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CHRISTIANITY WITHOUT THE RELIGION



60 years

He Had a Dream

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“I HAVE A DREAM”

Selected quotes from Martin Luther King Jr. are italicized and printed in *burgundy*. They ring as true now as they did when he first spoke them.

I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Martin Luther King Jr. was a Christ-centered man of faith who stood for non-violent resistance to the evils of war and racism. He believed in responding to hatred and racism with love.

by drinking from the cup of bitterness and hatred.

Martin Luther King Jr. fought racism with every ounce of his being. But 60 years after “*I Have a Dream*,” it seems *his dream* has been tossed aside, as the blood-swollen god of racism continues to devour all in its path. We must turn our backs on revenge, retribution and retaliation lest we find ourselves in another Civil War.

I have decided to stick with love. Hate is too great a burden to bear.

We must learn to live together as brothers or perish together as fools.

Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding



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Dr. King rejected answering violence with more violence and never believed that the answer to racism was more racism. He argued and pleaded for the way of forgiveness, peace and reconciliation.

August 28, 1963, Dr. King delivered one of the greatest speeches, if not the greatest speech, ever given on American soil. MLK Jr. spoke of *his dream* from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington D.C. During this month of August 2023—the 60th anniversary of “*I Have a Dream*”—let each of us personally reflect on his words and the state of racism in America, and realize that growing bitterness and divisiveness denies *the dream*, and that “ending” racism with even more racism leads to an ever-increasing nightmare of hatred and bloodshed.

I must say to my people... in the process of gaining our rightful place, we must not be guilty of wrongful deeds. Let us not seek to satisfy our thirst for freedom

deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.

“ALL IN THE SAME BOAT NOW”

We may have come on different ships, but we’re in the same boat now.

In the United States, many perceive racism exclusively as a black-versus-white issue, while ignoring the fact there are and have been many oppressed races in our nation today, not to mention the world.

The suffering of people groups across the blood-stained pages of history is an ugly and reprehensible sin of humanity against those who are different. No race, creed or color, no religion, no empire and no nation can claim to be innocent of the charges of taking advantage of minorities or the marginalized. *We are ALL in the same boat!*

Our experiences (and those of our ancestors) arriving here in these United States were vastly different. In most cases, our ancestors shared the common *dream* of looking for a better life. But of all arrivals, those who arrived in chains endured the most reprehensible nightmare and trauma.

The past is prophetic in that it asserts loudly that wars are poor chisels for carving out peaceful tomorrows.

Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend.

There is no question that our nation must do a better job of lionizing people like Nelson Mandela,

Just as the suffering of African Americans should never be minimized, many other racial and cultural narratives of suffering exist who likewise deserve our time, consideration and compassion. Many people groups over the history of the United States, Canada and across the history of our world have suffered injustices, abuse, slavery and genocide. Most notable 20th century examples include the Jewish Holocaust and Armenian Genocide—hatred unleashed against a racial, genetic and religious people group.

ANY movement that seeks to engineer a forced justice through coercion inevitably creates more



“Beyond Vietnam”

On April 4, 1967, one year to the day before he was assassinated, Martin Luther King Jr. gave a sermon titled “Beyond Vietnam” at the Riverside Church in New York City. Among other things, he said,

“We can no longer afford to worship the god of hate or bow down before the altar of retaliation...”

“Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.”

Frederick Douglass, Booker T. Washington, Thurgood Marshall, Bishop Tutu, Harriet Tubman, Ruby Bridges, Rosa Parks and John Lewis, to name but a few people of similar skin color. Let us also remember and honor other prophetic, righteous moral voices—brown and white—many who marched to the beat of MLK’s drum.

Racism is not an exclusive black-white issue—many over history have suffered. ***We must, as Christ-followers, admit past injustices of all people, races and cultures, and help lead the way for Christ-centered solutions.*** Christ-centered social justice is not one-sided nor is it reserved for only one geo-political historical era. Christ-centered justice redresses all injustice and all abuse—attends to all victims and all those who have been marginalized, belittled, dehumanized, hated and treated as if they were invisible.

dysfunction and multiplies injustice. Legislating agendas that impose exclusionary politics and policies, and then energizing them with hatred of the despised “other,” serves only to engender and escalate new and toxic cycles of racism, hatred and injustice... the fruit is not Christlike justice.

By contrast, the agenda of Christ-centered social justice, as proclaimed by Dr. King, is based on love, mercy and forgiveness—while it rejects retaliation and revenge as a means to “balance” the past.

In Christ, there is no difference—black, white or brown—we are God’s children in his sight. There is no Christian, Jewish, Muslim or Hindu blood—only human blood. Perhaps Paul said it best, *“There is neither Jew nor Gentile, slave nor free, nor is there male or female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus.”* (Galatians 3:28).

Hatred is hatred, injustice is injustice, oppression

is oppression, abuse is abuse and racism is racism, no matter who the perpetrators and victims might be.

Our scientific power has outrun our spiritual power. We have guided missiles and misguided men.

FOLLOW JESUS—PURSUE FORGIVENESS, LOVE & RECONCILIATION

Dr. King dreamed of a time when his children would not be judged by the color of their skin, but the content of their character. And yet 60 years later toxic voices of racist hatred, many—even in the name of “social justice”—infect our entire culture with hatred, threatening to destroy anyone and anything in its path.

Many today seek to end racism and resolve past injustices by inflicting revenge racism. Such an agenda will not solve anything, but further polarize and divide, and add fuel to the fires of racial hatred.

There’s an old story about six people who froze to death around a campfire on a bitterly cold night. Each had wood they could have contributed to generate and share warmth with the entire group but each one had a reason why they refused to help the others.

“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”

A white person would not throw their wood into the fire because there was an African American in the circle. The African American withheld their piece of fuel as a way of getting even for all that white people had done to their race. A homeless man would not give to help everyone because there was a rich man in the circle. The rich man had plenty of fuel to help the others, but he refused because he felt some of those in the circle were lazy and unemployed by choice. A Muslim would not contribute because a Jew was present, and the Jew reciprocated by withholding his contribution.

They died, not from the cold without; they died from the cold within.

Now is the time, my friends, to heed the clarion call of *“I Have a Dream”* and be grounded in the peace of God, and consequently pursue forgiveness,

mercy, love and reconciliation. *The Dream* is not over. Let us seek reconciliation and peace. Let us ask Jesus to live in us, so that we focus on him, leaving hatred, discrimination and racism behind as we follow Jesus. May we not make room for hatred, nor give into the virus of racism, but rather overcome racism by the love of God which, by his grace, will flow from our hearts.

Use me, God. Show me how to take who I am, who I want to be, and what I can do, and use it for a purpose greater than myself.

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Empathy and Compassion in “To Kill a Mockingbird”



In *“To Kill a Mockingbird”* Atticus Finch is an Alabama lawyer, a white man who represents African American Tom Robinson, who is charged with rape. Within this highly charged emotional setting in this Pulitzer Prize winning novel, published in 1960, Atticus sits down with Scout, his young daughter. Atticus tells Scout, *“You never really understand a person until you consider things from his point of view, until you climb into his skin and walk around in it.”*

Atticus is teaching Scout about empathy and compassion—about striving to perceive how others feel with the ultimate goal of extending love, mercy and tolerance. Progress in loving one’s neighbor will never take place as long as “others” are judged by the color of their skin rather than the content of their character. Progress will not only evade those who hate in return for hate, but revenge, deepening hatred, divisiveness and eventually bloodshed will result.