

Luke 15:8-9; Philippians 1:3-6 (1984 NIV)
God Finishes What He Begins

Introduction

The Ryugyong Hotel is a towering, empty concrete shell that was once intended for use as a hotel in Pyongyang, North Korea. Its 105 stories of massive height and floor space make it the most prominent feature of the city's skyline and the largest structure in that country. However, it remains unfinished and uninhabited today.

Construction on the pyramid-shaped hotel began in 1987. North Korean leadership envisioned the project as a channel for Western investors to move into the country. Then, a representative for the North Korean government had promised that "the foreign investors can even operate casinos, nightclubs or Japanese lounges if they want to". The picture of the hotel was added to maps and North Korean postage stamps before it was even half-finished.

The Ryugyong's 3,000 rooms and seven revolving restaurants were to open in June 1989 for the World Festival of Youth and Students, but problems with building methods and materials delayed it. Construction came to a halt in 1992 due to lack of funding, acute electricity shortages, and the prevailing famine.

Today, the basic structure is complete, but no windows, fixtures, or fittings have been installed, presumably due to the high cost. Experts say that the concrete used in building the hotel is of unsuitable quality and therefore unsafe. Hence, the building will never open as completely constructed. Pictures of the hotel have since been removed from maps and stamps.

<http://www.unfinishedbuildings.org/ryugyong.html>

Man's unfinished tasks come in many forms—buildings, writing, studies, reading, relationships, etc. How many of you here this morning have an unfinished project waiting for you—something you have been working on, trying to get finished, maybe for a long time, but for whatever reason, you haven't quite completed it? Perhaps, many of us have some kind of project, some kind of goal that we are working on.

This morning, I am not here to talk on what we have started but somehow still not able to finish. But I want to remind us this promise given to us in Scripture—i.e. God is going to finish what He has begun in us. This is how much God values you and the work He has begun in you.

This morning, I want to share three reasons as we talk about why God will finish what He has started in your life. First ...

I. God has a great love for you.

Turn your Bible with me to Luke 15:8-9. Jesus is telling a parable here—a story that describes God’s love for you.

8 Or suppose a woman has ten silver coins and loses one. Does she not light a lamp, sweep the house and search carefully until she finds it? 9 And when she finds it, she calls her friends and neighbors together and says, “Rejoice with me; I have found my lost coin.”

God spared nothing in His search for you. He gathered the greatest search party that has ever been formed in order to find you. He sent His Son, His Spirit, and His angels after you. As they searched, He had His people praying for you.

You do not belong to Him today because of chance, or accident, or a stroke of fate. You are His because He never gave up His search until He found you.

You may tell yourself that you are not a very obedient child of God, and so, you may think that God doesn’t love you as much as that more-godly-than-you person sitting next to you this morning.

But know that God rejoices at you because you belong to Him. Yes, you will bring Him greater joy when you choose to walk in His way and will. However, remember that He rejoices over you—not based on how good you are, but how much He loves you for who you are—you belong to Him in Jesus Christ.

On 5 Oct. 2004, a couple imported 500 roses for their wedding. It was held in the exclusive Sandy Lane Golf Resort in Barbados in the Caribbean. The reported cost of the wedding was between US\$1.5 million to US\$2 million. The whole complex was booked for the event.

A team of hairdressers was specially flown in from London to attend to the bride. About 150 distinguished guests were at the wedding, including Oprah Winfrey, Michael Jordan, Charles Barkley, and Bill Gates.

Fireworks lit up the night after the wedding ceremony. And the couple spent their honeymoon night on a rented multi-dollar yacht named Privacy. What a dream beginning to a supposedly fairy-tale marriage!

Some six years later on 19 Feb. 2010, the man appeared before a small group of people, including media personnel. He had these words for them:

Everyone of you has good reason to be critical of me. I want to say to each of you simply and directly, and I am deeply sorry for the irresponsible and selfish behavior I have engaged in.

I was unfaithful, I had affairs, I cheated. I hurt my wife, my kids, my mother, my wife's family, my friends, my foundation and kids all around the world who admired me.

I convinced myself that normal rules did not apply. I thought about only myself. I thought I could get away with whatever I wanted to do. I wanted to enjoy all of the temptations around me. I felt I was entitled. I was wrong.

These were the words of the No. 1 golfer at that time, Tiger Woods, and he said these as a personal confession before the media that day. Indeed, a dream wedding has not turned out to be a fairy-tale marriage. What has begun beautifully is not turning out well.

Tiger Woods also admitted this in his press statement—"My real apology to her (his wife) will not come in the form of words, it will come from my behavior over time. I have a long way to go but have taken the first steps in the right direction. I ask you to find room in your heart to one day believe in me again."

Tiger Woods admitted that he had begun the first steps in restoring his personal life through therapy. But at the time of his confession, even the words of this richest sportsman on planet earth (US\$100 million a year) were taken with a pinch of salt by people.

(The Straits Times, 20 Feb. 2010, A4)

What about God? Can we always take Him at His word? Yes we can because God is always and truly trustworthy. Scripture tells us that He loves us greatly as His children. He will never cheat on us. We can take Him at His word. He loves us so greatly that He will surely bring to perfect completion what He has begun in us when we come to Jesus Christ ... just as He has promised. That's why He is God and we are not.

The second reason why God will finish what He has begun in you is because ...

II. God is not done with you yet.

The Bible in Philippians 1:3-6 reads:

3 I thank my God every time I remember you. 4 In all my prayers for all of you, I always pray with joy 5 because of your partnership in the gospel from the first day until now, 6 being confident of this, that he

who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Phil. 1:6 talks about a good work that has been started, that work specifically, is the new life that you have received at the point when by faith you accepted Jesus Christ as Saviour and Lord.

From then on, you are a work in progress in God's hands. You are a project that God is working on, and you will not be complete until Jesus Christ comes again. Now, for those of you that don't like projects that don't get done "right now", this idea might be hard for you to swallow.

When I first pastored a church, we had a new believer who visited us. In time to come, he became one of our regular worshippers. One day, he came to confide in me. He said, "I want to tell you that I am very frustrated with my progress as a Christian. You know, I am very much a proud and bad-tempered person. And this has led me to many conflict situations with people. I have tried to control myself but always seem to lose the battle."

I told him that the fact he was honest enough to tell me his struggle at least proved that he was sensitive and responsive to the prompting of the Holy Spirit. The fact that he was troubled by his struggle proved that he knew his weaknesses and what the Lord wanted him to do about them.

We met up regularly over some months, sharing and praying. And with that kind of accountability, I could sense that he was improving in his walk with the Lord and obedience to Him.

When I resigned as pastor and left the church, we still kept in contact. In fact, he came to Evangel once not long after I settled down in this church.

At that time, he had lost his sight due to illness and had to move around with a cane. He had to fold up his printing business as a result. Fortunately, the Association for the Visually Blind helped him to be trained as a masseur so that he can still earn a living. I was one of his clients.

By that time, the Lord had broken much of his pride. The fact that he was humble enough to work as a free-lance masseur indicated not only his humility, but his spiritual maturity as well. "I may not see visually now, but I can see my Lord more clearly in a spiritual sense," he would say. Indeed, the Lord's moulding hands were fashioning him daily.

One night, my dear brother Lionel Choo went to sleep with a prayerful heart as usual. He never got up the next morning. The Lord took him

home peacefully while he was lying on his bed. But I believe he entered into the Lord's presence not as a proud and bad-tempered man, but as one who had demonstrated more and more of the new life in Jesus Christ in the last days of his life here on earth.

You are a project that God is working on, and you will not be complete until Jesus Christ comes again. How then shall you live between now and then? Allow God to change you, to mould you, and to use you. There may be painful and difficult times, but God is always doing something good in you. So, be always open to God's work in your life.

- What changes has God done in your life?
- Can you list some of the things that He has chiselled away?
- Can you list some of the areas that He has convicted you to change?
- What are you going to do about these challenges?

When we accept Jesus Christ into our lives, we accept Him as both Saviour and Lord. He is our Saviour because our salvation is secured in Him. He is our Lord because we are to take instructions and directions from Him.

But when we refuse to hand over control of our lives to Him, and He is not allowed to work in us, this will eventually cause us to grow cold in our Christian life. Many Christians have lost out because of their unwillingness to grow beyond their salvation experience. When we get saved, we must continue on our spiritual journey. Otherwise, we will fall astray.

God will finish what He has begun in you. You are His child. Allow Him to father you. Don't resist Him. Allow Him to work in you through His Spirit so that He can produce ...

- Love
- Joy
- Peace
- Patience
- Kindness
- Goodness
- Faithfulness
- Gentleness
- Self-control

The third reason why God will finish what He has begun in you is because ...

III. God doesn't see failure when He looks at you.

We live in a report-card culture—we focus on grades and scores. We bring this whole idea into our relationships, and even in our relationship with God.

We rate ourselves in various ways:

- We look at outward appearances.
- We compare ourselves to others.

Indeed in this report-card culture where high grades, scores, and numbers mean success, people are willing to take all kinds of risks and make all kinds of sacrifices in order not to look like a failure.

But does God ever rate us as a success or failure in such manner? Does He rate us according to how long we pray, or how much we put into the offering bag?

I believe not only do we apply human standards for success or failure to ourselves, but we also think somehow God judges us by those same standards.

We may think of how God look at us like we look at our own children. And how we look at our kids may not be right. For example, we may judge them a success or failure based on whether or not they made A's or D's.

When God the Father sees you, He's not looking at your report card with all your A's, or your busy work schedule, or your pay-check with a multi-figure salary. No, He's looking at your heart.

If you are a Christian, God sees a heart that has been covered by the blood of Jesus Christ, and He sees a person who is living for Him. Our responsibility is to want to keep growing even though we may still be a long way off.

Part of the growing process is failure. In fact, if you don't embrace the fact that you are going to fail along the way, you will never grow.

I remember seeing this sign at a MRT station. It is a wise saying of sorts—"The successful person is not one who has never failed, but one who will always rise up every time he has fallen."

The truth is there is no achievement without failure. How many times did the disciples have to fail miserably before they could learn? How many times did the Apostle Paul get thrown out of town while trying to preach the Gospel? How many times was he arrested and beaten? In fact, if the Bible were to be written by people who had never failed, we would be having a very thin Bible in our hands.

So, the answer is not in the number of times we have failed. The answer is this—we don't give up on growing and we don't stop trying to grow. An adversity in the way may be that very spur we need to drive us forward.

A very rich man was showing his guests around his newly completed residence. When he reached the recreation wing, he said to them, "Here is an Olympic-size swimming pool. In the waters is a man-eating shark. I will reward the one who dare to jump into the pool and swim safely across to the other end with a prize chosen from three options—\$1 million, or one of the finest horses in my ranch, or the hand of my daughter in marriage."

Just when he had finished, a loud splash was heard. A man was seen in the pool, swimming like the fastest thing on earth that even the shark could not catch up with him. When he reached the other end, everyone applauded at his amazing feat.

The rich man said, "Young man, that was fantastic. Now, do you want \$1 million?" While still shivering, the man answered, "No."

"I see. Perhaps, you want one of my horses." Again, the man shook his head and said, "No."

The rich man then said smilingly, "Okay. I know you want the hand of my beautiful daughter in marriage." Surprisingly, the man said, "No."

Perplexed, the rich man exclaimed, "Young man, now tell me, what is it that you really want from me?"

Still shivering, the man said, "I want the guy who pushed me in to be chased by the shark."

Indeed, an adversity in the way may be just that very spur we need to drive us forward.

We believe that God is still working in us and through us, and so we don't give up in the face of adversities and failures. We don't give up because God has not yet finished with us. He has not given up on us. So, we don't get down, we just keep getting ready to go on and getting up to start again.

You belong to God as His child. He doesn't see you as a failure. If He sees you as a failure, it implies that He has failed as the Heavenly Father. And of course, God cannot fail!

Conclusion

You need to know and believe that God is not done working in you, and He is going to complete what He has begun in you. So, put away your doubts. Put away your fears. Stand on truth, live by faith, believe and be excited about what God is doing and will continue to do in you.

Some ways we can apply this promise:

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- One, we can be certain of our salvation. 1 John 5:12-13 tell us that eternal life is only to be found in Jesus Christ and those who believe in him may “know” that they have eternal life. In this world of so much uncertainty, here is something God says you can know for sure. Do you want to know you’re going to heaven? You can. For those who truly trust Jesus Christ, there is a certainty that does not depend on them or their works, but on the promise of God who cannot lie. Because salvation is God’s work, when we trust in Jesus Christ, we can know that we are saved, that our sins are forgiven, that we are right with God, and that should we leave this life on earth, we will be with the Lord in heaven.
- Two, we can have hope when our progress seems slow. All of us, if we are honest, wonder from time to time why we seem to make so little spiritual progress. We “conquer” a sin today and then commit the same sin tomorrow. Or we “conquer” a sin today and commit four new ones tomorrow. Sometimes the Christian life seems agonizingly slow—three steps forward, two steps back. Why can’t we make 20 steps forward, take a deep breath, and make 20 more? Why must the Christian life seem slow in terms of real life change? There are many answers to that question, including the fact that struggle actually makes us grow stronger. We generally do not appreciate victories that come at no cost. What we fight for, we value highly. And even our “defeats” and setbacks and our backsliding teaches us to rely on the Lord alone for everything, and not on ourselves. 1 Thessalonians 5:23-24 tells us that one day we will stand before the Lord and be holy through and through. On that day we will be “blameless” before the Lord, deeply and radically cleansed of sin and profoundly renewed by the grace of God. On that day, we will be holy and pure in body and spirit. Most of us have a long way to go and we may despair of ever reaching that state. But “the one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24). Our hope rests in the Lord. He called us, He is faithful, and He will do it. Your current struggles cannot cancel God’s faithfulness. He will finish His work in you.
- Three, we can encourage others who are faltering. Hebrews 10:24-25 in the New Living Translation points to a crucial ministry of encouragement in light of the Lord’s return this way—“Think of ways to encourage one another to outbursts of love and good deeds. And let us not neglect our meeting together, as some people do, but encourage and warn each other, especially now that the day of his coming back again is drawing near.” Don’t be a Lone Ranger Christian. In these “last days”, let’s make sure we come together to worship and to encourage each other. Take time to lift up a fallen brother. Say a healing word to a discouraged sister. When a friend falls, pick him up and help him get back in the race for God.

- Four, we can wait patiently because we know the end of the story. If you've read Revelation, you know that Jesus wins in the end, and He wins big! And everyone joined by faith with Jesus wins because He is the Captain of our Salvation. When our Captain wins, the whole team wins. The forces of evil cannot stand against Him.

In this life many things remain a mystery to us, especially the troubling issues of personal loss, sudden death, and unexplained suffering. At the end of the day, after all our thoughts and prayers and meditations, and even after our deep study of the Word of God, we still don't know why some things happen the way they do. But we are not God. And if God is God, He must do many things that are far beyond our understanding. That truth does not answer all our questions, but perhaps it will enable us to quieten our hearts and to sleep better at night when otherwise we wouldn't be at peace at all.

Nothing is wasted with the Lord. Even the parts of life that make no sense to us today will be seen in the light of eternity to have fulfilled God's eternal purpose. Between now and then, we march onward and move towards the light that shines brighter and brighter. We march on with faith, hope and love, with deep confidence in the God who loved us enough to send Jesus Christ to die for us so that we could be with Him.

And God in Jesus Christ is continuing this good work in you as you ...

- Meet with people.
- Talk to strangers about Christ.
- Share what God has done for you.
- Share His love.
- Make a difference in His name.

You are saved in Jesus Christ to be a child of God. He is still fathering you and working in you. Our spiritual progress in Jesus Christ is not always one great leap, but it is always a growing journey.

You may not be all that He desires to see in you right now. But take heart—God will finish one day what He has begun in you. Amen!