

THE DREAM: UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Amos 5:21-24

(21) I hate, I despise your feast days, and I will not smell in your solemn assemblies. (22) Though ye offer me burnt offerings and your meat offerings, I will not accept them: neither will I regard the peace offerings of your fat beasts. (23) Take thou away from me the noise of thy songs: for I will not hear the melody of thy viols. (24) But let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream.

Introduction

Each year as we observe MLK day, we commemorate it with mixed emotions and conflicting thoughts. Today, more than ever, we are in a quandary as to the meaning and even the effectiveness of the civil rights movement. Folks my age and with my life experiences can see how far we have come as a nation, but many are still disappointed that things have not gone any further.

As we study the history of our great nation, we see the good, the bad, and the ugly. This is true in the study of all nations. This is true even in the study of church history. As we study the history of our nation, we see paths of contradiction - even hypocrisy. Many of the signers of the Declaration of Independence owned slaves. Even this great document, which was progressive for its time, near its end, labeled the Native Americans as savages. We see how the Southern Baptist, originally, separated from the Baptist in the north so that they could keep their slaves. (I say this with no sarcasm but with truth; I have many friends and acquaintances who are Southern Baptists.)

Martin Luther King, Jr. had a dream of a beloved community, in which neither privilege nor punishment would be meted out with regard to race, ethnicity, or gender. In this beloved community, which was really the whole world, there would be love, respect, and mutual support and cooperation. In this beloved community, there would be no wars, no hatred, no economic exploitation, and, of course, no racism or sexism.

There are many ways to look at Martin Luther King, Jr.'s dream of a beloved community. Some say we must continue to work harder and harder to make the dream a reality. Others say it has turned into a nightmare when we look at the seemingly increase of corruption, hatred, and crime, including black-on-black crime. Others say it is too aspirational and is really a mere fantasy. Those who think it is a fantasy point to Darwinism and say that our species, homo sapiens, has genetic limits, and we have

reached our limits in many areas. They assert that technology has made it easier for us to exercise our baser inclinations. A cave man could only kill so many people with his club, but a person with an assault rifle can kill scores. One can only spread a lie so far by word of mouth, but with social media, a lie can spread to millions. They assert that just as an individual cannot jump one hundred feet high no matter how hard he or she tries, likewise there are limits to our ability to love and to cooperate. Our lofty aspirations are limited by our genetic inclinations. This leads to contradictory behavior and hypocrisy. They assert that individually and collectively we are a “bundle of contradictions,” and these contradictions will not go away. It is a form of “regression to the mean.” Even progress is short-lived and cannot be sustained. They sometimes use the metaphor of a ballerina who dances gracefully on her tiptoes, but as soon as the ballet is over, she begins to walk flat-footed. Most of the time, she is not tiptoeing, but walking flat-footed. There is no way she can sustain walking everywhere she goes on her tiptoes.

Contradictory behavior can be very frustrating, even when we detect it in ourselves. Contradictory behavior is nothing new. Remember, King David. He said, “The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want,” then he saw another man’s wife, wanted her, took her, and had her husband killed. What a contradiction! Individuals are contradictory, and nations are contradictory. This is why each of us must pray constantly and let the Spirit guide us.

The beloved community seems elusive. There are wars in the Middle East, war in Ukraine, polarization in America, lack of common courtesy, and some of the major protestant denominations are fractured.

The dream of a beloved community is a work in progress. It will not be fully realized until we all get to heaven. We can do our part to proceed to realization. The dream is built on the teaching of Jesus Christ Himself. To abandon the dream would be to abandon the teaching of our Savior.

Our text was, perhaps, Martin Luther King, Jr.’s most often quoted periscope. Amos was an eighth century prophet of the Northern Kingdom. He called for repentance and spoke against immorality, social injustice, meaningless piety, and relying solely on military strength. The general point of this text is that God does not accept the worship of those who are not interested in justice and fairness for everyone.

Through it all, I remember the words of my philosophy professor at Morehouse, Reverend Dr. Samuel Williams. “It is better to teach love and not do it consistently, than to teach hate and do it constantly.” He also said, “One must also ask two questions in every situation: What should I do? What can I do? Then you do what you can to make

things better. Whatever you do, don't make it worse." So, let's see what we can do to "nurture" the dream.

Exposition

1. Lament The Effects Of Evil.

(Matthew 5:4.)

(Jesus Lamented Over Jerusalem.)

(Matthew 23:37; Luke 13:34; Luke 19:41.)

(Mourning And Murmuring Are Not The Same Thing.)

2. Love Everyone.

(Matthew 4:43-44; 1st Corinthians 13:1-13.)

3. Lift the Lowly.

(Matthew 25:34-40; James 1:27; James 2:14-20.)

4. Listen To The Spirit To Get A Rhema Word.

(A Particular Word, For A Particular Person, For A Particular Time.)

(A Rhema Word Will Never Contradict The Written Word.)

(Acts 8:29-39; Acts 13:2-4; Acts 16:6-7.)

5. Look To God Who Holds The Future.

(Psalm 121:1-2.)

Closing Thoughts

We can learn much from the spirituals of our foreparents. They exercised strong faith – very strong faith.

When they wanted to ventilate because of the evil perpetrated against them, they sang, Sometimes ***I Feel Like a Motherless Child***.

When they wanted to rid themselves of revengeful thoughts, they sang, *Lord, I Want to Be a Christian in My Heart*.

When they needed spiritual and emotional renewal, they sang, ***I Just Came From the Fountain, His Name So Sweet***.

When they became fatigued, disheartened, and experienced internal strife, they sang, ***Walk Together Children, Don't You Get Weary***.

When they wanted to rid themselves of suicidal thoughts, they sang, ***I Will Go, I Shall Go To See What The End Will Be***.

When they felt they were no match for the evil against them, they sang, ***I Shall Not, I Shall Not Be Moved***.

When physical death was imminent, their faith led them to sing, ***Soon I Will Be Done With The Troubles Of This World, Going Home To Live With God***.

When they felt they could not personally make a difference, they sang, *This Little Light Of Mine, I'm Gonna Let It Shine*.

John Wesley was in agreement with our foreparents when he said:

“Do all the good you can,

By all the means you can,

In all the ways you can,

In all the places you can,

At all the times you can,

To all the people you can,

As long as you can.”

The only way to make a dream come true is to wake up and go to work. Lets each of us rededicate ourselves to the principles of our Savior.

Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

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