

The One Who Will Do It • 1 Thessalonians 5:23–24

“Homilies” are sermons. But a new word appeared in a Mother’s Day publication. That word is “mamalies”. These are single sentence sermons given by mothers, and there are lots of them. I suppose one of the most famous is to “always wear clean underwear in case you are in an accident.” Can you imagine an ambulance driver including in a report whether you had on clean underwear? Or, “Don’t cross your eyes because they might stay that way.” How many people do you know whose children have crossed their eyes and they stayed that way? Another “mamaly” is, “Finish everything on your plate because the people in India are starving.” I can’t even begin to guess what the correlation is supposed to be in this statement.

But there is a great value to the exhortation, “Finish what you start!” It is a principle by which God relates to us. The God who saves us also finishes us. It is the principle of one of the great benedictions, this one found in I Thessalonians 5:23–24. Here the apostle Paul prays, “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” God is faithful to finish us.

There are two views to take of all of this: a view of God and a view of us. First of all let’s take a look at God. The call of God is a marvelous thing. It is God’s personal invitation to relationship and to service. It is a call that for most of us is first heard as a salvation call. We may know the words that the apostle Paul spoke to the Philippian jailer in Acts 16:31 when he said, “Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved.” That is a call from God.

Or consider the words of Jesus in the call to discipleship found in Luke 14:27 when he said, “. . . anyone who does not carry his cross and follow me cannot be my disciple.” That is a far-reaching

call, but there are some things we need to know.

First of all, the call of God is really a single call. God does not call some to salvation, some to discipleship and some to ministry. He calls us all to himself, although aspects of it may include salvation and discipleship and service and evangelism and all kinds of other things that are righteous and good. But essentially it is a call to know and to be with God himself.

It is also a continuous call. So it is with great care that the apostle writes, “. . . the one who calls you . . .” Present tense. God extends that call on an ongoing basis. It is not that we have to again and again experience salvation. We do not lose what it means to be a disciple only to regain it a moment later. It is the recognition that the call of God—to himself, to his salvation, to his service, to his discipleship—is something that does not just fit into one distant point in time; it is a continuing process. He is as much calling us to himself today as when we first heard that call. The question, however, is how do we respond to the continuing call of God?

We consider it to be rude to not respond to phone calls. We call back even to people we dislike. We break conversations with friends to answer phone calls from complete strangers.

God wants at least that much from us as he continuously calls to us. He wants us to be continually responsive to the call he extends. Every

day, throughout the day, he calls us to salvation, to discipleship, to joy, to service, to righteousness. His are not the calls of a nagging, irritating pest. His are the calls of a loving, faithful, well-wishing friend.

But God is not only a caller—he is a doer. In I Thessalonians 5:24 it says, “The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” Do what? He will finish what he started. You see, God not only calls

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us to be good but he does it. He makes us good. He not only calls us to salvation but he also saves us from sin. He not only calls us to discipleship but he makes us into disciples.

It really could be no other way. If we took the time to read the first five chapters of I Thessalonians, we would there find amazing expectations that God had of the Thessalonians. Expectations they could never begin to fulfill on their own. But God is the one who does it. Just as we find in our reading of the Bible that there are expectations laid upon us that are far beyond our reach. But God is the one who not only calls us, who not only has high expectations of us, but he is also the God who does it!

That may sound simple, but it is really profound. It is the great marvelous mystery of Christian living that so often is not understood. It is the mystery that God so amazingly and wondrously works in us. That he not only calls us to do things but somehow he accomplishes by his miraculous power that which he calls us to do. And he does it himself. It is difficult to explain, hard to understand . . . but true!

When you want to get something done and you talk to someone who has the authority and the power, you are always a little fearful that that person will delegate it to someone else and that person in turn may delegate it to someone else and eventually it will be so delegated down the line that the person who attempts to do it really does not have the authority or the skill or the know-how to get the job done. But when you talk to someone who really can do it and that person says, "I will take care of it myself," then you know it will really get done.

God is the one who says that he will do that which he calls us to do himself! He won't delegate it to an angel or some other heavenly or earthly creature. He will do it himself.

Maybe your response to all of this is:

Frankly, that is not my experience. I haven't really experienced God doing much in my life. Oh, I understand there are great promises from God. I have memorized them; I have read them; I have heard more sermons

than I could possibly ever keep track of. I know all the promises.

I know that God has great expectations. In fact, God's expectations are so great that at times that gets me down because I hardly get started on one and it seems he has 10,000 others to pile on top of me.

As far as his power is concerned, I believe that God has the power to do in my life whatever needs doing. I just have not seen it happen. I have not experienced that power of God. I have not seen the transformation. I have not personally seen the faithfulness of God in my life.

Maybe that's what gets me down. I've been waiting. I've been wanting. I have been praying. And the truth is that God has not been faithful to me.

Several years ago our family took a much-anticipated vacation to Yellowstone National Park. We stayed at the magnificent old log hotel called Old Faithful Lodge near Old Faithful Geyser. One of the first things on our lengthy list of things to see and do was to watch Old Faithful erupt. We found out when that was supposed to happen and hurried to the sight so that we wouldn't miss it. Cameras were ready. Children were waiting. Nothing. Then a gurgle . . . I took movies, but no big gush. Then a spurt. I have movies of that, too. Then . . . more nothing.

The children were not impressed. We waited and waited and waited. And just about the time we were ready to call it off and go looking for bears, it happened . . . a gigantic geyser of water and steam shooting high into the sky. It was spectacular! Fantastic!

Old Faithful does not always keep the seventy-minute schedule that we tourists prefer. But they say that of all the geysers in Yellowstone, while the precise schedule may not be predictable, one thing is sure, Old Faithful is the one geyser that will always "do it".

And so it is with the God who created Old Faithful. He does not always do the spectacular in our lives on the schedule we would choose. He does not always perform when our cameras are

ready. But he always does it . . . in his time. When all others fail, he is always faithful. He always comes through. “He who calls you is faithful and he will do it.”

That’s one view, “looking at God” and seeing that he is faithful. The second view is “looking at us” and seeing that we will be finished. I need to hear that. I need to hear that I will be finished. Because some days I wonder if I will ever be finished. Some days I look at my life and I find it easy to get discouraged. It reminds me of the time we painted our house. It seemed to take forever. Before it was finished it was time to start all over again.

And that’s the way I feel about me—grateful for the parts that are done, impatient for the rest, fearful that some of the finished parts already need redoing. It sometimes seems that I’ll never be finished! But I will! And the process is called sanctification.

In I Thessalonians 5:23 we read, “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly.” Sanctify literally means to “set apart”. It is the process by which God sets us aside for himself, making us holy. Here’s how it works.

Justification is what happens when we become a Christian. Our legal status is changed. We are saved from sin and destined for heaven. We may not practically be much different. We may still be sinful, hateful, unjust and more. But it is a declaration that we are just before God and that the righteousness of Jesus Christ has been transferred over to our account. Justification happens at a point in time.

Sanctification is what happens over the rest of our lives as God makes us practically holy as well as legally holy.

Imagine a deteriorated and dilapidated old house that has been the community eyesore. It is bought by a wealthy prince to become his home. On a specified date there is a closing and he owns

it and moves in. That day it officially becomes a palace although the roof still leaks, the plumbing is broken and the windows are smashed.

Then the renovation begins. Wall by wall, fixture by fixture, room by room—until it slowly begins to look like the palace it was meant to be.

We are like that old house—dilapidated by sin but bought by God in the legal closing of justification. We have been declared to be the palaces of the Lord, indwelt by the Holy Spirit. Now he is renovating us a piece at a time—cleaning out bad habits and sins, building walls and rooms of righteousness and holiness . . . until slowly we begin to look and act like the children of God we are meant to be. It is called sanctification.

God will sanctify us wholly. He will not miss a room; he will not skip a sin; he will not omit a detail. He will rebuild every part of our lives. He will sanctify us holy. He will finish what he has started.

A little different way of saying much the same thing is in the second half of I Thessalonians 5:23 where the apostle writes, “May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.” It is a promise of preservation. Not only will God finish us but he will also

preserve us to the coming of Jesus Christ and into eternity. God is not going to let anyone or anything wreck his palace!

It is important to note that this preservation is for “all” of us. I don’t mean everybody. I mean all that makes up who

you are and all that makes up who I am. Theologians have long argued about the distinctions of spirit, soul and body. Trichotomists believe we are essentially three parts—body, soul and spirit. Dichotomists believe we are essentially two parts—soul and spirit. Both emphases seem to miss the point that we are one. All of us will be preserved.

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God will deliver body, soul and spirit into heaven. Nothing will be missing. When we get to heaven we will be intact—body, soul, spirit, personality, everything. We will be us!

In this verse there is also a promise of preservation through judgement. “...at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ” refers to Jesus’ second coming as judge. Judge Jesus will indict and convict and condemn sinners. It will be an awesome and frightening time for sinners. But for Christians there is nothing to fear because he will preserve all of us.

What marvelous truths! What marvelous truths for days of doubt and discouragement...when we see so little progress in our lives, when we count the days until Jesus’ return and think that we will never be ready in time. It is then that we remember that God is faithful to finish us!

It is then that we receive the prayer of the apostle as much for ourselves as for the

Thessalonians: “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it.” Amen.

Faith Matters® is the Broadcast Ministry of
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