When I see how we live our lives in selfishness and hate, again I say “man is not made for that.” When I see how we often throw away the precious lives that God has given us in rouseus living, again I find myself saying “Man is not made for that. My friends man is made for the stars, created for eternity, born for the everlasting. Man is a child of the almighty God, born for his everlasting fellowship. “What is man that thou art mindful of him? and the son of man, that thou visitest him? For thou hast crowned him with glory and honour Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thou hands, thou hast put all things under his feet All sheep and oxen, yea and the beasts of the field. The fowl of the air, and the fish of sea. and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the sea.” This is man’s kingly perogative Who this afternoon will rise out of the dark and dreary valleys of sin and evil, realizing that man’s proper home is in the high mountain of truth, beaty and goodness, yea even where God the eternal dwells forever.

Preached at Dexter. July 9, 1954

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 22, "What Is Man?"

13 Cf Psalm 84-8

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“God’s Love,” Sermon
at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

[ 5 September 1954 ]
Montgomery, Ala

After a summer commuting from Boston, King moved to Montgomery and began to serve as the full-time pastor of Dexter Avenue Baptist Church on 1 September 1954. For his first sermon following the move, he preached from John 3:16 and 1 John 4:8, emphasizing God’s universality “God’s love is too broad to be limited to a particular race.”

Text John 3:16

I Introduction

(1) FW Myers question Is the universe friendly? This has been the question

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1 “For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

2 F W H Myers was a British scholar and member of the Society for Psychical Research in England in the 1880s. Harry Emerson Fosdick used this quote in The Meaning of Faith (New York: Association Press, 1917), p. 51. “F W Myers, when asked what question he would put to the Sphinx, if he were given only one chance, replied that he would ask, ‘Is the universe friendly?’”
that the questing minds of philosophers and theologians have asked over the years. Some have answered no to the question. Others have answered yes.

a. The answer of Shakespeare’s MacBeth

b. The answer of Paul Lawrence Dunbar

c. The positive answer that Christianity gives. God, we are told is love.

One of the familiar passages affirming this love of God is John 3:16 “For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.” And another states “God is Love.” 1 John 4:8. Both of these passages reveal several characteristics of God’s love.

II. The characteristics of God’s love

1. God’s love is unceasing and eternal. Love is an essential part of God’s nature. Notice the text says “God is Love.” This can never be said about man. We can never say that man is love. We can only say that man loves. Love is not an essential part of man’s nature. But God is love. God’s love is not a single act, but is the abiding state of God’s heart. God does not begin to love. God’s love have no beginning and will have no ending. God always has loved and always will love. Civilizations might rise and fall, but God love will be here. Empires might crumble and perish, but God’s love will be here. Even there might be a day when the stars cease to bedeck the heavens, but the love of God will be here. Man’s love might waver and even dry up, but God’s love will be here. God’s love is eternal.

2. Notice secondly that God so loved the world. In other words, God’s love has breath. It is all inclusive. It is a big love, its a broad love. This is one of the things that distinguishes the N.T from the O.T (ill. The O.T God is a tribal and national God.) Jesus came on the scene saying “our Father” meaning that he is everybody’s Father. God’s love is to broad to be limited to a particular race. It is to big to be wrapped in a particularistic garment. It is to great to be encompassed by any single nation. God is a universal God. This fact has been a ray of hope and has given a sense of belonging to hundreds of dis-inherited people. Use the illustration of the old slave preacher. Show how we as a minority group can gain consolation from it. All of the hate in the world cannot destroy the universal effect of God’s love. Along with its breath, it is personal and individual. God’s [loves?] infinitesimal me.

3. King may refer to Shakespeare, Macbeth, act 5, sc 5, as he does in “Creating the Abundant Life,” Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 26 September 1954, p. 188 in this volume.

4. King may refer to the poem “Life” by Paul Laurence Dunbar (1895) as he does in “Creating the Abundant Life,” 26 September 1954, p. 188 in this volume.

5. “He that loveth not knoweth not God, for God is love.”

6. In an audio recording of “God’s Love,” a sermon delivered on 23 December 1962 at Ebenezer, King used this illustration “This is what the old slave preacher used to say. He didn’t have his grammar right but he knew God, and he would stand before the people caught in the dark night of slavery with nothing to look forward to the next morning but the long row of cotton ahead, the sizzling heat, and the rawhide whip of the overseer. He would stand up before them after they had worked from [words inaudible] He said now, ‘You ain’t no slave. You ain’t no nigger. But you’re God’s child.’ “ This anecdote may have been drawn from Howard Thurman’s Jesus and the Disinherited (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949), p. 50.
(3) God so love the world that he gave God's love is self-giving and spontaneous. No body commanded God to give his love. It is just God's nature to give. God's gift to man was given not because God was asked to give it, but because he wanted to give it. Man didn't even ask for it. (Give ill of wife) So it is with God's love. Can't you see what the hymn writer meant when he said:

Were the whole realm of nature mine
That were a present far to small
Love so amazing so divine
Demands my life, my all and all.

(4) God's love is redemptive. God's love gives life and new light. It saves us from death.

III Conclusion All that I have said about the characteristics of God's love is brought to clearer light when we turn our eyes toward Calvary, for it is here that we find the supreme example of God's love. And the scene on Calvary is more than a meaningless drama that took place on an earthly stage, but it is a telescope through which we look out into the long vista of eternity and see the love of God breaking forth into time. It is God's way of saying to wayward man, "Come home I still love you." (Tell story of the musician who went to France.) Paul was right "Nothing can separate us from the love of God." 8

Preached at Dexter Sept 3, 1954

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 69, "God's Love"

7 King used the following illustration in his sermon "God's Love," Sermon notes, 5 September 1954, in Papers 2 327. "So God's gift to man was given not because God was asked to give it but because he wanted to give it. E.g. a gift that a man gives his wife which she doesn't ask for is more appreciated than one which is given which she ask for.

8 King cites Isaac Watts's hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (1707)

9 Cf. Romans 8 35-39

10 King may have misdated the sermon since 3 September was a Friday.

"The Vision of a World Made New"

[9 September 1954]

[St Louis, Mo]

At the invitation of Nannie Helen Burroughs, president of the Woman's Convention Auxiliary, National Baptist Convention, King spoke at the organization's annual meeting on the theme of the convention, "The Vision of the World Made New." 1 He rejects colonialism and imperialism and condemns segregation, noting, "The tragedy is that the Church sanctioned it." Still he remains hopeful. "Today we stand between

1 Burroughs to King, 3 August 1954, in Papers 2 282-283.