

Ronald Reagan and the Graduating Class of 2004

Pastor Joe Fuiten, June 13, 2004

This past week our nation laid to rest our 40th President, Ronald Reagan. He died on the very day that the 2004 graduates of Cedar Park Christian High School were graduating. Today we are honoring graduates. I would like to draw upon elements of the life of President Reagan to illustrate what I would like to say to this year's graduates.

First, I am happy to report that there was no doubt as to his faith in Jesus Christ. We have his own testimony and the testimony of members of his own family. At the memorial service at the National Cathedral, a very clear testimony of faith in Jesus was given. In the audience were leaders from all over the world. I was happy that our current president made the case for eternal life in heaven. President Bush said...(play the "face to face" segment here).

I also appreciated the clear testimony given by Michael Reagan at the graveside in California as well as earlier. Michael Reagan said...(play graveside segment here).

In the end, this is the most important thing that can be said about your life. Whether you get a state funeral or are cremated with your ashes scattered and your memory on earth ignored, nothing is more important than knowing Jesus and going to heaven. If you don't go to heaven, it is the most terrible tragedy that can befall a person. Hebrews 9:27-28 speaks of the certainty of death and the means of salvation: *"Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face judgment, so Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him."*

Second, if eternity is the essential issue, then any measurement of our life before that time cannot appreciate who we are. During President Reagan's administration he was criticized for putting Pershing missiles in Europe, building up the military, and starting the star wars defense. Europeans thought of him as a warmonger, just as they think of Bush now. They said his tax cuts would ruin government and the economy. Now, even his former critics acknowledge that he was right in what he did. It took twenty years but eventually people came to see the wisdom of his course of action.

It will not always be popular to be a Christian. If some of you end up at secular colleges, you may begin to wonder if anybody else is a Christian or if being a Christian is really the right thing to do. You may well face harassment or opposition. You might even fail to get some honor or position you want because of your faith.

We are people of the long pull, even beyond this life. Death is certain and so is eternity. The Jesus we serve today is the Jesus we will see face to face. Not just the diseases that affect the mind cause us to see through a glass darkly. Life itself is often a haze and we do not know clearly what path to take. We may get pushed around from side to side but one thing is certain. If Jesus hangs on to us and we hang on to him we will arrive at our destination and be whole.

Third, we should not be afraid to make our case for truth but to remember the impact of a charitable spirit. I believe one of the main reasons that Ronald Reagan was so successful was that he was a kind human being. He could do legislative battle with guys like Tip O'Neil during the day and have fun with them during the evening. Even Hinkley, the man who tried to assassinate him, found kindness from Reagan. He wanted to meet with him and let him know that he was forgiven but the psychiatrists recommended against it.

I thought it was quite a powerful statement that Mikhail Gorbachev attended the funeral. They had once been on opposite's sides. The two most powerful adversaries maybe in all human

history eventually came together in no small measure because of the personal attitude of Ronald Reagan

Just because someone disagrees with us, is not any indicator of who they are. There can be honest differences of opinion. This principle applies all the way from business to marriage to reaching those who have spiritually lost their way.

In marriage one of the most fundamental principles is that you never launch nuclear bombs. You will acquire them very early on, maybe even before you get married. You know what it is that will destroy the other person. You know that if you get your back against the wall, you can launch that bomb and they will be destroyed and you will win that battle. In marriage, there will be times you will feel like it. The only problem is, it is impossible to live for long in a nuclear bomb-blast zone. The radiation will be so strong it will kill you. It is possible to win and still lose. We have to learn to fight so everybody wins.

I wonder if Christianity would do any better if Christians actually liked non-Christians. Are we going to do well if we say "I love you in the Lord, but I really can't stand you?" I don't know about you but I don't want to be loved in the Lord. I can handle being loved, but being loved in the Lord strikes me as a very odd thing.

On more than one occasion, the Apostle Paul's life was saved because of non-Christians.¹ He thought it was so important that he made it a qualification for ministry. You have to have a good reputation with outsiders.² I have learned in life if you like people, they will like you. Conversely, if you don't like them, it is almost impossible for them to like you. Furthermore, it is up to me to initiate the process.

A charitable spirit is not always easy. It is what Jesus displayed on the cross when he offered forgiveness. Even more, Jesus showed that spirit when he went to the cross.

Fourth, Ronald Reagan operated by an internal set of informed biblical values. It is not enough to have a conscience. It is necessary to have a biblically informed conscience. Very early in his political career it was clear that he was reading the Bible. While still governor he quoted from Ezekiel 38 and referred to the Soviets as the ones who would come from the North into Israel. When he made his famous "evil empire" speech, hardly anyone remembers the context. He said it to a group of Christians, evangelicals to be exact, and he talked about the necessity of saving men's souls.

"Yes, let us pray for the salvation of all of those who live in that totalitarian darkness -- pray they will discover the joy of knowing God. But until they do, let us be aware that while they preach the supremacy of the state, declare its omnipotence over individual man, and predict its eventual domination of all peoples on the Earth, they are the focus of evil in the modern world.

It was C. S. Lewis who, in his unforgettable "Screwtape Letters," wrote: "The greatest evil is not done now in those sordid 'dens of crime' that Dickens loved to paint. It is not even done in concentration camps and labor camps. In those we see its final result. But it is conceived and ordered (moved, seconded, carried and minuted) in clear, carpeted, warmed, and well-lighted offices, by quiet men with white collars and cut fingernails and smooth-shaven cheeks who do not need to raise their voice."

Well, because these "quiet men" do not "raise their voices," because they sometimes speak in soothing tones of brotherhood and peace, because, like other dictators before them,

¹ Acts 19:30-31 Paul wanted to appear before the crowd, but the disciples would not let him. Even some of the officials of the province, friends of Paul, sent him a message begging him not to venture into the theater.

² 1 Tim 3:7 He must also have a good reputation with outsiders, so that he will not fall into disgrace and into the devil's trap.

they're always making ``their final territorial demand," some would have us accept them at their word and accommodate ourselves to their aggressive impulses. But if history teaches anything, it teaches that simple-minded appeasement or wishful thinking about our adversaries is folly. It means the betrayal of our past, the squandering of our freedom.

*So, I urge you to speak out against those who would place the United States in a position of military and moral inferiority. You know, I've always believed that old Screwtop reserved his best efforts for those of you in the church. So, in your discussions of the nuclear freeze proposals, I urge you to beware the temptation of pride -- the temptation of blithely declaring yourselves above it all and label both sides equally at fault, to ignore the facts of history and the aggressive impulses of an **evil empire**, to simply call the arms race a giant misunderstanding and thereby remove yourself from the struggle between right and wrong and good and evil.*

I ask you to resist the attempts of those who would have you withhold your support for our efforts, this administration's efforts, to keep America strong and free, while we negotiate real and verifiable reductions in the world's nuclear arsenals and one day, with God's help, their total elimination.

While America's military strength is important, let me add here that I've always maintained that the struggle now going on for the world will never be decided by bombs or rockets, by armies or military might. The real crisis we face today is a spiritual one; at root, it is a test of moral will and faith.³

He may have been using the weapons and resources of government, diplomacy, and military force, but at its core he was doing the Lord's work. Government is to punish those who do evil and reward those who do good. That is their job to do and Reagan did it well.

He was concerned about the souls of men and women being raised under Godless communism. He wanted to do his part. My question is, what internal and biblical value guides your actions.

When you think about the world, how do these words of Jesus influence your actions? (Mark 16:15-16) "*Go into all the world and preach the good news to all creation. Whoever believes and is baptized will be saved, but whoever does not believe will be condemned.*"

When you think about raising a family, how do the words of Proverbs 22:6 impact you? "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it." Are your kids in Sunday School? Do you talk about these things to your kids like Ronald Reagan did with Michael Reagan? Do you make sure they get into the youth group and overcome the usual blocks to relationship with the ministry?

When you think about dating and who you might marry, does the Bible shape your ideas? Paul said in 2 Corinthians 6:14 "*Do not be yoked together with unbelievers. For what do righteousness and wickedness have in common? Or what fellowship can light have with darkness?*"

If you will read the Bible, and go to church, you will learn God's values. As you pray, you can make them your own. (Ps 119:105) "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path."

³ Annual Convention of the National Association of Evangelicals in Orlando, Florida March 8, 1983