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ORU Chapel - Martin Luther King Celebration - Feb 5 1992 Bishop George D McKinney

George D. McKinney

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CHAPEL SERVICE
BISHOP MCKINNEY
FEBRUARY 5, 1992

RR: I want to welcome you again to this chapel. I have a very special honor that I would like to speak to you about this morning. I think we should give honor to whom honor is due. And to be on the Dean's list of ORU, a student must earn at least a 3.5 average in 14 1/2 or more hours. And, from the past semester, the first semester, we have 292 students who made the Dean's list. I would like--and you have been identified--you've been contacted; you know who you are. I'm going to ask those 292 who have made the Dean's list to stand, that we might say a good "God bless you." All 292, give them a good hand clap! These are your Dean's list students!

Now, in order to be on the President's list, you must have taken at least 14 1/2 hours or more. And you must have maintained a 4.0 average. Wow! One hundred and sixteen students are on the President's list. Would you who are on the President's list, stand, that we may give honor to you. Give them a good "God bless you!" And as the Scripture says, "Go thou and do likewise!"

How many of you are graduating seniors this May? Would you stand? I expect to be there with you. After nearly two years' work, I expect to march across the platform and get

my own Master's degree from our seminary. So I expect to march with you.

And those of you who are just expecting to graduate, I'm saying to you: really buckle down this semester, and see that you do. See that you've successfully completed all of your requirements. Last year, I remember one student that got right down to the end, and he thought that he had finished. But he hadn't. And he was not able to march. He was so disappointed. His family was so disappointed. And I don't want that to happen to you. So be sure and finish.

The President of the United States and Congress have established February as "Black History Month" in the United States of America. We are observing it at Oral Roberts University; first of all, because our President and Congress have mandated it. Secondly, because it's right. Thirdly, thirdly, I want to say to you as students and faculty and staff, I did not invite our speaker this morning because we are observing "Black History Month." Although I believe in observing "Black History Month."

I invited Bishop George McKinney, the jurisdictional bishop of Church of God in Christ, in the San Diego, California area--I invited him because he is a friend of Oral Roberts University. He is not only pastor of a great church in San Diego, but he also is the founder of Charles Mason University in San Diego. This is a man of God. This is a preacher. And I invited him because he is a friend of our university. And while I appreciate "Black History

Month," and I'm observing it because I believe it's right, I want you to know that I've invited Bishop McKinney because he's my friend. I love this man. I appreciate him; he's a man of God. And I believe you're going to receive a blessing under his ministry. Join me in welcoming Bishop George McKinney as he comes to preach the Gospel. Bishop, we love you! Just take your freedom!

GM: Let the words of our mouth, the meditation of the hearts be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord, our God, our Redeemer.

Thank you for the opportunity, thank you for the gathering of your people here. Thank you for the clear and powerful witness that is going forth around the world from this place. Be with us now and we shall give Your name the praise. Amen.

Good morning. It is my pleasure to bring you greetings from sunny southern California, San Diego. I am delighted to have the opportunity to be with my dear friend, Reverend brother Richard Roberts. I appreciate the opportunity to share these moments with this great student body and faculty. I want to say that. Saint Stephens and the Second Jurisdiction in southern California has been enriched by the association with Reverend Roberts and Oral Roberts University. I want to take this opportunity to say, "Thanks for the friendship, the fellowship, the partnership that exists between this great university and a new educational institution in southern California, Charles Harrison Mason

University.

I are very happy to extend my greetings to the distinguished faculty and members of the administration and to my colleague, Dr. Leonard Lovett, with whom we've had association for many years. Dr. Ned Adams, God bless you. I'm developing so many friends here in Tulsa that I really feel at home, and I appreciate the warmth, the hospitality that is given to me each time I come.

Thirty-five, forty years ago when I was a student, we were fortunate to observe "Race Relations Sunday" one day, one Sunday out of the year. On that Sunday we exchanged pulpits. Black pastors preached in white churches, and white pastors preached in black churches. But for the rest of the year, the other fifty-one Sundays and fifty-one weeks, we went our segregated ways with almost no communication. Forty years ago, what is happening here at Oral Roberts University with 20% of the student body as members of the minority communities was not a reality in any major university in the nation.

I want to again say that I applaud and commend Oral Roberts, Richard Roberts, and the Board of Regents and the faculty here, my friend Reverend Bill Owens, and all who have worked diligently to make possible the opening of the opportunity for education in a Christian environment for all people. And, yet, there is room for continued growth and improvement of relationships.

Reverend Richard Roberts was right--that it is right

that during February we focus our attention on the contributions, the life, the great services that are rendered and are being rendered by people of color in our great nation.

I have chosen today to spend a little time talking about one of the great social activists, Gospel preacher, scholar whom God used as a changed agent during a very turbulent period of our history. There is always the danger of our deifying our heroes--painting those persons whom we respect and love larger than life.

I do not want to make that mistake, for Martin Luther King was a man. He was not God or a demi-god. He was a man who had human frailties, weaknesses, and we must always keep that in mind when we talk about him. If there were any of us who had any illusion about his human frailties--any of us who are involved with him--we were made to know by the FBI that he had them. I'll always remember, as a participant in the move for justice, the fight to open the doors of opportunity in housing and employment, transportation and education, it was my privilege to be involved in that fight with Dr. King. It was my privilege to be acquainted with him. It was my privilege to break bread with him, to develop a close friendship with his father and know his wife and widow. And I shall always remember the phone calls--the threatening phone calls I would receive during that turbulent period from the FBI and the demand to meet with the agent for lunch--at which time he would tell me

about the latest information that they had received from the wiretapping of King's hotels. The FBI knew that I was a preacher in the Pentecostal church--believed in holiness and faithfulness to one wife--and all of that. They would say, "You don't want to be involved in any way with a man who's not faithful to his wife." And the lurid details were made available. But I said then--and I say now--that the cause of justice, the fight for freedom, the taking of a stand against discrimination and lynchings and all of the other evils that were present and are still fighting somehow to remain alive in the American way--that the fight for truth, justice and righteousness is bigger than any man or any man's faults. And, so, we continue the fight.

And yet King was, indeed, an instrument in the hand of God that was perhaps a major influence in saving this nation--and I believe it was God's hand upon him--that prevented a bloodbath, a holocaust. For there were those during the civil rights movement who felt that the only way to deal with the injustice, the discrimination, the lynchings was to take up arms, to engage in physical violence. King insisted that to use violence was to be tantamount to committing suicide. And he was right. For any black community in the nation could have been cordoned off and could have been exterminated in a matter of minutes if the black community had resorted to the use of violence in attempting to achieve the opportunities that King fought for.

So I want to talk for just a few moments about how

King's philosophy and King's ministry and his witness had its deep roots in the Christian faith.

There are those who complain that he was not evangelical, Pentecostal, or Charismatic. But you must bear in mind that in 1947, '48, 1950, almost no Charismatic, evangelical Bible school or seminary would admit Blacks. It was not until some years later that Dallas and a few other schools had begun to open the doors to blacks. So that King and I and others who desired to get a quality education had to make a choice to go to an unaccredited black seminary or go to a white liberal seminary. King chose to go to Crose in Boston; I chose to go to Oberlin where the atmosphere was not evangelical, but where there was an openness to accept people of color which was not existent in the evangelical, Christian colleges and seminaries around the country. Yet King had his roots in the black Baptist church where his father pastored in Atlanta. He attended school at Morehouse and sat under the anointed teachings of a great scholar, great mind, a great educator, Dr. Benjamin Mayes. He was motivated to learn the Scriptures and to become acquainted with the philosophies of those persons whom God had used throughout history to build brotherhood and the fight for justice and truth. So his training from birth was in the solid, Biblical tradition of the Baptist movement. His theological training was sound, although it was liberal. But it did not disturb nor diminish his interest, his love for God, and his desire to do the will of God. For after

graduating from Croswell and Boston, he could have easily taken the easy road, accepted appointment at some chair or philosophy or theology at one of the great eastern or northern or western universities. But the pull of the Gospel message, the truth that was expressed in those Scriptures that Moses chose rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the pleasures of academic life for a season, King decided to go back home. He went back to Alabama. There was a season during which Emmiteo [?] and others were being lynched. Blacks rode on the back of the bus. Schools were segregated. Transportation was segregated. Housing was segregated. The right to vote was still denied to people of color. The American dream was a nightmare for people of color. King decided to go back there and to stand in the tradition of the social prophets of Israel in the night of the Word of Jesus Christ. He went back to the South knowing that it would be sacrificial for he knew that undeserved suffering could be redemptive.

There are three areas of his teachings--of King's teachings--that I would like highlight for these next moments and show that his major thrust in ministry was solidly based upon the Bible, the Old and the New Testament. For after all, as Christians, we must be people of the Book. Someone has said that it's all right for a preacher to read the newspaper before going into the pulpit, but it is very important for him not to preach the

newspaper. For it is only the Word of God that brings life and direction and forgiveness and points the way to God. And so King emphasized at least three major biblical concepts, principles that are worth reviewing here today.

To hear his speeches, to read his books, to talk with those who knew him, brings one to an immediate awareness that King believed firmly in the biblical concept in the brotherhood of man and God's will that justice should be done in the earth. Brotherhood and justice. Holy history. The Bible from cover to cover affirms that God made from one blood all men to dwell upon the face of the earth. The Bible affirms that God has never had any step-children or grandchildren--that all mankind are precious in God's sight. King believed that. King understood that there was a good possibility that man really started in Africa in the first place. In the liberal seminaries we were not given the African connection regarding the Black presence in the Bible, regarding the role of the Black church fathers from North Africa. But King understood that there had been a revision of history--that Black men and white men and brown men had all been included in God's plan of redemption. He believed that there was brotherhood; and it was God's will that the artificial barriers that are erected by racism and classism and sexism must be torn down, so that black boys and black girls and black men and white men and men of all colors could somehow join together in the enterprise of life under the fatherhood of a benevolent God.

King believed in brotherhood. Therefore he was as much concerned about those who lived in poverty in Chicago as he was concerned with the garbage collectors in Memphis. He was as concerned about those who were the victims of a foreign policy that had gone awry in Vietnam as he was concerned about those who were denied the right to vote in Alabama. He was concerned about justice because he understood the meaning of justice. The prophet Micah had instructed him "What doth the Lord require of thee? He hath shown thee, o man, what is good." And the Lord requires that you do justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with thy God. Justice is a concept that the Bible upholds from cover to cover to cover for justice teaches us that the wealth of the world, the abundance of God's good earth, does not belong to the privileged class who may have control of it. The wealth of the world and the bounty of God's goodness is not the property of the wealthy who, with greed, hoard it. Nor is it the property of the poor who covet it. "But the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof."

And since the earth is the Lord's, the God of all the Universe wants all of His children to participate in the proper appropriation and the use of what God has provided. The fight for justice and brotherhood was not academic. He was concerned about those who were locked out, left out, those who were victimized and demarginalized in the society; because he believed that holy history all the way through, that God was always on the side of the oppressed--that God

is a God of salvation and salvation is about liberation and liberation is about justice and freedom. It is important for God's children to always be on the side that God's fighting on. You must never be on the side opposing God.

The second theme in his ministry and witness was the theme that still fascinates us: his emphasis against popular opinion that violence is nonproductive--that the Christian, the man or woman of faith must reject violence as a means of settling disputes and dealing with conflicts and problems.

To understand the depth of this commitment, one must understand what was going on in the '50s and '60s in America when people of color did not have the protection of the law. Property was confiscated with impunity; lives were lost without any recourse to the law in areas of this country. And the natural response to a situation where there is violence upon the person and upon the property of people--the natural response is to react violently. And the law of lextalionis [?]-the law of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth--is the natural outgrowth of man's desire to protect himself and to use violence if necessary to protect his person, his honor, and his sanctity. There were scholars, there were preachers, there were theologians, there were people of prominence and power who felt that King was absolutely crazy to contend that "you must go through this training and resist violence and the indignities and inhumanity that was being inflicted upon the civil rights

workers. "You must resist it with nonviolence." It made no sense. Rationally, it made no sense. It only made sense in light of the teachings of Jesus that was so deeply embedded in his mind and in his thinking that he said, "I'm willing to go to jail; I'm willing to die rather than to resort to a system of dealing with a problem that I know goes against God's plan, God's will for dealing with conflicts and tensions and problems."

So King taught and lived that it is better to approach life and to deal with problems nonviolently and that there is a power from God that is greater than the power of a gun, of a police dog, of a _____, of a lynch mob. There is a power that is greater than all of the powers of evil that deny human dignity, that truncate the personality of people. There's a power. It may be crushed to the earth at a moment, but true crust of the earth will rise again. That there is a power from God that may seem long in being manifested but weeping may endure for a night; but joy will come in the morning if you hold unto God's plan.

So King insisted that those in the movement would always approach life, the problems and segregation, discrimination and the lynchings with an attitude of nonviolence while he taught that to become violent forecloses us from ever gaining a friend. Through violence, no friendship can be formed. But he said that if you can match the evil desire to inflict injury and harm with a desire to love, strength to love, that love will find a way

not to destroy the one through whom evil is expressed. But love will find a way to win that one to truth and righteousness and goodness. And a friend can be experienced in relationship with the one with whom enmity had persisted.

Further, King believed that nonviolence was the way to deal with the problems of segregation and discrimination because Jesus taught it was. Jesus said, "Whoever lives by the sword will perish by the sword." And King understood that. King knew that through history, the three basic ways of dealing with tensions and conflicts and problems and human hurts--of the three ways, Jesus' way was the only way that worked. For the way of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth would always end up, as King would say, "with a blind society and a toothless generation."

And the second approach of withdrawal from those who are perceived to be the enemy or the ones who seem to be on the side of injustice and unrighteousness--to withdraw is to destroy community and foreclose on the possibility of reconciliation. King taught in his seminars and in the lectures and the sermons that the only way was through confrontation that's honest; confrontation that allows the possibility for repentance and confession. And through confrontation that's honest, there can be reconciliation. And out of the conflict, there can emerge a brotherhood. There can be experienced justice in the land. But painful confrontation will always precede confession, repentance, and reconciliation.

The third theme that is so important for us during this observation and for all of our lifetime is a theme that was very dear to King's heart and, time and time again, I heard him express it. But I think it's a theme that was probably motivated by one of Paul's tender letters--his letter to the church at Philippi. It's one of the most tender, intimate loving letters that Paul wrote. But in the tenth verse of the first chapter, and I believe it was this verse that motivated King in the third emphasis in the pursuit of excellence. In the King James we read this: "That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offense till the day of Christ."

King motivated thousands of students and young pastors and people around the nation to pursue excellence in whatever vocation, whatever work the Lord called us to perform. It is sometimes considered a bit radical because there were still persons in the '50s and '60s calling for blacks and other minorities to settle for something less than excellence. There were those who felt that if you could become a good black doctor or a good black preacher or a good black architect, you would have achieved the ultimate. King said, time and time again, "If you were just going to become a good black doctor, good black preacher, good black lawyer, you've flunked already for there is no place in this society for those who have a second-rate mentality. Be the best that you can be. Always pursue excellence."

He motivated those to whom opportunities were closed

and sometimes limited--that if your opportunity is only to be a person who's involved in the common labor, whatever that labor is, approach it with dignity.

And I have a personal experience with that. After graduating from seminary, during those days it was difficult to find a place to be assigned. And I remember taking the position, with my Master's degree, as a dishwasher in order to support my family. Some of my friends asked me "How is it that you with a theological degree could be washing dishes?" I told them that I had a family to support, and I didn't worry about the stigma of washing dishes because I brought dignity to the dishpan. And when I busted the suds, I did it with dignity! It didn't cheapen my self-respect because it was an honest job, and I knew I wouldn't be bustin'' them long because I knew that God would open the door and bring one from the kitchen washing dishes to the bishop! Do the best at whatever your hands find to do; do it with all your might.

King taught that you must pursue excellence. If you are to be a dishwasher or streetsweeper or plumber--whatever you are--do it with the same vigor, the same gusto, the same enthusiasm, with the same commitment to do it well--that Plato wrote his great books. Do it with the same kind of excellence that Chopin wrote music and that Beethoven wrote music. Do it with the same kind of gusto and enthusiasm and expertise that Michelangelo painted the ceiling of the Sistine Chapel. Do it well; do it well. If you do what you

do well, what God has called you and where God has placed you, the angels will stand up and applaud you. Nobody will be able to say you're sloughing off because you did what God called to do well.

I believe that King was inspired by Saint Paul to encourage all of us to do what we do excellently. Because Paul lived it. He could write to the Philippians and said, "Don't approve anything less than the best." Because Paul's ministry, his life demonstrated that that was his philosophy. He did not enroll in podunk universities, but he sat at the feet of Gamaliel and studied until he received the kind of insight into Jewish history and philosophy and law and languages that enabled him to be the primary contributor to the growth and the expansion of the Christian church. He was prepared because he pursued excellence even when he was not converted to the Christian faith.

He taught the Philippians and he taught us today to pursue excellence because we have no excuse to do anything less than to pursue excellence. Because we've got an excellent God we serve who has provided us an excellent _____ through an excellent Savior who provided an excellent redemption plan that has brought us from darkness to light, from separation to brotherhood. He took us from the pigpen and put us in the pulpit and brought us from the place of alienation and caused us to sit together in heavenly place in Christ Jesus. We have an excellent Savior who forgives sins and blots out

transgressions, opens understandings, and breaks down barriers and sets the captives free. We have a good Savior, an excellent Savior!

We ought not to accept anything in our personal lives whether in marriage or singularity; we ought not to accept anything less in our business dealings. We ought not to accept anything less in our pursuit of our studies than that which is excellent because God has provided for us a more excellent way--an excellent way of forgiveness and brotherhood and justice and peace, a way of righteousness and holiness.

So my word in the sharing and closing, Dr. King said, "Pursue excellence. Be the best that you can be." And to pursue excellence requires recognizing--and King taught it--the importance of every moment. Don't waste time. Use your time, for God has given everybody the same amount of minutes in an hour, the same number of days in a week, the same number of weeks in a year. And every minute is important.

King recognized the importance of seizing the moment and using time wisely and pursuing excellence. For you heard Dr. Mayes say time and time again, "You only have a minute with sixty seconds in it thrust upon you. You didn't seek it, you didn't choose it; it's up to you to use it, give an account if you abuse it, suffer if you lose it. It's only a little minute, but eternity is in it."

RR: Well, give a--