

# Bethel

## Prayer Meeting Addresses

### Number 110 The House was Finished

**Text:** *“And the elders of the Jews builded, and they prospered through the prophesying of Haggai the prophet and Zechariah the son of Iddo. And they builded, and finished it, according to the commandment of the God of Israel, and according to the commandment of Cyrus, and Darius, and Artaxerxes king of Persia. And this house was finished on the third day of the month Adar, which was in the sixth year of the reign of Darius the king” (Ezra 6. 14, 15) – especially, “And this house” – the house of God – “this house was finished.”*

“Grace will complete what grace begins.” There are no unfinished works with the Lord. What He begins, He carries on and completes. Now beloved friends, may that be our theme and the foundation of what we have to say this evening.

The subject is the house of God at Jerusalem, which was so important, both in the Lord’s sight and to the Lord’s ancient people. Now Solomon’s beautiful temple had been destroyed, but now many years later, a little remnant had returned from Babylon with the king’s decree and permission to begin rebuilding the house of God at Jerusalem. It had a good start. The foundation was laid, and at first the work went on, but then it came to a standstill, and it seemed that it could never be completed. One thing: their enemies viciously opposed them. God’s work will always be opposed. And not only that, they obtained the sanction from those in authority to stop the work. But apart from that, God’s ancient people lost interest. They became careless. They were swallowed up with carnality, with day-by-day things, and it seems not another stone was laid for fifteen years. That is a long time – fifteen years.

But God’s purposes cannot be overthrown, and His work must be carried on to completion. Great use was made of the Word of God, the prophets Haggai and Zechariah, and the word was attended with divine power, and the work began. They still had the prohibition, but when they appealed to the authorities, the original decree of Cyrus was found giving them authority to rebuild the temple. So we read, “They builded, and finished it,” and do not forget, “according to the commandment of the God of Israel.... And this house was finished.”

I just really want to mention three things on this subject this evening, and

the first is this: that God's purposes, God's promises, can never be overthrown, whether in providence or in grace. "Hath He said, and shall He not do it?" "His hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?" Now I am sure you will have things and you long to see them accomplished, and perhaps you have begun them in the fear of God, and then everything seemed to thwart them. But if the Lord was in it at the beginning, He will be with it right to the end, and He will bring it to a blessed conclusion. But do not be surprised if you are tried on it, and everything seems to go opposite to it. You will have to pray your way along, but you will prove if the Lord is in it, nothing can overthrow His purposes of love and mercy towards His poor, unworthy people. Now that is the first thing.

Now the second thing. This blessed truth is revealed in the passage I read, the rebuilding of the house of God at Jerusalem (Ezra 6. 1-15), but more especially in what was symbolised. If you read the Book of Zechariah, if you read especially the fourth chapter, and then if you turn to many places in the New Testament, the people of God, His blood-bought church, is compared to a building. Now the foundation of that building was laid in God's purposes, and then in reality in the cross of Christ, a sure foundation. And the work has been going on ever since Adam fell – living stones gathered out, gathered in, each built in their rightful place on that foundation.

Zechariah tells us the secret: "Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts." That word in Zechariah 4 will be fulfilled: "The hands of Zerubbabel" – Zerubbabel was the ruler of this people we read of in the Book of Ezra; he was the governor. "The hands of Zerubbabel have laid the foundation of this house; his hands shall also finish it."

So this work is going on. Nothing can stop it. There were times in the history of the church of God when it almost seemed to be at a standstill. There were those glorious times like the time of the Reformation and the time of the Evangelical Revival in England and in the United States when the work went on quickly, it went on apace. But it is going on to its completion and nothing can stop it. It will one day be recorded in heaven, "And the house was finished."

Beloved friends, the day hastens on when the last living stone will be laid in its place in Bethel Chapel, Luton, and you and I will either be part of this building or we will not; and so the day hastens on when the last vessel of mercy of all, called by grace, prepared and sanctified, a living stone, will be laid in its place, and then the angel will declare that time shall be no longer. "He shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it." It will be a solemn thing if you and I are not part of that building, a solemn thing if we have plenty of religion, but it is only scaffolding. When the building is

going up, the scaffolding almost looks more important than the building, and it is useful, it is necessary, but when the building is finished, the scaffolding is taken away. What is the mark, what is the difference between scaffolding and a living stone? Shall I tell you? Scaffolding never said,

“My hope is built on nothing less  
Than Jesus’ blood and righteousness.”

Scaffolding is not built on the foundation. These living stones are. I hope some of you felt an echo in the prayer we closed our last hymn with:

“May I be found a living stone,  
In Salem’s streets above;  
And help to sing before the throne,  
Free grace and dying love.”

“And the house was finished.” The third thing I want to speak about: this work being carried on and completed in the life and experience of every sinner saved by grace. Now if the Lord has begun, He will carry on and complete. We have that well-known Scripture: “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” But as in the chapter we read, there will be the difficulties, the opposition. There will be sin, Satan, temptation. At times there will be affliction. But amidst it all, God’s work will stand.

I think I have told you in the past, when I was a boy, we were on holiday somewhere in the south of England, and we saw a beautiful, half-finished house. It was some house of real antiquity and character and value, and the restoration of it had begun, but apparently what had happened: there was a wealthy man who undertook to pay for the whole of the restoration, but he had died and he had not made provision for it, and the house was left unfinished. I remember at the time, even though I was only a boy, how it struck me: how different from God’s work which is never left unfinished.

“Thou, Lord, wilt carry on,  
And perfectly perform,  
The work Thou hast begun  
In me, a sinful worm;  
’Midst all my fear, and sin, and woe,  
Thy Spirit will not let me go.”

“And the house was finished.” When the house is finished – whether thinking of the building, the church of God, or thinking of the work of grace – the Lord will not be disappointed. There will not be someone missed out. There will not be one forgotten. Do you remember John Newton at one time was

terribly tried: the millions in the great day, the last great day, but he thought such an unworthy sinner as himself might be overlooked and left out. The Lord delivered him with this: “The foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are His.” In this little, simple, sacred truth, “The house was finished,” stands the everlasting safety and security of every sinner saved by grace.

But going back yet once more to Zechariah chapter 4, really it is almost like a beautiful commentary and opening up of these words I have read to you, and the fundamental word there, for the carrying on and completing – it is not man’s work; it is God’s, it is the Holy Spirit’s work – “Not by might, nor by power, but by My Spirit, saith the Lord of hosts.” But that well-known verse: “Who art thou, O great mountain?” Zerubbabel was sad. It seemed to him the work was at a standstill, it could never be complete. It was like a great mountain to him. And the Lord said, “Who art thou, O great mountain? before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain: and he shall bring forth the headstone thereof with shoutings, crying, Grace, grace unto it.” The work will be finished. The work will be complete.

Well, the Lord’s people as they journey onwards – the work begun, the work not yet complete – they have many mountains, and some of them very great, in their pathway to stumble them, to hedge up the way, to overthrow them, to tempt them. Some are spiritual, some are bodily, some are providential. But the Lord speaks this as a challenge. It is God’s word: “Who art thou?” It does not matter what the mountain is, who it is, how great it is, even if it seems it is going to fall on top of you. “Before Zerubbabel thou shalt become a plain.” The Lord has a blessed ability to level mountains, however great, and to turn them into plains. “He which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ.” No unfinished works with the Lord! When He begins, He carries on and He completes.

“Grace will complete what grace begins,  
To save from sorrows or from sins;  
The work that wisdom undertakes,  
Eternal mercy ne’er forsakes.”

“And the house was finished.”

*This address was given by Mr. B. A. Ramsbottom, on Thursday, 6th August, 2020*