

‘GODSPEED!’

1 Peter 3:13-16

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I’ve heard that during the last weeks of May and the first weeks of June, more Americans attend graduation ceremonies than attend professional baseball games.

Usually some celebrity is the commencement speaker who tries to leave the graduates with some pithy or witty encouragement. A couple of the best lines I have heard are: *The tassel is worth the hassle* (Unknown); *All that stands between the graduate and the top of the ladder is the ladder* (Unknown)

One way you can tell when the speaker is about done is if you hear that word: *Godspeed!*

In her Commencement Address at the University of Arkansas last month Michele Obama said: *And I wish you Godspeed and every blessing on the road ahead. Thank you.*

When you graduate you must move on. You can’t stall where you are.

So grab the reins of your life. Pursue a purpose. Don’t just drift along. And *Godspeed; may God go with you; may his blessing be upon you.*

· You have a decision to make. Are you going to bow to outside influences, or are you going to shape your life by a strong inner resolve?

It’s a bit like the difference between a sand dune and a tree. A sand dune is shaped by the constantly changing weather. A tree is grounded by its roots and can withstand fierce storms. One is fashioned by outside influences, the other by inner purposes.

· What would have happened if, in the Garden of Gethsemane, Jesus Christ had just folded under outside influences? They pressed him unmercifully to abandon his deep inner resolve to go to the cross. He agonized in resisting the humongous external pressure.

It would have been a lot easier to rouse his napping disciples, and say, *‘I’ve changed my mind. This is too much! Let’s get out of here while we still have a chance.’*

There would have been no cross, no forgiveness of sins or hope for us.

· The Apostle Peter wrote a letter to Christians in Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia and Bithynia who had a similar choice to make. Christians throughout the Roman Empire had become targets of official persecution.

They had to choose. Would they remain firm in their *inner commitment* to Jesus Christ? Or would they capitulate to *social pressures* to worship the Roman Emperor, as the law stipulated, and be pulled into the mainstream of the great Roman world system?

In his remarks Peter deals with the tension between these two forces: inner purpose and outside pressure.

13. *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?*

14. *But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.*

15. *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect,*

16. *keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

If you hold firmly to an inner purpose to do what is right, sooner or later someone out there will ridicule you and tell vicious lies about you.

1 Peter 3:13-16 shows you a couple ways to be sure of “Godspeed” as you move to the next phase of life

1. Watch your heart.
2. Watch your head.

I. WATCH YOUR HEART. 1 Peter 3:13-15a

In the Bible your heart is the part of you that relates to God. It’s your spiritual nerve center. It’s who you really are.

15. *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.*

So Peter urges them to do good eagerly and sincerely—with their whole heart.

13. *Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good?*

14. *But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. “Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.*

For much of my youth I did good. People used to say I was a good boy. But it wasn’t because I was watching my heart. I was protecting my hide.

Peter says, ‘*Do it from your heart. From within. Don’t let the outside influences control you. And if people abuse you and you suffer for doing what is right, God will bless you.*

God’s blessing lets you sleep peacefully at night--because your heart is right with God. So watch your heart.

· Then Peter says at the end of v.14: “*Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.*”

Don’t be intimidated.

Graduates, lots of people will try to intimidate you. As you go to College or to work in a company, you’re at the bottom of the totem pole. You will feel tremendous pressure to please people and to fit in.

Make a commitment to God to do right. Don’t compromise your standards. God will bless you.

It won’t be easy. But it’s necessary if you are a genuine follower of Jesus Christ.

15. *But in your hearts set apart Christ as Lord.*

Peter has just said, “*Do not fear what they fear; do not be frightened.*

If Jesus Christ is truly your Lord—in your heart—not just on your lips, you can resist that outside pressure to make the wrong choices.

A simple illustration can make the point. A submarine that plunges to depths of thousands of feet is subjected to tons of pressure—pressure that would squeeze your unprotected body to a bloody pulp. The pressure of so many atmospheres is so great that it can collapse the whole submarine, unless there is strength within that is equal to or greater than the force outside.

As a Christian in this world you are under tremendous pressure. John wrote ‘*We know that we are the children of God and that the whole world is under the control of the evil one/evil.*’ (1 John 5:19)

So watch your heart: ‘*...in your heart set apart Christ as Lord.*’ That’s how a child of God lives in an evil world.

II. WATCH YOUR HEAD. 1 Peter 3:15b-16

Use your mind.

15. *Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have.*

Peter insists that every Christian must be ready to give a reason/defense for the hope we have in Christ.

Be prepared to give a defense. The original term is *apologia*.

Our term apologetics comes from this. It means a reasoned defense of the Christian faith, or ‘an explanation that makes good sense.’

Are you equipped to handle the sincere questions of those who want to know why you have faith in Christ? How will you respond to the challenges of those who will try to discredit the faith of the Christian community? (‘you’ is plural--church, fellowship)

A young boy was asked if he was a Christian. The lad said he was. “How do you know?” He said, “I think it runs in our family.”

Be sure you can give sound reasons why you have a certain hope of eternal life through faith in Jesus Christ.

· And show proper respect to people who challenge you.

‘But do this with gentleness and respect, keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.’ (3:15b,16)

If we represent Jesus Christ in an unkind or argumentative way, we make our Lord unattractive. Unkindness shouts so loud people won’t hear what you say.

Peter says, Watch your head, and use your head.

Have you set apart Christ as Lord in your heart? If so, your inner purpose can resist any outside pressure. Don’t be intimidated. When you submit yourself to Jesus Christ in this way, you can resist the devil himself and he will flee from you.

So “Godspeed!