

Matthew 24:14 This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come.

Have you ever really longed for completion? I don't mean longing for something to be over. That we can *all* relate to...on a daily basis these days. We long for the pandemic to be over. We long for the pandemic to be over. Even if that doesn't happen any time soon, we at least long for the restrictions to be over. And, depending on who you talk to, we long for the election to be over. And those are just the most obvious. In other areas of life...we long for treatments to be over, monthly payments to be over, classes to be over, diets to be over, job uncertainty to be over, and I could go on and on. There are so many things that we want to be over, done, finished.

But today, we're talking about completion – not done, over, finished – completion. Have you ever longed for completion? And then, of course, the next question is, have you ever achieved it?

You see, when it comes to the concept of completion, we actually aren't that familiar with it. When it comes to completion we're most often talking about building, filling, gaming (completing a level), or pot lucks (completing the circuit of all of the deserts, I mean all the salads). But think about it: all of those completions aren't really, satisfyingly achievable anyway. I mean, you might "complete" your building or remodeling project, but it doesn't take long before you don't like how something turned out and you're already thinking about "next time." And what does completely full really mean? After all, there

is only a drop of difference between surface tension full and overflowing. And even if you could manage it, completely full just isn't sustainable in every day life. You can't keep it steady or constant. And the way video games are now, even if you "complete" a level, there always seems to be a way to make that same level more complete than you did it with a higher score, a better rating, more coins. And even if you truly complete it, there is always the next level in that game or the next *game*. Actually, the best shot you have at completion is probably the desert table circuit. The right sized plate and some selective size choices and just might be able to do it. Of course, you won't feel very good after all is said and done.

I think that the disciples had a little sense of this *over vs. completion* struggle as they walked with Jesus and other followers in the temple courts that day. Here they were looking at the magnificence of what Herod had built, glorying in the grandeur, satiated by the spectacle. The historian Josephus described the massive, gleaming white cut stone used to build it, some blocks 37 feet long by 12 feet high by 18 feet deep. It is regarded to have been one of the architectural marvels of the ancient world. It must have been magnificent.

But Jesus wasn't impressed. He didn't jump on board with the disciples' sense of pride, their feelings of satisfaction, their end-all-be-all perspective on the glorious temple as a symbol that the Jews continued to be God's chosen nation and the apple of their heavenly father's eye. C'mon, Jesus. This is all good stuff, right?

But Jesus *replied to them*, "***Do you see all of these things? Amen I tell you: Not one stone here will be left on another that will not be thrown down.***" Jesus was talking about the destruction of the great temple, and the rest of Jerusalem with it, in 70 A.D., about 40 years later. Titus would

raze the city and the temple with it. He set fire to the temple first, though, causing the gold on the gilt roof to run down between the stones. The Roman soldiers pulled the stones apart to get at the gold.

The disciples that day, didn't question any of this in front of the others. But Mark tells us that Peter, James, John, and Andrew came to Jesus privately about the prophecy. They knew better than to challenge Jesus (by now they knew that if Jesus said it, it was going to happen). But for the Jews, the destruction of the temple, the destruction of Jerusalem, God's holy city, well, that was either the end of the Jewish world as they knew it, or it was the end of the entire world as God would have it – over, done, finished.

You see, the disciples were seeing the end of the world as the *end of* a good thing rather than *completion for* a good thing. That's why Jesus warns disciples then and disciples today, ***“Watch out that no one deceives you. ⁵ Because many will come in my name, saying, ‘I am the Christ,’ and they will deceive many people.***

Our study over the past month has looked at God's marvelous grace at work within the hearts of us, his children, to keep us safe, increase our faith, deliver us from temptation, and maturing us in our faith all according to his purpose: bringing to completion the good work that Christ began in our hearts when we came to faith in him as our Lord and Savior. In fact, his promise is to do this *completing* work ***until the Day of Christ Jesus***, that day being either the day we take our final breath and meet Jesus face to face, or the day when the trumpet sounds, and Jesus returns in glory, when every eye shall see him.

But I think that sometimes, as we deal with and react to all those horrible things – wars, rumors of wars, cataclysmic events, persecutions, pestilence – all those horrible things that Jesus says serve as

reminders to us that he is coming again and soon, I think that sometimes we get impatient, we fear for ourselves and our loved ones, we think about the perfection God expects and become frustrated. In short, we want to be complete *now*, so that we can better deal with all of this stuff, and we can't understand why God doesn't just do that *now*, or least do it a little faster.

It's just so difficult for us, with our finite minds. We know beginnings and we know endings. We started, we're in the midst of it now, and eventually we will end in this world. And there's the problem. You see, God's *completion* isn't this side of eternity. He isn't finishing us here so that the world can end. Rather, our lives will end, the world will end, as the final step in the *completion* process.

In a number of places in Scripture, this faith life of ours is compared to a race. The life we have now is the running. The life have to come in eternity is the finish line. The analogy is a beautiful picture, of course on many levels.

But as we conclude our series on *Becoming Complete* as Jesus' disciples, I'm going to ask you to shift that race and running analogy. Think of running as *completion*, running in perfection the way God has always intended. In other words, bringing us to faith is God saying *Runners to your marks!* Bringing us to *completion* – the process of sanctification, making us holy, these faith-lives of discipleship is God saying *Get set!* And it is the crossing over from death to life, the point of *completion*, is God saying *Go!*, as we run off into the eternal life to come. Runners to your marks, get set, go!

That's why Jesus makes it so clear to his disciples the importance of standing firm, remaining in him, ingesting the Bread and Water of life. Because ***whoever endures to the end will be saved***, brought to eternal completion on ***the Day of Christ Jesus***. No

longer *becoming* complete, complete. Not a finish line, not an end, not a game over, but a new beginning with Christ our King.

Yes, becoming complete and being complete are two different things, two different phases of a disciple's life and eternal life in Jesus. And while we long for *our* completion on *his* Day, we are still in the *process* of becoming complete. As we have seen over these last weeks, we have been called to lead lives of faith, to recognize our own failures, to offer penitent hearts to our loving God, to receive his gracious forgiveness, to rejoice in thanksgiving for all that he has done for us in Christ, and to give ourselves fully to the work of the Lord.

Not only does he give us the power to do all of this, but he blesses us with each other to help us do all of this. And so, in the months ahead, the Discipleship ministry of New Life will be helping us in this process through Personal Discipleship Plans, available coaching, devotional resources, and opportunities to grow and serve as you feel compelled to do so by the love of Christ in you, knowing that he is also working through you to the blessing of all around you. As Jesus himself said, through you and me, ***This gospel of the kingdom will be proclaimed throughout the whole world as a testimony to all nations...and then the end will come.*** Your completion and mine. Yes, discipleship is about the heart - preparation and anticipation for ***completion until the day of Christ Jesus.*** Runners to your marks. Get set...
Amen.