

The Lord's Arrow (CCC Baccalaureate Service 2009)

She is just a year older than me, but if you talked to her neighbors they would tell you that she has experienced a lot more difficulties in her first five decades of life. Her parents were both humble immigrants – her dad became a miner and her mom a shorthand typist to support their ten children. Because her mother was 47 when she was finally born, and because it was a difficult birth, she was briefly deprived of oxygen and later diagnosed with a learning disability that would follow her through life. She was constantly bullied as a child, and heartlessly given the nickname “Susie Simple” at school. As a result, she left school with few marketable skills and finally landed a lowly position as a trainee cook.

Her dad died in the 1990s and, because her nine siblings had all left home by then, she became devoted to looking after her aging mother until she died in 2007 at the age of 91. Losing her mom was so traumatic that she didn't leave the house for days, or even answer the door or the telephone for that matter. Two years later she still lives in the old family home, and her only companion is a ten-year-old cat. Over the years, due to the care of her mom, she never really had any time for herself – and whether it was that or just her “slightly off” personality, she never did find that special someone to marry. And so, other than visiting elderly members of the little church she attended, her life has been pretty lonely – just because she was different.

Other than the old house, her parents didn't leave her anything of much value – except for a love of music that she got from her dad, who used to sing at a bar. When she could, she would go to the theatre to listen to professional singers, and later on she too would try her hand singing at karaoke nights at bars just like her dad. But mostly, she would sing at the little parish church where the seniors loved her and loved to listen. It was safe there at least, because in her experience the world had been cruel.

Mothers are always proud of their children no matter what, and her mom was no exception. She got her to take some singing lessons here and there, and even convinced her to enter some local amateur talent competitions over the years. However, due to her disability, her simple appearance and her naiveté, all too many times people in the audience were more interested in mocking her than in listening. So, after her biggest fan died, she totally stopped singing in public.

She never would have taken the step if her mom hadn't been so insistent for her to at least try and sing before an audience bigger than the little parish church. She knew that her disability, her simplicity, her age, and even her looks were against her. She never would have done it – except it had been her mother's dying wish. And that brings us to April 11, 2009.

VIDEO CLIP: SUSAN BOYLE

After Susan's Boyle's televised appearance on the first round of the “Britain's Got Talent” competition, this video clip was viewed over 100 million times on the Internet in just nine days – an online record. She has literally become an overnight global singing sensation in the past two months. The media is clamoring for interviews, she has been given a major recording contract, and she will sing at the White House for President Obama in just a few days at the Independence Day celebrations on July 4, 2009. Even Elaine Page, the singer Susan said she aspired to emulate, has expressed interest in singing a duet with her and called her “a role model for everyone who has a dream.”

But the overnight success is not what impresses me most about Susan Boyle. I am impressed that, although she is well aware that the audience on “Britain's Got Talent” was initially hostile to her because of her appearance, thus far she has refused to change her image or even her lifestyle. The Glasgow Herald described Boyle's story as a modern parable and a rebuke to people's tendency to judge others based on their physical appearance. Similarly, Entertainment Weekly said that Boyle's performance was a victory for talent and artistry in a culture obsessed with physical attractiveness and presentation. New York's Daily News said that it was the stark contrast between the audience's low expectations and the high quality of her singing that made Boyle's performance such an engaging piece of television, noting that an underdog being ridiculed or humiliated but then enjoying an unexpected triumph has an enduring and powerful effect that inspires us all.

Susan herself had this to say in a Washington Post interview just a few weeks ago: “Modern society is too quick to judge people on their appearances ... There is not much you can do about it; it is the way they think; it is the way they are. But maybe this could teach them a lesson, or set an example.” Susan, I couldn't agree more.

Tonight, at this Baccalaureate Service, I have the high honor of addressing graduates who are DIFFERENT from everyone else in your respective schools. No, you probably don't have the disabilities that Susan had, but because of your stand for God you have sometimes been made to feel just as much of an outsider, and it has been lonely at times. Perhaps you too have been mocked for your convictions or your appearance; perhaps you have been left out and treated with disdain. And perhaps, in ways you can't even begin to put into words, the opinions and the unkindness of others have scarred you. I came to tell you two things tonight. First, your church is proud of you and thankful for your stand for God. Second, there is unbelievable potential in you that right now – just like Susan Boyle – most people who know you don't see.

You will not achieve your dreams or your God-given destiny without taking courageous steps toward your future. You will not become all that God wants you to be without hard work, good choices, and great faith. A person who never grows or changes is destined for mediocrity. When faced with a decision, many people say they are waiting for God. But in reality, GOD IS WAITING FOR ME. So when I am faced with the choice of doing nothing or doing something, I will ALWAYS CHOOSE TO ACT! Graduates, seize this moment and CHOOSE NOW.

2 Kings 13:14-19 (TEV) The prophet Elisha was sick with a fatal disease, and as he lay dying, King Jehoash of Israel went to visit him. "My father, my father!" he exclaimed as he wept. "You have been the mighty defender of Israel!" [15] "Get a bow and some arrows," Elisha ordered him. Jehoash got them, [16] and Elisha told him to get ready to shoot. The king did so, and Elisha placed his hands on the king's hands. [17] Then, following the prophet's instructions, the king opened the window that faced toward Syria. "Shoot the arrow!" Elisha ordered. As soon as the king shot the arrow, the prophet exclaimed, "**You are the Lord's arrow, with which he will win victory** over Syria. You will fight the Syrians in Aphek until you defeat them." [18] Then Elisha told the king to take the other arrows and strike the ground with them. The king struck the ground three times, and then stopped. [19] This made Elisha angry, and he said to the king, "You should have struck five or six times, and then you would have won complete victory over the Syrians; but now you will defeat them only three times."

The famous prophet Elisha, anointed successor to Elijah, the great 'double portion' prophet himself, is now in the last hours of his life. As he lays on his deathbed he is visited by the weeping King Jehoash, who knows that Israel is about to enter a terrifying new era – because, unlike Elijah, Elisha has no successor!

Jehoash exclaims, "O my father, my father, the chariot of Israel, and the horsemen thereof!" These are the exact words that the old prophet exclaimed many years before as he saw his predecessor Elijah ascend to heaven in a whirlwind (2 Kings 2:12). It is a fairly common expression in ancient Israel, and it expresses the fact that Jehoash knows Elisha is real power behind the country. His contact with God has accomplished more for Israel than their armies and weapons ever could have; in the words of the TEV translation, "You have been the mighty defender of Israel!" Literally, when Elisha showed up, God showed up with him!

But Elisha has no patience for pleasantries; he is a man who knows that he is fighting a losing battle against the relentless march of time, a man who knows that his very minutes are numbered, a man who knows that his appointment with eternity is now imminent. He doesn't even acknowledge the compliment; he just begins to bark out orders.

- Take bow and arrows!
- Put thine hand upon the bow!
- Open the window eastward!
- Shoot!

Elisha rouses himself to confidently declare, "The arrow of the Lord's deliverance, and the arrow of deliverance from Syria: for thou shalt smite the Syrians in Aphek, till thou have consumed them." Whether Jehoash is just humoring the old man or whether he realizes that an event of prophetic proportions is about to happen, we do not know at this point. He willingly complies with each direct request of the feeble prophet, fulfilling what is demanded of him. But suddenly, unexpectedly, Jehoash is put to the test which will forever mark his character and alter the very future of the nation he rules.

- Take the arrows! Smite upon the ground!

The king pauses, uncertain exactly how to continue. Until this moment, his instructions have been straightforward and detailed; he has been told exactly what to do and how to do it. But what does he do now? If there really is prophetic significance in these "arrows of deliverance" then it must matter how he proceeds! But the old prophet simply glares at him as if to say, "What are you waiting for?"

By now, Jehoash is beginning to sense it – somehow, in his hands is the destiny of his life and of his nation. But the teacher is silent, and all of heaven waits with baited breath to see what the pupil has learned. WHAT DO I DO NOW? Graduates, can you sense the same kind of destiny in your hands? Or do you just see arrows? Have you decided to smite the kingdom of darkness through sheer anointed determination, or do you just have a few memorized clichés to fire at the enemy? They say "only time will tell" – that's a truth, but here's a greater truth: "**ONLY YOU WILL TELL!**"

At the very moment when the miraculous could have happened, Jehoash fumbled the ball and settled for the mediocre and the mundane. With half-hearted hands, he took the arrows and smote the ground once, twice, three times ... and stopped. He was just turning his head to look for the prophet's approval when Elisha roused himself in anger and shouted in spite of his sickness: "Thou shouldst have smitten five or six times; then hadst thou smitten Syria till thou hadst consumed it: whereas now thou shalt smite Syria but thrice!"

Suddenly, Jehoash realizes to his shame that the first arrow was a prophetic act, but the remaining arrows were purely, simply, and entirely a test of zeal ... and he has failed the test utterly.

Syria will not be defeated, only smitten three times. The unnecessary battles and pointless skirmishes will rage on for generations – even into modern times – because Jehoash took his place on the stage of time with half a heart, the bare minimum of obedience, and a God-displeasing mentality of mediocrity.

In the words of the Psalmist (78:41), Jehoash has “limited the Holy One of Israel” by his actions. But isn’t God sovereign? Yes, but His sovereignty does not limit our responsibility! Because God has chosen to work through human vessels, the way each one of us approach our service to God becomes eternally important.

ONE PERSON CAN MAKE AN ETERNAL DIFFERENCE!

VIDEO CLIP: JOSHUA CHAMBERLAIN (ANDY ANDREWS)

Chamberlain later wrote, “I felt sorry for my men. Their leader had no real knowledge of warfare or tactics. I was only a stubborn man, and that was my greatest advantage in this fight. I had, deep within me, **the inability to do nothing** ... I knew I may die, but I knew that I would not die with a bullet in my back. I would not die in retreat. I am, at least, like the Apostle Paul, who wrote, ‘**This one thing I do, I press toward the mark.**’”

King Jehoash chooses to act totally out of hesitation, mediocrity, half-heartedness and FEAR, and as a result he forfeits his divine destiny. The old prophet falls weakly back on his bed, his body wracked by the fiery burst of anger. The very next verse (2 Kings 13:20) records his death and burial; we are left to assume that his frustration with Jehoash may have been a major factor in his swift demise. What was it that made Elisha so angry? I think I know ...

Elisha was also just a young man when his opportunity to make a difference came along. He was plowing in the field – working hard – when Elijah found him and threw his mantle over his shoulders. Elisha left his old life at a moment’s notice and served Elijah in obscurity for many years, ministering to him. And over that time, his determination and desire grew ...

When it became obvious that his mentor would soon be leaving him, Elisha stuck to him like glue. In spite of the smug mockery of the sons of the prophets who were content in their complacency, he shadowed Elijah through Gilgal, to Bethel, to Jericho, and finally to the banks of the Jordan River. And finally, after years of obscurity and humility that others thought extreme, after years of discipline that others deemed unnecessary, Elisha steps onto the stage of time and takes his single moment in the spotlight of divine destiny.

When the question came, Elisha was ready without a moment’s thought. “What shall I do for thee, before I be taken away from thee?” “I pray thee, let a double portion of thy spirit be upon me!” And for more than a half century, Elisha has lived out his determination. That’s why he is so frustrated with Jehoash, the patron saint of mediocrity! He has youth! He has strength! He has time! He has ability! And most of all, he has opportunity! And Jehoash is going to waste it all by just not trying hard enough. Elisha can’t take it!

Graduates, the spirit of Jehoash is very much alive in your generation; it will take a major effort to fight against it. **There is a little bit of rebellion in every young person – so use it to rebel against the WORLD!**

The problem with mellowing into mediocrity is that – like Jehoash – you will never know what could have been. As you leave the doors of your school or college this month, reality will begin to set in. The teachers are finished giving detailed instructions, your parents and your pastors are now – by virtue of your adulthood – moving from the position of supervisors to mere advisors. **So now the only person who can really tell you how hard, how long, and consistent to smite the arrows is YOU!** You will determine your own effectiveness and your own future.

The problem with most people is that after three blessings, three successes, three victories, we think we have it all – and that we can get by with less effort. And so we settle for less than God’s best. One of the worst enemies in life is peer pressure – because everyone is more comfortable with mediocrity. It’s easier to keep each other contented than it is to really live for God, do something for God, and give your life to God! If you are truly sold out to be an Apostolic Christian, be prepared to be criticized, maybe even mocked or shunned by the comfortable; but be prepared to be rewarded by the Lord!

YOU ARE THE LORD’S ARROW, WITH WHICH HE WILL WIN VICTORY!

- The arrows were united in smiting the ground.
- Arrows are shot by someone else – no personal agenda.
- Just because God has given you a ministry and a promise doesn’t eliminate your responsibility to keep smiting!

Joshua 1:3 Every place that the sole of your foot shall tread upon, that have I given unto you, as I said unto Moses.

The word “darak” (“tread”) also means to bend a bow; literally, God is saying “I will give you every place that you fight for!”

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