

COMMENCEMENT ADDRESS

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"Knowledge, Wisdom and Life for Servant Leadership"

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Someone has asked, Where is the Life we have lost in Living? Where is the Wisdom we have lost in Knowledge? Where is the Knowledge we have lost in Information? With the high level of development we have attained in Information and Communication Technology, it is possible to be sufficiently informed about anything and everything under the sun, and yet lack in the knowledge of God and God's ways. It is good to acquire much knowledge through our learning and training, to equip ourselves, since knowledge is considered as power. However, it is possible, having been thus equipped with certain professional skills and learning, which are useful, and yet be not endowed with the knowledge and wisdom of God, and lack in character which makes good servant leader. Mahatma Gandhi said, *Knowledge without character is a dangerous thing, as we see in the instances of so many talented thieves and gentlemen rascals.* James in his letter wrote, thus, *Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such wisdom does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness* (James 3:13-18).*

Our main theme for this year, ***Not to be served... but to serve***, is a great theme. Graduates of William Carey will live out this Biblical and Christian principle in their profession, private and public life. Possession of these three, *knowledge of God, wisdom from above and abundant life* will help us to live a life of servant-leadership.

Jeremiah wrote: *This is what the Lord says, Let not the wise man boast of his wisdom, or the strong man boast of his strength, or the rich man boast of his riches, but let him who boasts boast about this, that he understands and knows me, that I am the Lord who exercise kindness, justice and righteousness on earth, for in this I delight, declares the Lord* (Jer.9:23-24). Jesus in his pastoral prayer said, *Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom you have sent* (Jn. 17:3). Paul talked about the existence of *arguments and pretensions that set themselves up against the knowledge of God* and that he had *weapons to demolish* those things (2Cor.10:4-5). Jim Packer in his book *Knowing God* stresses the need to turn our knowledge *about* God into knowledge *of* God. *It is possible to know a great deal about God without much knowledge of Him*, he wrote.

Knowledge of God produces fear of God. It results in knowing that God knows me. The psalmist prays, *O Lord, you have searched me and you know me, you know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar; you discern my going out and my lying down, you are familiar with all my ways. Before a word is in my tongue you know it completely, O Lord. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty to attain* (Ps.139:1-6). Knowledge of God enables a person to know that he/she is known by God. Paul wrote to the Galatians, *But now that you know God-or rather are known by God* (Ga.4:9). Knowing God and being known by Him is important for serving Him and serving our fellow human beings. How does this happen in a person's life? It happens when we enter into faith-relationship with God through Jesus Christ, God Incarnate, who makes God known to us in human form. The writer to the Hebrews wrote, *by faith we understand* (Heb 11:3). Faith is the means by which we relate with God, and acts of our faith are the evidence by which we prove our faith is real and living, which constitutes the basis of our service for God and others. The following exercises help in the knowledge of God: reading the Bible and good Christian literature, participating in Christian community and fellowship, listening God's word rightly interpreted, expounded and delivered by God's servants, praying and contributing to God's work. Intimate knowledge between God and us is what is going to count ultimately. The time will come for all of us when we realize that we need to be known to God. The sad last reply by the bridegroom to the five foolish young women (the Bible calls them Virgins) who had lamps but not the oil in their lamps, when they came knocking at the banquet door, was, *I don't know you* (Mt.25:12).

The knowledge of God produces wisdom. The characteristics of God-given wisdom are purity, peace, kindness, gentleness, mercy, good fruit, impartiality and sincerity. Men and women of faith have this wisdom. Abraham may have looked foolish when he stepped out in faith to go to the land God would show him, but who will today say that Abraham was a fool in doing that? Moses applied his human wisdom of nationalism and killed an Egyptian which only brought him trouble. When trained and disciplined (humbled) by God, he was known to God, and endowed with His wisdom, he delivered God's people from bondage, which remains one of the greatest freedom movements of the world. Samuel could openly challenge his people to testify against him before God and the king, and the people said, *You have not done anything wrong to us*(paraphrased). What a Certificate of a life of personal and public integrity! Daniel and his friends may be considered, in our post-modern standard, extremists or fanatics when they demonstrated their uncompromising fear of God, in the face of the danger of losing even their very own lives. But, they had wisdom to understand that God is in control of human history, kingdoms and power, and looking beyond the immediate danger, they could turn the tide of events 180 degrees. Nehemiah was so burdened with his concerns for the repair of the walls of Jerusalem which lay in ruins, and as a governor, he ruled over his people with justice and righteousness, and accomplished the mission of rebuilding the walls. Esther used her God-given beauty and her position as Queen, risked her life for her people and averted Haman's dirty plan of genocide of innocent people. Paul was charged as though he had made a fool of himself in preaching Christ crucified, but countless numbers are blessed and will be blessed in eternity by his teaching and preaching of the "foolish" message of the Cross which he believed is wiser than all wisdom and more powerful than all power on earth. Where are the rulers now who persecuted him then? How much of disdain and rejection Mother Theresa suffered in her pleading and service for the poor and the destitute. Who will now say she made a mistake in taking the dying on her lap and letting them die with some dignity? Who can surpass the commitment of Jesus Christ to fighting injustices in religion and social system of his day, while making himself powerless to plead for his own life?

William Carey, who never had any opportunity and means to attend a university like us, understood God and His mission. He pleaded with tenacity for the cause of worldwide mission when his church was indifferent to mission. When he stood up in a meeting to propose a topic for discussion, “The duty of Christians to attempt the spread of the Gospel among heathen nations,” a senior leader of the Church rebuked him saying, “Young man sit down, when God pleases to convert the heathens, He will do it without your aid or mine.” He came to India against all odds, struggled through unfavorable conditions and hardships, including bereavements and mental imbalance of his wife Dorothy. It was as though, like Moses, he saw the invisible One, and persevered in his work. Among his many achievements were, translation of the Bible into more than 30 languages, banning of *suttee* (the practice of widow burning at the funeral pyre of her deceased husband), the founding of Horticultural-Agricultural Society of India, the development of journalism in English and native language, the transformation of Bengali language into a literary language which gave birth to Bengal and Indian renaissance, and the establishment of the historic institution of higher education in Arts, Science, Commerce and Theology, the Serampore College which is a leading theological university in South Asia, which has more than 50 seminaries affiliated to it. So many people have been blessed by his life and work. The British East India company authorities who did not allow him to do his missionary work in their territory, had to invite him later to help in their Fort William College to be a Professor of language to teach the young officers of the company the Indian languages and culture.

All these and many other servants of God had one thing in common, the knowledge of God and the understanding of His mission and purpose on earth. They were wise. They lived a life which has eternal value and led many in the way of righteousness. They seem to say to us today, *We found the true life and lived it, we discovered knowledge and wisdom by faith and applied it to our work.* They did not seek to be served but allowed themselves to be spent to serve others. What we read in the book of Daniel 12:3 *Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness like the stars for ever and ever,* is an apt epitaph for their lives. Shall we not consider this kind of persons as having acquired the true knowledge and wisdom and as having lived an abundant life ? It is my prayer and wish that graduates of William Carey will emulate them, for we find in Hebrews 13:7, an exhortation thus, *Remember your leaders who spoke the word of God to you, consider the outcome of their way of life, and imitate their faith.* America and India have such leaders, but we need more of them for America, India and for all the nations in our world today? The youth today want to see more of such leaders in their nations. One clear example is the popularity of, and the enormous support given by the youth to the anti-corruption movement which Anna Hazare’s ‘fast till death’ has recently triggered in India. Will the graduates who today are stepping out of the portals of this university which bears the name of such a great leader show to the world, that there still is a hope for future generations, because there are those who are willing to give their today for the tomorrow of others? You can be one such leader, will you? Leadership is not position or title. It is a quality of life. It is a life of service.

May God bless you, God bless America and all the nations represented here today. THANK YOU.

* All Biblical references are from the New International Version