

TEXT SERMONS

FINISH WHAT YOU START

Luke 14:28-30

“For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost, whether he has enough to finish it— lest, after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, ‘This man began to build and was not able to finish’?”

The background to this question was Jesus’ call to discipleship. He said, *“Whoever does not bear his cross and come after me cannot be my disciple.”* Jesus talks about discipleship and tower building from the viewpoint of one who began but did not continue. ***“Whoever does not bear cannot be”*** He poses a situation in which he shows the reasons and the results of beginning but not finishing. He was saying, “If you start you need to stick.”

This teaching of Jesus about tower builders can be viewed from two angles - from the standpoint of success or from the standpoint of failure. It can be considered positively or negatively. I propose to consider it negatively - to see the shame of failing to finish what one starts.

There are many who make a hasty decision to follow Christ but then fizzle. They go up like a rocket and come down like a rock! I have seen persons, sincere at the time, make a break with the life of sin and start for heaven only to fall back with the same old crowd, flounder around in the world and finally give up altogether. Discipleship like tower building is not easy. Those who are looking for an easy life should not attempt either venture.

The following words come to mind from one of John Peterson’s songs:

“It’s not an easy road we are traveling to heaven,
For many are the thorns on the way....”

I had one man say to me, “I think I’ll become a Christian.” I asked him, “Why do you want to do that?” He replied, “My brother became a Christian recently and since then it seems like everything has been going easy for him.” I said to him, “It is wise for you to desire to become a Christian, but your motive is wrong. If you become a Christian you will not necessarily have an easier life.” To which he responded, “Really? I thought that Christians have God on their side.” “That is true” I said, “We also have the devil against us and he fights us every step of the way.” He thought about that for a moment and then said, “Maybe I’d better leave well enough alone.” I could not convince him otherwise.

Discipleship is a process of building upon our relationship with Jesus Christ. Picking up a cross and walking after Jesus is like building a tower in that the decision to do either requires a deliberate and calculated commitment. There are many cross wearers but relatively few cross bearers. Many are they who have desired to walk after Jesus but were not disciplined enough to continue and dropped by the wayside.

In the analogy that Jesus uses, He warns would-be disciples that insincere cross bearers, like

incompetent tower builders will not succeed. There are lessons from losers that can be learned if we look at Jesus teaching about tower builders from the viewpoint of one who commenced but did not complete. First, consider the Intended Mission:

I. THE INTENDED MISSION.

"Which of you, intending to build a tower....."

Building an actual edifice of stone or a saintly life is a task not to be undertaken lightly. Tower building and discipleship have this in common: both are public undertakings that are conspicuous to all. When we announced our intention to follow Jesus Christ we invited attention!

You cannot hide a tower. When building a testimony or a tower you will be observed by others. You will have the scrutiny and observation of the public. Therefore, follow through with your intention to be an outstanding disciple of Jesus Christ.

Every believer should intend to build a towering testimony for Jesus Christ, however, while intentions are good, the intention will become a pretension unless there is completion! Good intentions and good eggs will spoil unless they are soon hatched! Therefore, one needs to know what is involved before beginning.

II. THE INITIAL MISTAKE.

"Which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first..."

Why do persons fail in their mission, whether temporal or eternal? Most of the time is the result of insufficient preparation and planning. Jesus did not rule out common sense and forethought. He spoke of the planning that goes into building a tower. Jesus said that anyone who is going to build sits down and meditates -- thinks things through, but the one who does not finish does not pause and plan.

The one who fails to finish does not think and consequently does not have his priorities in order. Notice the word *"first"* -- There are some things that are "first." If you want to finish what you start you must get your priorities in order. One lesson that this generation needs to learn is to get off their feet and on to their seat once in a while! This has been called the "Go Go" generation. But you cannot always be on the "go" and be in the "know."

If we are going to build we must visualize, strategize, organize and devise a plan of action. That requires contemplation. Regardless of what our intention might be, unless we *"sit down first"* we are not likely to succeed. The person who fails to finish does not think things through. An introductory enthusiasm will carry one only so far. All too often Christian craniums are not engaged when they enlist.

This is the age of the Talk Show on TV and radio. There is more talk than show in most cases - sound with no substance! They remind me of what goes on in many church circles. Some Christians get together and talk a good game but away from church many of those same persons do not walk a good walk! It is always the better part of wisdom to inform the brain before the mouth is open!

I heard a good definition of "thinking" given by a third grader: "Thinking is when you keep your mouth shut and your head keeps on talking to its self." Some people are like automatic elevators -- they can remember but they can't think. Consequently, they are always popping up and going down! Meditation has been called the lost art of the 20th century. Thomas Watson said, "Thought stirs the will to create." Emerson said, "The ancestor of every action is a thought."

*"The mind is a garden
Where thought flowers grow,
The thoughts that we think
Are the seeds that we sow."*

We cannot think in terms of failure and then succeed; we cannot think in terms of weakness and be strong; we cannot think in terms of fear and be courageous; we cannot think in terms of doubt and have faith! *"As a man thinks in his heart so is he."* The person who does not *"sit down first"* and think things through fails to finish what he starts. This is his initial and fatal mistake.

Proverbs chapter 9 begins with this statement: *"Wisdom has built her house."* The wise builder pauses and plans before proceeding. The unwise builder does not *"sit down first"* and think things through, prioritizing the undertaking. Instead, he rushes into things thoughtlessly, acts in haste and repents at leisure.

III. THE INVESTMENT MISCONCEPTION.

"For which of you, intending to build a tower, does not sit down first and count the cost..."

Jesus declared that all who wish to become His disciples must count the cost. He said that failure to do so is to act foolishly – like a builder who impulsively starts a project without considering what it will cost. When He spoke of discipleship, He emphasized its difficulties, demands and dangers. He never invited people to follow Him by deluding them with false impressions. He wanted those who followed Him to do so with eyes wide open. He made it clear that salvation is free, but discipleship is costly.

The person who does not finish what he starts is the person who does not, at the outset, calculate the cost. This is the person who writes a check to the lumber company one day and it bounces the next day. It comes back marked, "Insufficient Funds." This is the fellow who did not have "sense" or "cents!"

He was neither a logician (because he did not think) or a mathematician (because he went bankrupt). You cannot expect to erect a skyscraper for the same price as a birdhouse. You cannot expect a \$1000 return on a 10 cent investment! If you are going to finish what you start you must count the cost, whether you do business with God or man! And it costs to build a towering life for Jesus Christ. However, it is more costly not to build for Him! If you are going to finish what you start it will cost, among other things:

The price of preparation.

Here is a lesson from one of the lesser of God's creatures: *"Go to the ant, you sluggard! Consider her ways and be wise, which, having no captain, overseer or ruler, provides her*

supplies in the summer, and gathers her food in the harvest.” (Prov. 6:6-8)

The lesson from the ant is "Be Prepared!" That also is the motto of the Boy Scouts of America. If you are going to pay the price of being a towering disciple of Jesus Christ, you must be willing to pay the price of being prepared. That means that you may have to:

Forgo some things. For example: the latest fads and fashions, some social events, maybe even food and sleep, etc.

Undergo some things. Some testings, tauntings, temptations; some hardships, some hurdles and even some hatred, etc.

Let go some things. Let go of the past, let go of some person, let go of something precious to gain something more precious, etc.

The price of perseverance.

The words, "*not able to finish it*" in v.29, indicate, among other things, a lack of perseverance. Perseverance is "stick-to-it-iveness"! My homemade definition of perseverance is: "Keep on purring regardless of how severe things may be!" Think of the postage stamp - its usefulness consists in its ability to stick to one thing until it gets to its destination! Diamonds are lumps of coal that endured pressure!

The price of perspiration.

Building anything requires the expenditure of energy whether mental, physical, emotional or spiritual. Thomas Edison said, "Success is one percent inspiration and 99% perspiration." Unfortunately, there are some Christians whose favorite song is "Jesus paid it all." That's as far as they ever go in singing that song. They never continue and sing, "All to Him I owe." The word "sacrifice" is not in their vocabulary. When they first heard the gospel they leaped before they looked -- they did not count the cost and are not willing to pay the price of preparation, perseverance or perspiration.

IV. THE INCOMPLETE MONUMENT.

"not able to finish"

The landscape of history is strewn with half-built, unfinished buildings and lives. They were begun with good intentions but, for whatever reasons, were never completed. Incomplete monuments are monuments to either folly or faithlessness – in either case they are monuments to failure. A task half done is as useless as a task never begun.

What started out to be a refuge became a ruin; what started out to be a tower became a travesty and advertises the incompetence and or insincerity of the one who initiated the project. Such monuments emphasize the importance of finishing what one starts.

V. THE INEVITABLE MOCKERY.

"..... after he has laid the foundation, and is not able to finish, all who see it begin to mock him, saying, 'This man began to build and was not able to finish'...."

The would-be builder that Jesus talked about started but did not finish. His intended mission was to build a tower; his initial mistake was that he did not first pause and plan; his investment miscalculation was that he did not count the cost. The result? Shame and mockery.

When I was a child my grandfather showed me a rock house in the community where he lived, that had been begun years before. The man had begun to build but had quit. The unfinished house remained for many years until it fell down. It was known to all in that community as "Fools Castle." The curve in the road where the unfinished house was located was called "Fools Castle Curve."

What is the tower-builder tip from Jesus in His story? Just this: "If a task is once begun, never leave it 'till it's done!" That is, "Finish what you start!"

*"We are builders every day
In a good or evil way;
And the building as it grows,
Will our inmost selves disclose
'Till and every arch and line
All our faults and failings shine.*

*We will build a castle grand
Or a wreck upon the sand;
So build it well what 'ere you do,
Build it straight and strong and true;
Build it high and wide and broad
And build it for the eye of God."*

- Unknown

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