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While It Is Day-Living as if Time Mattered, Part One

On Saturday, May 21, Dr. Mohler addressed the class of 2005 at Union University's Commencement ceremony. The time for all of us is far shorter than first appears, he told the graduates. In that light, what exactly should we do with the time we have been given?

Monday, May 23, 2005

On Saturday, May 21, Dr. Mohler addressed the class of 2005 at Union University's Commencement ceremony. The following is the first part of his address, in the form of an edited transcript. Part Two will be published tomorrow.

This is a great day—a day of celebration, a day of completion, a day of tremendous anticipation, a day the Lord has already greatly blessed. To all who are gathered here: Let us join in a spirit of thankfulness to God, and of thankfulness for this institution, and thankfulness for its mission, and thankfulness for all that this day means.

I want to address you as the class of May 2005. You have been the recipients of an incredible education and an incredible experience. Many, if not most of you, know exactly what this means. One day, all of you will understand that you have been the recipients of something extremely rare—an education that is marked by genuine academic excellence and that is unapologetically rooted in the truth of God's Word.

This is an incredible institution. You have spent four years of your life here, and for the rest of your lifetimes there will be an indelible mark left on you by the fact that today you will cross this platform and you will emerge with a Union University degree. It is far more than a piece of paper, and it is far more than an academic program completed. It is an investment of your life, and it is a representation of the investment that has been made in your lives. And so you will understand that there is tremendous anticipation here tonight. Your parents have come here with great anticipation. We want to see what God is going to do in you and through you.

Senator Robert Dole said not too long ago that the role of a commencement speaker at an event like this is analogous to the role of the corpse at a funeral. It's difficult to have the event without you, but they don't expect you to say much. I'm going to attempt to say something.

The Massachusetts Institute of Technology was the scene of an unusual conference in recent weeks—the world's first convention of time travelers. Students at MIT decided that they wanted to test the theories of time travel that they had been considering in terms of quantum physics, and so some enterprising students organized a conference on the campus of MIT, to which they invited all time travelers past, present, and future.

They roped off a certain area on the campus with the cooperation of the MIT faculty, where any time machines could either land, or materialize, or emerge, or whatever they might do. The organizers of this conference advertised the event by using acid free paper and printing notices they embedded in books in the MIT library, so that scholars in the future who might be directly accustomed to time travel (and where would they study but MIT?) would find these slips of paper in a book, and would return to MIT on this particular day in May of 2005.

The conference was held just a few days ago. By the way, the organizers claimed that the conference was never to be repeated. If time travel works, you would never have to repeat an event, you would just keep going back to it. Alas, within that roped off sector of the MIT campus, no time machine materialized.

There is a sense in which that's exactly what we would like to take place here tonight. We would like to have some time traveler from the future come to May 2005, emerge even here tonight from your class, to tell us where you have been

and where you have gone. We would welcome a visitor from this class who could return from the future—to come back and tell us what you have seen, what you have done, what you have experienced, what you have witnessed. What about the impact you have left in the world?

It would be incredible if tonight we could have some visitor from the future, from your class, come and tell what you have done. For tonight, we have to look forward in hope, in confidence, and in anticipation. But the time is shorter than it appears. You look healthy. You look vigorous. You look ready. But you are going to die.

The time for all of us is far shorter than first appears. I can remember all too poignantly sitting exactly where you sit. Now I have to picture sitting with your parents, as my children will all too soon sit with you. For some the time will be longer, for some the time shorter. In the span of eternity, even in the expanse of human history, the time is short for all of us.

Jesus once said to His disciples: “We must do the works of Him who sent Me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work” [John 9:4 HCSB] The immediate context of that passage was one of the miracles of Jesus—it was when Jesus healed the man blind from birth—and it was on that occasion that His disciples asked Him some deep theological questions, and the Lord answered them.

But the Lord also reminded His disciples that the time is short. The immediate background to the words of Jesus is the fact that He knew that His time on earth was short. His earthly ministry would be short. The cross was on Christ’s horizon—the cross on which He would die as our substitute. “We must do the works of Him who sent Me while it is day. Night is coming when no one can work.”

It is interesting to note that Jesus did not merely say, “I must do the work of Him who sent me.” He said *we*, speaking to His disciples. In the same way, Christ speaks to the church, His body, even now. We must be about the business of doing the work of the Father while it is day, reminded that the night is coming when no one can work. This is an appropriate reminder to all of us, a statement of tremendous consequence.

With eternity on the far horizon, and our brief lifetime on the near horizon, we understand that the time is short. So if the time is short, what must we be doing? The Lord’s instruction is simple—the Father’s work. And what would that be? What would we do in order to fulfill the Lord’s command? Allow me to offer some suggestions.

Most supremely, the purpose for which we were created is to display the glory of God. The greatest privilege of a human life, of anyone made in the image of God, is to know the Creator. We can not only know *about* Him in an abstract sense, but we are called to know Him personally through the Lord Jesus Christ. To see the Christ is to see the Father. We know the Father through Jesus the Son, and our great privilege and purpose in this life is to display the glory of God in the midst of His creation by bearing testimony to the preeminence of Jesus Christ over all things. For the Father Himself has put all things at His feet—*all* things. These things include even principalities and powers. *All* things, even disciplines and programs; all things, even institutions and governments and schools; all things.

How would we display the glory of God and declare the preeminence of Christ in a generation like this? How would we define and summarize this task? We must live and work and witness as if time mattered.

While it is day, tell the truth. That is an important task for this generation, for your generation. You are better equipped today to tell the truth than you were when you arrived on this institution, because you have been involved in a program based upon the solid foundation of biblical truth, in order to learn how to speak that truth and bear witness to that truth, and to defend that truth in a world that is increasingly uncertain that truth even exists. We live today in the context of a postmodern culture that sees truth largely as an artifact of social construction and construes all truth claims as relative. Our task is to tell the truth to a generation that is largely resistant to the truth. Our task means that we must be about the Christian ministry of compassionate truth telling.

There is genuine compassion in telling the truth, even if the world does not always understand this to be true. We cannot speak as if we do not know that the Lord has spoken. We understand that truth is not something that human beings have merely invented, constructed, and negotiated—and is therefore up for endless renegotiation. We know that there are truths beyond what any mind can ever understand, much less invent. By grace and the gift of revelation, we do know the absolute truth of the Word of God and the deep verities of the Christian faith. We know that that truth shall set us free.

Your task, while it is day, is to tell the truth. And this task will sometimes cost you dearly. It will require mental agility and intellectual sophistication, and will put you at risk of being out of step with the culture at large. Your years invested in this institution and in your programs of study have helped to prepare you for that task.

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