

Transcript

Paul H. Dixon:

Before me today, we not only have our largest graduating class in history, we have some of the finest young people in America and some of the finest who've ever graduated from Cedarville. Graduates with tremendous potential for their Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. A college or university commencement, is very special, a sort of rite of passage that comes on rare occasion, like a wedding, the birth of a child or a grandchild, the beginning of a new day for every one of these graduates. They have mixed emotions, they have all of the positive things that go with graduation, but also all of the fears and the changes that they're about to experience.

Paul H. Dixon:

Seniors you've chosen well, your verse is from a choice text. One of our trustees, as she went out the door yesterday after the trustee meeting, said, "It suddenly dawned on me. I graduated 10 years ago and we had the same text." I went back in my notes, this being my 20th commencement and Dr. Jeremiah, had invited me to speak that last year, his last graduation when it was announced that I would be president and that's why it's 20 and I looked in my notes and found that it was five years ago that the class chose Jeremiah 29:11. It's tough to find a greater verse for commencement, "For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."

Paul H. Dixon:

Jeremiah is writing from Jerusalem, he's writing to the surviving elders, priests, prophets, and people Nebuchadnezzar has carried into Babylon. They are in exile. It is a journey of 800 miles, they number approximately 4,000. Confusion reigns along the journey and after their arrival, they're taking up new lives in the midst of a pagan culture. They are saying, "Is there any hope?" "Is there any future?" And the word comes from God through His prophet, Jeremiah. "Yes. I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you not to harm you, plan to give you hope and plans to give you a future."

Paul H. Dixon:

Seniors, there's little difference. You're not being taken captive into a pagan culture, but I assure you, that culture out there is not waiting for you with open arms nor as a whole do they want anything to do with your value system. This world has changed in the past four years, that was evidence in the Oklahoma bombing. We'd never had such evident depravity in this land, on our soil in the history of our nation. This ghastly deed, at first we thought surely, some foreigner. The jury said, "No. Timothy McVeigh in the name of patriotism, an American, did that."

Paul H. Dixon:

America's Holocaust has not gotten any better during your four years, grows worse. We have a bunch of senators and congressmen and a president who don't even have the backbone to say, "We're not going to allow the continual practice of partial birth abortion." God give us some leaders out of this group who have a backbone, who have the courage to stand up and say, "Look, this is worse than what we fought for in the civil war and the abortion that is across the land in America today. And let's stand against it."

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Paul H. Dixon:

In your culture, the gays and the lesbians are out of the closet big time, so much so that they announce their coming out parties on a dying sitcom and make it the hit of the week. Can you believe what has happened in this nation of ours as we open our newspapers and magazines on a daily basis and the pressure that is upon everyone to accept this wretched, sinful, dishonoring lifestyle that the word of God says, is absolutely wrong. God help us to love these sinners, but God help us to hate this sin.

Audience:

Amen.

Paul H. Dixon:

Graduates, this is your world as you live the last 30 months of the 20th century and you are most definitely politically incorrect and thank God for it. Jeremiah speaks to you as you take your place in this corrupt pagan, God rejecting culture and his message, if I could condense it, is this. The text that Dr. Obi read, as he writes to these people and this pagan culture is, "Settle down for the long haul, bloom where you're planted, make the most of your opportunities, be good citizens, God is in control and the Creator of the universe has a plan for your life, wherever you choose to serve Him."

Paul H. Dixon:

May I especially say this? Build your families. I'll say it again, build your families. Now I understand that in the plan of God, it may be that some of you will never marry, but most will. Build your families for God, it's a great place to start in this pagan culture. It's foundational for us as Christians, our theme for this academic year, "Forming a foundation for the future" and as you know, I therefore chose to speak to you the last five months on the foundation of building a Godly family.

Paul H. Dixon:

You are definitely counterculture when it comes to this, the family is crucial to the strength of a nation. The ancient cultures of Egypt, Rome, and Greece follow a pattern. When they were at the peak of their power and glory, their families were strong, they were prized and highly valued. As the nation became individualistic, the family and society deteriorated and the same is true of us in America. Many of our social ills are related to the breakdown of the family.

Paul H. Dixon:

We survey our student body. Periodically, we do this survey, we try to compare where our students are in 1997 as to where they were in the last study in 1990, here's an amazing statistic. You want to know what kind of families are represented here as a whole and represented in this graduating class? 90% of the students at Cedarville College, live with their birth mother and their birth father, 90%. You talk about, "Counter culture" and that says we are committed, our college family, the generally as a whole, the people who support us and are around us, are committed to the traditional family and build those families in this pagan culture, if we're going to have a witness for our savior, until he comes to take us home.

Paul H. Dixon:

I congratulate you married students, I congratulate the many of you who are getting married this summer. I don't know how many of you are getting married today, would you believe it? Usually, every

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year there are some, there are some who are getting married next week. I know several that I sent them gifts for June the 21st and after you get married, have lots of kids and send them all to Cedarville College, you are our future.

Paul H. Dixon:

"I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Build your families. Number two, build your faith. The key to your success as a Cedarville College graduate is your faith. Matthew Henry said, "He that in the beginning, finished the heavens and the earth and all the hosts of both will finish all the blessings of both of His people. He'll give them not the expectation of their fears, nor the expectation of their families, but the expectation of their faith." The great lesson from Jeremiah, as you are in the midst of this pagan culture, God's in control. I hear Christians say, "oh! I'm not sure whether we ought to bring children into this world." "Why not? God's in control!" Jeremiah didn't say to those people in Babylon, don't have any kids, because it's a wicked day. He just said, "No, I'm in control." Build your faith, build on that saving faith that God has given you. Every one of you profess faith in Jesus Christ as your personal savior, you've experienced the grace of God in salvation.

Paul H. Dixon:

Many, many people here today have that experience, there was a time in your life when you knew you were a lost sinner and you came to grips with the fact that, Jesus Christ died on the cross, was placed in the tomb, arose from the dead and you invited Jesus Christ to come into your heart, forgive your sin and save your soul and take the hell out of your future and He did. But many here today, haven't. Now you live in this pagan culture, would you listen carefully, ladies and gentlemen who are not sure, you know the Lord. Just as the only hope for these graduates is God and His son Jesus Christ, that's your only hope. That's your only hope for today, for your family, for your future, for your life and that's your only hope for the future and our prayer is that you'll come to know Jesus Christ as your personal savior. "For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Build your faith on saving faith, on growing faith.

Paul H. Dixon:

Several of your parents talked to me last night, they were grateful to the college and expressed that and talked about how you've grown since you've been here and I said, "Well, you gave us some great material to work with," And it's not like what's happened in the last four years, has just been due to the faculty and the administration, the staff and the people here and your friends in the dormitories and your friends off campus. It's been all of us, parents, pastors, everyone contributing to the effort.

Paul H. Dixon:

We just had the Emmy awards a few days ago, Mr. Rogers received an award, neat guy, humble guy and when he stood up to receive the award, he said, "Think about the people who have meant the most in your life." He said, "Because the only reason I can accept this award, is because of the people who contributed to my life, that brings me to this time." Here's what I want you to do. Seniors. I'm going to give you 10 seconds and I want you to think of the five people, who contributed so much to you as a person that you are, where you are today, because of those five people. For 10 seconds, think who are they?

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Now I want you next week, to write a note to all five and say, "I was thinking of you during my graduation. Thanks for making it possible." I'd also like to recognize people here today that collectively have built into your lives. Later will recognize your parents and grandparents, but right now, I'd like for you to express appreciation to the trustees, administration, faculty, staff, Mrs. Dixon, who have built into your life and made this college possible. Would you do that seniors? And seated behind me is one person who's been building into students lives at Cedarville College for 44 years. Our Chancellor James T. Jeremiah.

Paul H. Dixon:

"Stand up bro! I will help you," "There you go," "There he is."

Paul H. Dixon:

A faith grows because of people. A faith grows because of [baby cries] don't let those kids bother you, those are future students at Cedarville College. Maybe that's why they're crying, I'm not sure. God has used some people in your lives, who aren't here. Steve [Willison 00:18:11], who would have been walking down the aisle and walking across the platform, goes home to be with the Lord, taken home this year in that auto accident. Nathan [Battaglia 00:18:23], fourth year engineering student. Taken home to be with the Lord with that surprising invasion of the bacteria in his heart. Don't ever forget Steve, don't ever forget Nathan and what they've contributed to your lives.

Paul H. Dixon:

When the day comes that you want to quit, think about them, they finished the course. Young people a growing faith means take quit out of your vocabulary. Don't quit on your spouse, don't quit on your parents, don't quit on your kids, don't quit on your friends, don't quit on your God and don't quit on yourself. Stay at it, that's a growing faith. I conclude with, as you build your faith, it be a conquering faith, not just saving and not just growing, but something that surpasses and goes beyond the norm.

Paul H. Dixon:

You remember, when our theme was pursuing a passion for purity? That's what we're talking about, that's surpassing. That means lifelong commitment to purity, it's a passion for so few today. I mean this morning's paper again, the debate ranges is the military making too much of adultery. God deliver us from this debate, don't we understand adultery is sin. It's terrible, and as the nation, we just keep trying to drop the barriers. You remember when the theme was building values today for tomorrow?

Paul H. Dixon:

A few days ago, Defense Secretary Bill Cohen, gave a commencement speech at the Air Force Academy and without mentioning Kelly Flynn, he said, "There are some who now suggest that the military is preaching Victorian values in the age of Aquarius, that our standards are unrealistic or even undesirable when contrasted with contemporary mores." I disagree. "To serve," listen to this, "To serve as America's guardians, you must uphold the highest standards of conduct in the world. Character, integrity, excellence, service, teamwork." And if that's true of America's military, how much truer is that of God's soldiers? God help you to be that kind of a soldier for Him. America's guardians for truth and for values, you must up hold the highest standards of conduct in this world for our God.

Paul H. Dixon:

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Anchorman Tom Brokaw said a few days ago at Connecticut's Fairfield University commencement, "It's easy to make a buck. It's tough to make a difference." Which reminded me of a story that Tony Campolo was told. It was in his church in the east, he attends a black church. There were 40 young people getting up, I gather at a commencement and, boy, they were so excited about their accomplishments from Juilliard, their recognitions and awards from Yale and I mean, the parents were out there just Amening, bless God. Look at our kids and the pastor got up and his only our brothers can do, he just shouted out at those kids after all of this recognition,

Paul H. Dixon:

"You got to die. They're going to put you in a coffin. They're going to dig a hole in the ground. They're going to put that coffin in the hole and you in it. They're going to put dirt on top of you and when they're done, they're going to go back to the church and eat potato salad."

Paul H. Dixon:

What did you leave behind? Did you leave a title or did you leave a testimony? There was Moses and there was Pharaoh and Pharaoh had the title ruler of the land, he left with only a title and Moses left a testimony. There was Daniel and King Nebuchadnezzar and Nebuchadnezzar had the title, but Daniel left the testimony and there was Elijah and Queen Jezebel and she had the title, but Elijah had the testimony. Graduating Seniors, titles don't mean zilch, testimonies for God when it's all over mean everything. It is truly as our theme for that academic year. I believe your freshman year said, "Christ above all." Yes, it's a pagan culture. God says, "I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Build your families, build your faith, leave a testimony and remember Christ is all we need. Would you sing it with me? (singing)

Paul H. Dixon:

Amen.

Audience:

(singing)