

## I've Been to the Mountaintop: A Dr. Martin Luther King Story

By: William Braden

“Good God, what have they done?!”

Three firemen were putting out the remainder of the flames that had engulfed the front portion of the house just moments ago.

The home, belonging to Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., a well-known and outspoken Pastor of the local Dexter Avenue Baptist church, had just fallen victim to a bombing. This wasn't the first time Martin had witnessed such destruction over the past two months. Ever since the Montgomery bus boycott started, several black churches in the area had been vandalized by white extremists who were against the call to desegregate the city bus lines.

Surrounding the house was an angry mob, many of which Martin recognized. It was total pandemonium, as people were screaming and some were carrying guns.

“Was anybody in the house?” he asked a bystander.

“Yes, but they're all okay, thankfully. Hey, you're Martin, aren't you? He's here everyone!”

Martin was relieved, but still terrified by the damage to his home. However, he was even more terrified at the crowd gathered on the lawn and sidewalk. The people started cheering after seeing that Martin had arrived, but he could also sense the bloodshed in their hearts. He knew his friends and neighbors were there to support him, but he could also see that they wanted revenge.

*There is no love here, only hate. Am I standing up for the truth of God, or merely proliferating hate?*

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“It seems these bomb threats follow you around like Moses' flock, Martin.”

“It sure seems that way, Ralph.”

Martin and his good friend and colleague, Reverend Ralph Abernathy, were sitting in their cab on the way back from the Mason Temple, where Martin had delivered a speech nearly an hour ago. Both were donning dark suits, white shirts, and muted neckties.

“Yes, it nearly derailed all our functions for the next two months,” Martin pointed out, with his trademark grin on his face.

“You think these people'd realize they've lost the war at this point, Lord have mercy!”

“Ah, hate and sin always rears its ugly head, my dear friend, that's why we must keep our heads held high and show them our love and divinity.”

“Always finding the best in people, aren't you, Marty?”, Rev. Abernathy said, putting his hand over his heart.

“And that 'war' is never-ending, I'm afraid. We still have a long way to go.”

“Love never ends, Martin.”

Martin nodded and looked out the window for a moment.

*I didn't use to look for the good in people. Not even in myself.*

“I'm sure they were all impressed with 'I've Seen the Mountaintop'.”

“Oh, there was much applause and jubilation in that hall,” Martin said modestly, adjusting his suit jacket and still looking out the window. “You know it took me almost ten revisions to make it feel cohesive? And I still meandered a bit with the part about the Road to Jericho.”

“Always the perfectionist, Marty. You’re way too hard on yourself.”

“Hmm. Say, Ralph,” Martin turned, now looking him straight in the eye. “Do you think it was all worth it in the end?”

“Hmm?”

“All the trouble I’ve caused, was it worth it in the end.”

“Are you leading me into another one of your jokes, Marty?”

Martin paused a moment.

“No, no, not this time.”

Rev. Abernathy looked puzzled.

“You know, Ralph, I was arrested 29 times in my life,” Martin said, with a despondent look in his eyes. “I caused a lot of grief for a lot of people. Maybe I should’ve served time.”

“You did what you had to for a reason, a purpose from God!” Rev. Abernathy put his hand on Martin’s shoulder said. “The freedom and sanctity of life of others were and still are at stake, our black brothers and sisters!” Ralph proclaimed.

“Did you also know I tried to kill myself not once, but twice? That’s one of the greatest sins one can commit!” Martin fired back.

Rev. Abernathy turned and cocked his head, stunned by the very words that had just come out of his dear friend's mouth.

"Is this true, Martin?"

"Yes. When I was a child."

"That's neither here nor there, Martin. And it's between you and God. The past is the past."

Rev. Abernathy pulled out a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped his brow.

"You don't mean what you say, you're just tired."

"I was stabbed, incited riots, led to people getting killed, the blood's on my hands!" Tears were starting to bead up in Martin's eyes.

"You know, I was thinking about the day my house was bombed, back in Montgomery. A huge crowd of people stood outside my house, thirsty for blood and retribution."

Rev. Abernathy opened his mouth to speak, but he was cut off.

"It seems I am the supplier of hate, not love, my friend."

"That's certainly not true, Martin, and you know it!" Rev. Abernathy started to get angry and boisterous, as if he were about to launch into another one of his great sermons.

"For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God - or whether we be sober, it is for your cause."

"And what is my cause!" Martin fired back, "Endless bombings, endless riots. Making small gains but creating new problems. That is not what He stands for, Ralph!"

“Think of all the people you have saved, Martin. Not just here in Memphis to the black sanitation workers, or in Montgomery, or even the country. You are a worldwide phenomenon, preaching his word! You are valid in His eyes.”

“Empty idols make their worshipers empty,” Martin retorted.

Their conversation was cut short when the taxi driver said they’d reached their destination. The two paid the driver and stepped out of the car.

As the car drove away, Martin suddenly saw a bright flash appear in front of his face. It was a blinding, strobing flash, that felt warm, like the flames of a fire. Martin’s palms started to sweat.

“Ralph, do you see this?”

He didn’t answer. In fact, he couldn’t see him or anything else at all, everything was shrouded in blinding rays. Martin felt empty in this void, but at the same time it felt ever so familiar. Then, a vision appeared in front of him. It was the March on Washington, where he could see millions crowded around the Lincoln Memorial. Martin could see himself giving his “I have a Dream” speech. Only this time, he was looking from the opposing vantage point, the onlooker’s position. People, both black and white, were celebrating and raising their hands to the sky. When he delivered the speech, Martin couldn’t see any of the people’s faces or hear what they were cheering from the podium so far away, but now he had a bird’s eye view.

“We have a dream! We have a dream!” A woman was chanting.

Others were singing “We Shall Overcome”, while others yet were weeping tremendously.

Then the vision changed to Martin and members of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference leading a protest in Montgomery during the bus boycotts. Martin could see himself

getting arrested and shoved to the ground as the police cuffed him. Though Martin could see some fights breaking out, he saw masses of people on the periphery that were not engaging with others in the crowd.

“We will not fight; we will show love and resistance like Martin wants us too!” A man shouted.

Once again, the vision changed, this time back to the night Martin’s house was bombed. Martin saw members of the angry, gun-wielding group that had been emblazoned into his mind, but he also saw women and children praying within. He hadn’t noticed this at the time.

*This is God’s will. I understand now.*

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“Martin, hey Marty, can you hear me, are you okay!?”

Martin suddenly snapped to, the vision and flashing lights now gone. His eyes were now burning a some and his ears ringing. He shook his head to clear his senses.

“Marty, hey. What happened?”

Martin stood there a minute to compose himself, then looked out into the distance.

“Perhaps you’re right, my friend. As I said this morning, ‘I’ve Seen the Mountaintop’, I shan’t be troubled about my past, nor my future. And you’re right, it was for my cause.”

He turned back to Rev. Abernathy again.

“I think I need some rest, let’s go upstairs.”

The two climbed the steps up to the motel room they were sharing to get ready for a meeting later on that night. Meanwhile, a man with a rifle, full of hate and rage, was making his way to the Lorraine Motel when Martin and Rev. Abernathy were staying.