

Becoming All We Were Meant to Be

By Tony Campolo

Pastor Bobby welcomes Tony Campolo to The Hour of Power. Tony is Professor Emeritus of Sociology at Eastern University, a former faculty member at the University of Pennsylvania, and the founder and president of the Evangelical Association for the Promotion of Education. He is the author of more than 35 books. Tony is one of the founders of the Red Letter Christian movement and blogs regularly at his website redletterchristians.org. Today, Tony brings the message, "Becoming All We Were Meant to Be."

Good to be here. At my age, it's good to be anywhere. And I'm thrilled with the music of the morning. Are we not all thrilled? Having appreciated the singing of Patrick, I want to call your attention to the conductor Marc, Irene, and the pianist and organist Zeljko. They deserve a round of applause.

I want to give a very important word of praise to Bobby Schuller and Hannah Schuller, who together have continued the legacy of the Hour of Power. There is a nuance to this ministry that you don't find in some other ministries. There has been a positive dimension to this ministry tracing back to the days of Robert Schuller, who founded the Hour of Power. An incredible message he had, and continues to have. He was criticized by some because he didn't do enough condemning. I've heard people say he doesn't come down hard on sinners. I mentioned that to him once, and he said well, I'm not like Jonathan Edwards, who

preached sinners in the hands of an angry God. I have chosen to preach about sinners in the hands of a loving God. There's a big difference between those two messages. And Robert Schuller emphasized the latter, rather than the former. Now there's a place for condemnation, but when we do our condemning, we should do it with tears in our eyes and not with glee. And there's too much of that going on today.

Jesus was sent into the world by His father. I'm quoting from the third chapter of John, not to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved. We've got a God who comes with mercy and grace and welcomes you no matter who you are or what you've done. There's so much condemning going on in the world today. I mean there are Christians who are condemning Muslims, there are Muslims that are condemning Christians, there are people who condemn the police, there are people who condemn immigrants. It goes on and on, and over the last several weeks, there've been Republicans who have condemned the Democrats who have screwed up their lives, and there have been Democrats that have screwed up their lives indeed, but Republicans condemn the Democrats, the Democrats condemn the Republicans, and I'm tired of it all. I'm tired of this condemnation going back and forth, back and forth.

And that's why I thrive on this verse. "There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus." Read Romans the 8th chapter, the first verse. No condemnation to those who are in Christ

Jesus. There's so much condemning going on and sadly, there's a lot of condemning that goes on by the church. Jesus didn't come to condemn with one exception. He did condemn religious people who condemned. If you don't believe me, read the 22nd, 23rd chapters of Matthew. Woe unto you, Pharisees, who lay heavy guilt trips on people and do nothing to lift those burdens. Woe unto you. Woe unto you who make people feel like trash. When I come to this service, this church, to this tradition of the Hour of Power, I come to be among people who do not put people down but lift people up. As I said, there is a place for condemnation, I guess, but it should be done with tears in our eyes.

A new preacher came to this town and everybody was talking about how great he was, how much better he was than the former preacher. And so the question was asked, why is this preacher so much better than the former preacher? The answer was our former preacher told us that we were doomed and condemned unless we repented, we would go to hell. Well, what does this new preacher preach? That we are condemned and unless we repent, we will go to hell. The inquirer said I don't see the difference. He said this man does it with tears in his eyes. With tears in his eyes.

Perhaps there is a place where we have to say the negative, but it should create pain within us. The shortest verse in the bible was what – Jesus wept. He looked over Jerusalem and said oh Jerusalem, Jerusalem, how often would I have gathered thee together as a hen gathers

a brood, but you would not come. He wept over the failures of others. He did not rejoice in the failures of others.

Religious people need to learn something from Solzhenitsyn, the great Russian author. He said, "The line that separates good from evil does not separate one group of people from another group of people. Instead, it's a line that runs right down the middle of every one of us." And if you say you have no sin, says the scripture, you deceive yourself. You deceive yourself. We come to Galatians, the sixth chapter, the first verse, it says this: brothers and sisters, if you see someone who is overtaken in a fault, you who are spiritual restore such a one in the spirit of meekness, lest thou also be tempted. Be careful when you condemn for Jesus said with what judgment you judge, ye shall be judged. We are called to lift people up, to put them back together again.

This service, this church, this ministry that is continued on by Bobby and Hannah is a ministry in which we say there's a power, there's a wonder working power in Jesus Christ. A power that comes to restore. But you know when we talk about condemnation the most severe condemners are people like ourselves who condemn ourselves. So many of us, myself included, get down on ourselves. We know our own flaws, we know our own shortcomings, we know our own hypocrisies. I know mine. I told my wife when I prepared this sermon, this is a sermon I'm going to have to go home and listen to. I really need this message that there is now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus.

A woman caught in adultery, you know this story from the scripture. The religious leaders come around and gather and want to stone her to death. Jesus says to these religious, holier than thou judges: which of you is without sin? Let him throw the first stone. One by one they sneak away. He was writing in the dirt. I don't know what He was writing. I have a feeling He was writing the names of people and then with an equal sign citing their sins. One by one they leave. And finally they're all gone and Jesus looks at the woman and says woman, where are thine accusers? Where are those who have come to condemn you? She says they're all gone. And He says neither do I accuse you. Neither do I condemn you. Now go your way. And then He puts this on: and sin no more. In the affirmation of the woman, He simultaneously reminds her that she has an obligation to live a righteous life and simply not go back to where she was, but to move forward and live a righteous life. Self condemnation.

But nobody did the condemning of self better than the Apostle Paul. Read the seventh chapter of Romans where he calls himself a chief of sinners, where he looks at himself and this verse, man I feel this verse. When he wrote it, he was thinking of me. "The things that I shouldn't do, I end up doing. The things that I want to do, I don't do. Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me from this body of sin?" I can just imagine the Apostle Paul applying for admittance at a theological seminary and the admissions counselor saying tell me about yourself, and him saying,

which one of us? You mean there's more than one of you? Yes. There's an old me and a new me. Do these two selves have different names? Yes. The old me was named Saul, the new me is named Paul. Saul and Paul – do they get along with each other? They hate each other. The thing that Saul wants to do, Paul doesn't want to do. What Paul wants to do, Saul doesn't want to do. Oh wretched man that I am who shall deliver me?

People of God, we're all like that. We're all dual personalities. Those who go to see the Star War movies; the Star War movies say well there's a dark side to every one of us, and there's a bright side to every one of us. And Jesus came into the world to empower us, to destroy the dark side, and to elevate the light side.

That's why this program is called the Hour of Power. You need Jesus. You're not going to be able to do it on your own. That's what Paul is saying. Paul is saying I want to do the right thing, I don't. I want to avoid the wrong thing and I end up doing it. Oh wretched man that I am, but it doesn't end there. Read on. It says but praise be to God. There is therefore now – here it comes, no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Did you hear me? No condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus. Jesus didn't come to condemn the world, but to deliver the world from condemnation. This is crucial to His whole message, to His whole life.

The power that God gives you empowers you to do the following. First of all, to become that wonderful person that you were meant to be.

In the book of Romans in the 9th chapter it says, “you were predestined to do good works.” You were predestined to do something wonderful with your life and you’ve shied away from the destiny that I willed for you. I want to restore that. I want to give you the power to become all that you were meant to be, all that I created you to become.

I love the story by Fred Craddock, one of America’s great preachers. He was on his vacation in Gatlinburg Tennessee, and an old man in overalls walked by the table where he was eating his breakfast with his wife in this restaurant. The old man stopped and looked at Fred, said “Hey, you’re not from around here. What’s your name?” Fred said “My name’s Fred. Fred Craddock.”

The man said “What do you do?” Oh man, you can’t get rid of this man. Fred, trying to scare him off, blow him off, said “I’m the professor of homiletics at a theological seminary.” That should scare anybody.

The man said, “You’re a preacher.” That’s cutting right through it. Now I know what he was doing. Sometimes I’m on an airplane and the guy next to me wants to talk, and I want to get my work done, and I don’t know how to get rid of his incessant probing, and what do you do? And I always look at the guy and it usually ends the conversation. I usually look at the guy and say I’m a Baptist Evangelist. It ends the conversation immediately.

What do you do? I’m a professor of homiletics at a theological seminary. You’re a preacher. He said “I’ve got a preacher story.” He

grabbed the chair and pulled it up to the table. Fred said I could hardly wait.

He pointed out the window and he said, “you see those hills?” He said “I was born in those hills. And as I was growing up, you know what they called me? They called me Ben the bastard boy because that’s what I am, mister. I’m a bastard. My mother would never tell me who my father was. I’d walk down the street and I had the feeling that people were staring at me and saying ‘there goes Ben the bastard boy. I wonder who his father is.’ I don’t know whether they were saying it. It didn’t make any difference. I thought they were saying it. That’s all that really mattered.

Then this preacher came to our church. Everybody talked about how wonderful he preached so I went to hear him, and he was wonderful. I always came late and left early so nobody would talk to me either coming or going because I was so ashamed of who I am and who I was. But one day he was so good, I forgot to get up and leave. And as I tried to make my way out of the church, there was a heavy hand on my shoulder, I turned and this tall preacher man looked down at me, he said ‘hey, hey boy, what’s your name, boy?’ And before I could answer, he asked me the one question I didn’t want anybody ever to ask me: ‘Who’s your father, boy? Who’s your father?’ The one question that pierced me.

Pain went to the bottom of my toes to the top of my head. He said ‘you don’t even know who your father is, do you? Well I do, and I’m going

to tell you right now.” This old man said, “I looked up into that preacher’s face waiting for the answer, waiting for the solution to the riddle of my existence. He said ‘boy, your father’s name is God. You, son, you are a child of God. Never forget who you are. You are a child of God.’ When he said that, it changed my life. My whole life changed after that.”

He wiped a tear away from his cheek as he told the story that moved his own soul, and walked away. The waitress hurried over to the table and said, “do you know who you were talking to? Do you know who that was that you were talking to?” Fred said “I think he said his name was Ben?”

She said “that’s Ben Hooper. He used to be the governor of Tennessee;” a man who was raised from oblivion to this high role of leadership because he realized that he was a child of God.

That’s what the Hour of Power is endeavoring to do. It’s trying to make everyone in the world know that no matter where they’ve been and what they’ve done you’re still a child of God. God loves you. He loves you so much that if you were the only person that ever lived, He would have come into the world and died just for you. You are loved and that’s your identity.

I remember rushing to class one day at Eastern going to my English class and sitting down and I’m out of breath and the professor looked at me and said, “Mr. Campolo, would you lead the class in prayer?” I’m gasping for breath. And I started the prayer, “dear Lord I’m

so grateful that you love us, that you love me in spite of the fact that I'm so worthless." He said "just a minute." Broke up the prayer. "Just a minute. Mr. Campolo, you are not worthless. You are so precious that Jesus died on the cross for you. You're not worthless. You're unworthy. You may continue the prayer." Kind of took the edge off of it, you know.

I have a friend who has a daughter and there was a thunderstorm: lightening, thunder roaring through the place. He ran upstairs to see how this was affecting his daughter. She was standing on the window sill leaning against the glass. Lightening, thunder. "What are you doing, Sally? What are you doing?" And she looked back and said, "I think God's trying to take my picture." Now there's a kid who understands how special she is, that the creator of the universe wants to take her picture.

Hear me, people. I don't know whether God has a picture of you, a photograph of you in His wallet, but if He does, I'm sure He shows it to the angels from time to time. He loves you. He affirms you. He tells you that you're really quite wonderful, no matter what you have done or where you have been. Oh He wants to bring you to repentance. He wants you to weep over the failures of the past, but then after you've done your repenting, He gives this verse. In Philippians the third chapter - "forget those things which are behind now and press on to the mark the high calling of God in Christ Jesus, our Lord." You know what? You may be paralyzed because of your past and Jesus says it's time to shake off

those shackles and move forward with me. I've got great plans for you.
I've got great plans for you.

Robert Schuller emphasized that emphasis and Bobby and Hannah have continued that message up to the present time, so thank God for the Hour of Power and for this church, amen?

He not only defines you in new way, He not only empowers you to see you in a new positive fashion, but this: He also empowers you to become the person you always wanted to be. Down deep inside, there's a bright side. I mean there's a spirit of God within you. You say, not within some people. This is the light, says the scripture in the first chapter of John. That light hath.. listen to this – every man, every woman that cometh into the world, there's a soft still voice in the depths of your being calling you to become what God intended you to be, and you haven't been able to become that person. But there's a power, power, wonder working power in Jesus Christ. He flows into you and He empowers you to become what you could never be on your own.

In literature, you will read the Scarlett Letter – a book written by Nathaniel Hawthorne, an old classic. It's about a New England town. And in this town, this woman has been exposed for having committed adultery. They force her to wear a bib on which is embroidered the letter "A" so that everybody would be reminded that she had committed adultery. She went from there to living in the grace of God and in the power of the Holy Spirit. And she began doing good, loving things,

reaching out to those who were in need. Unlike some religious people, she came not with an area of superiority but in humility – caring, loving, serving, year after year, day after day. When the next generation came along, the children were asked ‘do you know what the “A” on her bib stands for?’ And there was a unified answer – ‘I think it stands for angel,’ they said. I think it stands for angel.

Isn’t that what it’s about? About a Jesus who could empower you and turn you into an angel? All of us are called to be lifted up. Brothers and sisters, says the scripture, are you listening to this? I’m quoting from the bible. “It hath not yet appeared what you shall become, but when you see Him, you’re going to become like Him.” Oh thank God. Thank God for that. That I’m not what I ought to be, but I’m not what I was, and I’m on my way. I’m on my way. I’m pressing, says the Philippians to the mark of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

I was pastoring this little tiny church when I was in graduate school, and a farmer came to the door in our little town, and wanted to know if he could do something for Tony. My wife said well if you want to buy him a present, he loves the books by Dostoyevsky and he can’t afford to buy them all. Maybe you could buy a few of those books. So he did.

She wanted to know, why are you so grateful? You don’t even come to this church. Well he said my son was mean, and when we would milk the cows, he would hit the cows and curse the cows and push the cows.

But one Sunday he came down the aisle and invited Jesus into his life, and now he's kind to the cows and he loves the cows. You say big deal. That is a big deal. Jesus comes, not just to challenge us to be better, but listen to this: empowers us to be better because the scripture says – listen to what Jesus Himself says in scripture: without me, you can do nothing. You can never become the person you want to be, that you ought to be, that you were created to be unless I am in you, working in you and through you and yes, it says this in the book of Philippians, the first chapter – “and the good work that He begins in you and through you” – listen – “He will complete on the day of His coming.” That's right. Amen.

And lastly this – the third point. He empowers you to do for others what He has done for you and what He continues to do for you: restoring people; lifting people up.

A group of my students from Eastern went to work with Mother Teresa for six months. They were there a short while when one of the young women said to Shane Clayborn, one of my other students, “Shane, I feel like such a hypocrite. I'm a lesbian and I have a feeling that if Mother Teresa finds out about who I am and what I am, that she'll ask me to leave. That she might condemn me. Should I tell her? I can't go on playing this game of hypocrisy.” Shane said “well I can't tell you what to do.”

About a week or so later, he asked her, “did you ever talk to Mother Teresa about being a lesbian?” She said “yes I did.”

“Well what did she say?” And this young woman said “it was weird – she bowed her head and prayed for a long, long time and then she looked up and smiled at me and said ‘Sarah, would you read the scripture at mass tomorrow morning?’” What a wonderful response. No judgment, but rather this – there’s a place for you in the household of God. There’s a welcome here. You’re part of the body of Christ. You’re welcomed here. Oh that the entire church would be able to function like Mother Teresa did on that crucial day for that young woman.

There’s a play that high schools do from time to time because it’s such a wonderful play written by Lorraine Hansberry called *Raisin in the Sun*. In it, this young man who has a father who dies, this African American family inherits, I think its ten thousand dollars, this African American family. And the mother sees this small amount of money as her out from the slums where she’s living, and she dreams of buying a new house over in New Jersey and she’s all thrilled with this. The daughter sees this money as a means to go to medical school, which she’s skilled enough to do. But the son begs for the money and says I have a friend. With this money, we can go into business together and I’ll be able to earn enough money to buy that house and to send you to medical school. I’ll be able to do all these things. Please, give me the money so I can go into

business with my friend. Against her better judgment, the mother yields to the plea of this son, who has never had a chance.

Needless to say, the so called friend takes the money and skips town with it. And the boy has to come home and confess to his family that he's been fooled, he's been tricked, he's been humiliated. The daughter starts screaming at him. Calls him all kinds of terrible names. And then the mother speaks and says, I thought I taught you to love him. Love him, she says. Love him. There's nothing left to love! And the mother speaks – there's always something left to love, and if you ain't learned that, honey, you ain't learned nothing.

When do you think it's time to love somebody? When he's done good and made things great for everybody else? Is that when you think you should love him? That's not the time at all. The time to love him is when he's at his lowest and the worlds done whipped him so. That's the God we have. He loves us most when we've messed up. Here's what it says in scripture. I'm quoting scripture. "Where sin doth abound" – hear me – "there God's grace does much more abound." Praise God. Praise God. Praise God.

There's a drive in every one of us to become good. We may fight against it, we may not yield to its impulses, but it's still there, and God will help you to live out the goodness that you want to live out. There's something in you that wants to live out goodness, and God will help you

to live out that goodness, which you will never be able to live out on your own. Goodness, being good, being good.

We live in an age where parents don't do enough to tell their kids to be good. There was a study done on mothers. When Japanese mothers were asked, what do you want your children to be when they grow up, there was a single answer: successful. And the Japanese people work harder than Americans do to be successful. When American mothers were asked exactly the same question, what do you want your children to become when they grow up? There was one answer over and over again: we want our children to be happy. Kind of makes you puke, doesn't it. Happy. You have to understand, my father was from Cicely. He really didn't care whether I was happy. If you'd ask him, what do you want your son to be when he grows up? He would have answered with one word: I want him to be good. I want him to be good. "Surely goodness and mercy should follow him all the days of his life that he might dwell in the house of the Lord forever." To become good. God wants to help you to become good, and without Him, you can't pull it off.

Well that's what it's about at this church. That's what Bobby and Hannah have been preaching as they continue the legacy of Robert Schuller. They continue a message that says there's a power. We're going to have a program that emphasizes the power. This church is about the Hour of Power. My goodness that deserves a wonderful response. Robert Schuller used to get the congregation to say WOW all the time. Do you

remember that? Wow. I can't pull that off. I have my own thing. For the good news of the gospel, I have these good words: hip hip hooray. So I want to hear it from you. Hip hip (AUDIENCE – hooray), hip hip (AUDIENCE – hooray), hip hip (AUDIENCE – hooray)! God bless you.