

“How long, Not Long”

Excerpt from a speech by Martin Luther King on the steps of the Montgomery, AL capitol building concluding the march from Selma to Montgomery

My people, my people, listen. (Yes, sir) The battle is in our hands. (Yes, sir) The battle is in our hands in Mississippi and Alabama and all over the United States. (Yes, sir) I know there is a cry today in Alabama, (Uh huh) we see it in numerous editorials: "When will Martin Luther King, SCLC, SNCC, and all of these civil rights agitators and all of the white clergymen and labor leaders and students and others get out of our community and let Alabama return to normalcy?"

But I have a message that I would like to leave with Alabama this evening. (Tell it) That is exactly what we don't want, and we will not allow it to happen, (Yes, sir) for we know that it was normalcy in Marion (Yes, sir) that led to the brutal murder of Jimmy Lee Jackson. (Speak) It was normalcy in Birmingham (Yes) that led to the murder on Sunday morning of four beautiful, unoffending, innocent girls. It was normalcy on Highway 80 (Yes, sir) that led state troopers to use tear gas and horses and billy clubs against unarmed human beings who were simply marching for justice. (Speak, sir) It was normalcy by a cafe in Selma, Alabama, that led to the brutal beating of Reverend James Reeb.

It is normalcy all over our country (Yes, sir) which leaves the Negro perishing on a lonely island of poverty in the midst of vast ocean of material prosperity. It is normalcy all over Alabama (Yeah) that prevents the Negro from becoming a registered voter. (Yes) No, we will not allow Alabama (Go ahead) to return to normalcy. [Applause]

The only normalcy that we will settle for (Yes, sir) is the normalcy that recognizes the dignity and worth of all of God's children. The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy that allows judgment to run down like waters, and righteousness like a mighty stream. (Yes, sir) The only normalcy that we will settle for is the normalcy of brotherhood, the normalcy of true peace, the normalcy of justice.

And so as we go away this afternoon, let us go away more than ever before committed to this struggle and committed to nonviolence. I must admit to you that there are still some difficult days ahead. We are still in for a season of suffering in many of the black belt counties of Alabama, many areas of Mississippi, many areas of Louisiana. I must admit to you that there are still jail cells waiting for us, and dark and difficult moments. But if we will go on with the faith that nonviolence and its power can transform dark yesterdays into bright tomorrows, we will be able to change all of these conditions.

And so I plead with you this afternoon as we go ahead: remain committed to nonviolence. Our aim must never be to defeat or humiliate the white man, but to win his friendship and understanding. We must come to see that the end we seek is a society at peace with itself, a

society that can live with its conscience. And that will be a day not of the white man, not of the black man. That will be the day of man as man. (Yes)

I know you are asking today, "How long will it take?" (Speak, sir) Somebody's asking, "How long will prejudice blind the visions of men, darken their understanding, and drive bright-eyed wisdom from her sacred throne?" Somebody's asking, "When will wounded justice, lying prostrate on the streets of Selma and Birmingham and communities all over the South, be lifted from this dust of shame to reign supreme among the children of men?" Somebody's asking, "When will the radiant star of hope be plunged against the nocturnal bosom of this lonely night, (Speak, speak, speak) plucked from weary souls with chains of fear and the manacles of death? How long will justice be crucified, (Speak) and truth bear it?" (Yes, sir)

I come to say to you this afternoon, however difficult the moment, (Yes, sir) however frustrating the hour, it will not be long, (No sir) because "truth crushed to earth will rise again." (Yes, sir)

How long? Not long, (Yes, sir) because "no lie can live forever." (Yes, sir)

How long? Not long, (All right. How long) because "you shall reap what you sow." (Yes, sir)

How long? (How long?) Not long: (Not long)

Truth forever on the scaffold, (Speak)

Wrong forever on the throne, (Yes, sir)

Yet that scaffold sways the future, (Yes, sir)

And, behind the dim unknown,

Standeth God within the shadow,

Keeping watch above his own.

How long? Not long, because the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice. (Yes, sir)

How long? Not long, (Not long) because:

Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord; (Yes, sir)

He is trampling out the vintage where the grapes of wrath are stored; (Yes)

He has loosed the fateful lightning of his terrible swift sword; (Yes, sir)

His truth is marching on. (Yes, sir)

He has sounded forth the trumpet that shall never call retreat; (Speak, sir)

He is sifting out the hearts of men before His judgment seat. (That's right)

O, be swift, my soul, to answer Him! Be jubilant my feet!

Our God is marching on. (Yeah)

Glory, hallelujah! (Yes, sir) Glory, hallelujah! (All right)

Glory, hallelujah! Glory, hallelujah!

His truth is marching on. [Applause]