

# “What is That in Your Hand?”

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I am grateful to be here and honored to have the privilege of joining with Dr. Clark, the university administration, fellow trustees, esteemed faculty, family, friends, and this incredible graduating class of 2008. Congratulations to each of you and thank you for allowing me the privilege of sharing this moment with you.

My assignment today is to provide perspective for where you are and for what the future may hold for you. It is my prayer I can do this in a very personal and practical way.

Graduation is a defining moment in life. It is certainly an incredible day of celebration. It can even be viewed as an exit strategy from the accounts receivable office at the university. That’s nice—no more money will be going there. Now it goes to the alumni affairs office (just want you to know where to direct your investments). And it appears today, all of you have clearance to move forward with graduation—that is, all but the two of you who foamed the fountain on Flagler last night!

At the most basic level, graduation is about a public recognition—walking away with something that officially confirms your accomplishment. However, when the cap and gown are gone and your experiences become a part of the past, what will you walk away with? To this end, I want to direct my comments to you on one very simple question: **“What is that in your hand?”**

This question is not original with me; it is actually a verse of Scripture. In Exodus 4, we read about Moses who met God at a burning bush. It was a defining moment in his life. God could have said many things to Moses. But God ultimately brought the conversation to one simple question: “What is that in your hand?” (Exodus 4:2). Just as God wanted Moses to come to terms with what he held in his hand that day, I want you to come to terms with what is in your hand today and to talk in light of this as you move forward into the future.

Now God did not ask Moses “What is that in your hand” for informational purposes. God knew what Moses had. It was a stick, a rod, a common thing. God also knew it was a very personal thing. It was something Moses carried for support and security through the wilderness. And it was a professional thing in the sense that it aided Moses in his profession of shepherding. God didn’t ask the question in order to see if Moses knew the answer. Instead, God asked the question in order for Moses to understand the *significance* of the **ROD** he held in his hand.

What Moses held in his hand many years ago is much like what you will hold in your hand today. It represented a present **Reality**. It symbolized who Moses was, where Moses had been, and what Moses had done. In the same way, the degree conferred upon you today represents, for some, a four-, five- or six-year “wandering in the wilderness” of higher education, as it were. It is a point of passage that ultimately brings you to a place of completion and credibility.

This is a day of great accomplishment in your life. I commend you. I hope you will always look back and remember with gratitude what you invested in and what others invested in your life to make a positive difference for days to come.

Like Moses, what you hold in your hand is a present reality that represents the completion of a journey up to this point.

Twelve days ago, Robert Cheruiyot won the Boston Marathon in 2 hours, 7 minutes and 36 seconds. It was the fourth time he had won this great event, putting his name in the history books. Two years

earlier, Cheruiyot also won the Chicago Marathon. However, the circumstances surrounding that victory were quite different. He did not remember the win!

Prior to the race, a sponsor decal was put on the street near the finish line. It rained that day, creating hazardous conditions for the runners. After a long, arduous race requiring stamina, strength and skill, Cheruiyot was the first to see the finish line. The victory was his! But his foot slid across the decal and underneath the finish line, knocking him unconscious. He was taken to the hospital and he did recover. However, it was an interesting thing that a man won a major marathon and did not even know it.

I do not know whether you will remember all the events of this day or how long you will remember all you have studied to get to this point, but this is a defining moment of completion in your life. It is a great reality. Congratulations!

This day also marks a defining moment of change between the life you have known in the past and the life that is before you. The piece of paper you hold in your hand is a passport to your future. This “rod” represents new **Opportunity**. Just as Moses stood before God with a rod in his hand (a tool for future service), so also the paper you hold represents your opportunity to step through the gateway into future opportunity.

I can’t begin to calculate the future potential of those I see represented before me today—the gifts, talents, capabilities, intellect and personal faith each of you possess. Yet, I believe God has given you this achievement and this moment so you may embrace the opportunity He has for your future to use it in a definitive way.

Of course, most references to opportunities focus on one thing: your opportunities. They *are* individual and personal. But I must point out that it is important to see your opportunities not for yourself alone, but for others as well.

I believe the nature of any Christian university is to imprint the hearts and minds of people with an understanding of Jesus Christ, the One who provided the supreme example of servanthood. He humbled himself and became obedient, even to the point of death. The Bible says, “...death on the cross.” Jesus died a tragic death, suffering and shedding His blood for our sins. There is tragedy in His servitude and death, but there is also triumph. For this Jesus who died on the cross, rose again “serving” us that we might have the opportunity of a life that matters and has meaning here on earth. Through the work of Christ for us, we are set free to live, not for ourselves, but for Christ and for others.

I hope you will live the life God has given to you with a spirit of gratitude, grace and well being for others. You have an opportunity to give, to contribute, to better the conditions of the world around you. You have an opportunity to relieve the issues of hurt and poverty.

One of the core values and focal points of your time at Palm Beach Atlantic University has been *Workship*, a combination of *worship*, *work* and the *world*. I pray you will do everything you can to remember this pattern and make the most of these opportunities in your life. I pray you will seize the opportunity God has given to you to make a positive difference.

But let me quickly say the doors of opportunity often swing on the hinges of opposition. While you, indeed, have been given gifts, talents and abilities to positively impact the future, you will not do so without offense. You live in a culture of offensiveness. While you should never make it your aim to be offensive in your attitude, behavior or demeanor, you can expect opposition even through kindness and truth. The Gospel of Jesus Christ, the cry for human justice and the challenge for moral living are offensive to many in our culture.

I challenge you not to let the resistance of offense keep you from seizing the opportunity to make a positive difference in this generation. You *can* make a difference and you *will* make a difference as you choose to use the diploma in your hand for new opportunities.

For Moses, there was the present **Reality**—where he had been and what he had received. There was new **Opportunity**—a tool to stand and lead the people of God. And ultimately, there was a defining **Destiny**. What Moses held in his hand represented his destiny to be a leader and to make a difference for God. It was just a stick in the hand of a common man, but God uses ordinary people to do extraordinary things. *You* are the person God can and will use to do extraordinary things for His kingdom. He knows the plans He has for *you*.

I believe in a Divine design. God has a plan, purpose and destiny for your life and mine. There is one message, one conviction, I pray you will take away from your days at Palm Beach Atlantic University: *your life is not yours alone*. Your life has been given to you to live for the glory of God. Your life is a gift you can give for the well being of others.

In reality, there will be hundreds of events like this one on college and university campuses throughout the month of May, and then again by year's end. Degrees will be conferred, diplomas will be distributed and people will go out having finished their academic preparation to embrace a new profession. But I believe the defining difference and distinctive significance of what you do with your life are woven together with what you hold in your hand for the glory of God!

This is a defining moment! Embrace what you hold in your hand! Let it be like the rod of God in the hand of Moses 4,000 years ago on the backside of a wilderness desert.

Several days ago, I was in London with my wife and daughter. We rode the London Eye and traveled by Tube. We visited Parliament and the Tower Bridge. We ate fish and chips, and enjoyed a meal at the Hard Rock Café. We timed our visit to Buckingham Palace to see the changing of the guard—the Queen sends her regards. But of all the things I saw, nothing touched my heart like the Churchill War Museum.

In a bunker well beneath the beautiful buildings and skyline of London, you can visit the Spartan, operational head quarters of Sir Winston Churchill's war room. In this secret bunker, Churchill and his cabinet planned and commanded the effort to stop the aggression of the Nazi German Army—fighting real issues in a real world in the dark days of WWII. There you find audio messages, video clips, photographs and letters. But as I walked into the museum, I was captivated by the words of Churchill imprinted on the wall: "We are all worms, but I believe myself to be a glow worm." And glow he did in the darkest days of human history!

As I read those words, I was reminded of the words of Jesus who said, "Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify your Father who is in Heaven." That is my prayer for you. Let your light shine! Seize the opportunity and ability given to you!

Churchill once said, "There comes a special moment in everyone's life, a moment for which that person was born. That special opportunity, when he seizes it, will fulfill his mission—a mission for which he is uniquely qualified. In that moment, he finds greatness. It is his finest hour."

My passion is to challenge you to go for *your* finest hour. Remember what is in your hand. It is a **ROD—Reality, Opportunity, Destiny**. Use it for the glory of God!

Thank you for the privilege of speaking to you today.