

Liberty University Commencement Address

By Former U.S. President Jimmy Carter

Lynchburg, Virginia

May 19, 2018

To Dr. Hawkins, who is retiring now as provost of this great university, and to Secretary Carson, who is here, whom I have admired for a long time, to President Falwell and all of his family, to the students who are graduating, to the parents who have supported them, and to all the rest of you: This is a wonderful crowd Jerry told me before we came here that it's even bigger ~~than~~ ~~last~~ ~~year~~—than it was last year. I don't know if President Trump will admit that or not, but to me it means a lot.

I am truly grateful for the invitation to speak to the graduates of this remarkable Christian university. I understand that there are 10,000 students enrolled and also that also this year 20,000 or more are graduating, that 30,000 students who enrolled here are in the military, and that 27 percent of all those online are minority students—African American and others. This is a ~~new~~ way to get an education, and I want to thank Liberty University for giving that opportunity to them. Also, I've noticed that among the graduates, the youngest one is only 16 years old, and the oldest one is almost 90 years old. (It's a female, and she doesn't want anyone to know who she is, because she doesn't want anyone to know her age, but she's four years younger than I am.) The students contribute almost a million hours a year of service to other people.

I have to admit that I was somewhat surprised to be invited to speak to you, and I want to thank President Falwell for making it possible for me to do so.

I remember receiving a whole lot of letters from Liberty University students and faculty when I was in the White House. Most of them referred to my giving away our Panama Canal, forming what they considered to be an unnecessary Department of Education, or normalizing diplomatic relations with the communist government of China. But those critical letters pretty well ended when the 1980 election results brought my involuntary retirement from the White House. After that, I didn't get very many letters from Liberty, and I particularly appreciate the opportunity to come here today.

President Falwell wanted me to say a few words about my background. It might duplicate some of the things he just said—and correct a few minor mistakes that he made. I grew up on a peanut farm near Plains, Georgia, in a community named Carey, with about 50 other families, almost all of whom were African American. And were my playmates. ~~It~~ was during segregation time, but the only ranking among us then was who could run fastest, had just caught the biggest fish, or could pick the most cotton in a day.

I left home when I was 17 years old, and World War II was just beginning; this was in 1941. I went to Georgia Tech, where I joined the Naval ROTC. Then I went to the Naval Academy at Annapolis, and that's where I began to teach the children lessons on Sunday. As a matter of fact, I taught the children of families that were stationed there permanently. I later served as a submarine officer, and my last sea duty, at sea in the Pacific Ocean, was during the Korean War. I served in the Navy for 11 years, and then I came back to Plains, Georgia, and to a life of farming.

One of the most memorable occasions I had then was to volunteer as part of what the Southern Baptist Convention called "pioneer missionary" program. Every year, I would go somewhere, assigned by the

For 35 years Rosalynn and I have volunteered to lead an annual Habitat [for Humanity] work project somewhere, one year overseas and the next in America. This year we're going to be near South Bend, Indiana; last year we were in Canada. Our biggest project was in the Philippines a number of years ago. We had 14,000 other volunteers join me and Rosalynn, and in five days we started and completed 293 homes for people who are desperately poor. The woman who would live in our house had three daughters, and before she got her new home, she and her daughters spent every night in an abandoned septic tank; they pulled a canvas cover over the top of it to keep the rain out. I understand that you resident students at Liberty are building Habitat houses here in Lynchburg. I hope you will keep up your work because Habitat needs you every day.

As a younger person, I lived during two serious crises much worse than anything we face today. One was the Great Depression when I was a child growing up on a farm, and the second was the w

All our major religions are also divided

With this threat to human existence, what can you and I do about it? For a long time, humans had to contend with animals, and we depended on our speed, our agility, our strength just to survive in our competition with animals. Now, for several generations, human intelligence and the weapons we have developed permit us to prevail over other animals. So what is there for how can we prevail as human beings? One of the things we have to learn is how to get along, to do good for one another, and to get along with our potential enemies instead of how we can prevail in combat. In other words, just follow the mandates of the Prince of Peace just learning how to live with our enemies in peace is what Jesus taught. And that will be our only chance for survival in the future.

We don't need enemies to fight, nor do we need inferior people whom we can dominate just quote this one verse of scripture, in Galatians 3:28: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor master, there is neither male nor female, for ye are all one in Christ Jesus."

So far, we Americans down through history have had a hard time adjusting to this concept of equality: We fought the Civil War, the War Between the States, that finally ended slavery; in the 1920s and then 40 years later we had a struggle in our country with granting white women and then black women 40 years later the right to vote, and more recently we have been struggling to end the (S)egregation (E)dit (W)B. S (e)g.

There are no limits to our ambition as a human being, and we have available to us, every one of us, constant contact with God in heaven, the creator of a universe and the creator of each one of us. How many of us decide ahead of time when we're going to be born, or where we will be born, or who our parents will be, or what our native intelligence level will be? You see, through prayer we can have constant contact, day or night, with our Creator, who knows everything and can do anything. And we have a perfect example to follow if we're in doubt: We just have to remember the perfect life of Jesus Christ.

Thank you very much, and congratulations to all of you.