

He Who Began a Good Work

by Gareth Evans

The sermon highlights God's sovereign work in our lives, urging believers to embrace transformation into Christ's image and to live distinctly as His witnesses in the world.

Duration: 28:00

Scripture: John 20:22, Acts 16:25, Romans 8:28-29, Philippians 1:6

Topics: "God's Grace"

Description

In this sermon, the speaker shares a story about a man who crashes his plane in the Sahara Desert and embarks on a journey for water. Along the way, he encounters a gatekeeper who denies him entry to a swimming pool without ties. The speaker uses this story as a metaphor to illustrate that God always provides us with what we need for our spiritual journey. He emphasizes that God gives us everything necessary to become like Christ and encourages the audience to see Jesus in one another and love and follow one another. The sermon also references the Titanic and the false promises of the world.

Transcript

Am I on? Yes, I'm on. One of my favorite TV programs is a travel documentary with Michael Palin. And this week as I watched it, he was joining a troop of salt herders traveling across the Sahara Desert with their camels.

He joined them for several days in the journey. It reminded me of a story. There was a man who was flying his airplane across the Sahara Desert and he crashed a few miles short of his destination.

And he comes out of the plane, he's unhurt, but the plane is a wreck. And so he begins to journey in a direction he thinks that he needs to go. And after a little while he's getting thirsty on the journey and a camel comes towards him, there's a man on the camel.

He stops, he waves, and the man comes over and he says, Hello, can I help you? And the pilot, the man says to him, I'm thirsty, he said, do you have any water? And the camel rider said, no sir, I'm very sorry, he said, I've just come from a convention of Thai salesmen, and all I've got are Thais. So the pilot went on his way a little further, he couldn't make much use of Thais, and so he's going over the next sand dune, he's getting more and more thirsty, and he sees another man on the camel, and he stops him and he says, I'm getting really thirsty, he said, do you have any water? The camel rider says, no sir, I'm so sorry, he said, I've just come from a convention of Thai salesmen, and I only have Thais. So the pilot has gone on, he

comes over the next sand dune, and he's really, really just about to collapse of thirst, he sees a man on the camel, he stops him, he says, I need some water, do you have any water? And the camel rider says, oh no sir, I'm so sorry, he said, I've just come from a convention of Thai salesmen, and I don't have any water, I just have Thais.

He goes on his way. Our pilot is just about dying when he comes over the next sand dune, and there he sees what appears first of all to be a mirage, and it looks like a building. As he gets close, he discovers it really is a building, and as he runs up to it, he finds there's gates, they're stopping him, he looks through the gates, and there's a swimming pool, and all the people inside are enjoying themselves so much in the refreshing pool, and he says, oh please, I must come in, and the gatekeeper said, I'm sorry sir, no admission without Thais.

The moral of the little story is this, that God is always ready to give us those things we need for this journey. Sometimes we don't think we need them, but God has always given us all things that pertain to righteousness. He wants us to become like Christ, and he gives us all the things we need to enable us to be that.

I'd like to turn with you please into the Paul's letter to the Philippians, chapter one. I'm going to take as my text this morning, I don't usually take texts, but I got a verse as a text for you. Just like the good old preachers used to do.

Verse six, these are the words of Paul writing to the Philippian believers. I am confident of this very thing, that he who began a good work in you will perfect it, until the day of Christ Jesus. I have this confidence in you people of Philippi, I have this confidence of you people at Departure Bay Baptist Church, that he who began a good work in you, will bring it to perfection, until the day of Jesus Christ.

Now Paul had confidence. What was the grounds of his confidence? He had spent very little time actually in Philippi. He had been on his second missionary journey when he had come there.

It was the first city in Europe that he had come into, and there he ministered to the few women by the riverside, and he found among them one called Lydia, who was a seller of purple dye. Very precious commodity in those days. They got it from the shell of a snail, it was ground and they made this purple dye from it, that was used for the emperor's robes in Rome, and the wealthy would buy it, and she was a seller of the purple dye, and she was the first convert that Paul had on his missionary journey, coming to the town of Philippi, the first convert in Europe.

Shortly afterwards there was a slave girl, who was demon possessed, and she went following Paul with him, and she came to the place where she was starting to speak about them, and she talked all the time about Paul being a messenger of God, and challenging the people to come and follow him, and listen to him. He cast out the demon from her in his ministry, and so her masters who made money from the fact that she was a soothsayer, a fortune teller, were very, very angry, and they raised up the crowds against Paul, and Paul and Silas, his partner, were thrown into prison. That was basically all his experience was in Philippi.

He didn't form a great church there, just a few converts. Very small beginning. In prison, you remember the story probably how Paul and Silas sang and prayed, worshipped God.

I remember once walking home when I was reading my youth work in Wales, and as I'm walking home late at night, I pass a group of young people coming the other way, and they were a little merry. They'd had a little too much to drink, and I remember a thought going through my mind. If only you knew Jesus as I knew Jesus.

If only you knew what he could do in one's life. What a transformation to make in your life. And I went home that night, and I wrote a little song, and a few verses too, but one of the verses says something like this.

Now Paul and Silas were in jail. They knew the Lord could never fail to deliver those who in faith on him call. They sang and prayed till 12 o'clock.

The earthquake came, it was an awful shock, for God broke in by breaking down that wall. Well, if you want to see a miracle, here I am. If you want to see a miracle, here I am, here I am.

By sin shackles I was bound, but now in Christ's new life I've found. If you want to see a miracle, here I am. God wants us.

Fine, I'll sell my records outside afterwards. The truth is, you know, this world is looking for miracles. It's looking for men and women who wear ties.

I do not mean in the figurative, in the real sense. I mean figuratively. You see, if we are people of God, there should be a distinctive difference about us.

People looking at us, people coming into your church, people dealing with you in your business, in your school, in your office, whatever it is, there should be a distinctive mark of difference. In my little fable at the beginning, the man could not enter into the promised pool and enjoy it because he did not have the required evidence. A tie is very clear evidence, particularly if you're walking in a desert, a man with a tie stands out.

But in reality, you know, we as Christians should stand out in this world. We're called a light in this world, a light in the midst of darkness. Have you ever noticed how small a light in the middle of a dark night can be clearly seen? That is how we should be.

We should be distinctly different. I was in a funeral on Friday to conduct a funeral for a dear, dear old lady we knew through the Welsh Society and a local doctor, a Welshman, was asked to do the eulogy. And he and I, we know one another very well and I enjoy David very much.

But David's background is his mother and father were Christian missionaries for many years and then they came back home to Wales and he passed out of church. And David, their son today, is a doctor in Victoria but he's a man with a great bitterness against the people of God. And yesterday as we sat at the table together, he started telling me all about the church that his father passed and all the squabbles that were going on and how that it had made him very bitter against God.

He believes in God but he wants nothing to do with God's people. A reminder of Gandhi, that wonderful Indian statesman who made the statement, Jesus Christ, I will follow anywhere but his people, never. I will become a Christian, he said, if it weren't for Christians.

That's a tragedy. Paul saw us, what did he say of me today? I have this confidence that God who began a good work in you, Gareth, is able to complete it. That the world can see the tie you wear.

Again, speaking figuratively. Paul, speaking of the people of Philippi, writes him and says, I have this confidence in you. Why does he have such confidence in them? He didn't spend a great deal of time there.

Is it because he felt that he had done a good enough work among them, that he could trust them to continue, that he'd laid a solid foundation? No, I don't think that's it at all, because he wasn't there to lay a solid foundation. Was it that he had confidence in them because he had heard good reports from them? Well, he does not say that too much about them. But a couple of verses later it shows me, I believe, the reason for his confidence.

For he says these words, for I understand that you all are partakers of God's grace along with me. God's grace is the tie that we wear. As God pours out his grace upon us, he expects us to take that grace to ourselves, that we become transformed to become the people of God he wants us to be.

In this verse I see three points I'd like to present to you this morning. I see first, sovereign initiative. Now Paul would be very familiar with sovereign initiative.

He who began a good work in you. This is God's work. Paul would be very aware that his work in Philippi would be mostly characterized by the walls of the prison falling down.

In today's society, men in prison are always trying to break the walls down so they can get out. God is in the business always of breaking walls down so he can break in. Break into the prison of my life.

Break into the cells, the hidden places of my life. He wants to break in to those places. And Paul and Silas were in prison.

They saw God break in. They saw a sovereign act of God. God broke in to bring them deliverance and through that deliverance the Philippian jailer came to faith, his family came to faith.

And Paul would be very aware of sovereign initiative even in his own experience in Philippi. And here speaking to these people his confidence says this, I am confident that he who began a good work in you. You and I are in church this morning not because we did something but because he did something.

Because God loved the world so much that he gave his only begotten son. He didn't wait until we were worthy of his son. He didn't wait until we had achieved some level of righteousness.

But in his sovereign initiative he spoke into this world. His word became flesh and dwelt among us. In his sovereign initiative he reached out to men and women who were in bondage to sin and under the sentence of death, eternal death.

And God took the initiative, the inspiration of the Father. The Father of the Trinity breathing life into men and women. And this is the beginning of the work.

He who began a good work in you. And I trust this morning every one of us can look back to a time. Maybe you cannot name a date but you can look back with assurance that you know that you have received the inspiration of God.

That you have received the breath of God. That you have received the life of God. I have to make this little analogy.

I do not remember the day I was born. November the 21st, 1938. I do not remember that day.

But I was there. And I know I'm alive. I know I was born because I'm alive.

I know I was born on November the 21st because I'm alive. As you and I consider our own life do we know that we're born again of the Spirit of God? Do we know that we've become alive unto God? I can remember the date when I knelt on my knees. I can't remember the date.

I remember the time when I knelt on my knees by my bedside and asked Jesus Christ to come into my life. And in his initiative the Sovereign Father gave to me eternal life. I like the picture we have in the book of John.

The night when Jesus rose from the dead. The first day of the week. He appeared to his disciples in a locked room.

It's written there in John chapter 20. It says these words, And he breathed upon them. The inspiration of the Father.

He said, Receive the Holy Ghost. And they were born again of the Spirit of God. The people of God are those into whom the life of the Spirit has been breathed.

It's not something you and I can earn. You do not become a child of God by membership of Departure by Baptist Church. Or any church.

You do not become a child of God because you're brought up in a Christian family. David, my friend, was brought up in a Christian family. That has no life in the Spirit at all.

We become children of God because God has breathed into us his Spirit. Eternal life. And Paul's confidence for these people in Philippi is that he knows that God, the sovereign God, has breathed into them life.

He was begun a good work in you. Then he goes on, secondly, to the sovereign design. It is a good work.

Not only is it a sovereign initiative, but there is a sovereign design. There is a reason why God breathes into us his life. He has a plan.

He has a purpose. He breathes it into us. His intention, the Scriptures clearly repeat over and over and over, is to make us imitations of his Son.

Sometimes I think we get caught up on the programs of the Church. And we think this sort of way, that the reason God has called us to be Christians is that we'll be a witness to this world. Absolutely true.

That we'll be soul winners. True. That we do good works.

True. But all of those flow out of his design, and that is that we become imitators of the Son. We become like Jesus.

That is his plan. In 2 Corinthians chapter 3, Paul writes these words, that he is constantly transforming us from glory to glory to glory to glory. Every experience of our lives, when we look back, should be a moment of glory, leading into glory.

What does glory mean? If I asked you to define glory for me, how would you define it? The prophets in the Old Testament tried to define glory. For example, Ezekiel and Isaiah, when they saw the glory of God, they tried to describe it, and they found words were not sufficient. Ezekiel used words like this, well it was like unto wheels, and there was like a sea above the wheels, and there was a throne, like a throne above the sea.

And there was one on the throne, and it was like, and as you read those accounts in Ezekiel, you find these lots of words, he does not know how to describe the glory of God. Moses, who meets God at the burning bush, has seen the miracles of the plagues in Egypt, seen the parting of the water, comes to God at Mount Sinai, when he receives the tablets of the Lord, and he said, oh God, show me your glory. God said, Moses, I can't show you my glory, for if you see my glory, you will surely die, but I will reveal to you my name, my character.

So how do you define what the glory of God is? If I'm being transformed and changed from glory to glory, I would define this way, it is all the presence of God, and the glory that we experience is only that part of the revelation of God's character and presence that he is willing to reveal to those who are his. Paul says we have been transformed from glory to glory. In other words, God is present in every portion of the act.

God's presence is there, God is doing something in our lives, as he has this work, this glorious work of transforming us to the image of his son. The theologians use big words like sanctification to describe this. There's a verse of scripture that Paul uses that you're all familiar with, all things work together for good to them who love God, that are called according to his purpose.

Do you know what the next verse says? God chose those he foreknew, and those he foreknew he predestined that they might be conformed to the image of his son. Why do all things work together for good? Why do circumstances come in life that cause us maybe to weep? Like the missionary story, the test we heard of the woman taken by rebels, Muslim militants. How could she go through that and still believe God was in control? Was God leading her from glory to glory? According to the scriptures, yes, his presence was there, though she was insensitive at many times to it.

And what is God doing through those tough times in your life and mine? He's conforming us to the image of his son. Those he foreknew, you and me, those he has brought to himself, his whole purpose in bringing him to himself is not that he'll have more people speaking for him, it's not that we'll have more programs or more missionary activity or more Sunday school activity, the whole purpose he has called us to himself is that he will conform us, predestine us, predetermine that we will be conformed to the image of his son. So when men look at me, do they see an image of his son? When they look at you, do they see an image of the son? This is the reason for discipline and this is the reason why in the Christian life there are often times of deep struggle.

The Hebrew says this much, that Jesus, the very precious son of God, learned obedience by the things he suffered. And if he had to suffer, my savior, in order to be conformed, to be what God wants him to be, he learned to be a son by his obedience. How much more do I? How much more do I need pruning that God might conform me to the image of his son? I want to be like Jesus.

How about you? To be like Jesus, this my son. This is the prayer of the people of God who long to be like him. This is putting the tie on.

That we become different, different to this world. A different people. We're not called to be in this world, giving testimony of Christ.

We're called to be different people in Christ, being a testimony to this world. And our number one commitment, brothers and sisters, should be to die to self, that Jesus might be seen in us, live his life through us, that we might be conformed to his image. God, often times, needs to take us into valleys to perform that work.

It's been my experience over the years, I've been a Christian, particularly working with younger people, that God brings them to a place where they are challenged in the character of Christ, be it his humility, be it his faithfulness, be it his integrity, be it his compassion. We come to a place in our life where we're challenged. And sometimes we fail the challenge.

We do not show the same compassion, the same humility, the same feeling for others that Jesus displayed. We do not display the same character of Jesus. And I found it many times, and I can tell so many stories, that people who have failed, how that God takes them around the mountain and brings them back to the same place.

I've often had young people come to me and ask me to help them find God's will for their life. They think in terms of God's will for their life as a blueprint that God must have in heaven for them. And if they step off the blueprint today, then they'll be out of God's will.

I actually heard a woman once say, that 15 years ago, God called me to be a missionary, and I refused. So I've been out of God's will ever since. How tragic.

I wanted to shout out, it was in a public meeting, I wanted to shout out, well get back in his will today, my sister. God's will is not where you are on your journey. God's will is what direction are you facing.

Let me repeat that. God's will is not where you are on the journey. God's will is what direction are you facing.

You could be a mature Christian tonight and today, this morning, out of God's will. Or you could be a young Christian who's struggling, but who's in God's will because you're facing in the direction that he wants to take you from glory to glory, to glory, to glory. There's a little rhyme I learned some years ago.

It's not very good theology. It expresses sometimes the thoughts that run through my mind. I think I'd rather frizzle up, spend time in a burning hell, than look into his sorrowed face and hear him ask me, what's your excuse? When I've offered you a tie and I've given you all the things you need for righteousness, what's your excuse? What's my excuse? I gave you my spirit, but you ignored his power.

I gave you my word, but you preferred the gossip and sports columns. I waited each day to spend time in intimacy with you, but you were too busy. My plans for you were to see you fly like the eagle in the anointing, but you were too busy gobbling with turkeys.

I desired to conform you to the image of my son. Well, Paul was confident in these people in Philippi that God, who began a sovereign work in them, was going to bring it about. His work was to make them like his

son.

Why? Because they were recipients of the same grace as Paul. Verse 7. My third point is this. The confidence in he who began a good work in you will perfect it.

God is going to do it. And though you and I in this life will fail and struggle, though you in this life may be and not the people we ought to be, and there's not one of us in this room who is, I pray that we're in a place where God is able to mold us, transform us, make us like Jesus, in humility, in integrity, in faithfulness, with a servant heart, with compassion, and all the things that describe the Savior, who, though he was equal with God, did not think his servant to be grasped onto, clung onto, but emptied himself and humbled himself and became obedient even to the death of the cross. The promise is this, says Paul, that he who began a good work will perfect it.

Thank God that you record that one day he's able to present us faultless. And though we may struggle in this life, there is that deep assurance that we can know that he is going to do the work because it's his work. And sometimes the best thing for me to do, to enable him to do that, is to die to myself.

I've taught you before from this pulpit about the fruit of the Spirit. He wants to produce the fruits of the Holy Spirit in my life. I cannot produce one little apple on the tree by my own efforts.

I cannot produce one portion of that fruit by my own efforts. The righteous man said, the psalmist is like a tree that's planted by a river of water that brings forth fruit in season. The sap, the Spirit of God within you and me is the one who brings forth fruit as I allow him to do so.

As I allow the Father to prune through the disciplines of life, God produces the character of Christ in you and me. Isn't it amazing how often we fight trying to produce the things, I will have joy in my life even if it kills me, instead of abiding in him, dying to self, and allowing him to do the work that he has begun. The work which his goodness began, said the hymnist, the arm of his strength will complete.

His promise is yea and amen, and never was forfeited yet. He is able. He is competent.

He will perform the work. And though we look at one another and we can judge one another, though we can judge ourselves, though we feel we have failed so often, I want to encourage you, brothers and sisters, that he who dwells in you is able to do the work and to present you faultless before the Father with exceeding joy, the word of God says. As I, a prophet, declare of Jesus, he shall see of the travel of his soul, as you and me, and be satisfied.

That thrills me. It means I can stop my warring. It means I can stop my fighting.

It means I can stop my wrestling. It means I can learn to abide in him and allow him to do the work. So we see sovereign initiative, God's inspiration, breathing life into these people.

We can see sovereign design. His purpose is to make them like his son, Jesus. We can see sovereign faithfulness because he's going to complete the work.

This is the work of the Holy Spirit. This is why he's come, so that you and I will be transformed in the image of his son. Paul says, I am confident.

He should know. He'd seen lives transformed. He'd seen God do a work.

And I am confident that you and I, as people here in Departure Bay Baptist Church, as we lean upon the Lord, as we allow his spirit to do the industry that he has come to do his work in us, that day by day, from glory to glory, we shall be transformed into the likeness of his son. There shall come a time when we look at one another and we see two things. We see a tie.

I'm speaking figuratively. We see a mark, a distinguishing mark that makes people different from the people of the world. That should be evident in one another.

And we shall begin to see Jesus in one another. So we learn to love and follow one another. It was said of the Titanic, after it hit the iceberg, the captain or the crew made comments to the passengers in those early moments after, don't you worry, don't you worry.

The ship will do what it set out to do. That's what the world's promises always are. We all know what happened.

It didn't finish the job. It didn't come across the Atlantic. But when God starts the work, because he is sovereign God, when God breathes into a man or woman's life, he intends to conform us to the image of his son.

And whether he does it here on this earth or not, praise God one day, we will be presented before his presence faultless. I trust that is your hopeless body. I trust as they respond to that hope, you will decide, day by day, right here on earth, that God will be given all the freedom he needs to transform us into the image of his son.

Amen.

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