

“Choices: How Will You Make Your Life Decisions?”

Baccalaureate Address

Rev. Ernest Forrester, Associate Pastor

Smoke Rise Baptist Church

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Wow, Warren, thank you for that awesome introduction. Those are some nice things you said, and it is a great privilege to speak this morning for many reasons. One is that my last biological child is graduating. I have had so many children graduate, but this is the last of my biological children. My family is here, and that is always a plus, but there is another reason, one that stands alone.

In eleven days (May 28th) it will be twenty years that we have held Baccalaureate services here at Smoke Rise. On May 28th, 1989 we had all the graduates' robe, process in, lead in the service, have a Baccalaureate message preached, and recess out. Before that our graduates were merely recognized on a particular Sunday, their pictures printed in the bulletin as an insert. None of the schools had Baccalaureates, so we had something unique.

Now I don't know how you feel about services like this, but I believe we need to give a person his/her due. These students have worked hard and as a collective congregation we need not only be proud, but show them how proud we are! We need to have this service for them, and I am both thankful and blessed that you have allowed us this service for twenty years. Students, you should be grateful to this congregation!

And now as to what to say; the only real problem is saying something (a) Will hasn't already heard me say, and (b) couching it in something we can all relate to. Of course I do feel I know this class. Since the early days, and I mean when they came here as babies and were in the nursery, I have known almost the entire crew. I am fairly certain I changed most of your diapers on one of my shifts in the nursery when Debbie and I had duty!

What I want to do is offer you some advice you can take with you. I want it to be something you can use that reeks of practicality like . . . The lane you are driving in will always be moving slower than the lane you just moved from! Now that is practical and true!!!

Some things are just obvious, like, there are two kinds of pedestrians: the quick and the dead! But you would figure that out by yourself, so I don't want to go there. Besides, there are other questions we need to consider. For example, can you cry underwater? Why are you IN a movie, but ON TV? Why do people pay money to go up tall buildings and then pay more money to look in binoculars to see things on the ground? And does anyone know what disease cured ham actually had?

I am not certain we will ever know the answers to some of this, but there is one thing for certain, and that is some of the characteristics about your class. Let me share just a few of those. The Class of 2009:

You don't remember when “cut and paste” involved scissors.

Voice mail has always been available.

Most of you do not know how to tie a tie. You have not needed to learn.

Digital cameras have always existed.

*Miss Piggy and Kermit have always dwelt in Disneyland.
You remember "Step by Step", "Family Matters", "Boy Meets World",
"Rugrats", and "Power Rangers".
Every one of you probably owned a Game Boy, and had Pokey Mon cards.
And you may still be looking for Waldo!*

The truth is you have come a long way. You are closing out one chapter of your life and beginning another.

In the passage of scripture Will read just a few moments ago, Joshua was challenging the children of Israel to choose between the God of their fathers, who had brought them up out of the Egyptian bondage, and the gods of the Amorites whose land they had captured and occupied. The issue at stake is similar to what you, to what all of us face today – the allegiance to old loyalties in the face of new conditions of life. It is from this I want to talk with you about choices. In many ways they can be considered common sense, but at the very least we might view them as life lessons. What will be the basis for the choices you will make?

The first is implied in Joshua's statement to the people; "Choose you this day . . ." Just by the mere fact that you are going to make a choice says that you need to have confidence in yourself. You need to **believe in yourself**. Low self esteem is one of the plagues of your generation, but in order to make good choices you have to believe in YOU first and foremost.

It is so easy for us to look at the scripture and think, "Duh, how hard can that be?" I mean, after all, of course we are going to choose God. Well believe it or not, some people look at your decisions and wonder why you made the choice you did. They base it on the fact you have been raised here and should know the right thing. The difference is they are not in your shoes, and that is why you need to believe in you, so you can act appropriately.

And you need to know you have the foundation for doing the right thing. In your short lives you have gone through the changes which come naturally as you grow. You have experienced the awkwardness of a growing, changing body and all the embarrassing moments associated with that.

Your experiences should have had an impact on your thinking and acting by now. I know you remember not making a team or a group you desired. Remember the hurt, the anguish, the anxiety? Well, I do and if you cannot remember I will tell you, but the point is it was those times of defeat that toughened your resolve. You have had plenty of victories to lift your spirits, but it is the failures that have strengthened you. The challenges have expanded your capacities and helped you realize you can do and be more, but it is the disappointments that have helped you grow. All of this together should have shaped you to **believe in yourself**.

The second point is going to come from Joshua's next few words, "...who you will serve ...". Now I know what he is talking about, but I want to make a point which can be a life lesson for you. Again, you have had opportunity to realize this from your time here, and hopefully you have. The second life lesson is simply to **be servant minded**. Up to this point your life has been mostly about YOU. I want to challenge you to include in your life an element of service to others. You may have heard of the Nobel Peace Prize winner, Dr. Albert Schweitzer. He gained notoriety with his work as a medical

missionary in Africa treating patients with leprosy. He said, "I don't know what your destiny will be but one thing I know. The only ones among you who will be truly happy are those who have sought and found how to serve."

Even Jesus encouraged us to serve. When he told his followers that true love is displayed when one is willing to lay down his life for his friends, I believe he was speaking of a servant attitude. Matthew tells us that the greatest among us must be the servant of all. Service is an important part of Christianity and life. When your family, friends, teachers, coaches, and other trusted individuals gave time to help you learn to ride a bike, play a sport, play an instrument, or read a book, they were serving you, giving of themselves, literally giving their lives to you. Since none of us can **MAKE** time for anything, I challenge you to **TAKE** time to give to others. Others have given to you. You have heard me say, "You are happiest when you are doing something for someone else." Include an element of service in your life.

Don't allow yourself to be caught up in a society that often puts great value on unimportant things. Society's obsession with material goods may tell you service to others is a waste of time, but I say, roll up your sleeves and pitch in because *making deals is less important than making a difference*. Philippians 2:3-4 says, "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves ... look not to your own interest, but also to the interest of others."

Joshua's familiar statement, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord", is the third of our choices or life lessons which can help us with our decision making. The point is to **follow God**. WE can do that because we have Christ in our lives, and it is through Christ that we have freedom.

I know this is an exciting time in your life. I also know it is a scary time. Most of you will go away from home and experience freedom in a way you never have before. Galatians 5 tells us, "It is for freedom that Christ has set us free. Stand firm then and do not let yourself be burdened again by the yoke of slavery." Freedom is about making choices. Some are hard and some are easy. Use what you have learned so that every decision you make will be wholesome and rewarding.

Surround yourself with good Christian friends. Meet a ton of folks, but make sure you develop real friends. Those are the ones who will be honest with you and not just say what you want to hear. They are the ones who will risk your friendship to tell you what will help you instead of what will help you be the same. Those are the ones who you can call on at 2 in the morning and they are there for you. They will be few and far between, so when you find one, hang onto them.

You stand on the brink of new adventures and challenges. You need divine guidance to direct your decisions, divine holiness to transform your motives, and love to enfold your lives. All of that can be found as you follow God. He can and will provide those things to you through His word (Psalm 119:105 – "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path."), through prayer (Philippians 4:6-7 – "Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving present your requests to God."), and by His grace (Ephesians 2:8 – "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith and this is not of yourselves, it is a gift of God").

The truth is there is so much stuff to tell you but not enough time to tell it all. I do encourage you graduates to believe in yourself, be servant minded, and to follow God, especially as you move into this next phase. NOW is the crucial time because all that you

have been taught, all the training you've received, everything you believe, will be challenged in the next 4 to 5 years.

I want to close with an excerpt from an essay from a person NOT from your generation. It is written by a fellow from my generation who for as long as I can remember has been an irreverent comic whose stand-up comedy of the 1970's and 80's was particularly offensive. His name is George Carlin, and he was in my day the most vulgar person I had ever heard. Yet this writing authored by Carlin demonstrates to me a change of heart - a more eloquent individual with a greater sensitivity and appreciation of life compared to his thoughts when I was your age. Listen as he notes the ironies and contradictions in our society:

"The paradox of our time in history is that we have taller buildings but shorter tempers, wider freeways, but narrower viewpoints. We spend more, but have less. We buy more, but enjoy less. We have bigger houses and smaller families, more conveniences, but less time.

We have more degrees but less sense, more knowledge, but less judgment, more experts, yet more problems, more medicine, but less wellness. We drink too much, smoke too much, spend too recklessly, laugh too little, drive too fast, get too angry, stay up too late, get up too tired, read too little, watch TV too much, and pray too seldom. We have multiplied our possessions, but reduced our values. We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often." OUCH!!!

He concludes his essay: "Remember, spend some time with your loved ones, because they are not going to be around forever. Remember, say a kind word to someone who looks up to you in awe, because that little person soon will grow up and leave your side... Remember to say, "I love you" to your loved ones, but most of all mean it... Remember to hold hands and cherish the moment for someday that person will not be there again. Give time to love, give time to speak, and give time to share the precious thoughts in your mind - give time to thank God for all he has blessed you with."

Congratulations Class of 2009. We are proud of you, and as you leave us to move on to your next venture, remember the one thing you should absolutely know by now in your time at SRBC – You are loved, and I love you too!!!

God Bless!