

No Reserves, No Retreats, No Regrets¹

Matthew 16:24-26

2010 Commencement Address

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Introduction

Graduates, family, friends, faculty, staff. Once again I stand before you as your Dean and I want you to thank you because it is truly an honor to serve here, and it's been an honor to serve you. This is a bittersweet occasion in many ways. You parents look at your boys and girls here who are no longer boys and girls but men and women. Spouses, you've reached a milestone today in your marriage because you have done something difficult and important together. The faculty here say goodbye to another group of students whom we have grown to love. Graduates, you have made life-long friends here at Boyce, and your time as students together has come to an end. But today is not just a day of ending, but a day of beginnings. **Graduates**, today you look forward with *hope* in a God who has great deeds in store for you after you leave this place.

Graduates, as we celebrate your commencement today, I want to take you back to another graduation—one that took place almost 100 years ago. At that time, there was a young man graduating from college—a man not unlike some of you. He felt the call of God on his life to be a missionary, and he was determined to preach the gospel to the Muslim Kansu people in Northwest China. But unlike most of you, this young man was fabulously wealthy. His name was William Borden, and at the beginning of the 20th century, he was the heir to the Borden Dairy estate.

The Legacy of William Borden

When Borden had graduated high school in 1904, his parents sent him as a 16-year-old on a trip around the world. As Borden travelled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the throngs of lost and hurting people he encountered. Because of what he experienced on this trip, he wrote home about his "*desire to be a missionary.*"

As you can imagine, many people in Borden's life had a difficult time coping with his decision. One of his friends expressed openly his astonishment that Borden was "*throwing himself away as a missionary.*" Here was the question that everyone was asking. How could a person with such tremendous financial resources just leave it all behind? In response, Borden wrote two words in the back of his Bible: "No Reserves." Meaning, Borden would not hold anything back

¹ Three sources were helpful in compiling the historical sketch of William Borden's life: Mrs. Howard Taylor, *Borden of Yale* (Minneapolis: Bethany House, 1988); John Hinkson, "Bill Borden: Challenge to a Consecrated Life," *The Yale Standard*, accessed online (May 6, 2010): <http://yalestandard.com/billborden.aspx>; "No Reserves. No Retreats. No Regrets." accessed online (May 6, 2010): <http://home.snu.edu/~HCULBERT/regret.htm>. I relied heavily on the last essay, even adopting much of the wording from the narrative provided there.

from Christ. There would not be any resource or talent that would be saved-up for safe-keeping. None of his wealth and fortune would be his own. It would all belong to Christ. *No Reserves*.

And that was exactly how Borden lived during college as he prepared for his mission to China. He arrived at Yale University in 1905 trying to look the part of an ordinary freshman. It wasn't long, however, before his classmates noticed something different about him, but it wasn't that he had a lot of money. One of them wrote,

“He came to college far ahead, spiritually, of any of us. He had already given his heart in full surrender to Christ and had really done it. We who were his classmates learned to lean on him and find in him a strength that was solid as a rock, just because of this settled purpose and consecration.”

It was during this time that Borden made an entry in his personal journal that defined what his classmates were seeing in him. He wrote this:

“Say ‘no’ to self and ‘yes’ to Jesus every time.”

Borden believed that Christ had *purchased* him and that therefore Christ *owned* him. So God turned Borden's time at Yale into four years of fruitful ministry. In his first year at Yale, Borden began something that transformed the campus. With just a handful of classmates, he started a morning prayer and bible study group. By the end of the year, there were 150 students meeting for bible study and prayer. By the time he graduated, there were 1,000 of Yale's 1,300 students meeting in these groups.

In the middle of this work, Borden was a relentless evangelist—going after the most wayward Yalies to bring them to Christ. Borden's ministry went beyond Yale's campus. Borden cared for widows, orphans, and the disabled of New Haven. He rescued drunks from the streets of the city. To try to rehabilitate them, he founded what became known as the Yale Hope Mission. One of Borden's friends wrote that,

“He might often be found in the lower parts of the city at night, on the street, in a cheap lodging house or some restaurant to which he had taken a poor hungry fellow to feed him, seeking to lead men to Christ.”

Upon graduation, Borden turned down lucrative job-offers. In his Bible he wrote two more words: *“No retreats.”* Borden would not be turned back from what God had called him to do. He would only press forward in his pursuit of Christ. And there would indeed be *No Retreats*.

After finishing his ministry studies at Princeton Theological Seminary, Borden finally sailed for China. Because he was to work with Muslims, he stopped first in Cairo, Egypt so that he could learn Arabic. While in Cairo, he contracted cerebral meningitis. Within a month, the 25 year old Borden was dead. Word spread quickly of his death as the story was carried in nearly every major newspaper in the United States. In her introduction to his biography, Mary Taylor wrote this about his death:

“It was as though a wave of sorrow went round the world. . . for Borden not only gave his wealth, but himself, in a way so joyous and natural that it was manifestly a privilege rather than a sacrifice.”

After Borden died, they found his Bible and that he had written two more words underneath “No reserves” and “No retreats.” As he lay dying he wrote this: “No regrets.” Whereas the world and even some of his friends looked on his life as wasted, Borden had come to a different conclusion even as he lay dying—No regrets.

And so this is the legacy of the great Borden of Yale: No reserves, No retreats, No regrets. Graduates, today we send you forth with the prayer that you would follow hard after Christ so that this might be your legacy as well: No reserves, No retreats, No regrets. That you would hold nothing back from Christ (No reserves). That you would let nothing turn you back from following Christ wherever he may lead you (No retreats). That you would count it all joy to lose everything for Christ (No regrets).

The Disciple of Jesus

The question is, how do you do that? How do you leave this graduation with the same determination with which Borden left his? How did Borden do it? How does a man—who has everything and then loses it and then dies—come to the end of his life with no regrets?

He didn’t do it by sowing his wild oats in the years of his youth. He didn’t do it by hedging his bets and keeping a financial safety net under him. He didn’t do it by living a cloistered life, cut-off from the tragedies of humanity. He didn’t do it by investing his life in building his own evangelical celebrity. He did it by believing what Jesus said in **Matthew 16:24-26**:

²⁴ *If anyone wishes to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me.*

²⁵ *For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it.* ²⁶ *For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world, and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?*

As we send you out from Boyce College, this faculty that has poured their lives into yours does not send you out to follow your dreams. We send you out to follow Christ. And to find that in truth all of your dreams can only be fulfilled in Him.

Christ is calling you to at least two things in this text. He is calling you to do something and to believe something.

1. What He’s calling you to do is to follow Him (v. 24). But following Him means more than just being a superficial admirer of this man Jesus. Following Jesus means denying yourself, your agenda, your plans, your ideas about what’s best for you. It means denying your fallen love for the world and its lusts which are passing away. It means denying your need to well-liked by everyone.

In fact Jesus says, it means taking up your cross to follow him. When Jesus says *take up your cross* he's not using a figure of speech like we do about daily annoyances in life (like "driving this crummy car is my cross to bear"). No, when Jesus said take up your cross, He meant it literally. Jesus was on His way to death on the cross, and He calls his disciples to follow him there. In short, discipleship means **being willing to go to the death for Jesus**. That you would hold everything in this world so loosely that even if it cost you your life, you would follow Him. We are sending you out today to follow Him in this way.

But Jesus doesn't leave it there. Because the main point of this text is not what Jesus has called us to do but what Jesus has done for us. We can't do what He's called us to do unless we have totally entrusted ourselves to what He has done for us.

2. What He's calling you to believe is the gospel (v. 25). The gospel is implied in the divine calculus of these words:

"For whoever wishes to save his life shall lose it; but whoever loses his life for My sake shall find it."

Meaning this. The gospel teaches that Christ was crucified and raised for sinners such that whoever believes in Him will not perish but have eternal life.

If you don't believe that, then you will spend the rest of your days trying to preserve your life, and if you do that you will lose your life forever. But if this gospel is true and you believe in Him who made it true, then you can't lose your life. No matter what gets thrown at you in this life—even if you follow Jesus to the death—no one can take your life from you. Jesus has stored up such glory for you such that the suffering of this present life isn't worthy to be compared to the glory that is to be revealed in us (**Romans 8:18**). So Christ is calling you to follow Him, but to do that you must hold fast to Him in faith.

Conclusion

Graduates, as you leave this place, we want you strong and faithful as you go into God's field. If there is a legacy for Boyce College in your life, let it be this. That here was the place that you learned that all you need is Christ. If you have Him, you have everything. To the end that God might build a legacy in you of **No reserves, No retreats, No regrets**.