

Endeavoring to Make the Dream a Reality: Unity is the Goal

Ephesians 4:1-6

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Introduction

Greetings from Buckner International. Russell Dilday and Victor Upton are here with me to answer any questions you may have. It is my supreme privilege to be invited to speak on this sacred Lord's Day at Bethlehem Baptist Church of Mansfield, Texas. Thank you Pastor Michael for the honor and privilege you have extended me to preach in your place at this historic church. I was pleased to learn of your history and you are in your 138th year of ministry as a church. Bethlehem Baptist Church was born in 1870 within 35 years of Texas becoming a republic and joining the United States of America as a new state. You have a long history of serving the people of this community. I want to commend you for the enrichment and after school programs that you offer in the Gymnatorium and the Hope House Clinic. You are a lighthouse of hope for this community and for the rest of your sister churches in Texas and beyond. Pastor Michael, I count it a blessing to know you and to be your guest today.

We are also here today to remember the life and legacy of one of the greatest moral leaders this nation has ever seen, the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Dr. King was a Christian man called to serve as a Baptist minister, preacher, orator, and a national figure in the civil rights era of the 1950's and 1960's. Dr. King is perhaps known best for the "I have a dream" speech delivered on August 28, 1963 on the steps of the Lincoln National Memorial. This past summer my wife and our three boys climbed those steps and looked out over the mall back to the Washington Monument and the Capitol. We stood right about the spot where Dr. King delivered the "I have a dream" speech. The heart of Dr. King's dream centered on issues of equality, justice, brotherhood, freedom, faith, and unity. He masterfully used the legacy of President Lincoln who led the nation to adopt the Emancipation Proclamation and he also referenced the vision of the Declaration of Independence to hold our nation's accountable for what was said by our founding fathers to describe the very core of our nations' identity. The vision resident in the Declaration of Independence was that "all men are created equal."

The Dream Speech pressed the nation to adopt the 1964 Civil Rights Act and by 1965 Dr. King was honored with the Nobel Peace Prize. Dr. King's vision for you and for me was that we would we would live in unity and in harmony. He believed in this vision so much that he was willing to lay his life down for it. He believed in the kind of unity that would make freedom, dignity, and opportunity available to everyone in the human family whether they were African American, Latino, Anglo, Native American, Asian, Arab and all other cultural groups of this great nation. Dr. King's vision was that we become one nation, under God, indivisible with justice and liberty for all.

The Beginning or the End

On that hot summer day in August of 1963 Dr. King was careful to say that 1963 was not the culmination or the end of a struggle, he said it was just the beginning. For almost 45 years the struggle for freedom, dignity, respect, and justice for all has raged. Some would say we have come a long way. Others would say we have a long way to go before the dream is a reality.

If Dr. King's vision was that we would live in unity with justice and liberty for all I think it would only be appropriate on this day to ask ourselves if we have arrived or if we have yet a long way to go. I want to link Dr. King's vision with the mission of Jesus and then assess where we are today.

The basic mission of Jesus as he announced it in his inaugural speech found in Luke 4:14 was to preach good news to the poor, to give sight to the blind, to bring freedom for the captive, liberty to the oppressed, and to proclaim the acceptable year of our Lord's favor. Jesus also echoed a similar mission in Matthew 25 when at the judgment day he will separate the sheep from the goats. He said "I was hungry and you gave me to eat, I was thirsty, and you gave me to drink, I was naked and you clothed me, I was in prison and you visited me, I was sick and you cared for me. When you did these things to the least of these, you did them to me."

The State of the Dream Today

Orphans. There are 143 million orphans in the world today. About 1.6 million of them live in Mexico City. About 300,000 of those children are abandoned and living in the streets with no family. About 3,000 children in Texas are waiting to be adopted. They have no family. Can we say we have good news for these, the least of these? Can we say these children live in just society while they remain abandoned? What would good news look like to them?

Slaves. Today, over 14,000 slaves are exported and bought in the United States. The greatest consumers of modern day slaves are California, Texas, and New York. These are young girls and in some cases children coming from Asia, Africa, and Latin America who think they are coming to work but get trapped into human trafficking and sex trade. What would freedom look like to them? What would liberty for the oppressed look like to them?

Undocumented. Approximately 14 million undocumented immigrants from Mexico and Latin America descent live in the United States. Every year about 5 million American born citizens and children of these undocumented immigrants are abandoned because their parents were deported. The older siblings are left to raise their younger brothers and sisters. This is happening right here in Texas. Where is justice and liberty for them?

The Poor. Almost $\frac{1}{4}$ of all children in Texas live in poverty and a full $\frac{1}{4}$ of children living in Washington State live in poverty. Some of the poorest counties in the nation are right here in Texas along the border. I thought I knew what poverty was until I visited Kenya and met children who only eat about once a day. Their families live on less than a dollar a day. I have met children in Ethiopia who have never owned a pair of shoes. About 50% of Latino and African American youth drop out of high school. Studies have shown that young person with a BA degree will earn about \$600,000 more in their lifetime than if they did not have a BA degree and \$1.6 million more with a Masters Degree than if they only had a BA degree. We are poor because we don't have education and we don't have education because we are poor. What would good news to the poor be for these children and students? I think it would be that they don't have to be poor any more and we can do something about that.

Buckner

In 1879, only about 9 years after Bethlehem Baptist Church was formed, a preacher from Tennessee arrived in Texas and saw a vision for a way to help children whose father's died in the Civil War. His name was Robert Cooke Buckner. He gathered deacons at a meeting and challenged them to start a ministry for children and in that meeting he passed the plate and collected about \$200 and the Dallas Children's Home was begun. Today Buckner serves children and families in 14 Texas cities, Oklahoma, Tennessee, and Washington as well as Russia, Latvia, Romania, Ethiopia, Kenya, Mexico, Guatemala, Peru, and we are beginning work in Honduras this year.

We serve children through residential care, foster care and adoption (**this year we will be opening international adoptions from Ethiopia**), transitional care, and preventive programs to keep children and families healthy. Some of the programs on the preventive side address the issues I just raised. They include:

KidsHope USA, a program designed to pair up one church with one elementary school to mentor children. It takes one church member to mentor one child for one hour a week. We have over 40 churches in the program. The Houston ISD Superintendent has request a Kids Hope program in all of the Houston schools. Our challenge is to find enough churches to meet the demand.

ISAAC, Immigration Services and Aid Center is a collaborative effort with the BGCT to provide guidance and training for churches who want establish a center to provide help to immigrants who qualify to become legal residents and citizens.

Shoes for Orphan Souls, is a national shoe drive that provides a way for churches to provide a pair of new shoes for a child somewhere in the world. We sent over 200,000 pair of shoes last year and have shipped them to over 60 countries around the world.

Mission Trips – We send about 3,000 short-term volunteers to serve children in Texas, the USA, and in 8 countries.

The goal of Dr. King’s dream is **unity**. This dream is not unlike the vision the apostle Paul had for the Ephesian church. The text will remind us of that today so let’s read it in Ephesians 4:1-6...

Leading a way of life worthy of the calling

The Apostle Paul urges the Ephesian Christians to lead a way of life that is worthy of the calling they have received. In other words, leading a life that is worthy means we live up to the standard, the criterion, and we conform the way we think, talk, act, speak, and relate to others to reflect the image of Christ in order to protect the unity of the church. The calling was a calling to Unity. In Verses 4, 5, 6 Paul provides 7 acclamations of Unity: three concerning the church, three concerning the Lord, and one acclamation concerning God himself.

One body, one Spirit, and one hope refers to the church Jesus died for. One Lord, one faith, one baptism refers to the Lord of the Church, Jesus himself.

One God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all refers to the God of the great Shema that says: Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is One!

The Calling is To Unity

The calling we are called to by Christ is a call to Unity, the same vision Dr. King had for our nation, for our states, for our communities, and for our families. The vision is found throughout the biblical text:

King David had a vision for unity when he said in Psalm 133:1 “How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!”

In the Gospel of John 17:23, Jesus in his prayer to the Father said “May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.”

The Apostle Paul, in his letter to the Romans 15:5 says “May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you a spirit of unity among yourselves as you follow Jesus Christ so that with one heart, and mouth you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

Again, the Apostle Paul says in Colossians 3:14 “And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity.”

For Paul, the church was the expression of God’s unity. When the church fails to express unity, it radically undermines the credibility of its belief in the one God!

You say Bro. Albert, help me understand!

You we see don’t two bodies, we have one. We don’t have two Spirits, only one Spirit of God. We don’t have two hopes, we only have one. We don’t have two Lord’s just one. We don’t have two versions of our faith, just one. We don’t have two baptisms, just one. We don’t have two God’s we only have one.

He is one God and father **of all** and that makes us brothers and sisters! He is One God **over all** and that puts you and me under him together. He is One God **through all** and that means that same Resurrection power that flows through you flows through me. He is One God **in all** and that means the same Holy Spirit that gets in you when you get saved gets in me. So today I

would say Hear, O, Bethlehem, the Lord our God is One! And because he is one, we are to be one!

What Does Unity Mean?

Now by Unity I don't mean Unanimity or even Uniformity. Webster says that Unity is being united, oneness, harmony, agreement, a union of related parts, a harmonious, unified arrangement of parts in an artistic work, continuity of purpose and action.

Unanimity implies we all have the same opinions or views.

Uniformity means we are all the same.

Unity does not mean everything is fine as long as you are like me or look like me. Unity does not mean we will all be ok as long as you agree with me. Unity does not mean I have to be like you, look like you, and talk like you to get along.

Unity means we get to be who we are, who God made us to be, and be together, to be in agreement, to be united and to be unified. We come together in the beauty of our differences and we become one of the same Spirit. And I believe this is what drove the vision of Dr. King. So how do we make this dream a reality?

How do we make the Dream a Reality?

Our dear Brother Paul provides five actions in Verses 2 and 3 that we must take to make the dream of unity a reality:

First, in verse 2 he says we must be **humble**. This is the attitude of counting others better than ourselves. We take into account the worth of our brother and sister in Christ. We extend a full measure of basic human dignity to each and every person we come in contact with.

Second, In order to make the dream a reality we must be **gentle**. We are talking about courtesy, considerateness, and a willingness to waive one's rights that comes from the common good without concern for personal reputation or gain.

Third, in order to make the dream a reality we must be **patient**. This is the ability to make allowance for other's shortcoming, tolerance of another's exasperating behavior.

Fourth, in order to make the dream a reality we must **bear with one another** in love. This means accepting others in their uniqueness, including their weaknesses and faults, allowing them worth and space. In order to bear with somebody we need God's kind of love. We need God's love to celebrate the uniqueness of African American culture. We need God's love to celebrate the uniqueness of Latino-Hispanic culture. We need God's love to celebrate the uniqueness of Anglo culture and Asian culture, and Arab culture. If we can't celebrate it now, we'll have a hard time celebrating it around the throne at the end of time when we people from every tribe, every language, every nation, and every tongue to sing worthy is the Lamb.

I am always looking for three guys. **Eddie, David, and Rene**. I grew up in a multicultural community in Southern California. I attended a predominantly Anglo Baptist Church and was saved and baptized there. My best friend at that church was Eddie Peterson, an African American Friend. David Smith was the only Anglo boy on my street. Nobody liked David so I decided to be his friend. Then the majority of the neighborhood was Latinos like Rene, Terry, Julian and others. But that is the way I grew up. Normal for me meant that Eddie, Rene, and David would be there. That is my frame of mind today. This is the way that my boys are growing up. They have Hispanic friends, African American friends, Asian Friends, and Anglo Friends.

Finally, in order to make the dream a reality we must **make every effort to maintain the unity** of the Spirit by the bond of peace. We must not miss an opportunity, not one opportunity to keep the unity of the Spirit. This means you and I become agents of peace and reconciliation. We are always looking for ways to bring people back together and to bring a person back to God.

Conclusion: The Dream becomes a reality...

When we can show the world our unity.

When you and I are unified to one purpose.

When we see each other as equals.

When we become friends.

When we celebrate each other's culture.

When together we serve the least of these, poor, sick, oppressed, in prison

When we assign value and worth to each other.

When we allow space, dignity, and respect for each other.

When we protect the unity of the Spirit and the bond of peace.

When we refuse to allow others to speak ill of the other.

When we stand against racial discrimination.

When we work hard to share power and resources.

Let's go now and make the Dream a reality in the name of the Father, Son,
and Holy Spirit.