



I Have a Dream

Martin Luther King, Jr. Day — Third Monday in January

Dr. Martin Luther King believed in nonviolence as a way to promote change. During the 1960s, he traveled in the South, preaching his message of peaceful demonstrations and civil rights for blacks.

In August, 1963, Dr. King gave a speech that has gone down in history. He spoke to approximately 200,000 people who were marching in Washington, D.C. They were demonstrating their support for civil rights. Here is part of what he said in this famous speech:

I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up, live out the true meaning of its creed: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal." I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave-owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice . . . will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin but by the content of their character.

Take a look at Dr. King's words. What he said is important, of course. However, the way he said it helped make his words effective. Imagine if he had summed up his thoughts something like this:

Someday I hope people in this country will really be equal. Then people everywhere will be able to associate with one another. The state of Mississippi has been an unjust state in the past, but maybe someday it will be over all that. Someday I hope that no one will care about the color of a person's skin. People will look at what is really important: a person's character.

Even though the meaning is the same, this version of the speech lacks the impact of the first version. It is doubtful that anyone would ever remember these words. Go back to Dr. King's original speech. Notice four things he did to make his words memorable:

- He repeated the words "I have a dream." This repetition is almost musical, like the repetition of a chorus in a song.
- He created an image we can see: sons of former slaves and slave-owners sitting down together. Notice that he doesn't have them sitting down at any old table. He has them doing something greater: sitting at the table of brotherhood.
- He created an image of perfection: Mississippi doesn't just get better. It becomes an oasis of freedom and justice.
- Finally, he created a personal image: his own "four little children" living in a country where they are judged by their character, not the color of their skin.