

**“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 2:**

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

Hebrews 10:19-25

Isaiah 61:1-3

2 Corinthians 3:12-18

**Background on the Text:**

This article by Dr. King was published in the *New York Times Magazine* in September of 1961. Dr. King was asked to address the increasing number of college and young African American adults who were leaving the college campuses, classrooms, and jobs to join the nonviolent resistance movement, many of which being arrested as they stood up to the Jim Crow laws across the South. In this article, Dr. King emphasized the young African American’s desire for freedom, their passion, and their continued resolve for justice in a changing America.

**Questions to Reflect on as we Journey Through our Texts:**

- (1) What similarities and differences do you see in the 1960’s movement of the African American College Student Nonresistant Movement and the current protests of today?
- (2) As a Christian, what is your opinion about “laws”? “Unjust laws”? “Civil Disobedience”? “Protesting”?
- (3) Have you ever had the experience of being treated unfairly because of your race, gender, creed, religion, etc.? What emotions did that make you feel? How did you deal with those emotions in the moment? Later on?

**Diving Into the Text...**

**The Changing Shape of the Civil Rights Movement**

Dr. King begins the article by showing how the face of the Civil Rights movement has changed. What began as a movement lead by the mature adult (picture Rosa Parks sitting on a bus), now has shifted five years later to a youth and college movement that is sweeping the nation in the 1960’s. The inner drive for these college students is this “goal of freedom and this leadership role” (p.

161) – something, I might add, that college students yearn for. The Civil Rights movement provided a positive outlet for this focus.

This movement of African American college students was not sporadic, but it swept across entire campuses. On many occasions, entire student bodies were involved in walk out protests. Campuses were flipped upside down. In the past, African American students would try to model their white collegian counterparts. Now the opposite was happening.

Dr. King shared the influence of these students were coming from countries around the world. As the students saw oppressed nations succeed in protests, they stood in solidarity and wanted the same in America. The students also wondered why after the Supreme Court handed down the desegregation issue in 1954, then why was it taking so long for it to happen. Their response was, “We won’t wait.”

### **Education is the Key...**

African American students see that education and learning have become tools for shaping the future. (p. 162) Unfortunately, education has only led to limited opportunities in the labor force. Even within the field of medicine and law, the cases seen are limited by supplies and cases that are sealed by circumstance.

However, this does not change the goal of the African American student. Dr. King shared that the student’s goal is to change the conditions that shape the future. (p. 163) (In today’s society, isn’t this the ultimate reason why voices are raised and need to be heard for social justice.) This is why the students have left the classroom and chosen to enter the nonviolent movement.

Dr. King also shared that the student is contributing to society as a whole through social responsibility. Instead of being a conformist (last week we talked about needing to be “maladjusted”), the African American student is learning courage and self-sacrifice, to go alongside knowledge and discipline. In the end, the student will have a double education – academic education and education from social action – a well-rounded, mature citizen.

However, not all students are cut out for this dual education. Some students have taken advantage of the situation. Dr. King shared how one student talked about the ease of giving in to a forceful response. Even in present day’s resistance, individuals have taken advantage of the situation and misdirected

their emotion. Unfortunately, these individuals are the ones that seek or get the most attention. However, we must remember from last week's themes, that the focus is the overarching issues, not a person. As Dr. King states, "It expresses some of the pent-up impatience, some of the discontent and some of the despair produced by minute corrections in the face of enormous evil." (p.164)

### **College Students and the Law**

Dr. King emphasized in the article that the African American student, embracing the teachings of Thoreau and Gandhi, have respect for the law, and a moral responsibility to obey "just laws". At the same time, they recognize there are unjust laws that go against the harmony of the moral law of the universe. (p.164) An unjust law can be imposed just on the minority or can be imposed without the minority having a say or a vote on it. Dr. King shared that the students knowingly, peacefully, and nonviolently disobeyed the law and accepted the penalty for violating it, in hopes of the public reexamining the law. The students were hoping to shine a light on the issue. (In today's society, are the protests shining a light on laws or issues that need to be addressed or changed?)

Dr. King held this nonviolent approach against the segregationist approach that tries to circumvent the law and unwilling to accept the penalty. The ultimate act is disrespect and anarchy. The student's appeal is to the conscience. Dr. King is encouraging the reader to look at the result. I tend to agree, especially with the current climate. In these debates and arguments, what is the "promised" result. Discussion and level headed debate leading to relationship building and community. On the other hand, superlative speaking and promised action, filled with hatred and resolve.

Dr. King goes on to share how this new age of nonviolent resisters see the law – not just declaring right, but also needing to deliver them. These student protesters are using their bodies as catalysts for this change. Lunch counters have been liberated in over 150 cities across the South. Students are pushing for more change, and they are aimed at the entire system of Jim Crow, not just "token" laws here and there. The student's ultimate goal is freedom for all – black, Native American, Jews, and Mexican – in America. Moreover, they want it NOW.

Civil rights bill for all. Federal action to curb police brutality. Right to vote. Unemployment help. NOW. "The far-reaching solutions for lifting the "weight of centuries" is what the African American students are fighting for. "The long-

deferred issue of second-class citizenship has become our nation's first-class crisis. We can deal with it now, or we can drive a seething humanity to a desperation it tried, asked and hoped to avoid." (p. 168)

### **Scriptural Foundations for the Text...**

#### **Hebrews 10:19-25...**

In the letter to the Hebrews, the believer is encouraged to stimulate one another to love and good deeds. Encouragement serves as a "bedrock" to Christian faithfulness. How can we encourage one another to stand up for the oppressed? How can we "stimulate one another" to love, even when we might not necessarily agree politically, socially, etc.?

#### **Isaiah 61:1-3...**

Dr. King was prophetic in his words to a nation. His words were driving forces to young people, many of which stood up in the nonviolent resistance movement, as were described in this article. As stated in Isaiah 61:1, how can we as Christians bring "good news" to the afflicted/oppressed in our world today? How can Christ and the church proclaim liberty and freedom to the captives and the prisoners?

#### **2 Corinthians 3:12-18...**

In Paul's 2<sup>nd</sup> letter to Corinth, the image of Moses with a veiled face is used to describe the hiddenness from Christ. Paul then states, "Where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty/freedom!" (v. 17) How is the Spirit working through you to create understanding? How is the Spirit working through you to initiate healing? How is the Spirit working through you to restore hope?

Understanding=Hope=Healing=Freedom

**Next Week – Wednesday, July 8 6:30 PM**

**"An Experiment in Love" (pages 16- 20, especially pages 19 & 20)**

**Luke 10:25-37**

**Matthew 18:21-35**