

Draft of Chapter VIII,
“The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore”

[July 1962–March 1963]

[Atlanta, Ga.]

King finds inspiration in ideas presented in Phillips Brooks’s “The Egyptians Dead Upon the Seashore” for this sermon, a version of which he delivered at Dexter in 1955¹ In a sentence deleted from the published version, King announces his faith in a just universe “A mythical Satan, through the work of a conniving serpent, may gain the allegiance of man for a period, but ultimately he must give way to the magnetic redemptive power of a humble servant on an uplifted cross.” Retelling the tale of the Jewish exodus from Egypt and the death of the Egyptian army that symbolized “the death of inhuman oppression and unjust exploitation,” he draws a parallel with the U S Supreme Court’s 1954 Brown v Board of Education decision, affirming that “the Red Sea was opened and the forces of justice marched through to the other side.” King concludes, “There is a Red Sea in history that ultimately comes to carry the forces of goodness to victory, and that same Red Sea closes in to bring doom and destruction to the forces of evil.”

Text “And Israel saw the Egyptians dead upon the seashore
Exodus 14 30.

¹ King, “Death of Evil Upon the Seashore,” Sermon at Dexter Avenue Baptist Church, 24 July 1955, Brooks, *Selected Sermons*, pp 105–115 King also preached a version of this sermon on 17 May 1956 in New York City (“The Death of Evil Upon the Seashore,” Sermon Delivered at the Service of Prayer and Thanksgiving, Cathedral of St John the Divine, in *Papers* 3 256–262)

July 1962–
March 1963

There is hardly anything more obvious than the fact that evil is present in the universe. It projects its nagging, prehensile tentacles into every level of human existence. We may debate over the origin of evil, but only the person victimized with a superficial optimism will debate over its reality. Evil is with us as a stark, grim, and colossal reality.

The Bible affirms the reality of evil in unmistakable terms. Symbolically, it pictures it in the conniving work of a serpent which comes to inject a discord into the harmonious symphony of life in a garden.² Through the warnings of the prophets, it sees evil in callous injustices and ugly hypocrisy. At the center of the New Testament, it sees it in a misguided mob hanging the world's most precious character on a cross between two thieves.³ The Bible is crystal clear in its perception of evil.⁴

Jesus was not unmindful of the reality of evil. While he never sought to give a theological explanation for the origin of evil, he never explained it away. In the parable of the tares Jesus made it clear that the tares were tares.⁵ They were not illusions or errors of the mortal mind. They were real weeds disrupting the orderly growth of stately wheat. Whether sown by Satan or by man's misuse of his own freedom, the tares were poisonous and deadly evil. Jesus said in substance concerning the choking weeds, "I do not attempt to explain their origin, but they are the work of an enemy."⁶ Jesus realized that the force of evil was as real as the force of good.

But we need not stop with the Bible's glaring examples to establish the reality of evil. We need only look out into the wide arena of everyday life. We have seen evil in tragic lust and inordinate selfishness.⁷ We have seen it in high places where men are willing to sacrifice truth on the altars of their self-interest. We have seen it in imperialistic nations trampling over other nations with the iron feet of oppression.⁸ We have seen it clothed in the garments of calamitous wars which left battlefields

² Cf. Genesis 3.

³ Cf. Matthew 27:35–38.

⁴ This paragraph was condensed in the published version. "Affirming the reality of evil in unmistakable terms, the Bible symbolically pictures the conniving work of a serpent which injects discord into the harmonious symphony of life in a garden, prophetically denounces callous injustice and ugly hypocrisy, and dramatically portrays a misguided mob hanging the world's most precious Person on a cross between two thieves. Crystal clear is the biblical perception of evil" (King, *Strength to Love*, p. 58).

⁵ Cf. Matthew 13:24–30.

⁶ Buttrick, *The Parables of Jesus*, pp. 65–66. "But if evil is not explained, it is not explained away. The tares are tares. They are not immature grain. They are not imaginary. They are weeds and poisonous. They positively war against a good harvest. Whether we call the power that sows them 'devil' or the wrong choice of human freewill, that power is the foe of our souls. 'An enemy hath done this.' Tares have entered the field—whether sown by Satan or by our perversion of a God-given liberty, and life will be clarified if we fixedly regard them as a hostile growth, and resolve to be rid of them. To regard evil as illusory solves no problems. Jesus says of the choking weeds of life: 'I do not account for them, but they are the work of an enemy.'"

⁷ The preceding three sentences were condensed in the published version. "Within the wide arena of everyday life we see evil in all of its ugly dimensions. We see it expressed in tragic lust and inordinate selfishness" (p. 59). In the 1955 version of the sermon, King added, "We have seen it walk the streets of Montgomery" (King, "Death of Evil Upon the Seashore," 24 July 1955).

⁸ This sentence was altered in the published version. "We see it in imperialistic nations crushing other people with the battering rams of social injustice" (p. 59).

July 1962–
March 1963

drenched with blood, filled nations with widows and orphans, and sent men home physically handicapped and psychologically wrecked. We have seen evil in all of its tragic dimensions.⁹

So in a sense, the whole of life is the history of a struggle between good and evil. There seems to be a tension at the very core of the universe. All the great religions have recognized this tension. Hinduism called it a conflict between illusion and reality, Zoroastrianism looked upon it as a conflict between the god of light and the god of darkness, **Platonism called it a conflict between spirit and matter**; traditional Judaism and Christianity called it a conflict between God and Satan.¹⁰ Each of these religions realized that in the midst of the upward thrust of goodness there is the downward pull of evil.

Christianity is clear, however, in affirming that in the long struggle between good and evil, good eventually emerges as the victor. Evil is ultimately doomed by the powerful, inexorable forces of good. Good Friday may occupy the throne for a day, but eventually it must give way to the triumphant music of the trumpets of Easter.¹¹ **A mythical Satan, through the work of a conniving serpent, may gain the allegiance of man for a period, but ultimately he must give way to the magnetic redemptive power of a humble servant on an uplifted cross.** Degrading tares may choke the sprouting necks of growing wheat for a season, but eventually the harvest will come and separate the evil tares from the good wheat. Evil may so shape events that Caesar will occupy a palace and Christ a cross, but one day that same Christ will rise up and split history into A.D. and B.C., so that even the life of Caesar must be dated by his name. Biblical religion recognized long ago what William Cullen Bryant came to see: "Truth crushed to earth will rise again," and what [Thomas] Carlyle came to see: "No lie can live forever."¹²

A graphic example of this truth is found in an incident in the early history of the Hebrew people. You will remember that at a very early stage in her history the children of Israel were thrown into the bondage of physical slavery under the gripping yoke of Egyptian rule. Egypt was the symbol of evil in the form of humiliating oppression, ungodly exploitation and crushing domination. The Israelites symbolized goodness in the form of devotion and dedication to the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These two forces were in a continual struggle against each other—Egypt struggling to maintain her oppressive yoke and Israel struggling to gain freedom.

⁹ The preceding two sentences were altered in the published version: "We see it clothed in the garments of calamitous wars which leave men and nations morally and physically bankrupt" (p. 59).

¹⁰ Fosdick, *Living Under Tension*, p. 216. "All the great religions have so pictured life in terms of conflict: Hinduism called it a conflict between reality and illusion, Zoroastrianism a conflict between light and darkness, Platonism a conflict between spirit and matter, traditional Judaism and Christianity a conflict between God and Satan." A central element of Zoroastrianism, a religion founded in Persia as early as 600 BCE, is the constant struggle between the evil spirit of darkness and the god of light and goodness.

¹¹ This sentence was altered in the published version: "Good Friday must give way to the triumphant music of Easter" (p. 59).

¹² Bryant, "The Battlefield" (1839), Carlyle, *The French Revolution* (1837). This quote from Carlyle, which King used regularly, was corrected in the published version: "'No lie you can speak or act but it will come, after longer or shorter circulation, like a bill drawn on Nature's Reality, and be presented there for payment—with the answer, No effects.'" (p. 59).

July 1962–
March 1963

from the chains of slavery For years the struggle continued The Pharoahs stubbornly refused to respond to the cry of Moses Plague after plague swept through the Pharoah's domain, and yet they insisted on following their recalcitrant path This tells us something about evil that we must never forget It never voluntarily relinquishes its throne Evil is stubborn, hard and determined It never gives up without a bitter struggle and without the most persistent and almost fanatical resistance¹³ But there is a checkpoint in the universe Evil cannot permanently organize itself. So after a long and trying struggle the Israelites, through the providence of God, were able to cross the Red Sea, and thereby get out of the hands of Egyptian rule But like the old guard that never surrenders, the Egyptians, in a desperate attempt to prevent the Israelites from escaping, had their armies to go in the Red Sea behind them As soon as the Egyptians got into the dried up Sea the parted waters swept back upon them, and the turbulence and momentum of the tidal waves soon drowned all of them As the Israelites looked back all they could see was here and there a poor drowned body beaten upon the seashore¹⁴ For the Israelites, this was a great moment It was the end of a frightful period in their history¹⁵ It was a joyous daybreak that had come to end the long night of their captivity

This story symbolizes something basic about the universe Its meaning is not found in the drowning of a few men, for no one should rejoice at the death or defeat of a human being This story, at bottom, symbolizes the death of evil It was the death of inhuman oppression and unjust exploitation

The death of the Egyptians upon the seashore is a glaring symbol of the ultimate doom of evil in its struggle with good. There is something in the very nature of the universe which is on the side of Israel in its struggle with every Egypt There is something in the very nature of the universe which ultimately comes to the aid of goodness in its perennial struggle with evil¹⁶ The New Testament is right when it affirms "No chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous nevertheless, afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness"¹⁷ Pharaoh exploits the children of Israel until they are relegated to the status of things rather than persons—nevertheless afterward¹ Pilate yields to the crowd and crucifies Christ on a cross between two thieves—nevertheless afterward¹⁸ The early Chris-

13 The preceding eight sentences were condensed in the published version "Egypt struggled to maintain her oppressive yoke, and Israel struggled to gain freedom Pharaoh stubbornly refused to respond to the cry of Moses, even when plague after plague threatened his domain This tells us something about evil that we must never forget, namely that evil is recalcitrant and determined, and never voluntarily relinquishes its hold short of a persistent, almost fanatical resistance" (pp 59–60)

14 Exodus 14 21–30

15 Brooks, *Selected Sermons*, p 105 "The parted waves had swept back upon the host of the pursuers The tumult and terror, which had rent the air, had sunk into silence, and all that the escaped people saw was here and there a poor drowned body beaten up upon the bank, where they stood with the great flood between them and the land of their long captivity and oppression It meant everything to the Israelites It was the end of a frightful period in their history"

16 The preceding three sentences were condensed in the published version "The death of the Egyptians upon the seashore is a vivid reminder that something in the very nature of the universe assists goodness in its perennial struggle with evil" (p 60)

17 Cf Hebrews 12 11

18 Cf Matthew 27 35–38

July 1962–
March 1963

tians are thrown to the lions and carried to the chopping blocks until man's inhumanity to man becomes barbaric and unbelievable—nevertheless afterward¹⁹

There is something in this universe which justifies Shakespeare in saying

“There's a divinity that shapes our ends,
Rough-hew them how we will”²⁰

and [James Russell] Lowell in saying,

“Though the cause of Evil prosper, yet
t'is truth alone is strong,”²¹

and [Alfred] Tennyson in saying,

“Good shall fall at last—far off—at last, to
all, And every winter change to spring”²²

Notice how we have seen the truth of this text revealed in the contemporary struggle between good, in the form of freedom and justice, and evil, in the form of oppression and colonialism. There are approximately 2,800,000,000 people in the world today. The vast majority of these people are found in Asia and Africa. More than 1,800,000,000 of the peoples of the world are found on these two continents. Just fifteen years ago most of the Asian and African peoples were colonial subjects. They were dominated politically, exploited economically, segregated and humiliated by some foreign power. For years they protested against these grave injustices. Almost every territory in Asia and Africa had some courageous Moses who pleaded with undying passion for the freedom of his people. For some twenty years Mahatma Gandhi, **the Saint of India**, pleaded unrelentingly with the Viceroy, and Governors General, the Prime Ministers and the Kings of England to let his people go. Like the Pharaohs of old, the leaders in power turned deaf ears on these agonizing pleas. Even so great a statesman as Winston Churchill responded to Gandhi's cry for independence by saying “I did not become his Majesty's First Minister to preside over the liquidation of the British Empire”²³. So for years the struggle continued between two determined forces—the colonial powers struggling to maintain political and economic domination and the Asian and African peoples struggling to gain freedom and independence. In a real sense this has been one of the most momentous and critical struggles of the twentieth century.²⁴

19 The preceding three sentences were altered in the published version “Pharaoh exploits the children of Israel—*nevertheless afterward!* Pilate yields to the crowd which crucifies Christ—*nevertheless afterward!* The early Christians are thrown to the lions and carried to the chopping blocks—*nevertheless afterward!*” (p. 60)

20 Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, act 5, sc. 2

21 James Russell Lowell, “The Present Crisis” (1844)

22 Alfred Lord Tennyson, *In Memoriam A. H. H.* (1850)

23 For a news report and transcript of this speech, see “Prime Minister Churchill's Speech,” *New York Times*, 11 November 1942

24 The preceding two sentences were altered in the published version “The conflict between two

July 1962–
March 1963

But in spite of the resistance and recalcitrance of the colonial powers, we have seen the gradual victory of the forces of justice and human dignity. Twenty five years ago there were only three independent countries in the whole continent of Africa. Today there are thirty two countries in Africa that have risen to the status of independence. Just fifteen years ago the British Empire had under its political domination more than 650,000,000 people in Asia and Africa. But today that number has been reduced to less than 60,000,000. Yes, the Red Sea has opened, and the vast majority of the oppressed masses from Asia and Africa have won their independence from the Egypt of colonialism, and are now free to move toward the promised land of economic and cultural stability. As they look back they clearly see the evils of colonialism and imperialism dead upon the seashore.

In our own struggle for freedom and justice in this country we have gradually seen the death of evil. In 1619 the Negro was brought to America as a slave. He was brought here from the soils of Africa.²⁵ For more than two hundred years Africa was raped and plundered, her native kingdoms disorganized and her people and rulers demoralized. Throughout slavery the Negro was treated in a very inhuman fashion. He was a thing to be used not a person to be respected. He was merely a depersonalized cog in a vast plantation machine.²⁶ **The famous Dred Scott decision of 1857 well illustrated the status of the Negro during slavery.**²⁷ In this edict the Supreme Court of the nation said that the Negro was not a citizen of the United States, but that he was property subject to the dictates of his owner. It stated farther that the Negro had no rights that the white man was bound to respect.

But in spite of the Dred Scott decision from so powerful a body as the United States Supreme Court, there were those who had a nagging conscience about slavery. They knew that such an unjust system was a strange paradox in a nation founded on the principle that all men are created equal. In 1820, six years before his death, Thomas Jefferson wrote these melancholy words:

“But the momentous question (slavery), like a fire bell in the night awakened and filled me with terror. I considered it at once as the knell of the Union. I regret that I am now to die in the belief that the useless sacrifice of themselves by the generation of 1776 to acquire self-government and happiness to their country is to be thrown away, and my only consolation is to be that I live not to weep over it.”²⁸

determined forces, the colonial powers and the Asian and African peoples, has been one of the most momentous and crucial struggles of the twentieth century” (p. 61)

25 The preceding two sentences were condensed in the published version “In 1619, the Negro was brought to America from the soils of Africa” (p. 61)

26 The preceding three sentences were condensed in the published version “In America, the Negro slave was merely a depersonalized cog in a vast plantation machine” (p. 61)

27 *Scott v. Sandford* (1857)

28 Jefferson to John Holmes Monticello, 22 April 1820, in *Memoir, Correspondence, and Miscellanies, From the Papers of Thomas Jefferson*, vol. 4, ed. Thomas Jefferson Randolph (Charlottesville, Va.: F. Carr, 1829), pp. 323–324

July 1962–
March 1963

There were numerous abolitionists who, like Jefferson, were tortured in their hearts by the question of slavery. With keen perception they saw that the immorality of slavery degraded the white master as well as the Negro.

Then came the day when Abraham Lincoln had to face this matter of slavery squarely. His torments are well known, his vacillations were facts. Yet he searched his way to the conclusions embodied in these words, "in giving freedom to the slave we assure freedom to the free, honorable alike in what we give and what we preserve."²⁹ On this moral foundation Lincoln personally prepared the first draft of the Emancipation Proclamation. This powerful executive order brought an end to chattel slavery. The world significance of the Emancipation Proclamation was colorfully described by that great American, Frederick Douglass, in these words,

"It recognizes and declares the real nature of the contest and places the North on the side of justice and civilization. Unquestionably the first of January, 1863 is to be the most memorable day in American annals. The Fourth of July was great, but the First of January, when we consider it in all its relations and bearings, is incomparably greater. The one had respect to the mere political birth of a nation, the last concerns the national life and character and is to determine whether that life and character shall be radiantly glorious with all high and noble virtues, or infamously blackened forevermore."³⁰

But in spite of the far reaching consequences of the Emancipation Proclamation, it did not bring full freedom to the Negro. While he enjoyed certain political and social opportunities during the days of reconstruction, the Negro soon discovered that these were short lived, and that the Pharaohs of the south were still determined to keep him in slavery. Certainly the Emancipation Proclamation brought him nearer the Red Sea for his passage out of Egypt, but it did not carry him across it. The system of racial segregation came into being backed up by a decision from the United States Supreme Court in 1896.³¹ Segregation turned out to be a new form of slavery covered up with certain niceties of complexity. The great struggle of the last half century has been between the forces of justice trying to end the evil system of segregation and the forces of injustice trying to maintain it. The Pharaohs have used legal maneuvers, economic reprisals and even physical violence to hold the Negro in the Egypt of segregation. Despite the patient cry of many a Moses, they refused to let the Negro people go.

But now we are seeing a massive change. A few years ago, through a world shaking decree by the nine justices of the United States Supreme Court, the Red Sea was opened and the forces of justice marched through to the other side.³² In this deci-

29 U S Congress, *Message of the President of the United States to the Two Houses of Congress*, 37th Congress, 3d sess., House Document 1 (Washington, D C., 1862). The endnote in *Strength to Love* mistakenly identifies this speech as "Annual message to Congress 1 December 1820" (p. 144).

30 Douglass, *Douglass' Monthly* (1 January 1863) 1.

31 King refers to *Plessy v Ferguson* 163 U S 537, 16 S Ct 1138, 41 L Ed 256 (1896).

32 King refers to *Brown v Board of Education* (1954). The phrase "the forces of justice marched through to the other side" was altered in the published version "the forces of justice are moving to the other side" (p. 63).

July 1962–
March 1963

sion the Court affirmed that the old Plessy decision of 1896 must go, that separate facilities are inherently unequal, and that to segregate a child on the basis of race is to deny the child equal protection of the law. This decision came as a great beacon light of hope to millions of disinherited people. As we look back we see the forces of segregation gradually dying on the seashore. The problem is far from solved. There are still gigantic mountains of opposition ahead. But at least we have left Egypt, and with patient yet firm determination we can reach the promise land. Evil in the form of injustice and exploitation cannot survive forever. There is a Red Sea in history that ultimately comes to carry the forces of goodness to victory, and that same Red Sea closes in to bring doom and destruction to the forces of evil.³³

All of this tells us something basic about life and history. It reminds us that evil carries the seed of its own destruction. In the long run right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. The great historian, Charles A. Beard, was once asked to give the major lessons that he had learned from history. He answered by saying that he had learned four. Here they are: "First, whom the gods would destroy they must first make mad with power. Second, the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small. Third, the bee fertilizes the flower it robs. Fourth, when it is dark enough you can see the stars."³⁴ This is not a preacher talking, but a hard-headed historian. His long and painstaking study of history revealed to him that evil has a self-defeating quality. It can go a long way, but then it reaches its limit. There is something in this universe that Greek mythology referred to as the goddess of Nemesis.³⁵

We must be careful not to engage in a superficial optimism at this point. We must not conclude that the death of a particular evil means that there will be a moment in history when all evil will lie dead upon the seashore. We must remember that all progress is precarious, and the solution of one problem leaves us standing face to face with another problem. The kingdom of God as a universal reality remains "not yet." Sin exists on every level of man's existence. Because of this, the death of one tyranny presents the threat of the emergence of another tyranny.

But just as we must avoid a superficial optimism, we must also avoid a crippling pessimism. Even though all progress is precarious, there can be real social progress within limits. Even though man's moral pilgrimage may never reach a destination point on earth, his never ceasing strivings can bring him closer and closer to the city

33 In the sermon's 1955 version, King accounted for the tenacity of discrimination and segregation, saying "I can imagine that those Egyptians struggled hard to survive in the Red Sea. They probably saw a log (log) here and even a straw there, and I can imagine them reaching desperately for something as light as a straw trying to survive. This is what is happening to segregation today. It is caught in the midst of a mighty Red Sea, and its advocates are reaching out for every little straw in an attempt to survive. This accounts for the passing of so many absurd laws by our southern legislators. We need not worry, however, for the passing of such laws is indicative of the fact that the advocates of segregation have their backs against the wall. Segregation is drowning today in the rushing waters of historical necessity."

34 Fosdick, "What Keeps Religion Going?" in *Riverside Sermons* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1958), p. 156. "Professor Charles A. Beard, one of the leading historians of our time, was asked sometime since what major lessons he had learned from history, and he answered that he had learned four. Here they are: 'First, whom the gods would destroy they first make mad with power. Second, the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceedingly small. Third, the bee fertilizes the flower it robs. Fourth, when it is dark enough you can see the stars.'"

35 Nemesis is the ancient Greek goddess of retribution or just punishment.

July 1962–
March 1963

of righteousness. Even though the kingdom of God may remain “not yet” as a universal reality in history, it may exist in the present in isolated forms, such as in judgment, in personal devotion, and in some group life. “The Kingdom of God,” says the New Testament, “is in the midst of you.”³⁶

Above all, we must be reminded anew that God is at work in his universe. He is not outside the world looking on with a sort of cold indifference. He is here on all the roads of life striving in our striving. Like an ever loving Father, he is working through history for the salvation of his children. So as we struggle to defeat the forces of evil, we do not struggle alone, we have cosmic companionship. The God of the universe struggles with us.³⁷ In the final analysis evil dies on the seashore not merely because of man’s endless struggle against it, but because of God’s power to defeat it.

Someone may ask, this morning, why is God so slow in conquering the forces of evil? Why did God allow Hitler to kill six million Jews? Why did God allow slavery to last in America two hundred and forty-four years? Why does God allow blood thirsty mobs to lynch Negro men and women at will, and drown Negro boys and girls at whim? Why doesn’t God break in and smash the evil schemes of wicked men?

I do not pretend to understand all of the ways of God and his particular timetable in grappling with evil. Perhaps if he dealt with evil in the overbearing way that we wish he would, God would be defeating his ultimate purpose. He would be making us blind automatons rather than responsible human beings. God has made us persons and not puppets. In doing this, he had to relinquish a bit of his sovereignty and impose certain limitations upon Himself. If his children were to be free, they would have to make the doing of his will a voluntary choice. Therefore, God cannot impose his will upon his children and maintain his purpose for man. If what God did through sheer omnipotence defeated his purpose, it would be an expression of weakness rather than power. Indeed, power is the ability to fulfill purpose. Action which defeats purpose is weakness.

But whatever the reason for God’s unwillingness to deal with evil with an overbearing immediacy, it does not mean that he is doing nothing. We weak and finite human beings are not alone in our quest for the triumph of righteousness. There is, as Matthew Arnold said, a “power, not ourselves, which makes for righteousness.”³⁸

We must also remember that as God works to defeat the forces of evil, he does not forget his children who are the victims of these evil forces. He gives us the interior resources to bear the burdens and tribulations of life. When we are in the darkness of some oppressive Egypt, God is a light unto our path. He imbues us with the strength to endure the ordeals of Egypt and he gives us the courage and power to make the journey ahead. When the lamp of hope begins to flicker and the candle of faith begins to run low, he restoreth our souls and gives us renewed vigor to carry

36 Luke 17:21 (RSV)

37 The preceding two sentences were condensed in the published version: “As we struggle to defeat the forces of evil, the God of the universe struggles with us” (p. 64).

38 Matthew Arnold, *Literature and Dogma* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), p. 27. “At the time they produced those documents which give to the Old Testament its power and its true character, the *not ourselves* which weighed upon the mind of Israel, and engaged its awe, was the *not ourselves* by which we get the sense for *righteousness*, and whence we find the help to *do right*.”

July 1962–
March 1963

on He is with us not only in the noon time of fulfillment, but also in the midnight of despair

When Mrs King and I were in India some months ago, we spent a lovely weekend in the State of Karala, the southernmost point of that vast country³⁹ While there we went to the beautiful beach of Cape Comorin In India this beach on the Cape is called “lands end,” because this is actually where the land of India comes to an end There is nothing before you but the broad expanse of the rolling waters It is one of the most beautiful spots in all the world It is a point at which three great bodies of water met—the Indian Ocean, the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal Mrs King and I took a seat on a huge rock that was slightly protruded into the ocean We sat there enthralled by the vastness of the ocean and its terrifying immensities We noticed the waves as they unfolded in almost rhythmic succession As the rolling waters would smash against the bottom of the rock on which we were seated, they had a sort of oceanic music that brought sweetness to the ear In this beautiful setting we turned our eyes to the west and saw the magnificent sun standing like a great cosmic ball of fire It was gradually going down and down Since we could see nothing before us but water, it appeared that the sun would sink into the very ocean itself⁴⁰ Just as it was almost out of sight, Mrs King touched me and said, “look Martin, isn’t it beautiful!” I looked around and there I saw another ball standing in all of its scintillating beauty It was the moon As the sun appeared to be sinking into the ocean, the moon appeared to be rising out of the ocean I looked back to the west and watched the sun as it finally passed completely out of sight, and noticed how darkness gradually engulfed the earth At this point I looked again to the east and the moon was still rising, and its radiant light was shining supreme

I said to my wife, “this is a real analogy of what often happens in life ” We all have experiences when the light of day goes out and we are left standing in some dark and desolate midnight—moments when our noblest dreams are shattered and our highest hopes are blasted; moments when we are the victims of some tragic injustice and some terrible exploitation⁴¹ During these moments our spirits are almost eaten away by gloom and despair, we feel that there is no light anywhere But ever and again, when these moments come, we find ourselves taking the eastward look, only to discover that there is another light which shines even in the darkness Something happens to transform “the spear of frustration into a shaft of light ”⁴²

This would be a miserable, terrible and unbearable world if God had only one light But we can be consoled by the fact that God has two lights—a light to guide us in the brightness of the day when hopes are fulfilled and circumstances are favorable and a light to guide us in the darkness of the midnight when frustrations are

39 For more on the Kings’ journey to India, see Introduction, in *Papers* 5 4–12

40 The preceding three sentences were altered and condensed in the published version “To the west we saw the magnificent sun, a great cosmic ball of fire, appear to sink into the very ocean itself” (p 65)

41 In the published version “We have experiences when the light of day vanishes, leaving us in some dark and desolate midnight—moments when our highest hopes are turned into shambles of despair or when we are the victims of some tragic injustice and some terrible exploitation” (p 65)

42 Cf Thurman, *Deep River*, p 39 The preceding two sentences were condensed in the published version “But ever and again, we look toward the east and discover that there is another light which shines even in the darkness, and ‘the spear of frustration’ is transformed ‘into a shaft of light’ ” (p 66)

July 1962–
March 1963

real and the slumbering giants of gloom and hopelessness are on the verge of rising up in our souls. Therefore we never need walk in darkness. This was what the Psalmist meant when he said

“Whither shall I go from thy spirit? Or whither shall I flee from thy presence? If I ascend up into heaven, thou art there. If I make my bed in hell, behold, thou art there. If I take the wings of the morning, and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, even there shall thy hand lead me, and thy right hand shall hold me. If I say, surely the darkness shall cover me, even the night shall be light about me. Yea, the darkness hideth not from thee, but the night shineth as the day: the darkness and the light are both alike to thee.”⁴³

This is the faith that will keep us going in our struggle to escape the bondage of every evil Egypt. This is the faith that will be a lamp unto our weary feet and a light unto our meandering path.⁴⁴ If such a faith ever leaves the spirit of man, he will stand in immediate candidacy for nonbeing, and his highest dreams will go silently to the dust.⁴⁵

TDd MLKP-MBU Box 119A

⁴³ Psalm 139:7–12

⁴⁴ Cf. Psalm 119:105

⁴⁵ This sentence was altered in the published version. “Without such faith, man’s highest dreams will pass silently to the dust” (p. 66). In the 1955 version, King concluded the sermon by turning from his analysis of segregation to one of “our own personal lives. There is not only an Egypt out in the world, but there are Egyptians in our souls. What is your Egyptian? Is it some corroding passion? Years, years ago you became its captive. Perhaps you cannot at all remember when. Perhaps you were born into its captivity.” King then reflected on the moment when “the conviction broke out within you like burning fire that this Egyptian could be conquered, that it could pass out of existence, finally dying upon the seashore.” He ended the sermon with the observation: “Isn’t this the peculiar insistence of the Christian religion? It is our conviction that if an individual sufficiently commits himself to Christ he can conquer any Egyptian that might well up in his soul. Christ is history’s eternal Red Sea who, on the one hand, stands as Savior and Redeemer aiding the forces of good to escape some evil Egypt, and on the other hand, as judge condemning the forces of evil to ultimate doom. My friends, get out of Egypt! Get something done! Realize that your life is not made to be dominated by evil Egyptians. Go out and leave your Egyptian dead. Your ultimate destiny is the promised land.”