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Transcript: Ashcroft's Bob Jones speech

Commencement address given on May 8, 1999 at Bob Jones University by Attorney General-designate John Ashcroft

Thank you very much, Br. Bob. I want to thank each of you for investing yourselves in the mission of Christ — in redemption and forgiveness, and for preparing yourselves in the way that you have.

A slogan of the American revolution which was so distressing to the emissaries of the king that it was found in correspondence sent back to England, was the line, "We have no king but Jesus." Tax collectors came, asking for that which belonged to the king, and colonists frequently said, "We have no king but Jesus." It found its way into the fundamental documents of this great country. You could quote the Declaration with me, "We hold these truths to be self-evident that all men are created equal, and are endowed by their creator with certain inalienable rights." Unique among the nations, America recognized the source of our character as being godly and eternal, not being civic and temporal. And because we have understood that our source is eternal, America has been different. We have no king but Jesus.

My mind thinking about that once raced back a couple of thousand years when Pilate stepped before the people in Jerusalem and said, "Whom would ye that I release unto you? Barabas? Or Jesus, which is called the Christ?" and when they said "Barabas," he said, "But what about Jesus? King of the Jews?" And the outcry was, "We have no king but Caesar."

There's a difference between a culture that has no king but Caesar, no standard but the civil authority, and a culture that has no king but Jesus, no standard but the eternal authority. When you have no king but Caesar, you release Barabas — criminality, destruction, thievery, the lowest and least. When you have no king but Jesus, you release the eternal, you release the highest and best, you release virtue, you release potential.

It is not accidental that America has been the home of the brave and the land of the free, the place where mankind has had the greatest of all opportunities, to approach the potential that God has placed within us. It has been because we know that we were endowed not by the king, but by the Creator, with certain unalienable rights. If America is to be great in the future, it will be if we understand that our source is not civic and temporal, but our source is godly and eternal. Endowed by the Creator with rights to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness. I thank God for

this institution and for you, who recognize and commit yourselves to the proposition that we were so created, and that to live with respect to the Creator promises us the greatest potential as a nation and as individuals. And for such we must reacquaint ourselves daily with His call upon our lives.

Thank you. God bless you, and thank you for honoring me by allowing me to stand with Asa (Hutchinson), Lindsey (Graham) and a great Governor.

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