

Finish

#0310

Study Given by W. D. Frazee—September 14, 1979

Now, this evening my subject is one word, F-I-N-I-S-H, finish, finish. We'll have a number of texts. We'll start with John the 4th chapter and the 34th verse, and Brother Boykin will help me again tonight. Won't you, brother?

I want you to notice the word "finish."

[Brother Boykin]

"Jesus saith unto them, My meat is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work" John 4:34.

[Elder Frazee] Christ was so interested in finishing what He had begun that it was more important to Him than eating and drinking.

"...My meat..." John 4:34.

My food.

"...is to do the will of Him that sent Me, and to finish His work" John 4:34.

Another translation says:

"It is meat and drink for me to do the will of Him who sent Me until I have finished His work" John 4:34 (*New English Bible*).

Now with this, let's put John the 17th chapter and the 4th verse. This verse we've just read in John 4 brings us the words of Jesus near the beginning of His ministry. In the 17th chapter and the 4th verse, we hear Christ's words at the close of His ministry addressing the Father:

[Brother Boykin]

"I have glorified Thee on the earth: I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do" John 17:4.

Did He get it done? Yes. Now, may I call your attention to something very important. It didn't look to other people like He had done everything. There were many things that other people were waiting for Him to do, looking for Him to do, expecting Him to do, that He never did at all. To finish what God has appointed you to do may not seem a finished work to other people. But it's your privilege and mine to follow the footsteps of Jesus, to finish the work that *God* has given us to do.

John the Baptist finished *his* work. He preached the coming of the Messiah, baptized those who accepted his preparatory message, gave a straight testimony to King Herod. As the result, he was put in the dungeon, finally lost his life. That was the way his work was finished. But thank God, he accomplished the work that heaven had outlined. He finished the work that God gave him to do. And so did Jesus.

Now, let's look at the apostle Paul in Acts the 20th chapter and the 24th verse. Perhaps we should read verses 22, 23 and 24 together to get the setting. Paul is on his way to Jerusalem. He's telling the elders of the church at Ephesus what is ahead of him:

[Brother Boykin] All together:

“And now, behold, I go bound in the Spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there: Save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God”
Acts 20:22–24.

[Elder Frazee] Paul was anxious to do what? To finish, to finish. He'd started years before. He had met Jesus. Jesus had met Him on the Damascus road. A great change had come in his life. And from that moment, he had one vision, one determination, one goal—to do the work that Jesus had called him to.

He had many obstacles. As you know, he was beaten, shipwrecked, imprisoned, stoned and left for dead, lied about. He had opposition from without and from within, all kinds of hardships. But he kept right on. And now, he's on his journey to Jerusalem.

And he says, “I don't know everything that's ahead of me, but I do know this. Every city I stop in the Holy Ghost witnesses that ahead lie bonds and imprisonment. But none of these things move me” [a paraphrase of Acts 20:23–24].

Even his brethren urged Him to turn back.

“...None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself...” Acts 20:24.

He was expendable in the truest sense of the term. To get God's work done was more important to Paul than what happened to him. Paul finally lost his life, had his head cut off like John the Baptist. But that was all right with Paul. He'd finished his work.

Notice what he wrote sometime later from the dungeon that was his last residence, 2 Timothy the fourth chapter and the sixth verse. This is his testimony written just a little while before Nero's final decree that took his life.

[Brother Boykin]

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" 2 Timothy 4:6–7.

[Elder Frazee] What a testimony. Oh, I want to be able to say that. Don't you, friend? But there's only one way that any of us can say it, and that's to keep on the course, not be diverted to the right hand or to the left, not be turned back by obstacles or allured by seemingly easier prospects, nothing of the kind. Just to go right ahead.

Notice how Paul puts it in Philippians the 3rd chapter, verses 13–14. Here is another statement from Paul. This too is written from Rome where he's in prison. But notice, there's just one thing on his mind, one goal, one desire, one determination.

[Brother Boykin]

"Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" Philippians 3:13–14.

[Elder Frazee] How many things? "This *one* thing I do." Not, "These many things I dabble in." The power of Christian witness is in its focus. The victory of the Christian life is in leaving aside many things, even good things. And like Paul, saying, "This one thing I do. God has called me to do a certain job. I'm going to do it."

I think of Noah. For 120 years, he did one thing—built the Ark and told the people about the flood that was coming. Did he succeed in his task? Yes, he did, thank God. And his whole household was saved as a result.

But I don't think that Noah got tied up in real estate schemes or another get-rich-quick idea. I don't think that he became a politician and was successful in public office. There are many other things that I could mention that I don't think Noah got involved in. Noah, like Paul, said, "This one thing I do" (Philippians 3:13). And he did that. He finished it. He got the Ark ready. And when the rain came, there were no leaks in the Ark.

Will your job be done when probation closes? Will your task be finished? When Jesus in heaven says, "It's done," will it be done in your life, your work here on earth? This is the thing.

I'm impressed, dear friends, that we're living in an age when, as never before (and I speak this thoughtfully), as never before, people find it easy to get out of situations that are difficult. And they're always wanting something that is more convenient, more remunerative, where they have less to do and more pay and an easier time. And as the result, they miss some of life's richest blessings, and most of all, they miss *this* lesson of finishing what they start, finishing what they start.

Did you ever pass by a pasture and notice a horse or a cow reaching over a fence or through a fence to get some grass that grew on the other side? There might be acres behind the animal, but there's something about the creature that wants to get beyond what is assigned him. Almost human, isn't it, almost human. And so, we have the proverb that the grass looks greener on the other side of the fence.

As I think of the work that God has called you and me to, I long that God shall develop more men and women of dependability, who will stick to responsibility and not be driven from the work by adverse situations, and not be enticed away from the work by more tempting offers. My soul is burdened on this matter, my friends.

It starts back in the home, starts back in the home. It used to be, you know, that children walked to school, or else rode a horse, something like that. That's a long time ago, I know (back in the dark ages), but it happened. A few people around can still remember it. But now, as one taxpayer said, "I am taxed to pay for school buses to carry my youngsters to school, and then I'm taxed again to pay for big gymnasiums so they can get the exercise they didn't get by walking to school." And there you have it.

If youngsters today are to make some money, how is it to be done? Some plan devised which will enable them to coax money from their uncles, their aunts, their parents, their grandparents, somebody. I think sometimes it might be easier to just give it for this project or that project.

Good hard work, to start a task and get it done—this is so necessary in character building. Work on the farm in the old days before the days of bulldozers and cats that have cranes on them, you know, ditch diggers, all kinds of modern equipment to keep people from using their backs and their legs and their arms. It's hard to get anybody to garden today unless there's some mechanical gas-inspired equipment.

Don't misunderstand me. I'm not about to take everybody back to the Middle Ages. Don't worry. I couldn't do it anyway if I tried. But oh, I long to see more young people, children and youth, in their teens and twenties, taking a hard task and carrying it through till it's completed, finished. And I repeat that the place that is learned is in the chores of the home, in gardening, and in tackling other so-called monotonous humdrum jobs, and doing a good job at it day by day by day by day.

How old was Jesus when He graduated from the home and the carpenter shop to preaching? Thirty. And during all those years at Nazareth, in His childhood and youth, in His teens and twenties, He was doing the same thing again and again and again until He finished the job that His Heavenly Father had appointed Him in

the home and in the carpenter shop. That built character. And He built character in the way that you and I can build it.

Did you notice that expression “I have finished the work,” Jesus said? We noted it a few moments ago. Paul’s expression, the same thing, “I have finished.” “I have finished.”

Will you repeat it with me, those three words:

“I have finished.”

Again:

“I have finished.”

Will you be able to say it? Thank God, it’s your privilege.

Luke the 9th chapter and the 62nd verse, here is a wonderful illustration from agriculture.

[Brother Boykin]

“And Jesus said unto him, No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” Luke 9:62.

[Elder Frazee] When a man puts his hand to the plow, what’s he not to do? Not to look back. What does it mean to look back? It means to think, “Oh well, I wonder if I really need to do this. I wonder if I have to do it. I wonder if I couldn’t get some more money somewhere else, someway else, reconsider it.”

Dr. Coolidge, I remember once you told me about a lesson that a surgeon has to learn, to make a quick decision when he has the patient’s abdomen open, and stick with the decision. It won’t do to get the gallbladder halfway cut and say, “I wonder really whether that ought to come out or not.” Don’t do it. The surgeon has to *finish* his work, right?

And in every line of labor or service, God is seeking to teach us to finish what we start, to complete what we begin. And it’s learned, or unlearned, or not learned in the home or in the school.

When a child is taught to wash dishes, he should be taught to finish and do it right. I wonder how many of us have had the experience of being invited (or some other verb might be appropriate, but we’ll use invite), invited back to do over again some piece of dishwashing. Any of you ever had that experience? Good, good. To finish doesn’t mean to just stop. It means to do a good job, a completed work.

“...No man, having put his hand to the plow, and looking back, is fit for the kingdom of God” Luke 9:62.

But thank God, we can be fitted up if we're not fit, friends. If in our childhood and youth somehow we miss these lessons, if we were allowed to get by with laziness, shoddy work, stopping things because we didn't feel good or because we had a backache or a toe ache or a headache or something—if some way or another we were allowed to get by with being slack, thank God, we can begin today and say, "Lord, help me to finish whatever I start. Help me to discipline myself if others have failed to discipline me. Help me to settle it in my heart that whatever I begin, I will go through with, cost what it may."

Now, God has given us another chapter in this book of finishing what we start. Turn over to Ecclesiastes 5 verses 4–5. Here's some counsel from the wisest of men inspired by the Holy Spirit. All the things we undertake are not in plowing or surgery or gardening or carpenter work. Some of them have to do with giving.

[Brother Boykin]

"When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay" Ecclesiastes 5:4–5.

[Elder Frazee] Do you agree? It's better to do what? Better to not vow than to? Vow and not pay. Somebody says, "Well, I'll play it safe then. I'll never vow."

You'll have a hard time sticking by that, my friends. If you move someplace and ask that the electricity be turned on, they'll want a pledge from you in one form or another that you'll pay the bill. Am I correct? If you want a telephone, the telephone company seems to have a similar idea. Am I right? You'll have to make some vows. If it's proper to vow some things to men, is it proper to vow them to God?

I was talking with a young person some time ago. They'd gotten into difficulty in one of our schools, and I think they were looking for a place where they could come and go as they pleased and, you know, that sort of thing.

So I sat down with this young person, and I said, "I'd like to help you. I'd like to help you make a real success out of your life." And I said, "I want to ask you something. Have you thought about the fact that wherever you go in life, you're going to have to make certain commitments, going to have to make certain commitments?"

I said, "Whatever school you go to, even if it's the school whose rules aren't as strict as this one that you've had the difficulty in, they have *some* rules, don't they? And won't you have to sign on the dotted line that you accept those rules and will live in harmony with them?"

Then I said, "By and by, when you get through school, you're going to look for a job, aren't you? What will you do? Your employer will expect you to comply with certain regulations. He'll expect you to be at work at a certain time. Won't he? He may, in certain situations, ask that you dress in a certain way to preserve the dignity

of the place where you work, or to have the necessary clothes to fit in with the needs of the task you're assigned to do."

And so, there are rules and regulations all through life. If you should join the army, either by draft or volunteer, do you have to put your hand up and swear that you'll do certain things? Do you? That's right. So, all through life, there are vows to be made, commitments to be made.

Now, I said to this young person to whom I was speaking, "Are you prepared to make any commitments, to take any responsibility? And will you *do* what you promise to do?"

Now, they'd failed to keep their promise in the school that they'd been to. I was trying to help them to see that there is no place to go in this world where you can run away entirely from responsibility.

Think it through, my friends. Isn't it a wonderful thing to build a reputation of keeping your word? And when you promise to do something that you'll do it? And one of the ways in which we practice this is with God. But He says that when we vow, when we pledge a certain gift for missions, or to help build a church, or to help with some other object like the harvest ingathering, or to help some poor family, whatever the need that we're filling, when we pledge that then we're to do what? We're to pay it. We're to finish what we began. We began it by pledging; we finish by paying. And it's better to do what? Better to not vow than to vow and not pay. But the best thing is to vow and pay, isn't it? That's right.

Now, let's turn over to the 15th Psalm, and we'll see how this principle applies both with men and with God. Oh, I want somebody here to get this blessing. You know, this message, like many of the messages in this chapel, goes out through these tape recordings to many far and near in various parts of the world. And so, let me say a word right here not merely to our audience tonight but to all who hear this tape recording as it will be reproduced.

Beloved, my dear friends, near and far, whatever you promise, keep your promise. Whatever you start, finish. Whatever responsibility you accept, discharge it. Don't look for a way out. Find the way through and on and upward to victory.

Now, suppose you get caught in a situation where the task is harder than you thought, where the price is greater than you've estimated. Then, what do you do? Right here is the test of your faith in this principle.

The 15th Psalm and we're going to read the first four verses. The key thought is in the last part of the fourth verse, but we need all four verses to bring out the principle.

[Brother Boykin]

"LORD, who shall abide in Thy tabernacle? who shall dwell in Thy holy hill? He that walketh uprightly, and worketh righteousness, and speaketh the truth in his heart. He that

backbiteth not with his tongue, nor doeth evil to his neighbour, nor taketh up a reproach against his neighbour. In whose eyes a vile person is contemned; but he honoureth them that fear the LORD. He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not" Psalm 15:1–4.

[Elder Frazee] That's it. Read those last two lines together with me:

"...He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not"
Psalm 15:4.

What does it mean? Why, it means that here my neighbor comes and he wants to buy something that I have.

And I say, "All right. I'll sell you that for \$50."

He says, "All right. I'll take it next week."

But meanwhile, somebody else comes along and says, "Mr. Frazee, I understand you have this article for sale. I'll give you \$65 for it."

What do I do? Why, I promised to sell it to that man for how much? Fifty dollars. But I'm going to lose \$15. I'll lose something worse if I go that way, won't I? It Works the other way, too. If the man promised to buy it for \$50 and later finds that he can buy it somewhere else for 40, he still comes and pays me the 50 which he promised to. Is that right? This is an example of what this text is talking about:

"...He that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not"
Psalm 15:1–4.

"A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches, and loving favour rather than silver and gold" Proverbs 22:1.

Oh, I long that this spirit of sticking to what we've said and finishing what we've started shall fill the soul of everyone here and everyone listening. What do you say? This is the spirit of Paul. This is the spirit of Jesus. This is the spirit of heaven.

You know, it cost Christ something to finish what *He* started. The plan of salvation was laid in sacrifice, in infinite sacrifice, and He's still carrying it on, friends. And His heart is still paying the price of pain and suffering as He shares the woes of a lost world. But He will not fail nor be discouraged. He'll carry through what He's started. I want to be like that. What do you say?

Now, if what we've studied so far is true and we sense it, would it make us, should it make us a little careful what we *do* start? If parents insist that when a child starts something, he carries it through, will it teach the child that he ought to be careful about what he starts? If when I make a vow to the church, or to the school, or to the institution, or to anybody, if I carry that vow through even though it hurts me

later to do it, will it teach me to be careful and thoughtful the next time I'm invited to make a vow or a pledge? Will it?

Let's take a text on this, Luke the 14th chapter verses 28–30. Here again, is another text on finishing, as you'll see.

[Brother Boykin]

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish it, all that behold it begin to mock him, Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish” Luke 14:28–30.

[Elder Frazee] Why wasn't he able to finish? He didn't count the cost to start with. Well, isn't it a pitiful thing to see a situation like that? A man has taken an amount of money that's insufficient and sunk it in something that's incomplete. He can't get any good out of it, and he can't get his money out of it. So, Jesus says, “Before you start, count the cost,” to see if you can do what? Finish it.

Somebody says, “Well, where's faith?” Faith is in believing what God says and doing what He commands. It isn't chasing after some rabbit that God never sent us after. It isn't attempting some foolish thing that we dream up, or somebody else dreams up for us. Faith and presumption sometimes seem to be close together, but really they're as far apart as the poles.

Faith is doing what God says. Presumption is doing what I want to do or what I think God wants done when I'm mistaken. Faith is accepting the promise of God, doing the command of God, and faith is invincible. But presumption sometimes leads us into very foolish things, like this man that Jesus told about here.

So, I appeal again to parents. Teach your children, little children, to complete what they've started. Some children are fortunate enough to have parents who teach that at night, before the child goes to bed, the child puts away toys. What's that teaching? Teaching the child to finish what he started. It's not enough to just scatter things around and leave mother to do it, or leave it there during the night. Start to bed early enough to put away what's been used. A simple thing, a little thing, but it's teaching this precious lesson of finishing what we start, completing what we begin.

Perhaps one of the most striking examples of what I'm speaking about lies in marriage, in the home. Why is it that we have nearly one divorce every two marriages today? Because children and youth have not been taught to consider their vows seriously. They've not been taught to finish what they start, even when the going gets hard. Oh, what it means to stand at the altar and say, “As long as we both shall live.” No turning back, no turning back.

“But Brother Frazee, you don’t know the home that I’m in.” No, I don’t. No, I don’t know that. But I know the God that has given us the promise:

“...I will strengthen thee...I will help thee...” Isaiah 41:10.

“...My strength is made perfect in weakness...”

2 Corinthians 12:9.

It means so much, my dear friends, for a young person who stands at the altar to understand that there is no possibility of changing when that’s done.

“Ah,” somebody says, “divorces are easy.”

Yes, they are, as far as the laws are concerned, but not as far as the law of God is concerned. The Seventh Commandment is just as eternal as the Fourth Commandment. Do you believe the Fourth Commandment can be changed by men? What about the Seventh?

God doesn’t change:

“...With whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning”

James 1:17.

And so, I appeal tonight that we settle it in our heart that vows that are made should be kept, pledges that are made should be honored, and there’ll be no turning back.

Hebrews 12:1 is the key to finishing everything we start, and it’s the only assurance that we *can* do it. Before I read this text, perhaps I should cover this point.

Somebody might say, “Brother Frazee, don’t you think it’s possible for a person to get started on a certain course of action, like a course of study in a school or a job or something, and really it’s the best thing for him to make a change?”

Yes, I do think there are cases like that. But all I’d like to say on that point can be summed up in one little couplet:

“The man who once so wisely said,
Be sure you’re right, then go ahead,
Could well have added this, to wit,
Be sure you’re wrong before you quit.”

Author Unknown.

Be careful what you start, then carry it through. But certainly, if somewhere along the line you find that the thing is wrong, if you’ve accepted a job with some employer and halfway through your assignment you find out that you’re going to be expected to do something dishonest, certainly get loose. But these are rare experiences.

Usually, what tempts people to make a change is that it's hard work, hard work to take the course I've started to take, hard work to do the job that I've promised to do, hard work to meet the assignments that I've accepted. Let nothing of that kind of thing keep you from going ahead. Let nothing cause you to turn back. But if it's sin, certainly you need to get out of sin.

And now, Hebrews the 12th chapter verses 1–2 is the key to success in going right ahead no matter what the obstacle.

[Brother Boykin]

“Wherefore seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith; who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God” Hebrews 12:1–2.

[Elder Frazee] Where shall we look? Look to Jesus. That's what Paul did. That's why he kept on his way from the Damascus vision on through to the day he was beheaded—one vision, one path that he was traveling, always looking to Jesus.

This is what happened to Moses:

“...He endured, as seeing him who is invisible”
Hebrews 11:27.

Leading the pilgrim band of Israel through those desert wanderings, he endured. He kept at it because his eye was on Jesus.

You and I, friends, whether it's in dish washing, giving treatments, hoeing in the garden, being faithful in the accounting office, or in the medical clinic, or in our home, in the factory, wherever God's providence has placed us.

“Looking unto Jesus the Author and Finisher of our faith...”
Hebrews 12:2.

Did you notice those words? “The Author”—what does that mean in this setting? The one that starts it. And the what? “The Finisher.” Thank God, Jesus is the Beginner and He's the Finisher. If we stick with Him, we'll finish with Him. What do you say? Oh, that we may keep looking to Jesus.

I wonder, friends, is there somebody here that believes God brought you here to hear this message tonight? Is there somebody here that's going to say to Jesus, “Lord, I'm sorry that I've let this, that and the other thing keep me from being a good finisher. And God help me, I'm going to zero in on the commitments I've already made, and I'm going to come to the place with your help, dear Lord, where people can count on my word and know that I'll stick.”

Is there somebody here like that? I want to see. Thank God for every soul of you, friends. I know that God has heard your words in your heart and seen your hands.

May we bow our heads?

Precious Lord, we thank Thee for the joy of finishing, the satisfaction of a completed task. And we pray for grace that will keep us toiling when the going is hard, that will hold us when we are allured and enticed by flattering offers here and there.

Oh, may we be men and women that can be depended on to stick to our word and our commitments, no matter what enticements and allurements come our way. That like Paul, we will finish our task with joy, and like Jesus, we will endure, seeing the joy set before us. We ask it in His name, amen.

Now, we're not going to take time for long testimonies tonight, but we're going to spend a few minutes in short testimonies of one sentence each of response on the subject tonight. If God impresses you that it would be to His glory and bless others for you to come up here and say in your own words one sentence of response, just come right now, one sentence of response.

May I urge you, don't say, "I want." Say, "I will." There's a difference, there's a difference. I can want a million dollars, but I'm not going to pledge a million dollars tonight.

[Woman from congregation] The Lord has really touched my heart on this and I just love Him for saying this thing, and I'm going to commit myself to Him again.

[Elder Frazee] Amen.

[Man from congregation] Trials patiently borne, blessings gratefully received, meekness, kindness, mercy and love accepted are the light that shines forth in the world in the character, revealing the contrast with darkness. That's my sentence.

[Elder Frazee] Thank you, brother.

[Man from congregation] I'm thankful for the counsel to be careful what we start and equally thankful for the counsel to be careful where we quit.

[Elder Frazee] Good. You got it, brother.

[Brother Boykin] Kind heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the covenant that Jesus made with the Father before coming to earth and that He let nothing stop Him from completing that work. Oh, what an example. By God's grace, we choose tonight to do the very work that God made us to do. To find that will and to do that will by looking unto Jesus. This is our prayer in Jesus' name, amen.

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