



Broadcast Transcript

Broadcast: Celebrating the Life of Dr. D. James Kennedy

Guest(s): N/A

Air Date: July 14, 2020

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Dr. Dobson: Well greetings everyone. I'm Dr. James Dobson, and you're listening to Family Talk, and I appreciate you joining us today. We're going to do something unique on this broadcast today. We're going to let you hear a recorded eulogy that I gave at the memorial service for Dr. Jim Kennedy. That was in 2007. His wife Anne, who has also gone on to be with the Lord in 2017, asked me to speak on this somber occasion, and I was deeply honored to do so.

I had great love and appreciation for Dr. Kennedy. He was a much loved pastor at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida for almost 50 years. He was also a wonderful pastor and the founder of Evangelism Explosion, which brought millions of people to the Lord. Many of you heard and saw Dr. Kennedy on his weekly television service there at church. With that, here are my remarks delivered in September 2007 at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church.

Dr. Dobson: I can't tell you, Anne, what an honor it is for me to be asked to speak here, because I love Jesus Christ, as you all do, and because I loved Dr. James Kennedy. He was a great friend and has been for 23 years, and to be asked to be here on this time of celebration is very meaningful to me. And it is a time of celebration. I know that the family wanted it this way and it has been this way. Have you enjoyed, even in a funeral service?

Jim told us not to mourn and not to grieve, and frankly that's very difficult to do because of the affection with which we held him. But we know where he has gone, we know where he is, and we know that we're going to see him again, and we draw comfort in that as those who have hope, not those who do not have hope. We are grieving today but are grateful.

I'm reminded of a scripture that I love in Acts 13:36 when it said, "For when David had served God's purpose in his generation, he fell asleep." Isn't that comforting? That's what happened with Jim Kennedy. He served the Lord's purpose for 55 years faithfully, consistently, with fidelity. There was no scandal. There was nothing that embarrassed the name of Christ in Jim Kennedy's ministry. And when he had served God's purpose, he fell asleep, and somehow I draw comfort from that.

I met Jim in 1984 when he came to California to be a guest on Focus on the Family, which was you might say in its infancy at that time. I did not know him until he came. We spent a good part of the day together, and I fell in love with this man. I saw his character. I saw his strength. I saw his commitment. And then he invited me to come be on his television show, and from that time on we were fast friends. I wish that we had had more time to spend together. We didn't, but we stayed in communication.

When we were concerned about something that was going on, we talked together by phone and mapped a strategy. I remember the day that we talked about what the ACLU was doing to the Christian message, and how there had to be an answer for it, and he and I and Larry Burkett and Dr. Bill Bright and others came together and gave a little money, and started the Alliance Defense Fund, which is one of the most powerful organizations, one of the most effective organizations in the country today to defend the Christian faith in the courts, and that came out of a conversation with Jim Kennedy.

So, we have had this opportunity to bond for a long time. He was as you know a born evangelist. He was committed, absolutely committed, to the message of the Gospel. We have heard today about Evangelism Explosion and all that it did. I have read that there is evidence, hard evidence, that more than six million people have come to know the Lord through EE. And it has touched our own family. Our daughter, Danae, went through the EE program and even today years later, she goes to nursing homes and shares the good news of the Gospel with those who don't know Him.

I can tell you that earlier this year, I had an opportunity to serve on a panel to talk to, and interview, if you will, some presidential candidates. And we asked them many questions. Then one member of our panel who is... I won't identify him, but he's very committed to Christ, asked of one of the candidates, "Sir, if you were to die tonight and went to Heaven and Jesus said, why should I let you in my Heaven? What would you say?" And this man said, "Well," it was with great bravado. "Well," he said, "You know, I've tried to live a good life and I want to leave the world better for my having lived here." And I was sitting there thinking, "We've still got work to do." And it's true, I wish those questions could be asked of everybody in Washington. Wouldn't it be interesting to see how many of them have a clue as to what the message of the Gospel is?

But Jim was so committed. And it's really interesting to me, I talked to Anne about this two days ago, that Jim's ministry began with a specific call from the Lord. When I was a kid, ministers talked often about the call, the call from the Lord, and you don't hear that very much anymore. It takes the divine element out of it not to acknowledge that God does call people. I mean, that's biblical. If you just look through the scriptures, what do you find? You've got Moses standing before the burning bush and the voice of the Lord is calling him to the assignment that He was giving him. And Samuel was 12 years old and he was in Eli's house, Eli the priest, and he was lying on his bed and he heard the voice of

the Lord calling him, "Samuel, Samuel, Samuel." And then he realized, with Eli's help, that that was God calling him, that He had a mission for him.

And David was out in the fields with his sheep when the message came that God had anointed him, had called him to be a king. Imagine what a shock that was. And Jonah was called to Nineveh, but he jumped on a ship and tried to get away and had a little encounter with a whale as a result. But he was running from a call when that happened.

And Gideon was called to lead the armies of Israel against the Midianites, and he didn't want to do it. He gave excuses. And on and on it goes. And of course, Saul was on his way to... I started to say Nebraska. He was on his way to Damascus when he was confronted by a great light and knocked him off his horse, and he was shocked. Then he heard the voice of the Lord say, "Saul, why are you persecuting me?" It was a call. It was a specific call. There's so many examples of Jeremiah and others who were called by the Lord.

Jim Kennedy was called. I believe that. It is not an accident that you are here, that this church is here, and that the ministry that came out of his teaching has led to such influence, because he was called. The interesting thing is that Jim fought the call, and many of the people I just named fought it. They didn't want to accept it. And that is very common. With just the few minutes that I have, I want to talk about that call and what it means for today because it has great significance for us.

And if you don't mind, I want to give a reference to my own father whom I often speak about because he had such great influence on me. But before he went to school, when he was a preschooler, he had one great passion in life and that was to be an artist. It was in his soul. He had an artist's temperament, and that's what he cared about more than anything else. He had five brothers and sisters, if you'd ask them what they were going to do with their life, they couldn't tell you. But all through elementary school and middle school and into high school, my dad would tell you, "I'm going to be a great artist." That was his determination.

He was walking down the street one day on the way to school and he got the call. His phone rang and he answered it, and the Lord was on the line. And he said, "Son, I want you to preach the Gospel of Jesus Christ across this nation." And my dad said, "No, no. No, Lord. You know I've got my life laid out, and one of my brothers... call my brothers, but I know what I want to do and I'm heading toward it." And he got it all argued down and as soon as he would get it put away, it would come back and it would come back. It was a call.

And when he was a senior in high school, he was going to have to choose whether he was going to seminary or whether he was going to art school. And when he got up one morning, the Lord said, "You will choose today." Not an audible voice, you all know what I mean, but he knew God was talking to him. And all day long, he struggled with this decision. Toward the afternoon, he'd

come home from school, there's nobody there at 3:00 in the afternoon, he was praying about this. My dad had a sensitive artist's spirit and he was walking back and forth in his living room and he was praying. Finally he wheeled on his foot and turned his face up to God and said, "It is too great a price and I won't pay it." And he said the Spirit of the Lord walked away from him as one person would walk away from another.

And his mother, my grandmother was just such a woman of God. As she came home, she found him pale and shaken. And she said, honey, what's wrong? And he said, "I have just told God no, and He's gone." And she said, "Oh, you're just emotional," and she tried to pray for him and she said, "I don't understand. I can't pray." And he said, "You don't understand it, but I do. I have made my choice." And his dad said that he would send him to any school in the country he wanted to go to and he graduated from the school of art number one in his class. And he was walking down the aisle to receive the award with a big number one on his paintings, and he heard the scripture in his ear, "Except the Lord build a house, they labor in vain that build it."

But he went on, he graduated in the midst of the Depression. He couldn't find a job anywhere, much less in art, and he wound up for seven years pumping gas at a Texaco station on the edge of town where cars never came, and he got pretty sick of himself and his lofty dreams.

And then one day an evangelist, yes, an evangelist came to their local church. The whole family was grown by then, six kids, mother, and dad and they all decided to go to the service one night, and my dad wouldn't go. They were over at their parents' house, and my dad hid. He wasn't going to have anything to do with it. He heard the brothers talking about where Jim was and somebody said, "Isn't Jim going tonight?" He said, "No, I don't think he is." Another one said, "I don't think he is." And Willis, who found the Lord at nine years of age, came looking for him. He was a godly man, went on to have a PhD in Shakespearean English. Looked for my dad and finally found him over on the side porch, sitting in a swing. And he said, "Jim, aren't you going to the service tonight?" And my dad said, "No Willis, I'm not ever going again." And my dad was looking at the floor and he saw big tears splashing on his brother's shoes. And he said, "I will go for him."

So they got to the church, they were late. My dad had made them late. The only seats available were on the front row. Eight people walked in and sat on the front row. And a singer was up singing and while she was singing, my dad yielded and gave his heart to the Lord and said, "I will do whatever you want." And the evangelist had enough fire on him to understand that. And he walked over to the edge of the platform and put his foot out on the rail and pointed to my dad and said, "You right there, young man. Stand up." And my dad stood. And he said, "Tell all these people what the Lord just did for you while that singer was singing."

And from that point on, he accepted the call and he was committed to the day of his death. Of course, the Lord gave him back his art just as soon as he yielded his will. And he was chairman of the art department at a college when he died. But he reached tens of thousands of people through his ministry, and one of them was a little toe headed kid named Jimmy, and I wouldn't be standing here right now with you if my dad hadn't answered the call.

Jim, Anne tells me, fought the call for a year, and what an incredible decision that was. Think of what was at stake. He could still be giving dance lessons at Arthur Miller's studio, but God had something better for him.

And I want to tell you that I'm concerned about the Church today, not this church, but the Church, the church of Jesus Christ, and about other young people that are out there. Some of them may be here, some of them are undoubtedly watching on television today, who have been fighting the call. They have not been willing to do what God has asked them to do, and there has been this tension there. I do hope that something that happens today will urge this next generation, or members of it, to accept the call.

When Jim Kennedy died last Thursday, a week ago Thursday, I got up early one morning, 5:30 in the morning, thinking about this. And I sat at my computer and I wrote, and I want to read to you what I wrote on that morning. This is last Thursday, a week ago today.

The question posed by the title is: Who Will Answer the Call?

“The passing of Doctor D. James Kennedy, which we mourn today, poses serious concerns about the future of the conservative Christian movement. Its senior leadership is undergoing a dramatic and inevitable change at this time. Many giants of the church are coming to the end of their journeys and are leaving this earth one by one. So many other leaders who have been used mightily by the Lord in the past 40 or 50 years are about to hand the mantle down to the next generation. And while we wish them long life, they will soon come to the end of their greatest influence. We shouldn't be reluctant to acknowledge that reality, because it's the way of all flesh. But it causes me to wonder who will be there to carry the banner when this generation of leaders is gone. That whole generation is passing.

“God has always ordained men and women to fulfill His purposes, and I know He'll do it again, but the question is, will the younger generation heed the call? Who will defend the unborn child? Who will speak for them? Who will speak for those who are older and no longer productive? Who will plead for the Terri Schiavos of the world, who can be starved to death legally for having the misfortune of being disabled? Who's got the courage to speak up? Who's going to fight for the institution of marriage, which is on the ropes today? Who will teach young people the dangers of both heterosexual and homosexual promiscuity? Anybody have the courage to talk about that? Who in the next generation will be willing to take the heat when it is so much safer and more

comfortable to avoid the controversial subjects? Who's going to defend traditional morality in a culture that's sliding into moral decline? Who will call sin by its name and lead a nation to repentance and holiness?

“Some ministers today, and I don't mean to disrespectful, but they're more inclined to edit the word of God and to boast about "not being political." That charge was made against Jim Kennedy many, many times, when it wasn't politics he cared about, it was morality and righteousness. They sometimes boast that they're not political, and yet they mean that they aren't willing to be vilified and disparaged for seeking the truth, and speaking the truth in love.

“I pray that the Lord will anoint another generation of Jim Kennedys, courageous men and women who will never waiver one inch in the defense of righteousness. And I believe we're going to see these new leaders emerge in the next few years and that the mantle handed down from my respected and loved friend will be taken up by those who are willing to die, if necessary, to defend biblical truth.

“We have a wonderful heritage in the Christian faith of men and women who did just that, such as Wilberforce and Bonhoeffer and Calvin and Wesley, and the other great leaders of the church who impacted their times for Christ against heavy opposition. We lost one of the best of these men of faith last week. May God help the younger generation carry on the work that Dr. Jim Kennedy did so ably for more than half a century, and I pray that the Gospel will continue to prosper in their hands.”

I admit to you today that it is curious to me why God chose to take Jim when he did. We're in a very critical time in our nation where the pendulum... where the balance could swing in one or two directions, and so many of the things that we have believed and fought to defend are in question today. What I will miss most from Jim Kennedy is his courage, his willingness to stand for the things that he believed. He never let criticism bother him at all. He read it, he put it aside. It was not going to change his message at all. I've watched him from afar and have marveled at his commitment to the things that I believe, and I just know that many of you do, too, and that's why you're here.

So, Jim, may I say to you, if you're listening, and I rather think you are, you were a giant in your time. You were an oak tree that gave us all shelter, and we're going to see you on resurrection morning and we're going to have quite a celebration there. I don't know how are we going to accommodate six million people, but we're going to work on it. And we will be forever with the Lord, and that is his legacy and that's why I loved and appreciated the man. Thank you all and thank you Anne and Jennifer.

Roger Marsh:

This is Roger Marsh, and what an uplifting edition of Family Talk. You've been listening to Dr. James Dobson's address delivered at Dr. D. James Kennedy's Memorial back in 2007. This presentation was a wonderful way to honor the

legacy of this godly man, but it also served as a stirring challenge for believers to continue standing for righteousness, no matter the cost.

Now before we go, we'd like to take a moment and congratulate the church Dr. Kennedy founded. This year, our friends at Coral Ridge Presbyterian Church in Fort Lauderdale, Florida are celebrating their 60th anniversary. We applaud them on this milestone and pray for God's continued blessings on this church body. To find out more about their ministry, and the life and legacy of D. James Kennedy, go to DJKM.org. That's DJKM.org. Well, that's all the time we have for today. Be sure to join us again next time for another edition of Dr. James Dobson's Family Talk.

Announcer:

This has been a presentation of the Dr. James Dobson Family Institute.