

**“A Study of Understanding, Healing, and Hope”
A Look at the Writings of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.**

A Testament of Hope: The Essential Writings and Speeches

Session 1:

“The Current Crisis in Race Relations” (pages 85 – 90)

Amos 5:18-27 Matthew 5:43-48 Psalm 89:14

Background on the Text:

This article written by Dr. King was published multiple times in numerous publications, but was first printed in the *Presbyterian Outlook* (date unknown). It was published under numerous titles, but was last printed, under this specific title, in March 1958, in the *New South* Christian publication. As we will see in this article, Dr. King emphasized the importance of Christians – all Christians, white and black - to love one’s neighbors, and the implications this had on the nonviolent civil rights movement, integration, and the ultimate goal of a united community.

Questions to Reflect on as we Journey Through our Texts:

- (1) What similarities and differences do you see between the race crisis in Dr. King’s time and our time today?
- (2) What strengths do you see in the Nonviolent Resistance approach taught and followed by Dr. King?
- (3) In what ways do you need to become “maladjusted” in today’s society to understand the needs of the oppressed? Help heal the hurting? Find hope for the social outcast?

Diving Into the Text...

The Struggle:

“*In American life there is today a real crisis in race relations.*” (p. 85) Dr. King could have been writing these words today. The precipitating causes he identified to the crisis were in general twofold: (1) open resistance in the South (in other writings we will see it extended beyond the South) to the Supreme Court decision of segregation of public schools versus (2) radical change in the way African Americans view him/herself.

Dr. King expounds on this second cause, and it is essential for us to hear his words for us to understand the current racial tension in America today. For decades, the African American man saw himself as inferior. This was rooted out of years of injustice, exploitation, complacency, and passivity – all birthed out of segregation. The hurt was physical, emotional, and spiritual. Dr. King said it created superiority for the segregator, and inferiority for the segregated (p. 85). However, history started to change, and the African American started seeing oneself with dignity and self-respect. This determination led to a desire for freedom and equality, a freedom that all oppressed people – across the world desires. This desire does not disappear until it is achieved. Often the privileged class does not give us the privileges without strong resistance. The oppressed will not stop until full freedom – and equality and justice – is achieved. (The struggle continues today...)

How to Wage the Struggle: Violence or Nonviolence?

Dr. King said there are two ways to wage against the forces of injustice – violence or nonviolence. Violence and corroding hatred solves no problems and just creates more issues. It may create temporary success, but ultimately results in permanent trouble. He argued that if the African American community chose this route, that future generations would pay the ultimate price, long nights of bitterness and chaos (p. 86). (In that time, Dr. King was arguing against militant groups like the Black Panthers who were supporting a more violent approach to oppression.)

NONVIOLENT RESISTANCE: Christianity in Action

(Learned this method from Mohandas Gandhi)

1. NR not passive. Instead, the mind, emotions, and spirit are always active seeking to persuade the opponent that they are mistaken. (This is the reason for so many writings/speeches/radio addresses by Dr. King.)
2. NR goal is not to humiliate or defeat your opponent, but instead to create a relationship or friendship with them. Boycotts/Noncooperation used to create moral shame, with the end result being redemption and reconciliation.

3. NR attack is directed at forces of evil, rather than persons caught in the forces. The tension is between justice and injustice, forces of light and forces of dark. Ultimate win is for all – a beloved community!
4. NR also emphasizes that the method not only avoids external physical violence, but also internal violence of the spirit. At the center is the spirit of love. Must not succumb to bitterness or hate. Not sentimental, affectionate love. To ask an oppressed individual to love in that way is too much to start. We are talking agape – understanding, goodwill, spontaneous, God operating in our heart love. Love the person, hate the deed, and love.
5. NR knows that the universe is on the side of justice. It is the faith and understanding that the NR accepts suffering without retaliation, because he/she knows the universe is on his/her side. Faith helps keep us going.

Moral Dilemma...

Dr. King said, *“the problem of race is indeed America’s greatest moral dilemma.”* (p. 88). Dr. King praised many churches and denominations for speaking out in support of Civil Rights and against segregation, but also said there were many others who continued to remain silent. He then challenged his readers to not give in to an “adjusted” society – to accept things just the way they are. Instead, he challenged the readers (and is a challenge to us) to be “maladjusted” – like Amos, Abraham Lincoln, Thomas Jefferson, and Jesus.

Scriptural Foundations for the Text...

Amos 5:18-27...

The prophet Amos traveled to the Northern Kingdom of Israel to prophecy the coming judgment of the Lord. The passage describes the nation lifting up worship, praise, and offerings to God that were meaningless in reality. The true justice and judgment that would come is not what they were wanting. Dr. King was using this scripture reference at the end of his article when talking about “maladjusted” society, praying that just as Amos spoke out in the midst of a society in need of change, that we too can speak out in a time in need of change.

Are we willing to speak out in a time in need of change?

Matthew 5:43-48...

In this famous passage from Jesus' Sermon on the Mount, Jesus challenged the disciples to "love your enemy and pray for those who persecute you." This also stretches back into the article where Dr. King talks about the importance of "agape" love for those who oppress you. Is it possible to have a beloved community in the end without the ability to love your enemy? Dr. King would argue "No". Jesus would argue "No". How would you argue that question?

Psalm 89:14...

In this psalm, it states that "righteousness and justice" are the foundation for God's throne. Dr. King shared that the universe/God is on the side of justice, which is reflected in this verse (and many other verses in scripture). If this is the case, what is the responsibility of Christians (and the church) to seek "righteousness and justice" in the world? In what areas can we at FBC Elon start making a difference?

Next Week – Wednesday, July 1 6:30 PM

"The Time for Freedom Has Come" (pages 160-166)

Hebrews 10:19-25

Isaiah 61:1-3

2 Corinthians 3:12-18