

## Ashamed to Die

Written by Michael Johnson - Last Updated Monday, 29 June 2009 18:40

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“You should be ashamed to die until you’ve made some contribution to mankind.” So spoke the late Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. as he quoted his predecessor pastor, Rev. Vernon Johns, of the Dexter Avenue Baptist Church in Montgomery, Alabama. In the 21st century, taking the gospel of Christ to all the world is the greatest contribution to mankind that the African American Christian community can make. If we don’t make this a priority, we should surely be ashamed to die.

In the early 1950s, the American Civil Rights Movement was in full swing. The progressive and “liberal” arm of the Christian church was awakening to its social responsibility toward all American citizens. American apartheid, enforced with Jim Crow laws, was facing a continued onslaught of moral outrage. Rev. Johns and Dr. King spoke of the anger and frustration of the oppressed masses. However, not all of their words were directed at the powerful. They spoke with equal force to those in their charge as congregants. The challenge remains just as pertinent today as it was almost 60 years ago. “You should be ashamed to die until you’ve made some contribution to mankind.”

As the world rallies around the word “change,” is it the change Christ wants and expects? Is His agenda ours or a side issue? Will we advocate for affirmative action and civil rights when it comes to advancing the gospel? (Missions agencies have plenty of job opportunities available.) Do our obligations as citizens in this world preclude or supersede our obligations as citizens of the kingdom of Christ?

Our pigment, tribe, or ethnicity or the fact that we are the historically disadvantaged minority is no excuse for ignoring the Great Commission from our one and only true Commander in Chief, Jesus the Christ.

I believe our time is now. African Americans are in a particularly privileged situation given the

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political and social climate of our nation and the world. we take advantage of “such a time as this” as the biblical Esther did? As the world “shuts out” those of lighter pigment, it is time for us to step into our place. Esther recognized her advantages in life were given to her to provide others with the advantage of life. Will we seize onto the time or continue the selfish legacy as outlined below.

Jim Sutherland of Reconciliation Ministries International, the World Christian Database, the U.S. Department of Education, and the Census Bureau offer some challenging statistics. It appears that we have allowed the American dream to substitute for and subvert our Christian values.

- Approximately 115,700 missionaries are from the USA.
- Black Americans make up 12 percent of the American population and have a total of 400 missionaries in the field. That represents less than 0.4 percent of the total.
- In 2004, the estimated buying power of black American households was \$679 billion.
- The nation of Ghana sends 500 missionaries per year. Her population is 22.1 million and her gross national income is \$10 billion.
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- Thirty-five million African Americans sent approximately 400 missionaries and spent \$10.7 billion on household furnishings and equipment in 2004, equivalent to the gross national income of Ghana.
- Nigeria sends 2,500 missionaries per year and has a gross national income of \$74.2 billion. That is just a bit less than one-tenth of the total buying power of African Americans. African Americans spent this much on vehicles, insurance, clothing, and gifts in 2004.
- As of 2005, 2.1 million African Americans were in higher education, which was a 2.2 percent increase from 2001 (about 7 percent of the population). We obviously have the financial and intellectual ability to impact the world for Christ. Do we have the spiritual hunger for lost souls?

In short, what are we doing with the mass of wealth, education, and opportunities that God has given us? We are called to the world. We are called to missions. Dr. King stated in his famous oration “A Knock at Midnight” that “Our churches often have more religion in their hands and their feet than in their hearts and their heads.” These are harsh words to be sure. However, one prominent African American denomination (will go unnamed here) with a membership of 3.5 million gives an average of \$31 per church per year or approximately seven cents per member per year to foreign missions. That is worth shouting about, but not a shout of rejoicing. Rev. Vernon Johns stated, “If you see a good fight, get in it.” Without getting in that good fight, we should be ashamed to die.

The apostle Paul was proud to die. He saw a good fight. He got in it. At the end of his life, he

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stated in 2 Timothy 4:7-8, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing."

We can give, go, and pray. However, we can't give or pray without being at least willing to go. That means our prayers must not be for God's perfect will for only those who go. Any compromise on our own part when it comes to going means we will give less and actually pray less. A heart that is truly willing to go will give more generously and pray more earnestly. If the denomination I noted would encourage each member to move from seven cents per year to \$1 per day, the difference in Bibles purchased, schools built, and water sources tapped would be phenomenal. We have to be willing to fight and even fight our own traditions and our own selfish agendas.

We need to truly be ashamed of dying unless we have fought this fight. It is a good fight. Let's not sit on the sidelines, watching, criticizing, and admiring those in the heat of the battle. Let's get in the fight. The change we can believe in is Jesus and Jesus alone. We must be ashamed to die until we have fought the good fight of faith and helped take this gospel to all the world.