

The Charge, is Dr. Martin Luther King's famous, sermon preached during the ordination of Reverend Al Sampson and Reverend McCall at Ebenezer Baptist Church in Atlanta, Georgia, January 2, 1966

This is the most sacred and serious undertaking that can befall any man. And if there's any one thing I would like to say to you tonight, its don't play with it.

First, I charge you to be sure that you are called to preach. Now this may be a trite statement, a concept that sounds a little old timely. But anytime a man takes on the responsibility of the Christian ministry, it's more than a vocation. It's more than an avocation It's more than a profession. He must somehow feel as Amos felt, that the word of God is upon me like fire shut up in my bones. He must feel like Jesus, that the spirit of the Lord is upon me. And so I charge you to preach with power, conviction, and sincerity every time you get to preach. And always remember that preaching is more than essay, for the dominant point in an essay is the subject to be explained, but the dominant point in a sermon is the object to be obtained. And that is a great distinction.

Preach to be three p's. Proving an appeal to the intellect, persuasion or painting rather than appeal to the imagination, and persuasion and appeal to the heart. And every time you get up to preach, have, mthe three P's.

Thirdly, I charge you to live a clean life, and this is going to be the hardest responsibility of your ministry, because I can tell you from experience that the temptations are out there. My people are going to say bad things about you. I can assure you of that. If you are in public life, you've got to get ready for it. They are going to accuse you falsely. If you are in public life-if you are a minister of God standing before many people-if they can't find anything wrong with you, they're going to make it wrong with you, they're going to make it wrong with you. And I can't -uh- say that you have the capacity to keep people from saying false and bad things about you, but you have the capacity to keep it from being true. And don't ever come to the temptation of being a regular fellow. Or preaching to become a regular fellow. Don't ever succumb to the temptation of having people tell you that you're just an ordinary man and a human being like everybody else. That's true, but people want to see in their minister a man who stands up with integrity, with honesty, with morality, with a sense of decency. He wants to know that his minister has God in his heart.

John Oxingham talked about it, "To every man there openeth a way, and ways a way. The high soul climbs the highway and the low soul gropes the low, and in between on the misty flats, the rest drift to fro, but to every man there openeth a high and low way. Every man chooseth which way his soul will go" To every minister there openeth a high and low way. And he must decide through the freedom that God has given him which way his soul shall go."

And finally, I charge you to know God. You won't be able to preach with power if you don't know him. And I'm marvelous to have searched back into the great insight of philosophy and cry out with Plato that God -uh- is an architect tonic to good. That's fine. It's alright to study Aristotle and read about his unmoved mover. It's alright even to stop

by Hegel and hear him talk about God as the absolute. It's alright even to deal with Jan Smutz and read what he says about him as the principle of wholism. It's alright even to know Paul Tillich, I love him. I have studied with him in all of his insights and read what he said about him that he's being itself. It's alright to read Alfred North Whitehead, and let him tell you that God is the principle of concretion, but after all of that's over, know that God is a force that moves in your heart. And when you know that, every time you stand up, people will catch on fire, because you have fire within you. And this will be the power. Read the theories and listen to those who say that God is dead, because they they are really saying that God is dead, because so many people who have professed to believe in God have made him dead in their lives, and they are trying to revitalize the ethnical insights of Jesus, so listen to them, but know in your heart that God is alive. For many times, I've heard them pronounce him dead and I've seen his name in the obituary column, but every time he breathes again. And whenever we live with that faith, we can preach with power. This is my charge to you. And go out and know that I'm with you all the way. And that if you believe in God, he'll be with you. And if you have the faith, he was the power. And now we come to the ordination prayer, but just before coming to that, I want to just present to you a symbol of what you will need in life. You need to know how to sing a preacher needs to know how to sing. And he needs to rely on music and singing, because there's power in singing, and there is power in the word of God as expressed through song, so I want to present this weapon to you. This is one weapon that I want to present to you Brother Sampson and Brother McCall, and this is another weapon I want to give to you, and don't ever forget this weapon. This is the Holy Bible. Now some people say there are some mistakes in here, I don't know. But I tell you one thing it is the record of an event. And I do know this. The event occurred. Now the record may have a few mistakes. I don't know about that, but in here you find the record of an event. And that event culminates in the life of Jesus Christ, and this is your Gospel. This is all you have to preach. I was saying the other Sunday that when the world war ended they had an extra newspaper out, and they ran all over the city, extra, extra, the war is over. Now this is all this book is about. It's an extra edition of God's eternal word, saying the war is over. God has conquered through Jesus Christ. These are your weapons.

Now the Reverend Dr. Ralph David Abernathy, the pastor of the West Hunter Street Baptist Church will lead us in the ordination prayer. May these two fine servants of God kneel in the family, and I will ask the preachers to come down, and we will lay the hands on the heads of these men and ordain them into the Christian ministry.

Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. January 2, 1966 R66. 01. 02. Charge at the ordination of Rev. Al. Sampson in the Ebenezer Baptist Church Atlanta, Georgia @ copyright Martin Luther King, Jr. Estate 1966