

**“Blessings Or Curses For Our Graduates”**  
**Deuteronomy 11:8-28**

**May 22, 2016**

**SI:** Allow me to reminisce for a minute.

When we moved here almost 20 years ago, we had two children,  
Adrienne and Eliza, our Florida girls.

It seemed like almost everybody in Christ Covenant back then  
had more children than we did.

Bonds had three, so did the Weatherlys, Eidsons, Jones, Nesbitts,.  
The Brights had four, so did the Nyquists and the Bagleys

I don't remember any fivers back then, and our current record holders joined later.  
But there were a lot of children and people were having children,  
so we gave in to peer pressure and had another one—our Alabama boy Will.

He graduated from high school this week

and when he leaves for college in the fall, we'll have an empty nest.  
So this is a special graduating class for me and Allison.

This morning I want to take a break from our study of the love of Jesus  
and give our graduates some words from God's word.

We're going to read a few verses from Deuteronomy that we studied  
together about six years ago, so this will probably sound familiar.

**INTRO:** The word Deuteronomy means the second giving of the law. The first giving of the law was on Mt. Sinai right after the Israelites had been delivered from slavery in Egypt.

They crossed the Red Sea, where God drowned the Egyptian army, they went into the desert to Mt. Sinai where the Lord gave Moses the Ten Commandments and all the law.

God said:

You're my people. I've redeemed you from slavery. I have great plans for you.

This law is how I want you to show your gratitude for the life I've given you.

Now, cross over the Jordan River

and take possession of the land I promised your forefather Abraham.

But the Israelites wouldn't do it.

They were afraid and refused to cross the Jordan River.

They wouldn't go into the Promised Land.

They didn't believe the Lord would be true to his promise.

They even talked about going back to Egypt.

So the Lord let them wander in the desert for 40 years until that generation had all died off.

Now their children had grown up and had their own children.

And the Lord gave that generation a second chance to enter the Promised Land.

Deuteronomy is Moses giving this second generation of Israelites

God's law for the second time. And it's a lot like a graduation speech.

They've finished their schooling in the desert, the 40 years of wandering.

Imagine that—40 years of school.

And they're right on the cusp of a new chapter of life.

Like a graduation speech—Moses spends a lot of time looking back, big events in their past, past blessings, past failures.

He also looks forward, talking about his new chapter of their lives.

They are standing on the edge of the Promised Land.

They are about to cross over the Jordan River and move into a life

that is very different in many ways from where they have been to this point.

Graduation speakers also end with some kind of challenge—

“Reach for the stars!” “Follow your dreams!”

Moses also ends with a challenge.

It's sobering and just as powerful today as it was over 3,000 years ago.

He says: In this new chapter of life you have a choice—blessings or curses.

Obey the Lord, get in step with him in this new chapter of your life,  
and you will enjoy blessings. Ignore the Lord and suffer curses.  
So choose blessings. Choose to get God's blessings.

I'm focusing on our high school graduates—  
but this applies to every transition in your life, to every new chapter—  
the good ones, the bad ones, and the uncertain ones, the surprising ones.  
Births, deaths, marriages, moves, job changes, illness, aging parents, empty nests—  
all those new chapters are ordained by the Lord and come with a challenge—  
Which will you chose? Blessings or curses?

Choose blessing.

Open your eyes to what the Lord is doing through this new chapter,  
get in step with the Holy Spirit, and choose blessing.

Let's look at three way that happens.

I'll give them to you as we go.

**MP#1 The new chapters of your life are opportunities for faith.**

Every new chapter of life, good or bad,  
is an opportunity to trust the Lord in a deeper way.

Moses says the Israelites.

Back in Egypt you planted your crops and you never worried about getting rain.  
Because it didn't matter if it rained or not.

The mightiest river in Africa flowed right past your gardens—the Nile River.  
And all you had to do was irrigate it by foot.

All you had to do was pump or haul water and you were guaranteed a harvest.  
Back when you were slaves in Egypt, you never had to think about water.

But the Promised Land, the land of Canaan, is going to be different.

It's a land flowing with milk and honey. It's very fruitful.

There are vineyards and olive groves—wine and oil in abundance.

But there is no Nile River. It's a land that's dependent on rain.

There is a cycle of dry seasons and rainy seasons.

So the success of your crops will depend on the rain coming at the right time.

What's that going to mean for you spiritually?

It means that you're going to have to trust God at a whole new level.

God hasn't changed. And your life really hasn't changed.

Even down in Egypt, it was the Lord who made the crops grow.

You were just as dependent on his mercy there—you just didn't see it as clearly.

So your faith didn't have as much of a chance to grow.

But in Canaan you will see how much you depend on him.

You'll wake up every day and look at your fields under the hot sun.

You'll count off another day of the dry season.

You'll search the sky for rainclouds—

and you will have the opportunity to trust your God in a whole new way.

You'll be able to see with eyes of faith that it is the Lord  
who sends the autumn and spring rains.

It is the Lord who gives grass for your cattle. It is the Lord who makes the  
grain swell and the grape ripen and who gives you your daily bread.

And so with this new chapter of your life, you will have an opportunity  
to trust the Lord in ways you've never trusted him before.

Your old props are going to be taken away. Not that they were bad.

There was nothing wrong with the Nile River there to give you water every day without you even thinking about it. But it's not going to be there any more—and that's a good thing, because it will be an opportunity to trust him more.

When I read this I can't help thinking of our high school graduates.

Your parents have been like the Nile River in your life for 18 years.

You didn't have to worry about water. They provided for you body and soul.

You could say the same thing about your church.

It's been here for you throughout your years, providing spiritual nourishment.

It's always been the Lord who has really done the providing.

He's provided for you through your parents, through your church.

But you're beginning a new chapter in your lives—

and some of these props are going to be taken away.

And the Lord's going to lead you places

where you have the opportunity to trust him more.

If you go off to college, that's exciting. The day I went away to college,

the day I got married, and the day we had our first child were the most exciting

days of my life. I still remember my feelings on those days very vividly.

Because I knew they were the beginnings of new chapters in my life.

Here's my challenge to you. Make it your prayer and your conscious thought

that you will trust the Lord more. Make it your goal to grow in faith.

Some of you here are facing new chapters in your life that aren't exciting—

they're scary. They may even be heart-breaking.

People and things you counted on have been pulled away.

You're facing a future that you did not plan, a future you do not want.

I remember a devout Christian woman in our Florida church. She and her husband

had retired to the beach to enjoy their golden years. He died the first week.

She said: This wasn't the plan. But, she said later, God is good.

Be encouraged. The Lord send you both the autumn and spring rains—

to soften the soil of your heart and to swell the grain at harvest time.

What does he want from you? He wants you to trust him more.

## **MP#2 The new chapters of your life are occasions for testing.**

The Lord is not the only one at work in the new chapters of your life—the Devil is too. He's the enemy of your soul. He wants to cast you down and make you ineffective and unproductive as a Christian.

He's crafty. He knows that you will be susceptible to temptation.

Sinful tendencies you might barely know are there can come out with terrible power in times of big change.

God doesn't tempt us to sin. He turns the temptations we face into tests of faith. The Devil tempts and the Lord tests.

The difference is that the Devil wants you to fail.

The Lord wants you to succeed so you come out stronger.

Moses says: When you get to the Promised Land,

you're going to be tempted to worship the false gods of the Canaanites.

That's going to be part of this new chapter of your life—

you're going to be tempted and tested.

Who were the gods of the Canaanites. Primarily two—Baal and Asherah.

Baal was the god of storm and rain. Isn't that interesting.

The Lord said, Trust me, and don't worry about rain. I'll send it.

But the Canaanites made an idol out of rain.

It was rain that gave them security about their future.

The worshipped created things rather than the Creator.

Asherah was Baal's consort. She was a fertility goddess.

The Canaanites worshipped her so that their cattle and sheep would multiply and their grain would grow. That's why there were sexual rituals in Asherah worship. It was the worship of fertility itself, worship of prosperity.

Once again: The Lord had said over and over to the Israelites.

Trust me. Worship me. Live holy lives before me.

And I will give you sons and daughters and your flocks and herds will increase.

Baal and Asherah worship is a perennial temptation.

Idolatry is simply worshipping created things rather than the Creator.

It's trusting in created things to give you what God alone can give.

It's looking for your security, comfort, approval, control, a sense of worth in things and people besides the Lord.

That temptation is always with us.

But it can be particularly intense in the new chapters of your life.

I've told you this story before, but a number of years ago there was a family that was in Christ Covenant for a time, a godly family, serious about their faith. I ran into the dad a few years back and he told me their oldest daughter had graduated from high school, gone to college, to UAH. While she was there she took a philosophy class and turned her back on the faith. He told me he pleaded with her and argued with her and prayed for her—but she pridefully looked down on the Bible and Christianity. What happened? She was enticed by the false gods of the Canaanites. In her case it was the idol of intellectualism. Human reason is superior to God. Scripture can be judged and criticized by us, rather than the other way around.

I don't know what made that idol appealing to her. Maybe she wanted to look good in the eyes of a professor she admired. Maybe she was embarrassed to be thought of as a Bible-thumper. Maybe getting rid of the Bible and the Christian ethic felt liberating to her—gave her justification for an immoral life—I don't know.

But I do know that her story is not unusual. One of the great sorrows of the church in America in our time is that many of sons and daughters grow up and instead of following Christ in the great new chapter of their lives, they follow the idols of materialism or hedonism or secularism. Listen, graduates, don't let that be true of you. Your faith will be tested—pass the test. The holy life is worth living. Following Christ is the path to happiness. The Christian faith does have intellectually and emotionally satisfying answers. Don't damage your souls following false gods.

And this is the challenge for all of you, who, like I mentioned a moment ago—are facing your own transitions and changes. You're going to be tempted not to follow God's Word and the spiritual leaders he had placed in your life—you're going to feel you want to do something, and call it the Holy Spirit leading you.

You're going to be tempted by security and comfort and fear to follow idols. Be forewarned.

### **MP#3 The new chapters of your life are openings for success.**

For Christians, the new chapters of life—good or bad—are by God’s grace openings, doorways, for success.

Look at the way Moses describes success to the Israelites—It’s very dramatic. He says: The Canaanites won’t be able to stand before you.

The Lord will drive them out. You will dispossess them.

Nobody will be able to stop you.

Your territory will be from the desert to Lebanon,  
and from the Euphrates River to the Western Sea

Then he says, When you enter this new chapter of your life:

“Every place where you set your foot will be yours.”

That’s quite a statement. They’ve been 40 years in the desert. Living in tents.

Here they are looking across the Jordan at the land flowing with milk and honey. And the Lord says:

You see a beautiful farm? Set your foot on it, and you own it.

You see a fruitful vineyard or olive grove? Set your foot on it, you own it.

The doors for success in this new chapter of your life are wide open.

But what does that mean?

It’s passages like this that the health and wealth, name-it claim-it, preachers point to and say: See, if you want that new car or new job, you just have to step forward in faith and claim it and God will give it to you.

Joel Osteen and his crowd say, Just imagine the best life you want and claim it.

That’s not what this means. This promise of success is not a promise that you’re going to get everything you want materially speaking.

It’s not even a promise that the new chapters of your life are going to turn out as you planned. Your plans might not work out.

You might lose material possessions for following Jesus, or die.

Larry Taunton spoke this past Thursday evening at the graduation for Cullman Christian School and he mentioned a conversation with Peter Akinola, Archbishop of Nigeria.

Told how he had recently buried in a mass grave 40 church members murdered by Islamic terrorists. And during the funeral, they were being shot at.

Sometimes Christ’s kingdom advances through martyrdom.

The success that’s spoken of here is much bigger than us and our plans.

It's about the Kingdom of God. It's about the salvation of the world through Christ. You see, the possession of the land of Canaan was part of God's redemptive plan. It was the fulfillment of his promise to Abraham. He told Abraham 500 years earlier that he would bring his descendants to this land, and that he would make them into a nation—and that nation would be a cradle for the promised Son, the Messiah, through whom all the nations on earth be blessed.

So when an Israelite man or woman crossed the Jordan River in faith. And when they set their feet on a Canaanite farm and claimed it for the Lord, and farmed it, and raised their children on it—when they did that—they were advancing the Kingdom of God. They were getting things ready for Jesus Christ to come. And that is real success. Real success is when you make the decisions of your life to glorify Jesus Christ.

In every new chapter of your life, the Lord will open doors for you to do that. He'll give you ways to participate in the advancement of his Kingdom and the spread of the Gospel. And when you recognize those open doors, and walk through them in faith, then you can be certain of success—because his Kingdom cannot fail. Every place you set your foot will be yours.

Graduates, in the next chapter of your life you will probably make some of your most lasting friendships, you will probably choose your life's work, and you will probably find your husband or wife. If you follow the Lord in those things, if you consciously seek his will, and listen to him and want to please him and lead others to him—then all of those things can be doorways for you to participate in his Kingdom. And if you do that, it won't matter how much money you make, or how prestigious your position—you will enjoy true success.

And it may be that the doors the Lord opens for you are doors you don't want him to open. It may be a painful loss that opens up a new chapter of your life. But even in that, are opportunities to share Christ in ways that you couldn't before. Even in the scary and painful changes are ways to advance his kingdom by saying to other hurting people—Let me tell you what Jesus has done for me.

**CONC:** In 1904, a young man named William Borden graduated from high school in Chicago. For graduation present his parents gave him a trip around the world. The Bordens were very wealthy family, William was the heir of the family fortune.

William was a Christian, and as he traveled he began to feel a spiritual burden for the people he saw—especially for the great numbers of people in Asia. He began to think about how many millions of them had never heard of Christ. He wrote home and told his parents that he wanted to be a missionary. Some family members said he was throwing his life away.

He started his freshman year at Yale.

And at the convocation service the President of the University told the incoming class that each one of them should have a purpose in life.

William was bothered by the speech because he saw that in the secular environment of Yale, there was very little interest in having Jesus Christ as the purpose in life.

So he asked one of his friends to meet with him before breakfast, so that they could pray for the student body. The two of them began to meet. And from that little prayer meeting there was a revival at Yale.

By the end of his freshman year, 150 students had joined their morning prayer.

And by the time he was a senior, 1000 students were meeting in small groups.

He started a mission to homeless people in New Haven.

He organized a missionary conference that was held on the Yale campus.

William's wealth and family connections were always tugging at him.

He was invited to join the most famous Yale fraternity, Skull and Bones—

which would have given him lots of good connections, but he turned it down.

Supposedly the only student in Yale history to do so.

When he graduated, he was offered several prestigious and high-paying positions but he turned them down as well because his heart was by that time set on going as a missionary to a Muslim people group in Western China.

Went to Princeton to study theology.

Then to Egypt, to study Arabic, Islam, before beginning his life's work in China.

But in Egypt he contracted meningitis and died at the age of 25.

His Bible had a number of mottos written in the cover:

One of them, written his freshman year of college said:

“Say ‘no’ to self and ‘yes’ to Jesus every time.”

What a life. He died young, and that's sad. But what a life.

Here was a young man who saw in this new chapter of his life, his high school graduation opportunities to grow in faith, occasions for testing, and openings for success—and he took them.

William Borden is not the hero of the story—God is the hero.

Because it is God who ordains the changes of your life.

And Jesus Christ is the hero—because through him you have a new heart, and you have his Holy Spirit, to guide you as you along the way.

God may call you to be a missionary and to give up your inheritance.

He may call you to walk in your parents' footsteps and live in Cullman and run the family business.

We believe every calling is holy to the Lord.

Wherever he calls you, love your Savior.

Keep in step with the Spirit,

and move ahead into the new chapter he has for you.