

President Lockwood, faculty, honored and relieved grads, bankrupt parents and friends of Multnomah. First of all, let me congratulate the grads on finishing today. The world and even our personal lives are too often littered with unfinished projects, but you have completed your course of study, and for this you are to be commended. Let me also thank you for inviting me to this commencement, though I think this is probably the most difficult assignment a person can have. All--faculty, grads, friends--all have their own idea what a commencement address ought to be, and everyone's is different. I'm supposed to preach, yet be scholarly; quote others but not bore; be contemporary yet timeless; aim at the grads but not ignore others. I think there is only one thing about which there is agreement concerning a commencement address, and that is it must be short. I sometimes wonder if Michael the archangel could satisfy all the demands of an occasion like this. But where angels fear to tread, here I am running in!

Now I have lived a long time, not so long as Methuselah nor as his contemporary, but almost. With age come perspectives you don't have when you're young and experiences you can't have because you are young. Fifty one years ago this month I began my full time teaching ministry, so I do have a perspective that longevity gives. During these years I have heard many comm. addresses including a few of my own. And I confess I don't remember much about any of them. I don't want that to happen tonight, so I am going to emphasize only one point and it's this: Focus your life on things that are eternal. There are 2 reasons for saying this. First, simply because they are eternal in contrast to things of this life which are temporary, and, second, a knowledge of the future affects the present. In a book I read some years ago entitled the Christian Mind the author wrote: "A prime mark of the Christian mind is that it cultivates the eternal perspective...It is supernaturally oriented, and brings to bear upon earthly considerations the fact of Heaven and the fact of Hell...It sees this life as an inconclusive experience, preparing us for another; this world as a temporary place of refuge, not our true and final home."

In contrast, I have observed in this last half century an obvious and undesirable shift away from focusing on eternal things as believers to an increasing concern for our present comforts. In my seminary days the church I attended had an annual prophecy conference from which I learned a lot from some of the best teachers in the country. Even in the earlier years of my ministry I was often invited to a number of prophecy conferences in various churches. But that interest seems to have diminished in recent years. Announce a men's meeting, a women's retreat, a financial planning seminar, a time management seminar, a parenting seminar, but don't announce a Bible conference or you're dead. Christian magazines have fewer and fewer articles on prophecy. In 1935 the old Revelation magazine had 25 major articles on prophecy. In 1975 its successor, Eternity Magazine, had only 1 that entire year, and it warned against focusing too much attention on the second coming. When CT began it was unashamedly premillennial. Now it has shifted to a more inclusive and even an anti-premillennial stance. In a relatively recent issue those of us who hold to an imminent rapture were labeled a sect. Just last week a friend told me that in her Bible study class no one knew what "the blessed hope" was. A recent book, not by an evangelical, observed that today funerals tend to say less and less about the gospel, resurrection, heaven, and judgment while more and more focusing on the life of the deceased.

Of course something had to come along to fill the vacuum left by this diminution of interest in our heavenly hope. What filled it? An increased concern and focus on this present life and a desire to make it as comfortable as possible. This in turn generated concern about societal problems and a uniting with others who shared the same concerns no matter what their religious persuasions were. Sociology tended to submerge theology. Strange alliances were formed. These came to the fore in the 80s and 90s in relation to causes like abortion, prayer in the public schools, and general moral decay in society. But it also spilled over into a toleration of various non-Christian religions. Cooperation with other "nice" people concerned with the same issues in society began to blind even Christians to the absolute truth in the Bible that there is only one living and true God and only one way to heaven. An article by a senior editor of Christianity Today in May 1995 praised the "beauties" in other religions. "From Buddhists," the author wrote, "I learned to be more sensitive

to suffering. From Confucianists I learned to pay attention to my roots. With animists I have seen that the supernatural permeated every area of life. Moslems have awed me by their reverence for God, their prayer-surrounded life, and their focus on ethics. ...We need not fear these other religions. They are parts of cultural heritages that are gifts of God." The truth is that they are deceptions of Satan who transforms himself into an angel of light.

Perhaps the documents "Evangelicals and Catholics Together" in 1994 and "The Gift of Salvation" in 1998 were a kind of climax to this togetherness. It acknowledged yet-to-be resolved differences (small matters like the place of the sacraments, devotion to Mary, purgatory, etc.) but said that "on the ancient creeds and the core beliefs of Christianity we stand together." Not so. Certainly not on the core beliefs concerning the supreme and final authority of the Scriptures and justification by faith alone. Certainly there are born again Roman Catholics, and certainly it is often quite right to cooperate with those who differ theologically in standing for morality, but when the bases of cooperation for societal concerns seeks to be built on a common theological base, on common core beliefs, it becomes deceptive, and it can divert our attention from eternal things to temporary things. Focus your life on things that are eternal and always remember: it is better to be divided by truth than to be united in error.

This focus on this present life has made us feel that we need to provide more and more creature comforts for ourselves and our families. In 1949 only 13% of all mothers worked outside the home. In 1992 60% did. Why? In many cases to have more income to satisfy our ever expanding list of "needs." The first credit card ever was the Diners Club card issued in 1950. At first, it was only a promise to pay, but soon a credit line was added. Today Visa, Master Card, American Express, Discover are worldwide and the personal debt people owe is staggering as is the interest owed on that debt. Think in your own case how much more you could have contributed to the Lord's work had you not paid any credit card interest last year. Where your treasure is, there your heart is also, our Lord said. So the items charged on a credit card can often unmask where your heart truly is.

I would label today's culture this way: not postmodern or generation X, but a pop-culture. I mean, as the dictionary defines it, a popular culture often disseminated through the mass media. Pop-TV--whatever is popular, whether sex or family, is what is broadcast. Pop-advertising--you should have this because you deserve it. Pop-credit. How many credit cards do you have? Pop-church programs which are usually promoted with the word "exciting". Pop-music everywhere whether in secular or church venues. I'm not opposed to modern church music, but I see this generation being cut off from some of the greats of the past like Bernard of Clairvaux, Isaac Watts, Wesley, Fanny Crosby simply because we do not sing their words, and I see them not learning theological truths through music, because substantial words are being replaced by mantra-like incantations. Pop-psychology. Learn to love yourself, and build yourself up in self-esteem, self-awareness, self-discovery, and self-actualization. Pop-seminars with their slick formulas. Pop-goals. Pop-sermons. Everything made easy and reduced to appeal to the broadest group at the lowest common denominator.

Focus your life and energies on things that are eternal, for they will affect how you live the rest of your lives. In preparing for this occasion I was surprised to recall how many N.T. passages relate our knowledge of the future to our lives in the present. Listen to some of them.

Many of you probably have never sung this song: "This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through. My treasures are laid up somewhere beyond the blue. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, and I can't feel at home in this world anymore. O Lord you know I have no friend like you. If heaven's not my home then Lord what will I do. The angels beckon me from heaven's open door, and I can't feel at home in this world anymore." This doesn't express the sentiment of many believers today who would prefer to rewrite that last line "and I want to feel at home in this world more and more."

Focus your life and energies and money on things that are eternal, like the message of eternal salvation. Efforts to improve society will not save. Our commission is not, as some of our evangelical leaders are promoting, it is not to save America. It is to save Americans. Can you imagine the Apostle Paul traveling around the Roman Empire holding "God save Rome" rallies? Psychology may help harmonize you with whatever is discordant in your life, but it will not give

you eternal life. Doing good works, through better than doing evil ones, will not save. Speaking in tongues will not. Faithfully going to church will not. Deciding to let Christ control the years of your life will not either. But that believing that Christ died in our place and for our sins and that He rose bodily from the tomb will.

Now let me focus, grads, on some things that will not change for you during your lifetimes. First, you are a child of God. You will never be kicked out of that family or disowned by your heavenly Father. You can become a wayward child or one who honors his or her Father, but always you will be in the family. Second, you are a gifted child of God. Every one has at least one spiritual gift and probably more. These are to be used in whatever be your occupation in life to promote eternal things for the glory of God. So be active in the Lord's work whatever be your occupation. Third, you are an educated, gifted child of God. You will forget things you learned at Multnomah, but you cannot escape the impact that a Christian education has inevitably made on your life. This is a commencement and that includes a commencing of further education, and I don't necessarily mean formal. Read, read, read all your life. Keep learning. People are still asking basic questions about the Bible and the Christian life. And some will be looking to you as a graduate of a Multnomah for answers. Fourth, you are a gifted, educated child of God who has been allotted a specific number of days. Teach yourself to number your days and apply your heart to wisdom. If you are 20 and live to 70 you have 18,262 days left. If 30, 14,610. If 40, 10,957. If 50, 7,305. If 60, 3,652. If 70 you are running on fumes. I hope your ambition will always be to please your Savior all of those days. Commencement is only the completion of one chapter in your life. Most of you will live long enough to write other chapters. But the last chapter will be written at the judgment seat of Christ. Focus on that and let it guide your agenda in this life. Give yourselves to the Word of the Lord and the Lord of the Word, learning it and Him, living it and Him, and loving it and Him, all the days of your lives. God bless you grads. You'll need it.