

God Will Get You to Your Destiny

By Bobby Schuller

Now unfortunately I have actually had the flu the last three days, so all day Thursday, Friday and Saturday I was sick in bed. And I put together a little something today. I emailed the team last night with some slides, but today I'm really going to be speaking more from the heart, meaning that I haven't prepared as much as I normally am, so have a bit of grace with me. But I really just want to speak from the heart.

I want to begin as we've been in this series of Advent, Advent is a time in which you're waiting for something. It's a time that we acknowledge that all of us in the human condition are in a weird place of waiting and we don't quite always know what it is that we're waiting for. And so Advent means the arrival. It means that that thing you've been waiting for has come.

And so for us, Advent becomes a time in which we build up within ourselves hope; that Jesus himself becomes a symbol and the actual reality of all the things that we hope for. And that as we wait in the milieu of life, the suffering of sickness, or poverty, or the other challenges that we face, that in the midst of all of that we serve the kind of God who breaks in the darkness. As J.R. Tolkien, we learned a new word a few weeks ago: euchatastrophe. That is that at the last second of the last minute of the last hour, somehow God tends to break through and bring

us the miracle we need. So Advent is a time of training into our soul rhythms and a spirit of hope.

And so there are four promises I wrote down that I wanted to talk about; four promises of Advent. And we're talking about the third promise today. And the third promise is this: God will get you to your destiny. God will get you to your destiny. Today I want to talk about the idea that although all of us have a calling in God, too often we're focused on our calling and not our character and that if you focus on your character, God will focus on your calling.

There is a huge looming fear in all people that well when it's all said and done, I didn't do anything with my life that truly mattered. Almost all of us live with a daily fear that my life won't matter; that I need to do something spectacular. And this is a big challenge and it seems like the wealthier our nations become, the more this existential question becomes a major issue for us.

And so I just want to begin by saying this: in the kingdom of God, no matter what you accomplish, your life matters. Can we just say that? That no matter what you do, no matter what trophies you have on the wall, no matter what you can say at your retirement party, or even what you can say on your deathbed, no matter what you accomplish, your life matters. Your life matters because you are loved by God and that's very good news.

And too often, we think that we have to earn something to make our lives worth anything. So many of us, we're so scared that our life's not going to matter, and it does. It always matters.

There is this modern thing that says do something great with your life. And you should. You should do something great with your life. But when you do something great with your life, it doesn't make your life worth more.

There's a great book called "The Denial of Death" written in the 1970's by a guy named Ernest Becker. And Ernest Becker had this idea. He was psychologist and a philosopher. His book won the Pulitzer Prize. And he had this idea that most of mankind was obsessed with building symbols and stories to construct in their own lives a sense of immortality. That underneath the surface for almost every human being was this looming, and he used the word dread; this ongoing fear that I'm going to die someday. I'm so afraid of dying. And that a lot of civilization was built around constructing essentially a sense of immortality; that even though I will die, my name will carry on, or my death will have meaning. He called this journey for the human being "the hero project." That all of us have this little hero project that if we can build out of our lives a sense heroism, well then our lives are going to matter. And he says that this is a problem because what you're doing is actually trying to deny and distract yourself from the idea that someday you're going to die. This is a bit dark, isn't it? It gets better, I promise.

So he believed that much, if not most pathology was rooted in this deep sense of dread, this fear of death that every single human being has. And he was working off of Kierkegaard and he said ‘the only time you can truly be healthy is when you abandon this hero project and embrace faith, and that faith, that I’m going to live on beyond this life, that that’s the only hope that truly makes you healthy.’ And the irony about this book was that Earnest Becker himself was Jewish, but he was agnostic and he sort of laments at the end of the book, “but I don’t have that faith.”

And I think in our modern world, science is trying to help in this role of giving meaning, but they’re not doing a very good job. And he basically said, “I don’t think they’re going to accomplish helping give meaning to people who don’t believe in an afterlife.” And that’s kind of how it ends. As a digression, by the way, Earnest Becker later on gets in a written conversation with a youth pastor who actually ends up sort of converting him to Orthodox Judaism. I don’t know if he’s Orthodox, but he came to a deep faith in his Jewish roots, and so he had some kind of faith when he died.

But I guess I just want to begin there because I think many Christians who forget about the truth of heaven, and the ceaselessness of the soul, and the fact that regardless of what you accomplish, your life matters; that very often we fall into the hero project trap. That many of us, we don’t truly have faith in God, faith in heaven, and so for many of

us, we want to do great things not for others, we want to do great things not to benefit the world truly, but in order to build our hero project; in order to distract ourselves from a looming fear of death. And I just want to challenge you that this is not the role for Christians; that Christians should not be building a hero project; that we should do great things and we should actually be heroes, but not for ourselves, and not to build some kind of symbolic immortality. We know that there is a heaven, and we know God is faithful, and we know he is our father, and just like any father wouldn't abandon his kids, we know God won't abandon us.

Amen?

The more you can build that knowledge into your soul that you're a ceaseless being with an eternal destiny in God's good universe, as Dallas Willard said, the less you worry about always doing something spectacular and fantastic. That's a big concern, isn't it? I mean I just feel that so many people are so worried that I'm going to die and my life is not going to matter. And I just think about all the good people in the past who knew the Lord that had simple lives. That were farmers, or they worked the same job all of their lives, but they were faithful to the gospel, and they knew Jesus, and they loved the Lord. Did their lives matter? Of course they did. Every life matters. And guess what: not all of us are going to be Julius Caesar, or Brad Pitt, or the President of the United States, okay? There's only a handful of people in history are going to do that, and in the kingdom of God, they're the lowest. That's what Jesus

teaches us. That if you want to be the greatest, you become a servant; that you become humble and you become like Jesus. And there will be a day when we get to heaven that we'll see that that makes sense.

And so I just want to begin by saying don't worry. Your life matters, not because of what you do. Your life matters because you're a human being and you're loved by God. You're treasured. All right, can we just establish that? Okay. I don't mean to hammer it home, but I just want to say this: on that one point, you know, I just sang here with Haven. Do you think I love Haven more because she sang with me? Do any of you who are parents love your kids more when they do cool things? No! You're proud of them, you think it's great, you applaud them, but do you love them more? Absolutely not. God does not value you or love you more because of your trophies.

So let's talk about calling, okay? But all of us do have a calling and I just want to say four things before I actually get into the text; four things about reflections on calling. Number one, I just want to say that all of us have more than one calling. All of us have more than one calling. We always think that there's this one great thing we're supposed to do in life. I'm supposed to write a best-selling novel. I'm supposed to become the senator of California. You come up with these ideas of things that... these great things that it's going to say on your grave or whatever, but let me just tell you that all of us have multiple callings all the time that God calls us to do this, and later he calls us to do that.

Think about Jesus. We always think that Jesus had one calling, but he didn't really start his ministry until he was thirty. Jesus as a child was a faithful student. And then later he was a faithful carpenter and he'd build things and he had to work with people constantly. And all of that time God was preparing him for the next calling, which was to be a rabbi.

And even then, think about Jesus. He had twelve disciples. He's from a little Podunk part of the empire that nobody really cared about. He wasn't even from Jerusalem. He was from like the northern outskirts. But that was his calling and God used those things for major, major.. obviously to change the whole world. So you never have just one calling.

Number two: every calling comes to an end. This is maybe one of the saddest things because for many of us, when we're doing what God has called us to do, we say I'm doing what I was born to do, sometimes it suddenly comes to an end. We get fired, or we get an injury or sick, or divorced or some twist happens in the plot and we just weren't expecting that and we think but that's what I was called to do. How could God let this happen? But every calling comes to an end. No matter where you are in life, you are in a season and seasons come and seasons go. And that should give you hope because if you're in a place of sort of an in-betweenness, well God still has another calling for you.

Number three, and I already said this, but your calling is not your identity. You know I may be a pastor, and that's what I'm called to do at

this time, but someday I may not be a pastor. And that's not who I am. If what we do vocationally or what we do for a living becomes a part of our identity, then our soul is on a roller coaster because if that thing gets taken away from us, we lose our sense of who we are. And so our life becomes fragmented as we try and search for a new identity.

The one thing that will never change in your life is that you are loved. That God loves you, will never stop loving you, and there's nothing you can do to change that. That is the constant. And if our lives are rooted in that truth, we will have a deep sense of peace and joy in everything else we do. Amen?

Number four and this is the thing I really want you to hear: if you're alive, you have a calling. If you are alive, you have a calling. I just want to say this. You didn't miss out on your calling. And you say you don't understand, I've been given a week to live. You didn't miss out on your calling. You don't understand, I went through a divorce. You didn't miss out on your calling. You don't understand, I kind of feel like I've lost my faith, I don't know where I'm going. You didn't miss out on your calling. You have a calling right now. God's calling you to do something. It doesn't matter how old you are, sick, poor, uneducated, young, you have a calling.

Look, there's nothing more inspiring than seeing people at the end of their rope pursuing knowledge, pursuing growth, and pursuing God's best for others. I remember Dennis Prager was telling a story about how

he used to visit hospice and he said there's nothing more inspiring than going around seeing these people who were on their death bed and they were encouraging one another, they were writing letters, they were sitting there reading the newspaper. People who love to learn. These are people, I think, who had a love for knowledge, and might even be people who understood if I've got a day left, I'm going to use it. Look, if you're alive, you're alive for a reason. If you're alive, you have a calling, and that's very, very good news.

One of my favorite movies that came out last year was this movie "The Intern." It was like with Robert De Niro, and he's this retired guy. He did really well in his corporate world, and it begins with him in retirement. And he says, you know, I've done everything. I've done Chinese classes, I've done dating, I've done golfing, I've done yoga, I've done swing dancing, and he said now I'm just bored to death. And finally this guy, in this story, he goes back to this big firm to be the intern, to be the guy at the bottom of the rung, and plot twist here, the narrative is that he's eventually used to coach the CEO of a company. So he's sort of used in this narrative. He comes in at the very bottom just to be a servant, but he realizes he's not at the end of his rope.

Many of you, like you're retired and you might find out like.. you just feel like you're bored, and maybe you're trying to have more fun or travel more, and that's great, but I just want to encourage you even if you're retired, you still have a calling. And although this is a good time to

have fun, and to be with your grandkids, and those types of things, you're at the best peak of your life when it comes to knowledge. You know more now than you've ever known. You're in the perfect place for God to use you in phenomenal ways. That no matter how old you are you have a calling.

I remember when I was in college there was this guy and he decided that everyone at this home near our school, he's like well they still have a purpose. And he went down there and he created a prayer team. And he started taking these prayer requests that would come in to ORU from all around the world, and he'd bring them in. And this table of saints would sit around this table and they would pray by faith with power every day, spiritually breaking chains in the lives of others; that even though they weren't physically able to leave that space, God was using them to break spiritual chains. They believed, and I believe, that no matter who you are, if you're alive, you have a calling. Believe it. Believe it.

So you say well what is my calling? I just say I don't know, I don't know. Can't help you there. God knows and he'll show you, if you listen. But I want to say this: don't worry about it. Don't worry about your calling. Worry about your character. If you focus on your character, God will focus on your calling. If you work on being a Jesus kind of person, you'll have so much opportunity come to you you'll have to shake it away with a stick. In fact, people who have built into themselves the character

of Christ, their biggest challenge is saying no to all of the people that want help from them. If you become a Jesus kind of person, you'll automatically be a healing presence everywhere you go, and people will want more from you, and then you're going to have to practice boundaries. You're not going to be asking God what's my calling, you're going to be thinking stop calling me to so much stuff! I have to say no!

If you focus on your character, God will focus on your calling. If you focus on your character, God will focus on your calling. Forget about your calling. Don't worry about it. Worry about what kind of a person you want to be and God will prepare you for the next season of purpose in your life. Amen? I'm basing this off of the story; I finally get to the scripture at the end of my sermon.

There's this great Advent story when God is preparing the way for Jesus. And it's this old priest named Zachariah. Zachariah is an old man and his wife, Elizabeth, is an old woman. And he has worked in this temple forever. They have probably maybe a thousand priests working in this temple and they're always taking turns. And what happens is every day, each team gets to roll the dice and one person from that group gets to go and burn incense. If a priest is lucky, he will burn incense in a forty year period once in his life.

And here's Zachariah. He's in the temple and the lots are cast and it comes to him - once in a lifetime opportunity. Thousands of people

turn to look at him and he ascends the stairs to go into the holy place of the temple. And there he goes to burn incense before the Lord.

And as he's going in, it's like imagine being Zachariah. This is a once in a lifetime opportunity; an amazing experience. I've waited my whole life. I'm an old man. I've seen thousands of priests do this. It's finally my turn. As he's walking up you can hear people outside singing and saying things, and you might hear a roar. I mean it's this really intense spiritual moment. I can't imagine being more expectant for God to do something.

And he steps in and he goes in, and of course there is an angel standing waiting for him. He says Zachariah I have a message for you. You're going to have a son and his name's going to be John. This is the foretelling, by the way, of John the Baptist. John the Baptist was the man who went before Jesus and prepared the way; a super important character in the story of the gospels and the story of Jesus. And he says to Zachariah you're going to have this son and his name will be John. And Zachariah says, kind of like, he's this old Jewish guy and he's like, I don't know how that can be. I'm pretty old. You know? And my wife, she's pretty old too, I don't know.

And the funny thing about the story is like now I'm putting this into the story, but I assume when I'm reading this text, that this is a character issue for Zachariah. The scriptures say that Zachariah and Elizabeth were righteous people; that they were good in God's eyes; that

they did what was right. But you kind of imagine that there's this doubt; that there's this sort of response of Zachariah to speak doubt into something. I think if it's a once in a lifetime chance that I roll the dice, a one out of a thousand that I'm going to go into the temple, then when I go into the temple there's an angel there, and the angel says something and I'm like, I don't know, it just doesn't seem likely. I don't know. It seems like there might be a character issue there.

And so what I think, and I'm putting this into the text, but I think the character issue is cynicism. I think he's a cynic. I think he's an old man. He's probably been disappointed and he probably wanted a kid and he's been shooting it down. And so what happens in the story? The angel mutes him. He mutes him until his son is born. The first thing he's able to say is his name will be John.

And the reason I just wanted to just finish with this story is this: God actually took care of Zachariah's character, his cynicism issue so that he could take care of his calling. All of that to simply say, friends, focus on your character and God will get you to you your calling. Look at the habits in your life, the little things, and devote your life to becoming more like Jesus, to becoming a Sermon on the Mount kind of person. Do everything you can to live and be more like Jesus and God will get you to your calling.

And today I just want to say you can stop worrying about it. Don't worry about your calling, worry about your character. And I'll just finish.

You may have seen this quote before; one quote from Dallas Willard at the end. This is his prayer: “Lord, don’t give me more success than my character can handle.” If that’s a hard prayer to pray, congratulations, you’re a human being. It’s hard for all of us to pray that but the harder it is for you to pray, the more you need to focus on your character, and the less you need to focus on succeeding. If you focus on your character, God will prepare you for your destiny. Don’t worry about your destiny. God’s going to get you there and it is good. And if you trust in the name of Jesus, your future is always bright. Even when your present is dark, if you trust in the chain breaking name of Jesus Christ, you will get to your good destiny. I promise. You don’t have to worry. Focus on your character. Become more like Jesus and God will get you where you need to be. Amen?

All right would you pray with me? In Jesus’ name, Lord, we pray that you’d forgive us of our sins, that you’d renew us and that you’d make us Jesus kind of people. I pray, Father that you’d fill us with your Holy Spirit; you’d help us to understand that this is your world, and to give us faith that no matter what, we don’t have to worry; that you want us to do great things. But I pray that you’d prepare our hearts and minds so that when those great things come, we have the character to endure them and fulfill them. Lord, we love you in Jesus’ name, amen.