

GOD CAN BE TRUSTED
BACCALAUREATE SERMON
E. LEBRON FAIRBANKS
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INTRODUCTION

1. Dr. Warren Bennis, noted author on leadership and distinguished Professor of Business Administration at the University of Southern California, recently quoted a corporate CEO who stated, "If you are not confused, you don't know what's going on."
 - a. Aside from questions on the grammar of the statement, the underlying concept of the statement is valid.
 - b. Dr. Bennis was discussing the rapid change in the nature of leadership today.

2. Students often enter college with the belief that their college experience will produce all the answers to life's questions and leadership issues.

3. Reality is, however, that students come to graduation with increased anxiety and ambiguity about the future and apprehension about serving as Christian leaders in the decade of the 90s.

4. In my last sermon to you before you graduate, I want to leave you with ONE thought I hope will stay with you throughout your lives.
 - a. In times of your confusion, as well as in moments of your serenity, **GOD CAN BE TRUSTED.**

- b. Listen to the words of Paul in Acts 27:25, "Take courage, men, for I have faith in God that He will do it just as he said he would."
5. Let me tell you the rest of this profound story as given in Acts, chapters 20-28.

Paul had finished his third and final missionary journey. He had taken an offering for the Jerusalem Church at each of his stops on his last journey. He felt he should take the offering personally to the Jerusalem Church. On his way to Jerusalem, he stopped by to visit with Christian friends in Ephesus, Tyre, and Caesarae. At each stop, his friends told him he should not continue to Jerusalem. "Trouble awaits you," they told him. They even begged him not to continue. "You are breaking my heart," he told them. It was not until Paul told them, "God's will be done," did they withdraw and release him to continue to Jerusalem.

His friends were right. Paul entered Jerusalem and went immediately to the temple to worship. Enemies of Paul saw him and created a riot. Paul was taken to jail. There he delivers a magnificent defense of his faith before the Sanhedrin. They returned him to prison. The next night, while in prison, the Lord speaks to Paul and gives him a vision, "As you have testified about me in Jerusalem, so you will also testify about me in Rome."

But Rome was far away, and Paul was in jail. And there were enemies of Paul that had vowed not to eat nor sleep until Paul was dead.

By God's mercy, Paul was taken to a jail in Caesarea, where he was imprisoned for over two years. The governor often called Paul to his office to talk to him "to try to get a bribe from him" so the scriptures say. Finally, King Agrippa visited

the city. Because Paul had appealed his case to Caesar, Agrippa wanted to talk to this man. King Agrippa concluded, "This man could be set free, if he had not appealed to Caesar."

At last Paul began his trip to Rome, the seat of Caesar. On the way to Rome, Paul encountered a typhoon and experienced a shipwreck. It was during the typhoon and shipwreck that Paul spoke the words of the text, "Have courage, men, for I have faith in God, that he will do just as he said he would."

Acts 28 tells us that Paul finally arrived in Rome to see the vision realized that God had given to him several years before.

WHAT DOES THIS EMOTION-CHARGED STORY SAY TO US AS AN MVNC FAITH COMMUNITY, AS WE ENTER THE NEXT PHASE OF OUR LIVES?

There are at least four implications for me, and, I believe, for each of you.

I. GOD CAN BE TRUSTED...even when delays occur

- A. God had spoken clearly His will to Paul, and reinforced His will on Paul with a clear vision of what Paul was to do in Rome.
- B. However, over two years passed before God's vision to Paul was realized.
- C. Can we, with Paul "have faith in God" even when delays in our lives occur?

II. GOD CAN BE TRUSTED...even when hardships are experienced

- A. Paul's life was threatened.
- B. Paul manipulated.
- C. Paul spent over two years in jail.
- D. He suffered through a typhoon and experienced a shipwreck.
- E. Can we, with Paul, "have faith in God" in the midst of hardships we may encounter?

#III. GOD CAN BE TRUSTED...even when tempted to doubt

- A. King Agrippa said, "This man could be set free had he not appealed to Rome."
- B. Paul could have easily "second-guessed" himself.
 - 1. What if I had not appealed to Rome?
 - 2. What if I had listened to my friends and not gone to Jerusalem in the first place?
 - 3. Can we, with Paul, "have faith in God" in those moments of temptation and doubt?

#IV. GOD CAN BE TRUSTED...even when the future is unknown

- A. Paul believed God's will had been revealed to him.
- B. Paul was sure of the vision from God about witnessing in Rome.
- C. But the steps leading to the realization of God's will, and the fulfillment of the vision was not clear.
- D. Can we, with Paul, stand firm, and have faith in God even when the future is unknown, believing that IN HIS TIME God will be faithful to his word and promise?

E. Will you sing with me the chorus, "In His Time"?

In His time, In His time,
He makes all things beautiful, in His time,
Lord, please show me every day,
As You're teaching me Your way,
That you do just what You say,
In Your time.

CONCLUSION

1. Courage to believe in God...

- A. in the midst of delays
- B. in the midst of hardships
- C. in the midst of doubts
- D. and in the midst of uncertainty

is rooted in a radical faith in the providence and sovereignty of God.

E. God rules and reigns.... This is our faith. Radical faith!

2. We can choose to believe...even when it appears that God is silent...because God is sovereign. He can be trusted.

Remember the chorus written and sung in chapel by Bob Diehm:

Lord, You are my Savior and my shield,
And in You my heart endures and leaps for joy,
Lord, You are the strength that stays my fear,
And Your mercy is the reason for my song.
Lord, You are, You are;
You're the shepherd that takes care of my heart,

Lord, You are, You are
The Savior of my heart,
You are! Amen!

3. The best part of the story is this:
 - A. God used Paul in Rome even though Paul was again placed in jail.
 - B. While Paul was in jail, however,
 1. Paul shared his faith
 2. And Paul wrote what is known as the Prison Epistles--Philippians, Ephesians, Colossians, Philemon.
 - a. Paul could have complained and pitied himself.
 - b. Rather, he "bloomed where he was planted" and used the circumstances and setting where God placed him.
4. And God can be trusted in your life...regardless of where he places you,
 - A. To lead you,
 - B. To sustain you,
 - C. And to use you.
5. God can be trusted...because in his providence and sovereignty...our God reigns!

TRANSITION TO COLLEGIANS FINALE

I close this message with a short narrative you perhaps have read superimposed over a picture of footprints in the sand. The narrative is titled FOOTPRINTS.

One night a man had a dream. He dreamed he was walking along the beach with the Lord. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene, he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand; one belonged to him, and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he looked back at the footprints in the sand. He noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times in his life.

This really bothered him and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, you said that once I decided to follow you, you'd walk with me all the way. but I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why, when I needed you most, you would leave me."

The Lord Replied, "My precious child, I love you and I would never leave you. During you times of trial and suffering, when you see only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

GOD CAN BE TRUSTED! Because OUR GOD REIGNS!

