

GRADUATION MESSAGE for IFL (March 2017)

Adapted for the Web

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Joshua 1:9 “Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go.” (ESV)

At the time this is spoken, Moses had finished his tasks and died, but not one step to claim the promised land had been made. As God’s people looked forward, the opposing peoples were powerful. The land to claim was large. God intervenes by speaking directly to Joshua. After giving him commands and direction, this verse records God’s closing statement.

So, it is also with you. Each of you has land to claim, but there is a requirement from the Lord to make the claim real: do as He commands. For a secular school or a secular message, there is no such requirement. But if you claim the Lord Jesus Christ as your personal Savior, then the message to Joshua pertains to all students and graduates, because it has a truth repeated often in the Bible. Your path is intended to be different. Is it? Will it be different? It depends on your heeding the commands of the faith you claim as your own.

You will be proven in your walk. Teachers test. The Teacher tests. Teachers intend for you to learn and mature. Even more, the Heavenly Teacher intends for you to learn and mature. The lessons He intends are larger than those in textbooks, activities, sports, social relationships, and even the church, because He wants to teach you personally: one-on-one, heart-to-heart. This is the truth: only a few find the way. This is also the truth: you can find the way if you choose, because He is the Way. He can make the next grade, the next school or your profession an extraordinary walk if you let him be a part. Will you?

I exhort you to let Him be a part. Congratulations on your achievements so far, but there is a need for you to reach deeper and farther. If you have fears, set them aside. If you are dismayed, let that dismay fade in the light of His promise to be with you. Then, take land, take territory, beginning with the recesses of your heart. If you take the land in your heart with Him, taking the giants in front of you will prove easier. Finally, with other believing students, take the land, and move forward together. Challenges met with faith in Him are ahead for you to be met.

Consider Matthew 10:34-39: “Do not think I have come to bring peace to the earth, but a sword...Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it.

There is something about the passing of significant points of our life—like a graduation or the entrance to a new grade or school—that gives us a chance to look where we have been and where we intend to go. This is one of those times for you. It is the little things that you decide daily that tell yourself, your teachers, your staff, and your parents what direction is important to you. It seems ridiculous that to really gain your life you must lose it for Christ’s sake, but he

really does say that if you seek him first, you will actually discover your most fruitful path and obtain the life intended by God for you to live. But this portion of scripture also states the cost, and there is one. The idea that Christ came to bring a worldly concept of peace on earth is wrong. His peace brings peace in the heart, but the process of Gospel taking root in a person's life also brings a sword. A sword is a forceful weapon that penetrates and divides. The Kingdom of God is like that, and the first division occurs in the heart as a person decides to go God's way rather than his own. But in so doing, the seeming loss of life on your own is exchanged for a life in Christ that truthfully brings life that is much deeper, more fulfilling, and wider than you can imagine. It affects people around us, because some want Him in the center of things and many do not. So, Jesus states that it often brings divisions around us as well. But any cost paid is returned because you gain new friends, new directions, new lands, and new relationships that are far more fruitful.

The statement in Joshua was based upon Joshua's willingness to adhere, obey, and love God's ways. In so doing, he would go on to claim the promised land. You have promised land to claim. There is a cost of following the Lord, regardless of the school, university, or profession that is your goal. The promised land that God wants for you requires the same thing: a desire to have God as the focal point and springboard for what you do, what you say, how you behave, and what fruit you will produce. Please, choose wisely. It may require force on your part as the war within us to do our own thing rather than God's thing is always around the corner or close at hand. Choose wisely as you move forward.

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