

King Came Preaching by Dr. Mervyn A. Warren, InterVarsity Press, Downers Grove, IL: 2008 (10 Quotes selected by Doug Nichols)

1. King Family, Good Family Values

Under the leadership of King the elder, Ebenezer grew from a membership of six hundred to four thousand. Such phenomenal growth likely indicates good leadership and effective communication—qualities that King Jr. inherited. Not only were young Martin, his sister Willie Christine (one year older) and his brother Alfred Daniel (year younger) reared in an atmosphere that promoted public speaking but public address seemed destined to become the salient source of the family's income.

During most of the time that King Jr. led the civil rights movement, Willie Christine taught in Baptist college for girls. Martin Jr. ministered as associate pastor with their father in Atlanta, and Alfred Daniel also pastored in Atlanta. That the daughter should follow the occupation of the mother, Alberta King, and the sons that of the father suggests a strong influence exerted by the parents. In any event, children of the King household were taught “to love and respect parents and elders. The *old* fashioned verities of hard work, honesty, thrift, order and courtesy were adhered to faithfully. Education was looked upon as the path to competence and culture. The church was the path to morality and immortality. (Page 20)

2. King, Too Tolerant

In an interview with Wainwright, King confessed to be too tolerant: “It is one of my weaknesses as a leader. I’m too courteous and I’m not candid enough. However, I feel that my softness has helped in one respect: People have found it easy to become reconciled around me.”

Wainwright warns, however, against misinterpreting such attitudes in King: “The impression of otherworldliness, or passivity, does not last. However gentle King’s voice, however soft his mien, these attitudes cannot completely mask the mind behind them. It is brilliant, one-track and tough, constantly on the move toward its single goal.”(Page 22)

3. Emotionally Charged Worship, Not Good

King’s revulsion against the ministry has been evoked, however, not merely by the extrinsic forms of black worship. He was convinced that emotionally charged worship simply had little, if any, relevance to the real problems and needs of the Negro masses. (Page 28-29)

4. King’s Advice to the Up-and Coming Clergyman

Alexander called me yesterday just to tell me about how you swept them at Friendship Sunday. Every way I turn people are congratulating me for you. You see, young man,

you are becoming popular. As I told you, you must be much in prayer. Persons like yourself are the ones the devil turns all of his forces aloes to destroy. (Page 37)

5. King Later Reflected on Those Early Days

The first few weeks in the autumn of 1954 were spent formulating a program that that would be meaningful to this particular congregation. I was anxious to change the impression in the community that Dexter was a sort of silk stocking catering only to a certain class. Often it was referred to as the “big folks” church.” Revolting against this idea, I was convinced that worship at its best is a social experience with people at all levels of life coming together to realize their oneness and unity under God. Whenever the church, consciously or unconsciously, caters to one class it loses the spiritual force of the “whoever will, let him come” doctrine, and is in danger of becoming little more than a social club with a thin veneer of religiosity. (Page 37)

6. The New Man and The New Hour

The pulpit at Dexter will be long remembered for it having been occupied by one who led Montgomery’s monumental bus boycott, the episode that Louis Lomax views as the “first major battle” of the Negro revolt. Ironically, Dexter is less than one hundred yards from the Alabama State Capitol, near which is 1861 Jefferson Davis, the Confederacy’s new president, was introduced with these words: “The man and the hour have met.” In mid-1962, Montgomery and the world would witness the converging of a new man and a new hour. (Page 38)

7. King’s Address as President of MIA

In putting together his first address as president of the MIA, on December 5, 1955, King noted a **problem** that would perpetually challenge his public speaking on civil rights: how could he make a presentation that would be militant enough to arouse African Americans to positive action yet moderate enough to keep this fervor within controllable and Christian bounds? He decided to face the challenge head on by attempting to combine two apparent irreconcilables: the militant and the moderate forces. (Page 39)

8. Kings First Mass Meeting at MIA

Our method will be that of persuasion, not correction. We will only say to the people, “Let your conscience be your guide.” . . . Love must be our regulating ideal. Once again we must hear the words of Jesus echoing across the centuries: “Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, and pray for them that despitefully use you.” If we fail to do this our protest will end up as a meaningless dream on the stage of history, and its memory will be shrouded with the ugly garments of shame. In spite of the treatment that we have confronted we must not become bitter, and end up hating our white brothers. As Booker T. Washington said, “Let no man pull so low as to make you to hate him.” . . . If you will protest courageously, and yet with dignity and Christian love, when the history books are written in the future generations, the historians will have to

pause and say. “There lived a great people—a black people—who injected new meaning and dignity into the veins of civilization.” This is our challenge and our overwhelming responsibility. (Page 39)

9. King Had Deep Inner Strength.

King was a man of deep strength. If any one point marked the moment of conversion from a mere pastor to a minister with illimitable inner resources, it was probably the one night in 1956. Pressured by the claim of leadership, engulfed by the omnipresent possibility of sudden death, forced to shoulder immense responsibility, King set dejected in his kitchen and told God he could go no further alone. His heart overflowed: “I am here taking a stand for what I believe is right, but now I am afraid.

The people are looking to me for leadership, and if I stand before them without strength and courage, they too will falter. I am at the end of my powers. I have nothing left. I’ve come to the point where I can’t face it alone.

What resulted from that prayer of relinquishment? Did God answer the petitioning pastor? “At that moment I experienced the presence of the Divine as I had never experienced Him before. It seemed as though I could hear the quiet assurance of an inner voice saying: ‘Stand up for righteousness, stand up for truth, and God will be at your side forever.’ Almost at once my fear began to go. My uncertainty disappeared. I was ready to face anything.”

And face almost anything he did, including twenty-four arrests between January 26, 1956, and June 11, 1964, and a near-fatal stabbing by a deranged woman in Harlem on September 20, 1958, while he was autographing his first published book, *Stride Toward Freedom*. (Page 40-41)

10. Black Preaching Evolved From Spiritual Necessity

History has a plethora of precedents. Take the pilgrims in 1624, fleeing from European oppression in the ardent hope of founding a nation without a king and a church without a pope. All such remedial movements, of course, find their prototype and draw strength from an enduring spiritual paradigm, the Hebrew exodus from Egyptian bondage. Later in faith history, hunger and thirst for a spiritual relationship that is both theocentric and anthropocentric (Godward as well as personal, existential and contemporary) was a prime reason for Jesus Christ’s seceding from Judaism and establishing Christianity.

Thus traditional Black preaching evolved from authentic spiritual necessity and justifiably assumes validity. Given the extent to which the dominate white Christian church in American had endorsed dehumanization and violation of blacks through intrinsic and systemic racism of the “one blood” ethic of Scripture (Acts 17:26), a need for correctives became critically urgent for returning to genuine godliness and

meaningful human relations. In this spirit black preaching has served as a gentle yet stern conscience among Christians, reminding the sacred community of its past wilderness wanderings and better paths that today deserve our travel. (Page 47)