

"STUDENTS OF THE KING"
(Hebrews 6:1-3, 11-12)
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[East Cobb U.M.C.; 5-24-09]

-I-

1. Read Texts (MSG at 9:30am; NRSV at 11:00am): Hebrews 6:1-3, 11-12 and Pray.
2. Today is Graduate Sunday: a day for us to celebrate and recognize the achievements of all our graduates, but especially those graduating from high school and college.

A-Those of you who are graduates may not realize it, but if you're graduating from high school, you've spent nearly 40,000 hours learning for nearly 13 years to get to this point in your life, and our college graduates have spent over 52,000 hours in at least 17 years.

B-That's an awful lot of time spent learning and studying!

3. But did you know that if live to be an average age of 75, our College Graduates have about 51 years and 464,000 hours left in which to spend your life, and you High School Graduates have over 57 years and 500,000 hours left?

A-So what are you going to do with all of that time? Some of you may go on to pursue graduate degrees, while others may start a career/job, while still others of you may not know quite what to do.

B-Well, whatever you about continuing "formal" education, one thing I hope that you will I *not* do is assume that your days of learning are over.

1-To the contrary: whenever you graduate, your days of learning (*real* learning) – about life, about people, about yourself -- have most likely *only just begun*.

2-You see, in the best and greatest sense, we're all called to be "perpetual students" / "life-long learners" – to grow and mature by always being willing to learn new things, new ideas, and new ways of doing things from life itself.

-II-

4. And there's no better example of this than what we find in our own Christian faith.

A-You know, too often I often meet people who seem to think that Christianity is something that we can "graduate" from – an achievement that we can get a "spiritual" diploma for.

B-...The idea here being that if we can just have "*this*" particular spiritual experience, or go to "*that*" retreat, or attend "*this*" Crusade or Revival, then we've experienced the pinnacle of faith – we've "graduated" and don't need anything more!

C—And yet, just as life and learning don't *end* with graduation from school, so our Christianity does not and cannot end with certain religious experiences – no matter how dramatic or life-changing they may have been! ¹

5. If you were with us back in March for our series on God's grace, you may remember today's scripture reading in our discussion of "Sanctifying Grace" – as reminder, though, Verses 1-2 tell us... (MSG) "*The basic foundational truths [of our faith] are [already] in place....*" (NRSV) "...*NOT [to] lay again the foundation*" of basic things such as "*repentance,... faith,... instruction...*", etc.

A—In other words, when we accept Christ into our hearts, there *are* some *basics* we're supposed to learn, like the things he goes on to mention there.

B—And yet, he also says that *mature* Christians are to... (MSG) "*leave [behind] the preschool fingerpainting exercises on Christ and get on with the grand work of art. [To] grow up in Christ*"; (NRSV) "...*go on toward perfection, leaving behind [these] basic teaching[s] about Christ.*"

1—In other words, as we grow in our faith, we're *not* to stop with the basics, but to move *through them* on into deeper and deeper levels of faith/commitment.

2—In fact, we're to do what Verses 11-12 say... (MSG) "*extend the same intensity towards a full-bodied hope, and keep at it till the finish. Don't drag you're your feet. Be like those who stay the course with committed faith...*" (NRSV) "*show the same diligence so as to realize the full assurance of hope to the very end, so that you may not become sluggish, but imitators of those who through faith and patience inherit the promises.*"

6. Too often today we meet people who somehow think that they're mature in their faith *simply because* they were "saved" 20 years ago at a Billy Graham crusade – even though they may not have lived much of the Christian life *since then!*

A—Well, it's good that they had that experience, but biblically, Christian salvation is much more than just a one-time event – it consists of an ongoing, lifetime *relationship* with the living Christ.

1—You see, we can get a HS/College diploma that says "magna cum laude," or "summa cum laude," or simply "lawdy, lawdy I'm done!", but the *real* question that'll be asked of us in 20 years is NOT whether or not we got a diploma but: "*What have we done with our life since we got that diploma?*"

2—The same is true for our faith: the question is *NOT*... Were you saved 20 years ago? Or 10 years ago? Or even last year?

3–No. The *real* question is: are we “saved” now? today? this moment? ...What have we done with our faith *since* our “graduation” mountain top religious experience?

B–You see, the Bible teaches that *true* Christianity is NOT a static state that we achieve in a short period of time, but is instead a *relationship* that needs constant cultivation to remain fresh, vital, and alive.

C–And if we’re not doing things that *help* us to grow – things like worshiping with other Christians, sharing together in Bible Study, prayer, financial giving, and the receiving of Holy Communion – then we *can’t grow*.

7. Think back to the New Testament for just a moment.

A–What did Jesus call his followers? ...“the completed ones”? “the perfect ones”? “those who have it all together”? Or “those who never make mistakes”?

1–No. He called them “*disciples*” – that is: “*one who learns; a pupil; a student who later shares with others what they learn*”

2–In this sense, then, we who call ourselves “*disciples of Jesus Christ*” are in reality “*Students of the King*” – the Master (Jesus), whose Holy Spirit teaches us all we need to know about life.

B–In Matthew 28:19, Jesus gives us what’s often been called the “Great Commission” by telling us to “*go... and make disciples of all nations...*”

1–He didn’t say, “*Go and tell everyone they need a one-time conversion event.*”

2–He said, “*Go and make disciples*” = STUDENTS / life-long-learners. ²

C– [STORY OF TOUR GUIDE WHO DIED CLIMBING]

High in the Swiss Alps in Europe is a monument raised in honor of a faithful guide who perished while ascending a peak to rescue a stranded tourist. Inscribed on the memorial stone next to the guide’s name are the words: “*He Died Climbing.*”

1–Friends, the real question for us is NOT “*If you died tonight would you know you’d be in heaven?*”

2–No, the better question is that at the end of OUR lives as Christians, will it be said of us “*He/she died climbing...*” (i.e., closer to God)?

8. So let me ask: Are you “climbing” closer to God today? Or are you just resting on some spiritual “diploma” that you got sometime in the past?

A–Yes, it’s great to have “graduation” events and experiences, and we certainly need to celebrate these when they occur.

B–But just as it is for high school and college graduates, for the Christian, “graduation” (in whatever form it takes for us) is *only the beginning* of a life-long process of listening and learning from the Master teacher Himself.

C–It’s merely the *beginning* of us becoming **Students of the King**.

10. [PRAYER *...for all of us who call ourselves Christians to see ourselves as perpetual “Students / Disciples of the King.” For us to constantly be seeking new heights and new*]

ENDNOTES:

1. For example, sometimes I’ll meet Christians who seem to think of “accepting Christ” or “been saved/converted” in terms of a graduation ceremony that gets us into heaven – that conversion and “getting into heaven” is the goal or end of salvation. But while the Bible teaches us that “getting into heaven” IS a fringe benefit of salvation, it is *not* it’s primary goal. Oh, it’s a necessary first step, but like graduation, it’s just the *beginning* of the rest of our Christian life.

2. This means that our task as “disciples” who also share faith is NOT to convert everyone (that’s GOD’S business), but simply to offer the good news about Jesus Christ in order to get others started on their own journey of faith, and then let God do the rest.