

"HEAR YE HIM"

A Devotional Series For Radio

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The Sermon: I HAVE FINISHED THE WORK

Scripture: John 17:1-8.

These words spake Jesus, and lifted up his eyes to heaven, and said, Father, the hour is come: glorify thy Son, that thy Son also may glorify thee; As thou hast given him power over all flesh, that he should give eternal life to as many as thou hast given him. And this is life eternal, that they might know thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent. I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do. And now, O Father, glorify thou me with thine own self with the glory which I had with thee before the world was. I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world: thine they were, and thou gavest them me: and they have kept my word. Now they have known that all things whatsoever thou hast given me are of thee. For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me: and they have received them, and have known surely that I came out from thee, and they have believed that thou didst send me.

When Jesus therefore had received the vinegar he said, It is finished; and he bowed his head, and gave up the ghost.

One day one of my daughters came home to announce that a certain organization in which she was interested had chosen a new leader, whom she named. She was much more enthusiastic about the prospect under this new leadership than I was. Thinking perhaps to warn her of what was to come, and to teach her a lesson at the same time, I said, "I give him at the most, two months. Before that time he will have cooled off and quit." I knew the young man in question. I knew that he was a good starter. Everything he did he started to do with a great show of activity and enthusiasm, but he seldom followed through and actually finished anything. And he did quit this new job in less than two months.

All of us need to learn the lesson of being good finishers, as well as good beginners. It is easy to promise to do a certain job, and to make a great show of beginning it, and then to neglect it. The great and worth-while men of earth however, are those who keep plodding on -- oftentimes laboriously, painfully, slowly, and quite unspectacularly -- until the task is finished. In a race, it is not the flashy starter who wins, but the one who finishes first. Paul got rather a late start in his Christian labors, but as he awaited the headsman's axe in a Roman dungeon he wrote to Timothy: "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."

Jesus seems always to have been keenly aware of the necessity for finishing the tasks entrusted to his care. On one occasion, after his interview with the Samaritan woman at the well, his disciples came urging him to eat. He replied: "My meat is to do the will of him who sent me, and to finish his work." On another occasion he told a short parable about a man counting the cost before building a tower, admonishing his disciples to count the cost of any undertaking before beginning it, to make sure that they had means to finish it. When speaking of the tribulations at the end of the world, he said, "He that shall endure to the end, the same shall be saved."

Jesus finished the work he was sent to earth to do. When he went back to his Father in heaven, he took with him a task finished, completed, perfected. He had measured up to his opportunities; he had ministered to the limit of his capacities; there was nothing he had been sent to do which had been neglected or partly finished, or left altogether undone. How unlike our own lives! There is no one of us who has not lived below his capacity,

neglected his opportunities, shirked to some degree the obligations imposed by the heavenly Father; and finally we go to our reward with some task yet unfinished.

Yet in another sense, no task is ever finished in this earthly life. When Jesus neared the time of his crucifixion, he offered what is sometimes known as his "high priestly prayer," in which he consecrated himself as an offering for sin, and commended his disciples to God, praying that they might be one as he and his Father were one. In this prayer he said: "I have glorified thee on earth; I have finished the work thou gavest me to do." Moffat's translation says: "I have glorified thee by accomplishing the work thou gavest me to do." Was Jesus' work finished, in the sense that there was nothing more for him to do? No, for the crucifixion was yet before him. But he had glorified God by accomplishing the work given him to do up to that point. In his prayer he specifically mentioned three things which he had faithfully performed: (1) "I have glorified thee on earth." (2) "I have manifested thy name unto the men which thou gavest me out of the world." and (3) "I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me." In these three ways he had accomplished or finished or completed his work. But the cross still lay before him.

Later, as Jesus expired on the cross, he again said, "It is finished." But again his statement was relative. He had been obedient; he had accomplished the great sacrifice of himself for the sins of the world. But the resurrection still remained to be accomplished. The task of building his church was still largely unfinished. The gospel still remained to be preached in all the world for a witness. The resurrection of all men through the power of his resurrection, and their final judgment, still remained as a part of his assigned labors. After his death on the cross, Jesus did not go back to his Father to sit down on a throne and do nothing through eternity. His promise to the disciples at this ascension was, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." There were, and still are, unfinished tasks of direction, of guidance, of planning, of building, of resurrection, of judgment, of reward, of punishment, of reign and rule over the righteous.

The eternal God and his eternal Son both work eternally. We are told in the account of creation that "the heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." But after a day of rest, we find God back at work in the later por-

tions of this same second chapter of Genesis, forming man out of the dust of the earth, and placing him in a garden. Modern scientific thought bears out the concept that God's creation is never finished or static, but continues eternally. New stars and new galaxies are being born as today's astronomers watch through their telescopes. Cosmic rays out of space constantly bombard the earth to carry forward certain eternal processes of creation.

Many years ago I read a brief biography of an old minister, written by his daughter. I have long since forgotten names and places, but the daughter wrote that when her father died at an age well past ninety, his only complaint was that he had to leave behind so much unfinished work that he wanted to do. Like this old man, I sometimes wonder whether I shall ever have time to finish doing all the interesting things I find in the world to do. But after all, the question is not so much how many years we have on this earth, as how we use those years we have. The question is not so much whether we have finished all we would like to do, as whether we have finished what God gave us to do -- whether we are able to take back to him, as Jesus did, a finished piece of work, or a work barely begun. If we have proved our ability to follow directions, to take the initiative ourselves when necessary, to carry a task forward to completion, God will provide an eternity in which we can complete all the unfinished business which we have to leave behind when we die.

On the other hand, if we are called home with no orders obeyed, no initiative exercised, no fruits gathered, no harvest reaped, no opportunities grasped, no responsibilities assumed, no task finished, we have already proved that we would not know what to do with eternal life if we had it. Under such circumstances, why should God give it to us?

In the epistle to the Hebrews (12:2) Jesus is called the "Author and Finisher of our faith." He was in the beginning. He laid down the plan of salvation in the beginning. He came to earth and followed through on that plan, under his Father's direction. He finished the work given him to do. But his work continues on and on, eternally -- his work of creation, his work of salvation and redemption. He was not only a good starter; he was a good and faithful finisher. He is still at work. May we, with eternity constantly before us and around us and behind us, nevertheless be able to say with Jesus each day, "I have finished the work which thou gavest me to do."