



Chaplain Barry C. Black

Becket's 2019 Canterbury Medalist

May 23, 2019

Thank you so much. You honor me more than I can say. This has been an amazing evening for me. It has brought me to a table where I was seated next to one of my dearest friends, Senator Orrin Hatch, who has come this evening. And Bishop Charles Blake is one of the finest servants of God I know. To be able to sit here and hear him say those wonderful things that means more to me than I can say. And to make it even more special, my wife is here to hear those kinds of words. Praise the Lord. I married out of my depth and thank God, he has given me an opportunity to at least have some advocates on my behalf. So Darling, thank you very much.

One of the great challenges when you're at a banquet like this is to answer the existential question to eat or not to eat. There are people who say that when you eat, of course you are borrowing cerebral energy and the digestive process. So many public speakers do not eat no matter how delicious the meal may be. I was able to make a commitment a number of years ago when I was at a banquet like this, and I was giving the keynote address and there was a gentleman at our table who was going to sing before I spoke. So the waiter came with the salad and the gentleman raised his hand and said, "I'm doing special music so I'm not



eating tonight." And the waiter came again with the entrée. The gentleman raised his hand and said, "I'm doing special music. I'm not eating this evening." They introduced me, he got up and sang his song. And as he headed back to the table, one of the ladies at the table said, "He should have eaten."

So, I have therefore made a commitment to eat any chance I get. You just never know. And of course, eat dessert first. You never know what's going to happen.

But I want to talk just a bit about experiencing true freedom. And some of you know my story of how my mother migrated from South Carolina, fourth grade education, the daughter of a South Carolina sharecropper and in the toxic pathology of the inner city of Baltimore, Maryland, motivated my four siblings and me to memorize scripture. And she did it by providing a monetary incentive of 5 cents, which was big money back in those days. You could get the big snickers bar for only 5 cents back in the day. You all remember. Some of you remember those times. If you would come to my home, you would see my siblings and me searching sacred literature, not for spiritual nourishment, but for short verses, right? We were looking for a low hanging fruit. I know every Bible verse that is five words or less. I really do. My favorite Bible verse is John 11:35: "Jesus wept." Powerful, powerful, powerful verse. My second favorite is Luke 17:32: "Remember Lot's wife." Powerful, powerful, powerful verse.



My mother eventually put me on a flat rate. She says, I don't care. You can memorize the entire Bible. You're not going to get more than a quarter a week, okay? I fell in love with the book of Proverbs because the verses are short, and I did not know that what my mother was doing was providing me with true freedom. One day I memorized Proverbs 1:10 that says, "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." My mother insisted on the King James version. She said, if it was good enough for Jesus, it's good enough for us. You did not argue with mom, okay?

Well, that day in my neighborhood, two young men came by and invited me to get back at someone. And I felt the words, I mean the, the force of that verse reverberating in the corridors of my spirit. "My son, if sinners entice thee, consent thou not." And that was all of the verse that I knew. When I read it later I saw the context about violence and death. And the two young men who invited me to go along with them, did not just get back at someone, but they killed someone. And night after night their story was being played out over WBAL TV and WMAR-TV Channel 2 in Baltimore and the judicial consequence was life in prison. So I literally owe my life to the freedom that came from those nickels that motivated my siblings in me to get supernatural power inside of us. Hebrews 4 says, "The word of God is quick and powerful, sharper than any two-edged sword piercing even to the dividing asunder of bone and marrow and is a discernor of the thoughts and the intents of the human heart."



We do not so much search the scriptures as the scriptures search us.

And it is one of the keys to true freedom. You see, we need freedom that is greater than governmental freedom. In John Chapter 8, Jesus of Nazareth made a startling statement. He said, “If you commit sin, you are a slave.” Wow.

If you are tethered by the chains of addiction and sin, you are a slave, no matter what governmental system you may be under. Then he says, John 8:31 and 32: “If you abide in my word, there's those scriptures again and my word abides in you. You are my disciples indeed, and you will know the truth and the truth will set you free.” And then he says something rather remarkable: “If the son has set you free, then are you free indeed.”

Experiencing true freedom? How do we do it? In this great nation, we must continue to work to provide a bastion against the secularization of government. At the constitutional convention, when the framers had reached an impasse in 1787, good old Ben stood up. Benjamin Franklin said, “Gentlemen,” there were no ladies then, “I am a very old man, but I have lived long enough to believe that if a sparrow cannot fall without God knowing it, that a republic cannot rise without his assistance.” And Ben suggested that they pray. Well, being good politicians, they debated it over and over again. But finally they got around to praying. So in 1789



when the legislative branch was established, one of its first acts was to establish a chaplaincy and I am blessed to be the 62nd chaplain of the United States Senate.

And it's very interesting because detractors have challenged the constitutionality of legislative chaplaincy and institutional chaplaincy in general. But by the providence of God that on the day that that establishment clause was written, a chaplain convened that session of the Senate with an invocation and prayer has continued on interrupted since then.

So that in *Marsh v. Chambers*, 1983, got some lawyers here. I've got to let you know that I have studied. The Supreme Court declared that history and tradition make it clear that the framers, while maybe wanting a separation of church and state, did not intend a separation of God and state. We need the spiritual.

We need the spiritual because the greatest Jewish king who ever lived, Solomon – what a king – wrote in Proverbs 14:34: “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” Religious liberty is a national security issue. Sin is an equal opportunity destroyer. Sin does not care that your name is America. Sin brought down Babylon. Sin brought down the Middle Persian empire. Sin brought down Greece, says Alexander the Great, ended his reign in a stupor of drunken debauchery. Rome, the Great Rome, you've read about



the decline and fall of the Roman Empire. Rome was destroyed from within. Sin is a reproach to any people and Solomon declared in 2 Chronicles 7:14: If my people called by my name will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways then will I hear from heaven, says the sovereign God of the universe. I will forgive their sins – and I love it — I will heal their land.

So as I go to my seat, I cry out with Tennyson: “Tis not too late to seek a newer world... to sail beyond the sunset and all the baths of all the western stars until we die. It may be that the gulf should wash us down. It may be we should touch the Happy Isles and see the great Achilles, whom we knew. Tho’ much is taken, much abides. And though we are not now, that strength, which in olden days moved earth and sky, that which we are, we are, one equal temper of heroic hearts made weak by time and fate, but strong in will to strive, to seek, to find and not to yield.” Liberated by the power of God's word.

God bless you.