, as he was finishing

his work, felt the cold damp of death coming over him, calling his scribe, he said; "All is done but just one-half a chapter." And, as his pulses grew colder, he summoned up his faith and courage, and called his amanuensis, and said; "Write quickly." And he began to dictate, and words poured from his lips as fast as the hand could write. "Be quick," he said, "be quick, the sands are running out." And the words poured out as the last drops of the stream of life; and when he had finished it, he clasped his hands, and said "Now, glory be to the Father, and to the Son, and to the Holy Ghost." And his lips were cold and his work was done. There was nothing lacking. The last line had been added, and the English Bible was put in the hands of man. That was finished work. God has something for you to do until it is all done, and then when it comes to the end, O, it will be sweet to say like Lady Huntingdon: "My work is finished, and I have nothing to do but die."

So, may the dear Lord bless our living and then I am sure He will glorify our dying.