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Sermon Notes

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God's Work Done in God's Way

1 Corinthians 16:5-12

The famous missionary pioneer Hudson Taylor once said, "God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply." Taylor was a trailblazer in the explosion of the 19th century missionary movement, leading a missionary thrust into the inland regions of China. He had first landed as a missionary in the bustling port city of Shanghai, China on March 1, 1854. In his first missionary tour, he came to realize that all the mission work being done in China was hugging the coastline, concentrated in port cities. God gave him a heart for the vast inland provinces of China, and he knew he would need to trust God both for laborers for the harvest and the money to support them.

This was a vast undertaking, and it could only be done by faith in a great God. He found his inspiration from the powerful way the Lord had provided for three million Israelites in the desert for forty years:

"Our heavenly Father is a very experienced One. He knows very well that His children wake up with a good appetite every morning. He sustained 3 million Israelites in the wilderness for 40 years. We do not expect He will send 3 million missionaries to China; but if He did, He would have ample means to sustain them all. Depend on it, God's work done in God's way will never lack God's supply."

The missions society founded by Taylor was ultimately responsible for bringing more than 800 missionaries to China. They began

125 schools, directly resulted in some 18,000 Christian conversions, as well as more than 300 stations of work with more than 500 national helpers in all 18 provinces of China.

But what did Hudson Taylor mean by “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply”?

What is “God’s work?” And what is “God’s way” to do that work?

Wisdom is a matter of choosing not only the best possible destination, but the best possible road to get there. God is an infinitely wise King, who has chosen the best possible destination for the history of the world, as well as the best possible road to get there.

The ultimate destination of human history is the GLORY OF GOD... that God’s great glory would be put on display in his wise, loving, powerful, gracious ways of dealing with human beings. The greatest display of the glory of God is in the salvation of sinners by the saving work of Christ... by his death on the cross and his resurrection victory over death and the grave... by the proclamation of that simple gospel message, to save sinners from every tribe and language and people and nation.

That is God’s Work... or to use the words Paul uses here in this morning’s text, “the Lord’s work”:

1 Corinthians 16:10 If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am.

“The work of the Lord” = the Lord’s work = God’s work

Simply put, the Lord’s Work is the work of the Great Commission:

Matthew 28:19-20 go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, ²⁰ and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

Evangelism and discipleship... that’s the Lord’s Work...

The Bible makes it plain! But what is God's work DONE IN GOD'S WAY? Does God give us any indications of HOW we are to go about this vast work?

Is the wisdom of God on display in the pages of scripture to tell us HOW TO MAKE DISCIPLES? How to live in such a way that the work we are doing will last for all eternity?

This is the marvelous promise he gave at the end of 1 Corinthians 15, the great resurrection chapter... because every single one of God's elect will come to faith in Christ and be raised from the dead in glorious resurrection bodies, Paul said this:

1 Corinthians 15:58 Therefore, my dear brothers, stand firm. Let nothing move you. Always give yourselves fully to the work of the Lord, because you know that your labor in the Lord is not in vain

This morning, we are going to study the words of the Apostle Paul to try to glean some aspects of his approach to the work of the Lord... though this is just a kind of practical closing with some brief words of instruction, we can look through them to learn timeless principles for carrying on the work of the gospel... the Lord's work done in the Lord's way... or as Hudson Taylor put it 18 centuries later, "God's work done in God's way"

John MacArthur gives us another picture: referring back to the great building project of 1 Corinthians 3, where Paul says he laid a foundation as an expert builder and now other men are building on it

1 Corinthians 3:10-13 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds. ¹¹ For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. ¹² If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, ¹³ his work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each man's work.

MacArthur says “A building must be constructed according to the architect’s plans and the required building codes. Before it can be used, it must pass inspection to see that the codes were followed. The church’s work for the Lord is done in the same way.”

Leaning on some of those insights, we can see some key elements of Paul’s methodology in building the Lord’s house:

Vision... Flexibility... Diligence... Opportunity... Suffering...
Teamwork

I. Vision

A. Simply Put: Paul Had a Visionary Plan

1 Corinthians 16:5-8 After I go through Macedonia, I will come to you-- for I will be going through Macedonia. ⁶ Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. ⁷ I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits. ⁸ But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost

B. Leaders Must Have a Vision for the Future

1. In other words, a plan for what they’re going to do... but more than a plan... a sense of leadership from the Lord that is very practical and moves you in a specific direction
2. Paul was consistently planning and strategizing and dreaming in the best sense of the word
3. His epistles are full of these kinds of statements:

Romans 15:24-25 I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while. ²⁵ Now, however, I am on my way to Jerusalem in the service of the saints there.

4. God uses people who think in great detail about the future, saturating their thoughts in prayer...
 5. They ask the Lord, "What would you have me do? How can I best use the time I have and the gifts you have given me to maximize my fruitfulness for your glory?"
 6. "If you shoot at nothing, you'll hit it every time."
 7. These kinds of plans involve detailed knowledge about the place in which you're ministering... what their needs are, their culture, their history...
 8. Because we are physical, we have bodies, we live in a physical world... people have felt needs... so do we; if we want to see Christ's Kingdom grow on earth, information, study, and strategy are essential!
 9. God uses VISIONARY LEADERS... people who spread the map of their city out before the Lord and say "How can I reach this people?"
- C. Paul Was Not Mentally Idle... He Always Made Plans and Was Moving in a Specific Direction
- D. Application: FBC Members... what PLANS do you have for ministering to the city of Durham? To your neighbors? Your lost relatives? Or even, to be used by God to help reach a lost people group with the gospel? Do you have spiritual plans that you have taken to the Lord in prayer? Or are you moving through life as in a fog, with no real direction?

II. Flexibility

1 Corinthians 16:6 Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go.

1 Corinthians 16:7 I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

- A. Simply Put: Take the Last Point and Hold It LOOSELY! God May Change All Your Plans!

Proverbs 19:21 Many are the plans in a man's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails.

James 4:15 you ought to say, "If it is the Lord's will, we will live and do this or that."

B. This is HUMILITY and FLEXIBILITY

1. Paul had to do that frequently!
2. He made solid, seemingly wise plans, but sometimes events would overtake him that were beyond his power to change
3. For example, on his second missionary journey, Paul planned to visit all the churches he and Barnabas had planted on their first missionary journey... but the Lord's purpose intervened

Acts 16:6-10 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the region of Phrygia and Galatia, having been kept by the Holy Spirit from preaching the word in the province of Asia. ⁷ When they came to the border of Mysia, they tried to enter Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus would not allow them to. ⁸ So they passed by Mysia and went down to Troas. ⁹ During the night Paul had a vision of a man of Macedonia standing and begging him, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." ¹⁰ After Paul had seen the vision, we got ready at once to leave for Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to preach the gospel to them.

4. Sometimes Satan intervenes:

1 Thessalonians 2:17-18 But, brothers, when we were torn away from you for a short time (in person, not in thought), out of our intense longing we made every effort to see you. ¹⁸ For we wanted to come to you-- certainly I, Paul, did, again and again-- but Satan stopped us.

5. Adoniram and Nancy Judson, the first missionaries from America, had intended to partner with William Carey in India... but the British East India Company would not let them settle in India... so the Judsons diverted to Burma, and that's where they poured out their lives

6. All of our best-laid plans can often go a different direction... God wants his servants to be flexible and humble, not trying to force a square peg in a round hole... if you are burning with zeal for the glory of God and salvation of lost people, you will energetically find a place to serve... your first plans may just get you going, God can then divert you to the place he really chose for you
7. Missionaries will tell you again and again, HUMBLE FLEXIBILITY is essential to being fruitful in the Lord's work

III. Diligence

- A. Simply Put: Be thorough, skillful, and careful in the work you are doing for the Lord... do not accept shoddy workmanship

1 Corinthians 16:6-7 Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go. ⁷ I do not want to see you now and make only a passing visit; I hope to spend some time with you, if the Lord permits.

- B. Paul Knew the Level of Dysfunction in the Corinthian Church would take a LONG TIME to iron out... so he wanted to spend in-depth time with them!

- C. Paul Did CAREFUL WORK in building disciples

1. Remember, the Great Commission includes careful instruction to the end of comprehensive life obedience on the part of the disciples

Matthew 28:20 teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you.

2. Paul deeply, thoroughly poured the Word of God into the churches he planted... he was careful and comprehensive

[Corinth] Acts 18:11 Paul stayed for a year and a half, teaching them the word of God.

3. Even more minor points of doctrine, he took the time to explain in detail:

2 Thessalonians 2:1-5 Concerning the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ and our being gathered to him, we ask you, brothers, ² not to

become easily unsettled or alarmed by some prophecy, report or letter supposed to have come from us, saying that the day of the Lord has already come. ³ Don't let anyone deceive you in any way, for that day will not come until the rebellion occurs and the man of lawlessness is revealed, the man doomed to destruction. ⁴ He will oppose and will exalt himself over everything that is called God or is worshiped, so that he sets himself up in God's temple, proclaiming himself to be God. ⁵ Don't you remember that when I was with you I used to tell you these things?

4. Paul was vigorously against SHODDY WORKMANSHIP when it came to building up the church doctrinally

1 Corinthians 3:10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as an expert builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should be careful how he builds.

2 Timothy 2:15 Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.

D. Comments: IMB... debate on SPEED vs. IN-DEPTH DISCIPLESHIP

1. There are some missionary leaders who are so concerned about rescuing people from hell, they think we don't have time to do careful doctrinal instruction... just the basics, the rudimentary doctrines of the gospel are all that's needed, and then PUSH PEOPLE HARD to multiply, so as to keep up with the exploding birth rate
2. Others may well get into a pattern of spending years and years developing doctrinal precision, and they seem to have lost any passion for winning the lost
3. We MUST NOT make such a choice... no one in the history of the Christian church did BOTH so fervently as Paul
4. Paul was zealous to win the lost!

Acts 20:24 I consider my life worth nothing to me, if only I may finish the race and complete the task the Lord Jesus has given me-- the task of testifying to the gospel of God's grace.

AND he advocated speed:

2 Thessalonians 3:1 Finally, brothers, pray for us that the message of the Lord may spread rapidly and be honored, just as it was with you.

5. But he was also the most careful, meticulous instructor of Christian doctrine ever... he wrote the Book of Romans, which goes as deep into Christian theology as it would take a lifetime to fully develop; he taught on eternal predestination, details of eschatology, and practical theology such as Christian marriage and parenting, and stewardship principles
 6. So, missionaries should advocate BOTH zeal and passion for the lost AND careful doctrinal instruction for their converts!
- E. Application: Work diligently at your ministry! Be zealous to the highest level of craftsmanship... if your gift is hospitality, do it excellently; if it is leading a home fellowship with good Bible discussion... do it excellently

Luke 16:10 "Whoever can be trusted with very little can also be trusted with much, and whoever is dishonest with very little will also be dishonest with much.

IV. Opportunity

1 Corinthians 16:8-9 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

- A. This Analogy is Powerful: A GREAT DOOR of EFFECTIVE WORK has been OPENED for me
1. Paul is in Ephesus... God is using him powerfully there
 2. The “open door” speaks of opportunity... a God-ordained moment in time for Paul to do work of eternal consequence for the Lord
 3. God orchestrates these moments... he sovereignly ordains them!

[to the church at Philadelphia] Revelation 3:8 Behold, I have placed before you an open door that no one can shut.

B. “God’s Work Done in God’s Way” includes seeing where God is moving and going powerfully in that direction

1. Henry Blackaby: *Experiencing God...* discerning the movements and preparations and activities of God and JOINING HIM IN HIS WORK
2. Discernment!!! What is God doing in the people around you? How has he gone ahead of you to prepare hearts to hear about Christ? What great movements of people could he be working in the future? Are there any indicators of a wonderful movement of the Lord? How can we follow his leading? What doors has he opened?
3. Remember the Lord’s statement to Paul:

Acts 18:9-10 One night the Lord spoke to Paul in a vision: "Do not be afraid; keep on speaking, do not be silent. ¹⁰ For I am with you, and no one is going to attack and harm you, because I have many people in this city."

V. Suffering

1 Corinthians 16:8-9 But I will stay on at Ephesus until Pentecost, ⁹ because a great door for effective work has opened to me, and there are many who oppose me.

- A. Amazing! To Paul, OPPOSITION to the gospel was in no way a deterrent... actually it tended to prove that God was at work... it is a CONFIRMATION of the “open door of effective work” that he just mentioned!
- B. Paul wanted to stay in Ephesus at least in part to PROTECT the church there from the effects of vicious persecution... he wanted to suffer for Christ and show them how... like the Philippians:

Philippians 1:12-14 Now I want you to know, brothers, that what has happened to me has really served to advance the gospel. ¹³ As a result, it has become clear throughout the whole palace guard and to everyone else that I am in chains for Christ. ¹⁴ Because of my chains, most of the brothers in the Lord have been encouraged to speak the word of God more courageously and fearlessly.

C. The Level of Suffering Paul Would Go Through Was Extreme!

1. There was a “riot” in Ephesus... in which Demetrius, the metalworker fanned the population into flames in rage against Paul and the gospel because it was minimizing the glory of Artemis, and her temple... one of the seven wonders of the ancient world
2. They were so enflamed with zeal for the pagan goddess. That they shouted “Great is Artemis of the Ephesians!”
3. Many were coming to faith in Christ, and Satan’s kingdom was threatened... he doesn’t kick up trouble for Christians unless they become dangerous to his interests by fruitful ministry; but once that happens, he moves his forces vigorously against them!

2 Corinthians 1:8-11 We do not want you to be uninformed, brothers, about the hardships we suffered in the province of Asia. We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure, so that we despaired even of life. ⁹ Indeed, in our hearts we felt the sentence of death. But this happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God, who raises the dead. ¹⁰ He has delivered us from such a deadly peril, and he will deliver us. On him we have set our hope that he will continue to deliver us, ¹¹ as you help us by your prayers.

D. Application: Are we at FBC a threat to Satan’s dark kingdom here in the Triangle? If not, he will let us be... but if we are willing to accept suffering for the gospel, we will be fruitful... it is not possible for us to have a vast harvest of souls won and enriched with the gospel unless we are willing to suffer for the kingdom:

John 12:24 Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit.

VI. Teamwork

A. Paul ALWAYS had an Entourage! People he was training for leadership in the ministry... as well as men and women who were strategic co-laborers in many different roles... at the end of the Book of Romans, he mentions TWENTY-FOUR individuals and TWO HOUSEHOLDS that were teammates with him in the work of the gospel...

- B. This follows the pattern of Jesus... who called Twelve to be with him and learn from him; Robert Coleman's *Masterplan of Evangelism*
- C. Here Paul mentions TWO key men: Timothy and Apollos; he deals with them differently
- D. First, Timothy

1 Corinthians 16:10-11 If Timothy comes, see to it that he has nothing to fear while he is with you, for he is carrying on the work of the Lord, just as I am. ¹¹ No one, then, should refuse to accept him. Send him on his way in peace so that he may return to me. I am expecting him along with the brothers.

1. Timothy was Paul's beloved "son in the faith"
2. He was young... perhaps in his mid-twenties
3. Based on 1 and 2 Timothy, he tended to be sickly and was given to timidity—fearfulness of others
4. Given how fractious and rebellious and contentious this church of Corinth was to Paul—the leader and founder—it was reasonable for Paul to expect them to think very little of Timothy... to "despise him" (meaning to LOOK DOWN ON him and not obey him or help him at all)
5. Worse than that would be if they abused him verbally or attacked him in some other ways... making him feel terrible
6. Paul strongly surrounds Timothy with an admonition here to protect him: he tells the Corinthians that Timothy is doing the WORK OF THE LORD as much as he is! That he, Paul, is behind Timothy, and more than that, that the Lord Jesus himself is as well
7. Therefore, they should welcome him warmly and not do anything to make him feel afraid
8. It is vital for churches to accept their spiritual leaders and accept the teaching they bring... this is the LORD'S WORK done in the LORD'S WAY

Matthew 10:40 "He who receives you receives me, and he who receives me receives the one who sent me.

E. Second, Apollos

1 Corinthians 16:12 Now about our brother Apollos: I strongly urged him to go to you with the brothers. He was quite unwilling to go now, but he will go when he has the opportunity.

1. He was a more seasoned leader than Timothy, and likely would have been well received by the church at Corinth, since they knew him well and he was a polished orator...
2. There was even a faction that followed him as much as others followed Paul:

1 Corinthians 1:12 What I mean is this: One of you says, "I follow Paul"; another, "I follow Apollos"; another, "I follow Cephas"; still another, "I follow Christ."

3. It is clear that Paul wanted Apollos to go immediately to Corinth and continue the work there... he strongly urged him to do so; but the Greek is emphatic... Apollos was strongly unwilling to go now...
4. It is significant that Paul, the greatest leader in the Christian church, does not pull rank on Apollos, not that he could have... Christian authority is persuasive, not so much positional... he does not carry himself like one of the rulers of the Gentiles who lord it over others and dominate them... or like a medieval Pope, commanding obedience...
5. He is willing to let Apollos make up his own mind; Paul is willing to trust the Lord's leading in another leader's life

Romans 14:4 Who are you to judge someone else's servant? To his own master he stands or falls. And he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand.

6. There is a beautiful humility and TEAM-SPIRIT in Paul here... and a trust in the Holy Spirit's leading of another brother

F. Teamwork with the Churches:

1. One other aspect is how Paul relies on the local churches to help him in his missionary work to the frontier regions

1 Corinthians 16:6 Perhaps I will stay with you awhile, or even spend the winter, so that you can help me on my journey, wherever I go.

Romans 15:24 I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to visit you while passing through and to have you assist me on my journey there, after I have enjoyed your company for a while.

This reminds me of the co-operative program that Baptist churches have for missions... the principle of pooling resources to do tasks too great for any one local church or individual to do

VII. Applications

A. Summary: Hudson Taylor: “God’s work done in God’s way will never lack God’s supply”

1. Today, we’ve seen some key elements of God’s way of doing God’s work... through the example of the Apostle Paul

Vision: having a clear plan, a prayed-over strategy

Flexibility: being willing to flex, adapt, change according to God’s providential leading

Diligence: craftsmanship, careful instruction, quality workmanship in the ministry of the gospel... Paul willing to settle in and pour deeply in the churches he planted

Opportunity: the “great door of effective work” in Ephesus... teaches us to look at FBC and Durham/Raleigh/Chapel Hill... to see how God has opened opportunities up for us here, doors we are supposed to walk through

Suffering: Paul’s willingness to pay a steep price for the work of the gospel... the fact that great opposition always goes with great opportunity

Teamwork: Paul had a team, and worked together well with them

B. How Are these Things at Work in YOU PERSONALLY? And in FBC as a whole?

C. Gospel Call for Salvation through faith in Christ