

God Will Finish the Work

FOCUS THOUGHT

We must allow God to complete the work He has started in our lives.

▶▶ FOCUS VERSE

Philippians 1:6

Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.

▶▶ LESSON TEXT

Acts 23:11–14

11 And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul: for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.

12 And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

13 And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

14 And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul.

▶▶ CULTURE CONNECTION

GOD'S WORKS ARE NEVER UNFINISHED

In his article titled “The Unfinished Portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt by Elizabeth Shoumatoff,” Professor Christopher Muscato relates the story of one of the most famous, unfinished works of art in American history. Muscato writes, “Every American president has had a formal portrait, and generally this is the first image we think of with that president. Occasionally, however, there are those rare images of presidents beyond the official portraits which capture our attention and stick in our collective memories.

“Of those, perhaps none is quite as chilling as the portrait of Franklin D. Roosevelt, created on April 12 of 1945 by artist Elizabeth Shoumatoff. The painting is unfinished and was destined to forever remain that way. The reason? April 12, 1945 is the day FDR died.

“At 1:15, the President complained of a ‘terrific headache’ and suddenly collapsed in his chair. He was pronounced dead just two hours later” (<http://study.com>, accessed September 24, 2017).

Through the centuries there have been many unfinished works—paintings, books, musical compositions, and architectural structures. All were left incomplete due to sudden and unexpected disease or death, incapacitating the artist, author, musician, or builder. It is inevitable that some individuals will begin human works that will ultimately be left unfinished, but such is never the case with the Lord. God’s Word assures us He will complete the good work He has begun in us (Philippians 1:6).

▶▶ OUTLINE

I. GOD HAS CALLED US TO WORK FOR HIM

- A. “You Will Testify in Rome”
- B. He Has a Work for Us to Do

II. THE ENEMY WISHES TO STOP THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN US

III. THE ENEMY’S PLANS WILL NEVER SURPRISE GOD

IV. GOD WILL COMPLETE THE WORK HE HAS BEGUN IN OUR LIVES

- A. A Plan to Get Paul to Safety
- B. God Will Finish What He Started

▶▶ CONTEMPLATING THE TOPIC

God has a scripted plan for every individual’s life. Because God created us as individuals of freewill, we can choose to ignore God’s script for our lives and follow our own selfish inclinations, or we can choose to align our lives with His plans for us. The choice is ours.

Whichever choice we make, God will be neither surprised nor thwarted in His overall plan for human life and eternity. He desires us to conform to His designed script for our lives, but He will allow us to go our own way if that is our choice. However, make no mistake: choosing to follow our own selfish and human inclinations instead of following God’s plan will not deter His ultimate plan. Rather, He will utilize our decisions to work toward good outcomes for other individuals—working toward the good of those who love God and are the called according to His divine purpose (Romans 8:28).

»»» SEARCHING THE SCRIPTURES

Two calls from God come to every believer. First, God calls all individuals to salvation. It is the most important call anyone will ever receive. Salvation through Jesus Christ gives our lives significance and aligns us with God's plans for us.

Second, every believer who accepts the salvation call also receives God's call to an individual work of ministry within the body of Christ. No believer in the body of Christ is without meaning or purpose. God has called every person to find his or her place within the function of the entire body, the church.

To minister is to serve. All believers are called to serve the body of Christ through the roles to which God has called them and the positions in which He has placed them.

-
- » *To what role or service has Jesus Christ called you?*
 - » *Should you consider that function in any way inferior to other roles and positions within the body of Christ? Why or why not?*
-

I. GOD HAS CALLED US TO WORK FOR HIM

Our calling of service within the church involves a specific work for which God has created us. We are to dedicate ourselves to performing and completing that work. Of course, we all are called to win souls for Christ, and we all have a testimony to share with others—both within and without the church body. However, beyond our general calling to reach the lost, we also have a specialized work to which we should devote ourselves.

Our specific work may be either a specialized area of ministry to the lost or to our fellow members of the body of Christ. God has given every one of us unique gifts and abilities, which He will use for His glory when we yield and submit them to Him. The joining together of all these differing gifts and abilities makes the church strong and vibrant in its ministry throughout the earth. A person's work may be to preach or to teach, or it may be to play musical instruments or to sing. It could be a calling as a missionary at home or abroad, or it could involve using one's abilities to assist in the administration of the work of the church. Whatever the calling, it is special and unique to each individual.

-
- » *What are some of the gifts and abilities people have that God might utilize to advance the work of the church?*
 - » *Does God use the innate gifts of believers, acquired abilities of believers, or both? Explain.*
-

God has called us to work for Him and He will empower us to successfully perform His work. We can observe an example of God's specific calling in today's lesson text. God called Paul to testify in Rome. Nothing would prevent Paul's fulfillment of that calling because God was guiding Paul's way toward an eventual mission in Rome.

A. “You Will Testify in Rome”

In Acts 23:11 we read God’s encouraging words to Paul. God let Paul know in no uncertain terms that he would testify in Rome just as he had in Jerusalem. Paul had just faced an intense grilling by the Jewish Sanhedrin council. From a human perspective, Paul had reason to be discouraged, but God did not leave him without an encouraging word. God had a specific plan for Paul’s life and He would not allow that plan to be thwarted.

-
- » *Have you ever received special encouragement from God?*
 - » *What means did God use to encourage you during a time of disappointment or discouragement?*
-

B. He Has a Work for Us to Do

God has a grand plan for enacting His supreme will in this world, and amazingly, each one of us has a specific work to perform within that incredible plan. We may not experience what the world views as success in every venture we undertake, and sometimes we may feel like we are failing. However, God will bring to pass His ultimate plan in the end, and He will use us in the process as long as we keep ourselves compliant to His leadership and submitted to His will.

“In the eleventh century, King Henry III of Bavaria grew tired of court life and the pressures of being a monarch. He made application to Prior Richard at a local monastery, asking to be accepted as a contemplative and spend the rest of his life in the monastery. ‘Your Majesty,’ said Prior Richard, ‘do you understand that the pledge here is one of obedience? That will be hard because you have been a king.’

“‘I understand,’ said Henry. ‘The rest of my life I will be obedient to you, as Christ leads you.’

“‘Then I will tell you what to do,’ said Prior Richard. ‘Go back to your throne and serve faithfully in the place where God has put you.’ When King Henry died, a statement was written: ‘The King learned to rule by being obedient.’ When we tire of our roles and responsibilities, it helps to remember God has planted us in a certain place and told us to be a good accountant or teacher or mother or father. Christ expects us to be faithful where He puts us, and when He returns, we’ll rule together with Him” (www.sermonillustrations.com, Steve Brown, Key Biscayne, Florida).

-
- » *What are some reasons believers might become weary in the performance of their life callings?*
 - » *How might believers gain encouragement from Galatians 6:9 during such a time?*
-

While we can be certain God has a work for us to do in the performance of His holy will, we also can be sure His enemies will do whatever they can in an effort to thwart His will.

II. THE ENEMY WISHES TO STOP THE WORK GOD IS DOING IN US

A group of more than forty Jews so despised the work Paul was attempting to accomplish for God, they mutually swore an oath to neither eat nor drink until Paul had been killed. They were intent on stopping him and stopping the message of Jesus Christ and His church. This group conspired with the chief priests and elders in a plan to ambush Paul and execute violence against him.

The hatred Satan and his imps have for God and His kingdom is difficult to comprehend. Satan will go to any length or depth of depravity to oppose God and His kingdom. Consequently, Christians can become caught in the crossfire of Satan's opposition to God and His plan. Interestingly, God turns all of Satan's attempts at afflicting the people of God into surprisingly potent sources of strength, learning, and spiritual growth. No pain of affliction is pleasant or enjoyable when we experience it, but we know it will strengthen us in the end.

One writer put it this way, "Contrary to what might be expected, I look back on experiences that at the time seemed especially desolating and painful with particular satisfaction. Indeed, I can say with complete truthfulness that everything I have learned in my 75 years in this world, everything that has truly enhanced and enlightened my experience, has been through affliction and not through happiness" (Malcolm Muggeridge, in *Homemade*, July, 1990).

III. THE ENEMY'S PLANS WILL NEVER SURPRISE GOD

Fortunately, Paul's nephew heard of the plot and warned Paul, who sent him to speak to the Roman Tribune, warning him of the plan. Consequently, the Tribune arranged for a two-hundred-man army to escort Paul to the governor Felix, providing him protection as a Roman citizen.

Opposition to the work of God never catches the Lord off guard. God is fully aware of Satan's opposition to His work in this world, for He is omniscient—possessing perfect knowledge of all things. Whatever the will and purpose of God may be, we can be certain that Satan and his hordes will actively oppose it on every front and by every means possible. Fortunately, no tool formed against the Lord and His people shall prevail against them (Isaiah 54:17).

Christians do not want to have enemies who oppose them and their work, but it is impossible for those who serve the Lord Jesus to avoid having enemies. Specifically, their enemies are the ones who oppose God and His purposes on earth.

-
- » *When an acquaintance seems determined to be our enemy because of our position as a believer in Christ Jesus, what are some actions we might take to try to reach that individual for Christ?*
 - » *Is it sometimes necessary to abandon all effort to befriend such a person? Why or why not?*
-

Christians may seek to be peaceful and kind, making many would-be enemies their friends. However, because they belong to Christ they will face opposition from

His enemies. Jesus said, “If the world hate you, ye know that it hated me before it hated you” (John 15:18). Unfortunately, none of us can avoid having some enemies because they are the enemies of God.

“A reporter was interviewing an old man on his 100th birthday. ‘What are you most proud of?’ he asked. ‘Well,’ said the man, ‘I don’t have an enemy in the world.’ ‘What a beautiful thought! How inspirational!’ said the reporter. ‘Yep,’ added the centenarian, ‘outlived every last one of them’” (www.sermonillustrations.com).

Despite whatever enemies one may have in life and whatever opposing forces one must face, the believer may have complete assurance of ultimate success within the purposes of God. God will complete His work within every believer.

IV. GOD WILL COMPLETE THE WORK HE HAS BEGUN IN OUR LIVES

God does not abandon the works He begins; He will finish every work. God has demonstrated this truth from the very beginning of time. Genesis 2 tells of God finishing all the work of creating the heavens and the earth, and “on the seventh day God ended his work which he had made; and he rested on the seventh day from all his work which he had made” (Genesis 2:1–2).

The same principle is true with regard to God’s working within the lives of believers. We can be certain He will complete within us every work He has begun. God was not through with His plan for the great apostle Paul’s life, so He activated a plan for Paul’s rescue from his enemies.

A. A Plan to Get Paul to Safety

Not only was God not surprised by those who opposed Paul’s work and their plan to destroy him, God already had a plan in place to assure Paul’s safe passage. Although the Romans certainly were not friends of Jesus Christ and His church, God used them by putting His plan into their hearts. Consequently, they arranged for and used an army of two hundred Roman soldiers to provide Paul safe passage to Caesarea. Their conveyance of Paul to the Roman governor in Caesarea was only one component of God’s plan for guiding Paul safely all the way to Rome. Although it was not quite time for him to go to Rome, God was preserving Paul by keeping him safe from harm by his enemies.

God had a plan for Paul’s life and no opposition could thwart that plan, regardless of the number or strength of the opponents. God’s plans are always at least one step ahead of His enemies.

B. God Will Finish What He Started

God had an encompassing plan for the life of Paul, which included his eventual trek to Rome where he would testify and spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. By whatever means, God would fulfil His plan for Paul at the appropriate time. Paul would indeed go to Rome where he would perform God’s intentions.

It is gratifying to know God plans for us to succeed in the work to which He has called us. He does not call us to fail. He has called us to perform the ministry of His

church, and He will empower us to successfully fulfill that call. Paul wrote of God performing His will through us in His epistle to the Philippians.

“For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.” (Philippians 2:13)

“Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” (Philippians 1:6)

God will finish what He has begun in us in at least two ways.

1. God will complete His work of salvation in us. Salvation is not only a momentary event in our lives, but it is also an ongoing work that lasts a lifetime. Our own stubborn, human will is the only force that can interrupt or derail God’s work of redemption within us. As long as we remain faithful to Him, He will continue His work of salvation in us.

2. God will bring to completion the work He is doing through our lives to reach the lost, testify to the world, and minister to others in and outside the body of Christ. Whatever our individual ministry may be, God will use it for His glory and bring it to a successful conclusion before we take our final breath.

God always completes the work He begins, and His work in each of us will be finished. We will not die as an incomplete, half-hearted beginning of a project. Our life and its work will be completed together at the appropriate time, once again demonstrating the faithfulness of God.

▶▶ INTERNALIZING THE MESSAGE

Sometimes individuals become discouraged because they cannot see the big picture of God’s perfect plan. They sometimes come to think they are failing in the work to which God has called them. However, as long as they are faithful to Jesus Christ, they can be certain He will not abandon them as a half-finished work. He will complete the work, and it will be finished on time.

Circumstances of life will bring certain forces of opposition believers will have to confront. There will be pains to suffer and set-backs to endure. But if we could see the whole picture of what God is doing, we would recognize there is no failure or defeat in our lives. God is only using our perceived setbacks to bring about His ultimate plan and victory for eternity.

Human and divine perspectives of victory differ. Humans often think of nothing but strength, speed, and being the first to push across the finish line. However, God’s perspective of victory is quite different.

» ***What elements of a person’s life might God consider to be more important than strength or speed?***
