

Palm Sunday Sermon  
on Mohandas K. Gandhi,  
Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church

[22 March 1959]  
[Montgomery, Ala.]

*Returning to his pulpit after an absence of nearly two months, King discusses the life of Gandhi, suggesting that "more than anybody else in the modern world" he had "caught the spirit of Jesus Christ, and lived it more completely in his life." Referring to Gandhi as one of Jesus's "other sheep," he observes that "it is one of the strange ironies of the modern world that the greatest Christian of the twentieth century was not a member of the Christian church." King continues by comparing the lives of three martyred leaders, Jesus, Gandhi, and Abraham Lincoln, noting that the latter two were shot for their efforts "to heal the wounds of a divided nation." He concludes with a warning: "God grant that we shall choose the high way. Even if it will mean assassination, even if it will mean crucifixion, for by going this way we will discover that death will be only the beginning of our influence." This transcript is drawn from an audio recording of the service.*

To the cross and its significance in human experience. This is the time in the year when we think of the love of God breaking forth into time out of eternity. This is the time of the year when we come to see that the most powerful forces in the universe are not those forces of military might but those forces of spiritual might. And as we sing together this great hymn of our church, the Christian church, hymn number 191, let us think about it again:

When I survey the wondrous cross,  
On which the prince of glory died,  
I count my richest gains but loss  
And pour contempt on all my pride.

A beautiful hymn. I think if there is any hymn of the Christian church that I would call a favorite hymn, it is this one. And then it goes on to say, in that last stanza:

Were the whole realm of nature mine,  
That was a present far too small.  
Love so amazing, so divine,  
Demands my life, my all and my all.<sup>1</sup>

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1. Isaac Watts, "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross" (1707).

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We think about Christ and the cross in the days ahead as he walks through Jerusalem and he's carried from Jerusalem to Calvary Hill, where he is crucified. Let us think of this wondrous cross. [*congregation sings "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross"*]

This, as you know, is what has traditionally been known in the Christian church as Palm Sunday. And ordinarily the preacher is expected to preach a sermon on the Lordship or the Kingship of Christ—the triumphal entry, or something that relates to this great event as Jesus entered Jerusalem, for it was after this that Jesus was crucified. And I remember, the other day, at about seven or eight days ago, standing on the Mount of Olives and looking across just a few feet and noticing that gate that still stands there in Jerusalem, and through which Christ passed into Jerusalem, into the old city.<sup>2</sup> The ruins of that gate stand there, and one feels the sense of Christ's mission as he looks at the gate. And he looks at Jerusalem, and he sees what could take place in such a setting. And you notice there also the spot where the temple stood, and it was here that Jesus passed and he went into the temple and ran the money-changers out.<sup>3</sup>

And so that, if I talked about that this morning, I could talk about it not only from what the Bible says but from personal experience, first-hand experience. But I beg of you to indulge me this morning to talk about the life of a man who lived in India. And I think I'm justified in doing this because I believe this man, more than anybody else in the modern world, caught the spirit of Jesus Christ and lived it more completely in his life. His name was Gandhi, Mohandas K. Gandhi. And after he lived a few years, the poet Tagore, who lived in India, gave him another name: "Mahatma," the great soul.<sup>4</sup> And we know him as Mahatma Gandhi.

I would like to use a double text for what I have to say this morning, both of them are found in the gospel as recorded by Saint John. One found in the tenth chapter, and the sixteenth verse, and it reads, "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold." "I have other sheep, which are not of this fold." And then the other one is found in the fourteenth chapter of John, in the twelfth verse. It reads, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do, shall he do also. And greater works than these shall he do because I go unto my Father."

I want you to notice these two passages of scripture. On the one hand, "I have other sheep that are not of this fold." I think Jesus is saying here in substance that "I have followers who are not in this inner circle." He's saying in substance that "I have people dedicated and following my ways who have not become attached to the institution surrounding my name. I have other sheep that are not of this fold. And my influence is not limited to the institutional Christian church." I think this is what Jesus would say if he were living today concerning this passage, that "I have

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2. For more on King's travels in the Middle East, see King, *A Walk Through the Holy Land*, Easter Sunday Sermon Delivered at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 29 March 1959, pp. 164–175 in this volume.

3. Cf. Mark 11:15.

4. Indian nationalist and poet Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941) won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1913. It is believed that he was the first to address Gandhi as Mahatma (see *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 15, August 1918–July 1919 [Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1965], pp. 495–496).

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people who are following me who've never joined the Christian church as an institution."

And then that other passage, I think Jesus was saying this—it's a strange thing, and I used to wonder what Jesus meant when he said, "There will be people who will do greater things than I did."<sup>5</sup> And I have thought about the glory and honor surrounding the life of Christ, and I thought about the fact that he represented the absolute revelation of God. And I've thought about the fact that in his life, he represented all of the glory of eternity coming into time. And how would it be possible for anybody to do greater works than Christ? How would it be possible for anybody even to match him, or even to approximate his work?

But I've come to see what Christ meant. Christ meant that in his life he would only touch a few people. And in his lifetime—and if you study the life of Christ, and if you know your Bible you realize that Christ never traveled outside of Palestine, and his influence in his own lifetime was limited to a small group of people. He never had more than twelve followers in his lifetime; others heard about him and others came to see him, but he never had but twelve real followers, and three of them turned out to be not too good. But he pictured the day that his spirit and his influence would go beyond the borders of Palestine, and that men would catch his message and carry it over the world, and that men all over the world would grasp the truth of his gospel. And they would be able to do things that he couldn't do. They were able, be able to travel places that he couldn't travel. And they would be able to convert people that he couldn't convert in his lifetime. And this is what he meant when he said, "Greater works shall ye do, for an Apostle Paul will catch my work."

And I remember just last Tuesday morning standing on that beautiful hill called the Acropolis in Athens. And there, standing around the Parthenon, as it stands still in all of its beautiful and impressive proportions, although it has been torn somewhat through wars, but it still stands there. And right across from the Acropolis you see Mars Hill. And I remember when our guide said, "That's the hill where the Apostle Paul preached."<sup>6</sup>

Now when you think of the fact that Athens is a long ways from Jerusalem, for we traveled right over Damascus where Paul was converted, and Damascus is at least five hours by flight from Athens. And you think about the fact that Paul had caught this message and carried it beyond the Damascus Road all over the world, and he had gone as far as Greece, as far as Athens, to preach the gospel of Jesus Christ. This is what Jesus meant that "somebody will catch my message, and they would be able to carry it in places that I couldn't carry it, and they would be able to do things in their lives that I couldn't do."

And I believe these two passages of scripture apply more uniquely to the life and work of Mahatma Gandhi than to any other individual in the history of the world. For here was a man who was not a Christian in terms of being a member of the Christian church but who was a Christian. And it is one of the strange ironies of the modern world that the greatest Christian of the twentieth century

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5. Cf. John 1:50.

6. Cf. Acts 17:22.

22 Mar was not a member of the Christian church. And the second thing is, that this  
1959 man took the message of Jesus Christ and was able to do even greater works than  
Jesus did in his lifetime. Jesus himself predicted this: "Ye shall do even greater  
works."<sup>7</sup>

Now let us look at the life, as briefly as possible, the life of this man and his work, and see just what it gives us, and what this life reveals to us in terms of the struggles ahead. I would say the first thing that we must see about this life is that Mahatma Gandhi was able to achieve for his people independence [*Congregation:*] (*Yes*) through nonviolent means. I think you should underscore this. He was able to achieve for his people independence from the domination of the British Empire without lifting one gun or without uttering one curse word. He did it with the spirit of Jesus Christ in his heart and the love of God, and this was all he had. He had no weapons. He had no army, in terms of military might. And yet he was able to achieve independence from the largest empire in the history of this world without picking up a gun or without any ammunition.

Gandhi was born in India in a little place called Porbandar, down almost in central India. And he had seen the conditions of this country. India had been under the domination of the British Empire for many years. And under the domination of the British Empire, the people of India suffered all types of exploitation. And you think about the fact that while Britain was in India, that out of a population of four hundred million people, more than three hundred and sixty-five million of these people made less than fifty dollars a year. And more than half of this had to be spent for taxes.

Gandhi looked at all of this. He looked at his people as they lived in ghettos and hovels and as they lived out on the streets, many of them. And even today, after being exploited so many years, they haven't been able to solve those problems. For we landed in Bombay, India, and I never will forget it, that night. We got up early in the morning to take a plane for Delhi. And as we rode out to the airport we looked out on the street and saw people sleeping out on the sidewalks and out in the streets, and everywhere we went to. Walk through the train station, and you can't hardly get to the train, because people are sleeping on the platforms of the train station. No homes to live in. In Bombay, India, where they have a population of three million people, five hundred thousand of these people sleep on the streets at night. Nowhere to sleep, no homes to live in, making no more than fifteen or twenty dollars a year or even less than that.

And this was the exploitation that Mahatma Gandhi noticed years ago. And even more than that, these people were humiliated and embarrassed and segregated in their own land. There were places that the Indian people could not even go in their own land. The British had come in there and set up clubs and other places and even hotels where Indians couldn't even enter in their own land. Gandhi

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7. King may have been influenced by missionary E. Stanley Jones's book on the life of Gandhi: "One of the most Christlike men in history was not called a Christian at all. . . . God uses many instruments, and he has used Mahatma Gandhi to help Christianize unchristian Christianity" (Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation*, p. 77). King owned and annotated a copy of Jones's book.

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looked at all of this, and as a young lawyer, after he had just left England and gotten his law, received his law training, he went over to South Africa. And there he saw in South Africa, and Indians were even exploited there.<sup>8</sup>

And one day he was taking a train to Pretoria, and he had first-class accommodations on that train. And when they came to take up the tickets they noticed that he was an Indian, that he had a brown face, and they told him to get out and move on to the third-class accommodation, that he wasn't supposed to be there with any first-class accommodation. And Gandhi that day refused to move, and they threw him off the train. And there, in that cold station that night, he stayed all night, and he started meditating on his plight and the plight of his people. And he decided from that point on that he would never submit himself to injustice, or to exploitation.

It was there on the next day that he called a meeting of all of the Indians in South Africa, in that particular region of South Africa, and told them what had happened, and told them what was happening to them every day, and said that, "We must do something about it. We must organize ourselves to rid our community, the South African community, and also the Indian community back home, of the domination and the exploitation of foreign powers."<sup>9</sup>

But Mahatma Gandhi came to something else in that moment. As he started organizing his forces in South Africa, he read the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>10</sup> He later read the works of the American poet Thoreau. And he later read the Russian author Tolstoy. And he found something in all of this that gave him insights. Started reading in the Bible, "turn the other cheek," "resist evil with good," "blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth."<sup>11</sup> And all of these things inspired him to no end. He read Thoreau as he said that no just man can submit to anything evil, even if it means standing up and being disobedient to the laws of the state. And so this he combined into a new method, and he said to his people, "Now, it's possible to resist evil; this is your first responsibility; never adjust to evil, resist it. But if you can resist it without resorting to violence or to hate, you can stand up against it and still love the individuals that carry on the evil system that you are resisting."<sup>12</sup>

And a few years later, after he won a victory in South Africa, he went back to India. And there his people called on him, called on his leadership, to organize

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8. Gandhi was called to the bar in London in 1891 and traveled to South Africa two years later.

9. Gandhi describes these events in part 2, chapters 8 through 12, of his autobiography (Gandhi, *Gandhi's Autobiography: The Story of My Experiments with Truth* [Washington, D.C.: Public Affairs Press, 1948]).

10. Cf. Matthew 5-7.

11. Cf. Matthew 5:39, Romans 12:21, and Matthew 5:5. In his autobiography Gandhi recalled reading the Bible while a student in England (Gandhi, *Gandhi's Autobiography*, pp. 91-93).

12. Gandhi suggested that Thoreau's impact on him had been overstated: "The statement that I had derived my idea of civil disobedience from the writings of Thoreau is wrong. The resistance to authority in South Africa was well advanced before I got the essay of Thoreau on civil disobedience" (Gandhi to Kodanda Rao, 10 September 1935, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 61, April 25-September 30, 1935 [Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1975], p. 401).

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them and get ready for the trials ahead, and he did just that. He went back, and in 1917 he started his first campaign in India.<sup>13</sup> And throughout his long struggle there, he followed the way of nonviolent resistance. Never uttered a curse word, mark you. He never owned an instrument of violence. And he had nothing but love and understanding goodwill in his heart for the people who were seeking to defeat him and who were exploiting and humiliating his people.

And then came that day when he said to the people of India, "I'm going to leave this community." He had set up in a place called Ahmadabad, and there was the Sabarmati ashram. He lived there with a group of people; his ashram was a place of quiet and meditation where the people lived together. And one day he said to those people, "I'm going to leave this place, and I will not return until India has received her independence." And this was in 1930. And he had so organized the whole of India then; people had left their jobs. People with tremendous and powerful law practices had left their jobs. The president of India was a lawyer who had made almost a million rupees—a million dollars—and he left it, turned it all over to the movement. The father, the president of, the prime minister of India, Mr. Nehru, left his law practice to get in the freedom movement with Gandhi, and he had organized the whole of India.<sup>14</sup>

And you have read of the Salt March, which was a very significant thing in the Indian struggle. And this demonstrates how Gandhi used this method of nonviolence and how he would mobilize his people and galvanize the whole of the nation to bring about victory. In India, the British people had come to the point where they were charging the Indian people a tax on all of the salt, and they would not allow them even to make their own salt from all of the salt seas around the country. They couldn't touch it; it was against the law. And Gandhi got all of the people of India to see the injustice of this. And he decided one day that they would march from Ahmadabad down to a place called Dandi.

We had the privilege of spending a day or so at Ahmadabad at that Sabarmati ashram, and we stood there at the point where Gandhi started his long walk of two hundred and eighteen miles. And he started there walking with eighty people. And gradually the number grew to a million, and it grew to millions and millions. And finally, they kept walking and walking until they reached the little village of Dandi. And there, Gandhi went on and reached down in the river, or in the sea rather, and brought up a little salt in his hand to demonstrate and dramatize the fact that they were breaking this law in protest against the injustices they had faced all over the years with these salt laws.

And Gandhi said to his people, "If you are hit, don't hit back; even if they shoot at you, don't shoot back; if they curse you, don't curse back (*Yes, Yes*), but just keep

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13. Gandhi returned to India in 1914 and in 1917 began his first protest movement on behalf of exploited indigo farmers in Champaran, Bihar. The campaign, which consisted of rent strikes, work boycotts, and community development, led to the signing of the Champaran Agrarian Act (1918).

14. In his autobiography, Nehru describes his father's immersion into the freedom movement: "Nonco-operation meant his withdrawing from his legal practice; it meant a total break with his past life and a new fashioning of it—not an easy matter when one is on the eve of one's sixtieth birthday" (Nehru, *Toward Freedom: The Autobiography of Jawaharlal Nehru* [New York: The John Day Co., 1941], p. 66).



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moving. Some of us might have to die before we get there; some of us might be thrown in jail before we get there, but let us just keep moving.” And they kept moving, and they walked and walked, and millions of them had gotten together when they finally reached that point. And the British Empire knew, then, that this little man had mobilized the people of India to the point that they could never defeat them. And they realized, at that very point, that this was the beginning of the end of the British Empire as far as India was concerned.

He was able to mobilize and galvanize more people than, in his lifetime, than any other person in the history of this world. And just with a little love in his heart and understanding goodwill and a refusal to cooperate with an evil law, he was able to break the backbone of the British Empire. And this, I think, is one of the most significant things that has ever happened in the history of the world, and more than three hundred and ninety million people achieved their freedom. And they achieved it nonviolently when a man refused to follow the way of hate, and he refused to follow the way of violence, and only decided to follow the way of love and understanding goodwill and refused to cooperate with any system of evil.

And the significant thing is that when you follow this way, when the battle is almost over, and a new friendship and reconciliation exists between the people who have been the oppressors and the oppressed. There is no greater friendship anywhere in the world today than between the Indian people and the British people. If you ask the Indian people today who they love more, what people, whether they love Americans more, British more, they will say to you immediately that they love the British people more.

The night we had dinner with Prime Minister Nehru the person who sat at that dinner table with us, as a guest of the prime minister at that time, was Lady Mountbatten with her daughter, the wife of Lord Mountbatten, who was the viceroy of India when it received its independence.<sup>15</sup> And they’re marvelous and great and lasting friends. There is a lasting friendship there. And this is only because Gandhi followed the way of love and nonviolence, refusing to hate and refusing to follow the way of violence. And a new friendship exists. The aftermath of violence is always bitterness; the aftermath of nonviolence is the creation of the beloved community so that when the battle is over, it’s over, and a new love and a new understanding and a new relationship comes into being between the oppressed and the oppressor.

This little man, one of the greatest conquerors that the world has ever known. Somebody said that when Mahatma Gandhi was coming over to England for the roundtable conference in 1932, a group of people stood there waiting.<sup>16</sup> And somebody pointed out, and while they were waiting somebody said, “You see around that cliff? That was where Julius Caesar came, the way he came in when he invaded Britain years ago.” And then somebody pointed over to another place and

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15. Louis Mountbatten (1900–1979) was the last viceroy of India. His wife, Edwina Mountbatten (1901–1960), and their daughter Pamela (1929–) were in attendance at the 10 February dinner with Nehru and the Kings.

16. Between 1930 and 1932, three roundtable conferences were held in London to consider a future constitution for India. Gandhi represented the India National Congress at the second roundtable in 1931.

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said, "That was the way William the Conqueror came in. They invaded years ago in the Battle of Hastings." Then somebody else looked over and said, "There is another conqueror coming in. In just a few minutes the third and greatest conqueror that has ever come into Great Britain." And strangely enough, this little man came in with no armies, no guards around him, no military might, no beautiful clothes, just loin cloth, but this man proved to be the greatest conqueror that the British Empire ever faced. He was able to achieve, through love and nonviolence, the independence of his people and break the backbone of the British Empire. "Ye shall do greater works than I have done." And this is exemplified in the life of Mahatma Gandhi.

Let me rush on to say a second thing: here is a man who achieved in his life absolute self-discipline. Absolute self-discipline. So that in his life there was no gulf between the private and the public; there was no gulf in his life between the "is" and the "oughts." Here was a man who had absolved the "isness" of his being and the "oughtness" of his being. And this was one of the greatest accomplishments in his life. Gandhi used to say to his people, "I have no secrets. My life is an open book." And he lived that every day. He achieved in his life absolute self-discipline.

He started out as a young lawyer. He went to South Africa, and he became a thriving, promising lawyer making more than thirty thousand dollars a year. And then he came to see that he had a task ahead to free his people. And he vowed poverty, decided to do away with all of the money that he had made, and he went back to India and started wearing the very clothes that all of these disinherited masses of people of India had been wearing. He had been a popular young man in England, worn all of the beautiful clothes and his wife the beautiful saris of India with all of its silk beauty, but then he came to that point of saying to his wife, "You've got to drop this." And he started wearing what was called the dhoti, loin cloth, the same thing that these masses of people wore. He did it, identified himself with them absolutely.

And he had no income; he had nothing in this world, not even a piece of property. This man achieved in his life absolute self-discipline to the point of renouncing the world. And when he died, the only thing that he owned was a pair of glasses, a pair of sandals, a loincloth, some false teeth, and some little monkeys who saw no evil, who said no evil, and who somehow didn't see any evil. This is all he had. And if you ask people in India today why was it that Mahatma Gandhi was able to do what he did in India, they would say they followed him because of his absolute sincerity and his absolute dedication. Here was a man who achieved in his life this bridging of the gulf between the "ought" and the "is." He achieved in his life absolute self-discipline.

And there is a final thing Mahatma Gandhi was able to do. He had the amazing capacity, the amazing capacity for internal criticism. Most others have the amazing capacity for external criticism. We can always see the evil in others; we can always see the evil in our oppressors. But Gandhi had the amazing capacity to see not only the splinter in his opponent's eye but also the planks in his own eye and the eye of his people.<sup>17</sup> He had the amazing capacity for self-criticism. And this



was true in his individual life; it was true in his family life; and it was true in his people's life. He not only criticized the British Empire, but he criticized his own people when they needed it, and he criticized himself when he needed it. 22 Mar 1959

And whenever he made a mistake, he confessed it publicly. Here was a man who would say to his people, "I'm not perfect. I'm not infallible. I don't want you to start a religion around me. I'm not a god." And I'm convinced that today there would be a religion around Gandhi if Gandhi had not insisted all through his life that "I don't want a religion around me because I'm too human. I'm too fallible. Never think that I'm infallible."

And any time he made a mistake, even in his personal life or even in decisions that he made in the independence struggle, he came out in the public and said, "I made a mistake." In 1922, when he had started one of his first campaigns of nonviolence and some of the people started getting violent, some of the Indian people started getting violent, and they killed twenty some, twenty-eight of the British people in this struggle. And in the midst of this struggle, Gandhi came to the forefront of the scene and called the campaign off. And he stood up before the Indian people and before the British people and said, "I made a Himalayan blunder. I thought my people were ready; I thought they were disciplined for this task."<sup>18</sup> And people around Gandhi were angry with him. Even Prime Minister Nehru says in *Toward Freedom* that he was angry. His father was angry. All of these people who had left their hundreds and thousands of dollars to follow Gandhi and his movement were angry when he called this movement off.<sup>19</sup> But he called it off because, as he said, "I've made a blunder." And he never hesitated to acknowledge before the public when he made a mistake. And he always went back and said, "I made a mistake. I'm going back to rethink it, I'm going back to meditate over it. And I'll be coming back. Don't think the struggle is over, don't think I'm retreating from this thing permanently and ultimately. I'm just taking a temporary retreat, because I made a mistake."

But not only that, he confessed the errors and the mistakes of his family. Even when his son, one of his sons, went wrong he wrote in his paper about it.<sup>20</sup> And his wife committed an act once that was sinful to him. He had pledged himself to poverty, and he would never use any of the money that came in for his personal benefit. And one day his wife, feeling the need for some of that money that had come in, decided to use it. And Gandhi discovered it, and he wrote in his paper that his wife had committed a grave sin.<sup>21</sup> He didn't mind letting the world know it. Here was a man who confessed his errors publicly and didn't mind if you saw

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18. Gandhi admitted to making a "Himalayan miscalculation" in organizing a protest movement against the English repression of Indian civil liberties in 1919 (Gandhi, *Gandhi's Autobiography*, p. 469). Three years later Gandhi halted a non-cooperation movement after an Indian mob killed twenty-two British officials in Chauri Chaura, Uttar Pradesh.

19. Nehru, *Toward Freedom*, pp. 79-80.

20. Gandhi was responding to allegations that his eldest son, Harilal, operated a fraudulent business (*Young India*, 18 June 1925, in *The Collected Works of Mahatma Gandhi*, vol. 27, May-July 1925 [Delhi: The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1968], pp. 259-262).

21. Gandhi reflected on this incident in his autobiography (pp. 219-222).

22 Mar him fail. He saw his own shortcomings, the shortcomings of his family, and then  
1959 he saw the shortcomings of his own people.

We went in some little villages, and in these villages we saw hundreds of people sleeping on the ground. They didn't have any beds to sleep in. We looked in these same villages; there was no running water there, nothing to wash with. We looked in these villages, and we saw people there in their little huts and in their little rooms, and the cow, their little cow, or their calves slept in the same room with them. If they had a few chickens, the chickens slept in the same room with them. We looked at these people, and they had nothing that we would consider convenient, none of the comforts of life. Here they are, sleeping in the same room with the beast of the field. This is all they had. Pretty soon we discovered that these people were the untouchables.

Now you know in India you have what is known as the caste system, and that existed for years. And there were those people who were the outcasts, some seventy million of them. They were called untouchables. And these were the people who were exploited, and they were trampled over even by the Indian people themselves. And Gandhi looked at this system. Gandhi couldn't stand this system, and he looked at his people, and he said, "Now, you have selected me and you've asked me to free you from the political domination and the economic exploitation inflicted upon you by Britain. And here you are trampling over and exploiting seventy million of your brothers." And he decided that he would not ever adjust to that system and that he would speak against it and stand up against it the rest of his life.

And you read, back in his early life, the first thing he did when he went to India was to adopt an untouchable girl as his daughter.<sup>22</sup> And his wife thought he was going crazy because she was a member of one of the high castes. And she said, "What in the world are you doing adopting an untouchable? We are not supposed to touch these people." And he said, "I am going to have this young lady as my daughter." And he brought her into his ashram, and she lived there, and she lives in India today. And he demonstrated in his own life that untouchability had to go. And one of the greatest tasks ever performed by Mahatma Gandhi was against untouchability.

One day he stood before his people and said, "You are exploiting these untouchables. Even though we are fighting with all that we have in our bodies and our souls to break loose from the bondage of the British Empire, we are exploiting these people, and we're taking from them their selfhood and their self-respect." And he said, "We will not even allow these people to go into temple." They couldn't go in the temple and worship God like other people. They could not draw water like other people, and there were certain streets they couldn't even walk on.

And he looked at all of this. One day he said, "Beginning on the twenty-first of September at twelve o'clock, I will refuse to eat. And I will not eat any more until the leaders of the caste system will come to me with the leaders of the untouch-

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22. Gandhi adopted Lakshmi Dafda Sharma (1914-) in October 1920. Lakshmi and her parents, Dudabhai and Danibehn Dafda, became residents of the Satyagraha ashram near Ahmadabad in September 1915 at Gandhi's invitation.

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ables and say that there will be an end to untouchability. And I will not eat any more until the Hindu temples of India will open their doors to the untouchables.” And he refused to eat. And days passed. Nothing happened. Finally, when Gandhi was about to breathe his last, breathe his last breath and his body—it was all but gone and he had lost many pounds. A group came to him. A group from the untouchables and a group from the Brahmin caste came to him and signed a statement saying that we will no longer adhere to the caste system and to untouchability. And the priests of the temple came to him and said now the temple will be open unto the untouchables. And that afternoon, untouchables from all over India went into the temples, and all of these thousands and millions of people put their arms around the Brahmins and peoples of other castes. Hundreds and millions of people who had never touched each other for two thousand years were now singing and praising God together. And this was the great contribution that Mahatma Gandhi brought about.<sup>23</sup>

And today in India, untouchability is a crime punishable by the law. And if anybody practices untouchability, he can be put in prison for as long as three years. And as one political leader said to me, “You cannot find in India one hundred people today who would sign the public statement endorsing untouchability.” Here was a man who had the amazing capacity for internal criticism to the point that he saw the shortcomings of his own people. And he was just as firm against doing something about that as he was about doing away with the exploitation of the British Empire. And this is what makes him one of the great men of history.

And the final thing that I would like to say to you this morning is that the world doesn't like people like Gandhi. That's strange, isn't it? They don't like people like Christ. They don't like people like Abraham Lincoln. They kill them. And this man, who had done all of that for India, this man who had given his life and who had mobilized and galvanized four hundred million people for independence so that in 1947 India received its independence, and he became the father of that nation. This same man because he decided that he would not rest until he saw the Muslims and the Hindus together; they had been fighting among themselves, they had been in riots among themselves, and he wanted to see this straight. And one of his own fellow Hindus felt that he was a little too favorable toward the Muslims, felt that he was giving in a little too much toward the Muslims.

And one afternoon, when he was at Birla House, living there with one of the big industrialists for a few days in Delhi, he walked out to his evening prayer meeting.<sup>24</sup> Every evening he had a prayer meeting where hundreds of people came, and he prayed with them. And on his way out there that afternoon, one of his fellow Hindus shot him. And here was a man of nonviolence, falling at the hand of a man of violence. Here was a man of love falling at the hands of a man of hate.<sup>25</sup> This seems the way of history.

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23. King describes Gandhi's September 1932 fast, which was triggered by the British government's announcement of separate electorates for the untouchables.

24. Gandhi frequently stayed at the home of G. D. Birla in Delhi.

25. Gandhi was murdered on 30 January 1948 by Nathuram Vinayak Godse, a member of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sevak Sangh, a Hindu nationalist organization. Godse was later hanged with a co-conspirator.

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And isn't it significant that he died on the same day that Christ died; it was on a Friday. This is the story of history. But thank God it never stops here. Thank God Good Friday is never the end. And the man who shot Gandhi only shot him into the hearts of humanity. And just as when Abraham Lincoln was shot—mark you, for the same reason that Mahatma Gandhi was shot, that is, the attempt to heal the wounds of a divided nation. When the great leader Abraham Lincoln was shot, Secretary Stanton stood by the body of this leader and said, "Now he belongs to the ages." And that same thing can be said about Mahatma Gandhi now.<sup>26</sup> He belongs to the ages, and he belongs especially to this age, an age drifting once more to its doom. And he has revealed to us that we must learn to go another way.

For in a day when Sputniks and Explorers are dashing through outer space and guided ballistic missiles are carving highways of death through the stratosphere, no nation can win a war. Today it is no longer a choice between violence and nonviolence; it is either nonviolence or nonexistence. It may not be that Mahatma Gandhi is God's appeal to this age, an age drifting to its doom.<sup>27</sup> And that warning, and that appeal is always in the form of a warning: "He who lives by the sword will perish by the sword."<sup>28</sup> Jesus said it years ago. Whenever men follow that and see that way, new horizons begin to emerge and a new world unfolds. Who today will follow Christ in his way and follow it so much that we'll be able to do greater things even than he did because we will be able to bring about the peace of the world and mobilize hundreds and thousands of men to follow the way of Christ?

I close by quoting the words of John Oxenham:

To every man there openeth a way, and ways, and a way  
The high soul climbs the high way, and the low soul gropes the low,  
And in between on the misty flats, the rest drift to and fro.  
But to every man—to every nation, to every civilization—there openeth  
a high and a low way.  
Every soul decideth which way it shall go.<sup>29</sup>

And God grant that we shall choose the high way, even if it will mean assassination, even if it will mean crucifixion, for by going this way we will discover that death would be only the beginning of our influence.

"I have other sheep," says Jesus, "which are not of this fold. And if you will believe in me and follow my way, you will be even, you will be able to do even greater works than I did in my lifetime."

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26. King used this same description in his 9 March "Farewell Statement for All India Radio" (see note 4, p. 136 in this volume).

27. Jones, *Mahatma Gandhi: An Interpretation*, p. 159: "So Mahatma Gandhi is God's appeal to this age—an age drifting again to its doom."

28. Cf. Matthew 26:52.

29. King paraphrases Oxenham's "The Ways," which was published in a collection of poems entitled *All's Well!* (New York: George H. Doran, 1916), p. 91. Allan Knight Chalmers, a professor of preaching and applied Christianity at Boston University and an acquaintance of King's, quoted Oxenham's verse in two of his books (Chalmers, *The Constant Fire* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1944], p. 104, and *High Wind at Noon* [New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1948], pp. 76–77).

O God, our gracious Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the fact that you have inspired men and women in all nations and in all cultures. We call you different names: some call Thee Allah; some call you Elohim; some call you Jehovah; some call you Brahma; and some call you the Unmoved Mover; some call you the Architectonic Good. But we know that these are all names for one and the same God, and we know you are one.

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And grant, O God, that we will follow Thee and become so committed to Thy way and Thy kingdom that we will be able to establish in our lives and in this world a brotherhood. We will be able to establish here a kingdom of understanding, where men will live together as brothers and respect the dignity and worth of all human personality.

In the name and spirit of Jesus we pray. Amen. [*organ plays*]

We open the doors of the church now. Is there one who will accept the Christ this morning just as you are? Who will make that decision as we stand and sing together? One hundred and sixty-two. [*congregation sings "Just As I Am"*]

Let us remain standing now for the recessional hymn. We are grateful to God for these persons who have come to unite with the church. I might mention, just before leaving, that this afternoon the baby contest which is sponsored by the August club [*recording interrupted*]