been bathed in the sunshine of omniscience or baptized in the waters of omnipotence. I come to you with only the claim of being a servant of Christ, and a feeling of dependence on his grace for my leadership. I come with a feeling that I have been called to preach and to lead God's people. I have felt like Jeremiah that the word of God is in heart like burning fire shut up in my bones. I have felt with Amos that when God speaks who can but prophesy. I have felt with Jesus that the spirit of Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor, to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and to set at liberty them that are bruised.

May 1954

AD CSKC Sermon file, folder 118, "Sermon Material"

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3 Cf Jeremiah 20:9
4 Cf Amos 3:8
5 Cf Luke 4:18

The Martin Luther King, Jr. Papers Project

“Mental and Spiritual Slavery,”
Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

May 1954
Montgomery, Ala

King made several trips from Boston to Montgomery before moving permanently in September 1954. For one such trip, he preached from this handwritten outline. King calls on his new congregation to consider Pontius Pilate, who acquiesced to the crowds and sentenced Jesus to death. He criticizes conformity. "Many white people are against many of the practices of their group, but they are afraid to take a stand." The following outline was compiled from fragments found in two different sermon folders.

"They are slaves who fear to speak, for the fallen and the weak, They are slaves who will not choose, Hatred, scoffing and abuse, Rather than in silence shrink,

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1 King's announced 7 September 1952 sermon at Ebenezer Baptist Church was also titled "Mental and Spiritual Slavery" ("Rev King, Jr. Will Deliver Last Summer Sermon Sun," Atlanta Daily World, 6 September 1952)
3 This document's pages were found in two separate folders in King's sermon file. The first two pages were stored in the folder titled "Mental Slavery." The last four pages were filed in an untitled folder (Sermon File Inventory, pp 609 and 621 in this volume)
From the truth they needs must think,
They are slaves who dare not be,
In the right with two or three.\(^4\)

I

Int These words from the pen of James Russel Lowell are quite expressive of all that I intend to say this morning. Usually we think of slavery in the physical sense, as an institution inflicted on one group of people by another group. But there is another type of slavery which is probably more prevalent and certainly more injurious than physical bondage, namely mental slavery. This is a slavery that the individual inflictst upon himself. History abounds with individuals who have enjoyed physical freedom and who have at the same time inflicted mental and spiritual freedom upon themselves. Deep down in their souls and minds they were slaves. (Notice the mental slavery of the Negro.)

II

This morning I would like to use Pilate as an example of one whose mind was caught in the clutches of slavery.

1 His mind and soul were enslaved to the crowd. In other words Pilate found security in conforming to ideas of the mob. Listen to the account. “And so Pilate, willing to content the people, released Barabbas unto them, and delivered Jesus to be crucified.”\(^5\) Pilate did not have the moral courage stamina to stand alone on his convictions.

1 Most people today are in Pilate’s shoes i.e., conformist. Most people would take stands on their ideas but they are afraid of being non-conformist. (This particular slavery has lead us to a philosophy of a numerical test of truth.)

(a) Many white people feel are against many of the practices of their group, but they are afraid to take a stand.
(b) Many people develop undesirable habits in an attempt to conform.
(c) Notice how the Church has often conformed.

Now at a point we must all be conformist. (We are tied to an extent to the folkways and mores.) There is no virtue in being a non-conformist just to be a non-conformist.\(^6\) Some people are non-conformist just to get attention and to be different. This type of non-conformity I am not speaking of. I am speaking of a non-conformity which is based on high and noble purposes. This type is both legitimate and necessary. Whenever the mores and patterns of our society conflict with our highest ideals and tend to degrade human personality then it is our moral obligation to revolt against them. (1 Against War 2 Against the inequalities of Capitalism 3 Many white people 4 Young people)

(D) Quote Emerson.\(^7\)

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4 James Russell Lowell, “Stanzas on Freedom” (1892)
5 Cf. Mark 15:15. Pontius Pilate, who ordered Jesus’ execution, was the fifth Roman governor of Judea and ruled for a decade (26–37 CE).
6 The remainder of this document was filed in a separate folder.
7 King may be referring to Ralph Waldo Emerson, Self Reliance (1841) "Whoso would be a man must be a nonconformist.”
The truly great men of history have been those who could stand up before the crowd and not bow. The great creative insights have come from men who were in a minority. It was the minority that fought for popular education, for religious liberty, for freedom of scientific research.

Professor Bixler of Harvard College has made some interesting comments on our new psychological talk about the well-adjusted life.

We Christians are not called upon to be the conformist, but the non-conformist (use ill of Thermostats and the-mom). Being a Christian is serious business. It is more than reciting a few creeds. It is more than singing a few beautiful hymns. It is more than partaking of the sacraments.

Let us look at Pilate again. We find that his mind and soul were slaves to his own selfish interest. Pilate made it clear that he didn’t believe Jesus to be guilty of the charges heaped upon him and he continually said “I find no fault in him.” So Pilate’s problem was not that of deciding whether Jesus was guilty or innocent. He knew he was innocent. The problem was whether he should free an innocent man and lose he secure position with the people, or sentence an innocent man to death and so establish himself more securely in the affections of his subjects. He did not want to condemn Jesus to death. But to free him would jeopardise his own position. And so he crucified upon the cross of his self-interest.

Now it is easy for us to look back and condemn Pilate for such an action, but we must also see that many of us are just as much victims of this sort of thing as Pilate.

(a) Take the politician choosing between truth and votes.
(b) Take the businessman choosing between truth and some sharp business practice which mean more money.

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8 Harry Emerson Fosdick, “Facing the Challenge of Change,” in The Hope of the World (New York Harper and Brothers, 1933), p. 132. 9 Dr. Seelye Bixler, of Harvard University, has lately made some shrewd comments on our new psychological talk about the well-adjusted life. Julius Seelye Bixler was a professor of theology at Harvard University from 1933 until 1942 and served as president of Colby College from 1942 until 1960.

9 King probably refers to Paul’s words in Romans 12:2. “And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.” He also used this text as the basis for the November 1954 version of “Transformed Nonconformist” and the version that was submitted for publication in Strength to Love (see King, “Transformed Nonconformist,” November 1954, and King, Draft of Chapter II, “Transformed Nonconformist,” July 1962–March 1963, pp. 195–198 and 466–476 in this volume, respectively). See also Chart 1 (p. 16), which compares King’s explication of this biblical text in this document with passages in his several versions of “Transformed Nonconformist.”

10 “And so the Christian is called upon not to be like a thermometer conforming to the temperature of his society, but he must be like a thermostat serving to transform the temperature of his society” (King, “Transformed Nonconformist,” November 1954, p. 196 in this volume).

(c) Take the ministr choosing between truth and keeing in with the member and being popular with the breathen

The great progressive moves of history have been ruined by the purpetuity of "Pilateness". Conclusion—Who has been the most influential character in history Jesus or Pilate? Who is it that has been the most influential character of human history—Jesus or Pilate? Who is it that was able to change a Simon of sand into a Peter of Rock,13 Who is it that was able to change a persecuting Peter into an Apostle Paul—Jesus or Pilate?214 Who is it that has been able to split history into A.D. and B.C.—Jesus or Pilate? Who is it that so captivated the soul of man that they shook the hinges from the gates of the Roman empire—Jesus or Pilate? Who is it that gave impetus to a movement that has grown from a group of eleven men to more than 600,000,000 followers today—Jesus or Pilate? Who is it whose influence has outlasted the Caesar and whose majestic power has towered above empires—Jesus or Pilate? Who is it that has given a message so universal and international that choirs the world over can sing In Christ there is no East nor West—Jesus or Pilate?215 Who is it that has so convinced men that his message is eternal and lasting that they have cry out with Handel of all Halleluhia, Halleluhia.16

Preached at Dexter May, 195417

ADf CSKC Sermon file, folder 113, "Mental Slavery", and Sermon file, folder 124

12 King added this sentence in a second pen
13 Cf John 1:42
14 Cf Acts 9:1–28
15 King cites John Oxenham's hymn "In Christ There Is No East or West" (1908)
16 King cites the "Hallelujah Chorus" in George Frederic Handel's oratorio Messiah (1741)
17 King added this sentence in a second pen

"A Religion of Doing,"
Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

4 July 1954
Montgomery, Ala

During another weekend trip from Boston to Montgomery, King preached the following sermon at Dexter. Drawing ideas from Harry Emerson Fosdick's "Christianity Not a Form but a Force," King asserts "Christ is more concerned about our attitude towards racial prejudice and war than he is about our long processionsals. He is more concerned with how we treat our neighbors than how loud we sing his praises."1

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1 Fosdick, A Great Time to Be Alive, pp 89–97