

SERMON: FLOWING RIVERS AND A FRUITFUL TREE **(The Legacy of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr.)**

Psalm 1:1-3

(1) Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. (2) But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in His law doth he meditate day and night. (3) And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.

Introduction

There has always been the discussion about what makes each of us who we are. What makes us tick? Why do we do what we do? Why do we like what we like? When someone is deemed successful or famous, it is often asked, 'What was the greatest contributing factor to their success or fame?' Was it nature or nurture? Was it genetics or geography? Was it talent or training? Was it a "push" away from something or a "pull" toward something?

While psychologists, philosophers, and many other academics may debate this issue, there is something we must never forget. God, at the right time, has always combined these contributing, developmental, elements, in the right proportion, to produce a person who is destined to change the course of history. It could be a Johann Sebastian Bach or an Andrae' Crouch. It could be an Albert Einstein or a George Washington Carver. It could be a William Shakespeare or a Maya Angelou. It could be a John Dewey or it could be a Booker T. Washington. It could be the Esther of the Bible or Fannie Lou Hammer of Mississippi. It could be Martin Luther, the 16th - century reformer, or Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., the profound, peaceful warrior.

The First Psalm presents the portraits of two men. There is the blessed, happy, successful man who guards his direction, his leisure, and his company. He loves and meditates on the Word of God day and night. The ungodly man is just the opposite. He walks in the counsel of the ungodly, stands in the way of sinners, and sits in the seat of the scornful. Instead of being secure, fruitful, and happy, the ungodly man is blown away by the winds of life and is finally destroyed by the lack of a sure relationship with God.

For this sermon we will only concentrate on the godly man. Verse three will be the focal point. This verse describes him as a tree planted by an abundance of water sources. This implies stability and fertility. Bearing fruit in his designated season suggests his patience and dependability. Leaves that do not wither imply health and well-being and a stately and unblemished image. As I look at verse three and think of Dr. Martin Luther

King, Jr. and other successful individuals, including my father, William Bradford Ward, Sr., I see many rich parallels.

The text says “rivers of water.” The tree is nourished by more than one source of water. It could have been planted where a tributary flows into a main river. It could have been planted in a location where several irrigation canals converged. The same Hebrew word is used both for a natural river and a man-made canal. The point I make again, is that the tree had several sources of water. It was strategically planted there to assure success.

God places many pure rivers that flow through each person’s life. These rivers are the good people, the inspirational places, the unique experiences, and life lessons that make each of us who we are. Some of life lessons are formally taught; others are informally “caught.” It is common knowledge that Martin Luther King, Jr. grew up in a Black community, was nurtured in a Black church, and matriculated initially at a Black college. He imitated the positive things he saw others do and elevated them to a “higher height.” Let’s look at some of the rivers and streams that nourished the life of Martin Luther King, Jr. and, without a doubt, constantly run through the life of every godly person.

Exposition

1. The River of Scripture.

(Scripture Comforts, Challenges, And Corrects.)
(Dr. King Was A Man Of Scripture.)

2. The River of Selfless Service.

(He That Would Be The Greatest Among You, Let Him Be Your
Servant.)
(Dr. King Was A Servant Leader.)

3. The River of Sorrow and Suffering.

(No Pain-No Gain.)
(No Cross-No Crown.)
(Dr. King Suffered Martyrdom-The Ultimate Sacrifice.)

4. The River of “Stick-to-itiveness.”

(You Can’t Stick To It, If You Are Not Planted In Fertile Soil)
(If You Are Called, You Can’t Quit It And “Forgit” It.)
(Dr. King Did Not Quit, Even In The Face Of Death.)

5. The River of Sacred Song.

(Don’t Let Satan Steal Your Song.)
(Ain’t Gonna Let Nobody Turn Me ‘Round.)

(I Will Go, To See What The End Gonna Be.)
(We Shall Over Come.)
(Dr. King Kept A Song In His Heart.)

Closing Thoughts

This Psalm emphasized character, servanthood, and righteous living. Only when we have accepted Christ as our Lord and Savior and are cleansed by His blood, do we have the power to lead this kind of life. Most of us are not called to be a drum major for justice like Martin Luther King, Jr., but “if we can help somebody as we pass along, then our living shall not be in vain.” Give God Glory! Give God All The Glory!

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