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SPEAKER #1: Welcome to the Bethany Hour. We come to you under the auspices of grace from the Bethany Baptist Church Brooklyn New York, Dr. William Augustus Jones, pastor. Bethany is a church totally committed to a gospel of holism. We believe that Jesus Christ speaks to the totality of the human condition. We commend him to everyone as the all-sufficient savior. We urge you to worship him each Lord's day. Come now and unite with us as we celebrate the goodness of the Lord. (choir sings)

REV. DR. WILLIAM AUGUSTUS JONES, JR: Here now the lesson as recorded in the fourth Gospel--the Gospel as recorded by John. chapter 15, verses 14 through 18: "Yeah my friends, if ye do whatsoever I command you. Henceforth I call you not servants. For the servant knoweth not what his Lord doeth. But I have called you friends. For all things that I have heard of my father I have made known unto you. Ye have not chosen me. But I have chosen you and ordained you that ye should go and bring forth fruit and that your fruit should remain. That whatsoever you shall ask of the father in my name." (choir sings)

JONES: Kindly turn now to selection 141. Our hymn of consecration, "Love Lifted Me." (choir sings "Love Lifted Me")

JONES: Amen. On this Martin Luther King Sunday, I lift verse 13 out of chapter 15 of John's Gospel. Here's what it says: "Greater love hath no man than this. That a man lay down his life for his friends." And I want to talk simply and succinctly for the next little while about no greater love. No greater love. Jesus Christ has no equals. He never has, he never will. He occupies the peak place. His is the highest summit. The best kingly crown worn by men of earth has to be laid at the feet of Jesus. King of Kings and Lord of Lords is the indelible inscription upon his best bets.

There's nobody like Him. Christ has no equals. He never has, he never will. And yet he has advised his people of powerful possibilities. Possibilities which exceed his own accomplishments. On the eve of his death, he told his men most assuredly: "I see unto you he who believes in me the works that I do he will do also. And greater works than these he will do because I go to my father." He said that we creatures of clay, like you and like me, would do greater works. My! What confidence he has in us. More than most of us have in ourselves. Greater works, works greater than his works. He had to be speaking in terms of degree rather than kind. For who among us can surpass the savior. Who can outdistance the redeemer? Who can match, let alone surmount the master?

Of course, when you realize that whatever his people accomplish--that's noble and honorable and grand and glorious, is accomplished in his name and by the assistance of his power. So then with his help and his grace, I can do greater things than he did. Because whatever I do, he's doing it

really through me. He's doing it for his name's sake and for the kingdom's sake. I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me. You'd better believe I can. I know that I can. All those that are infused with that feeling and led by his spirit are really strangers to the human order. For their driving motivation stems from the logos. The creative power who brought all things into being. They pursued the impossible. They were always looking for a miracle. For they were driven by a dream. A dream that is part and parcel of the eternal himself. So, then my friends although Christ has no equals, he as sovereign Lord of history enters history and every now and then equips one of his servants to do greater things than he did. But remember he does it. Christ does it because he's the source. The source of instigation and the source of inspiration.

That explains Martin Luther King Jr. whom we honor today. That explains all of them who took the master seriously, owned him as Lord; lived out his ethic. And then went the way of martyrdom. On crucifixion eve while seated at table in old Jerusalem, Jesus lifted sacrificial service to its highest pinnacle. By declaring greater love hath no man than this, that a man laid down his life for his friends. What a noble and valiant proposition. What a glorious and marvelous ideal. What a sublime assertion. What a search soon corner (??). What a call to courage. Yeah, one takes leave from the ordinary, the mundane, the purely planetary. This is more than Christian fellowship. This goes far beyond Bible study. This transcends service in the choir or on the usher board. There's something about this that's peculiarly princely. Greater love hath no man than this. That a man laid down his life for his friends.

That demands a dignity of the deepest dimension. That's generosity way past the second mile. That's much more than the giving of one's cloak. That's magnanimity of mammoth proportion. Greater love hath no man than this. That a man laid down his life for his friends. That's grandeur of spirit. That's stately. That's august. That's imperial. That's sublime. You can't go any higher than that. That is the summit. That is the peak. That is the vortex. That is the apogee. That is the acme. In a word that's beyond the beyond. Greater love hath no man than this. That a man laid down his life for his friends. That's what he said. He who is greater than Solomon. He who has no equals. He said greater things shall ye do. That's what my master said. He said if you want to get up yonder, up beyond where the eagles play, up in that citadel of being where angels sing incessantly of the glory of the king. If you want to know greatness at its zenith. If you desire the summit scene. Then lay down your life for your friends. There is no greater love. Lay it down Jesus? Is that what you really said? Lay it down? Sounds sort of suicidal does it not? Sounds like deliberate dying. Dying under self-imposed circumstances. Jesus, are you advocating suicide? And his spirit answers the troubling query: "No I'm not talking suicide. I'm talking martyrdom." Suicide is self-centered. Martyrdom is other directed. Suicide is self-defeating. Martyrdom is redemptive. Suicide is tragic. Martyrdom is triumphant. With suicide the victim is also the executioner. With martyrdom the executioner is another. A suicide says it's all over, but martyrdom declares it's all just beginning. For the eternal God is about to do a marvelous thing. And my friends that's why the blood of the martyrs became the seed of the church. Martyrdom what a posture. Martyr, what a personage. It's *martus*. In the Greek *martus* means witness or testifier. Martyr connotes total commitment. You do what you do and say what you say because you know who you know. Your faith in him propels you into service for him. Your faith expresses and evidences itself in works. Your deeds are outer directed rather than self-serving. Dietrich Bonhoeffer the German martyr said it well: "When Christ calls the man, he bids him come and die." And that's the way it's been since the master talked about no greater love. Martyred for the Gospel's sake, that's the epitaph of men like Peter,

Paul, John, and Martin King. All of them laid down their lives. They all put their feet in redemptive paths. They all suffered for his name's sake. So, it's not suicide, rather it is martyrdom. Martyrdom after the example of him who said no man taketh my life, I lay it down. And souls of this persuasion declare--I belong to a larger scheme. I'm a strange combination of dust and divinity, of sod and sky. And that makes me different from the common herd. For I operate under the auspices of the almighty. I'm an instrument of love. My credentials have the seal of eternity upon them. And my passport has no restrictions at all. It reads go ye into all the world and preach the Gospel to every creature. I lay down my life. I give myself so fully to my Lord's cause that I'm always a candidate for a crucifixion. And even if demonic forces destroy this body. The action is not final. Because can't no grave hold this body down. Greater love hath no man than this. That a man laid down his life for his friends. Martyrdom--no greater love; life laid down for friends. That's what it is, for friends. And who were Martin's friends? Well, the same kind of people who were Jesus' friends. The little ones. The hungry, the sick. The naked, the imprisoned. The least, the last. The sick, the naked. The imprisoned, the least. The last, the lost. The locked out, the locked in. The dejected, the despised, the defeated, the despairing, the dismissed, the discarded, the disowned and the disinherited. The unwept Yanan of the unsung, the unwashed, the unkempt, the unwanted, the nobodies, the somebodies, anybody, everybody, all bodies south of heaven and north of hell.

Greater love hath no man than this. That a man lay down his life for his friends. Martin did it. Layered by his Lord. He did it. With a zeal according to knowledge. He did it. With pathos and passion. He did it. With faithful fortitude. He did it. With sweat, tears, and blood. He did it. God knows he did it. He took on the emissaries of evil. He challenged the Goliaths of segregated society. He blew the whistle on rabid racists. He lifted the trumpet against lethargic and uncommitted Christians. He reminded timid preachers that they needed nobody's permission to be prophetic. He did it. He did it. I declare he did it. Heaven knows he did it. Thank God he did it. Grateful souls everywhere shout he did it. By God's grace Martin did it. He laid down his life for his friends. He went the way of martyrdom. Satanic forces conspired to gun him down in Memphis where he was doing it for the least of these garbage workers. And I remember that day when we planted his body in Georgia soil.

But I heard the psalmist saying: "the earth is the Lord's and the fullness thereof." I heard slaves singing. I got a home in Beulah land that outshines the sun. I heard Julia Ward's house singing, "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord." And I heard my Lord say destroy this body and I'll raise it up. I heard Him say again, "I am the resurrection and the life he that believeth on me though he was dead yet shall he live. Yeah, whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." And then I heard that diminutive tentmaker from Tarsus declared that which is sown in corruption shall be raised in incorruption. That which is sown in dishonored, shall be raised in glory. That which is sown in weakness shall be raised in power. And when this corruptible has put on corruption and this mortal has put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying, "Oh death where is thy sting? Oh, grave where is thy victory?" Oh, if you lay it down in his name for your friends, he'll pick it up. If you give it up, he'll give it back. If you lose it for his sake, you'll surely find it. Die for him. Live with him. Live for him. And then reign with him. Martin did it and God let him peep over Jordan. The slaves put it plainly: "I looked over Jordan and what did I see? A band of angels coming after me."

When the late Charles Spurgeon died and his funeral was held, a preacher named B.H Carroll delivered one of the eulogies. Carroll was a citizen of this land, and it is reported that in his eulogy he concluded by saying that when Charles Spurgeon died all of heaven took notice. A convoy of angels was dispensed to carry his immortal soul beyond the clouded skyline of earth and on into the city eternal. The heavens drew to meet him. And the heavenly host welcomed him. Well, that might have been the case with Charles Spurgeon, but not so with Martin. When Martin died that fateful day in Memphis, God said get back angels and I'm handling this one myself. And God brought him to glory. I tell you he died for the least among us. Martin did it and again God let him look over Jordan.

Well, I have that privilege. Every day of my life I get a glimpse of glory. I get a look at the city. The city of the lamb. And the older I get the more pronounced the vision. I'm talking about that city in God's great land. The city forest square??. The city where there is no temple. The city that needs no light because God the father and God the son constitute the light. I'm talking about the city of God. The holy city. The city of everlasting day. The city where flows the river of life, clear as crystal. The city whose gates are never shut. The city where God shall wipe away all tears. The city to which the saints abound. I'm looking at the city right now--new Jerusalem and I intend to dwell there someday. You see I signed up one day. I signed up for the Christian jubilee. And they wrote my name on the wall. I told Jesus it would be all right if he changed my name. He signed it and he sealed it. So, my hope is sure, and my destiny is fixed. All of my life I've heard my elders talk about going home. About laying down their armor not to be troubled anymore by the toils of this life. I heard them saying--oh they tell me of a home far beyond the skies. So, they tell me of a home farther away. Oh, they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise. Oh, they tell me of an uncloudy day. Oh, they tell me of a home where my friends have gone. Oh, they tell me of that land farther away where the tree of life in eternal bloom sheds its fragrance through the unclouded day. Oh, they tell me of a king. It is beauty there. And they tell me that his eyes shall behold. Where he sits on the throne that is whiter than snow. In the city that is made of gold. Oh, they tell me even more. They tell me that he smiles on his children there. And his smile drives their sorrows all the way. And they tell me that no tears ever come again in that lovely land of unclouded days. Oh, the land of cloudless days. Oh, the land of unclouded days. Oh, they tell me of a home where no storm clouds rise. Oh, they tell me of an unclouded day. Don't you want to go to that land? That land where I'm bound. Don't you want to go to those peaceful environments? Well, why don't you come on and go with me to that land? To that land, yes to that land where I'm bound. And when I get there, it will be forever dwell with me. I don't expect any difficulty upon arrival. I plan to go marching in the way Martin did. I plan to go in with my shoulders erect, my head high, with my spirit intact, and with thanksgiving on my lips. Thank you, Jesus. Thank you for saving my soul. Thank you for bringing me all the way. Thank you for every deliverance. Thank you now. I just want to engage in perpetual praise. I want to give my thanks all over God's heaven. That will be thank you Jesus. Down at the river of crystal: thank you Jesus. Around the great throne: thank you Jesus. On the streets of pearl: thank you Jesus. At the gates of gold: thank you Jesus. Around the walls of jasper: thank you Jesus. With the saints of the ages: thank you Jesus. In his blessed presence: thank you Jesus. For you brought me a mighty long ways. Greater love hath no man than this. That a man lay down his life for his friends.

Let me ask you: have you done any dying at all of late? For his sake make it simpler than that. Have you bled just a little for the kingdom's sake? You have to answer that within the throne room

of your own soul. But remember what the master taught: no greater love than to give oneself. To spin oneself on behalf of his friends. Hallelujah! Hallelujah! Praise the Lord. Doors of the church open. Doors of the church open.

It may be that there's someone present who wants to join that great caravan where martyrdom is a possibility. Martin used to say if you haven't found something that's worth dying for you haven't even begun to live. Anybody here want to hook up with Jesus this day? If so, we warmly invite you to come while we sing this blessed hymn of invitation.

If there are persons present who live in Brooklyn or its environs without a church home, we want to invite you to come and unite with this fellowship. We're going to sing what is commonly regarded as a children's hymn. But if you read it as you sing it, you'll understand that it's applicable to anybody who trusts in Jesus. J. Robert Bradley, a great singer down in Tennessee, was invited to give a recital in London, England. And while there he was summoned by Buckingham Palace to come for an audience with the Queen. They talked for a little while and Queen Elizabeth said will you sing for me Mr. Bradley? And he said to her "What would you have me sing your majesty?" And she said, "Whatever you choose, I just want to hear you sing." And he said he thought about some of the great music written by British musicians. He thought about great German composers.

And he said finally it dawned on him that he must sing out of his own experience. And he started singing without the benefit of accompaniment. You know what he sang: "Jesus loves me, this I know." That'll work anywhere. Karl Barth, the imminent theologian, who left us a few years ago--One of the theologians from the continent--was once asked what is the real essence of the New Testament when you boil it down to bare essence. What's the great theme, the great story of the New Testament? Barth did not hesitate at all. He said there's one line that sums it all up: Jesus loves me, this I know. That's it. That's enough. If that was the only declaration in all of scripture that's enough to get us out of hell and on the highway to heaven. Jesus loves me, this I know. If there are those who desire to come, we bid you come while we sing this old hymn that has inspired so many across the years. Let's stand and lift it to the glory of our Christ.

(choir "Jesus Loves Me")

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