

**Remarks at Royal Missionary Baptist Church in North Charleston, South Carolina
January 19, 2025**

The President. Hello, hello, hello. Please. Please, sit.

Before I begin, let me tell you what I told Jim about 20 minutes ago.

I used to start off, as a young kid getting involved in the civil rights—my State, Delaware, to its great shame was a—anyway, fought on the wrong side of the—*[laughter]*. My State was segregated by law. My State, Delaware, was no different in terms of its laws than South Carolina or any other Southern State. And like two other States, just couldn't figure out how to get in the fight on the side of the South because it was cut off. But the southern two parts of my State—

[At this point, the President briefly imitated a Southern accent.]

—they talk funny like y'all do down here. You know what I mean? *[Laughter]*

And—but all kidding aside, I used to—I used to go, when I got engaged to—in the—I didn't plan on—I love reading these biographies on how I knew I was going to be President, going to run for President, et cetera. Truth of the matter was that I'm a kid who—we talk about impediments; I used to ta—t—ta—talk—talk like that. I used to stutter. Came from—came from a—you know, came from a place called Claymont, Delaware. A lot of steel town—it all went bankrupt. Come from Scranton, Pennsylvania. Things didn't work out so well because of the economy.

But you know what? Every time—every time—I spent time in the Black church—I was telling Jim—I think of one thing: the word "hope." *[Applause]* No, not a joke.

Pastor Holt, thank you for allowing me to be back at this pulpit. And, Senator, thank you for that introduction. I appreciate it.

You know, you made a really moving sermon, Pastor. And thank you, for the congregation of Royal Missionary Baptist Church, for welcoming me back to Charleston to worship with you.

I prayed with you here in February of 2020 when I was running for President. On my final full day as President, of all the places I wanted to be was back here with you.

I first got involved in public life because of the civil rights movement. I'd attend 7:30 mass at my church, then I'd go to another morning service at the AME Church in Delaware: the Black church, the spiritual home of the Black experience that helped redeem the soul of the Nation, literally.

That's the truth we honor on the weekend we celebrate one of the political heroes—my political heroes, many of yours—Dr. Martin Luther King. I have two busts in my office that I can see from my desk. I had two political heroes growing up: Dr. King and Bobby Kennedy. No, I'm serious. You've been in my office, Jim. There's two busts that I see from my desk.

On Sundays, we often reflect on resurrection and redemption. We remember Jesus was buried on Friday and He rose on Sunday. We don't talk enough about Saturday, when His disciples felt all hope was lost.

Our lives and in the lives of the Nation, we have those Saturdays; we bear—to bear witness of the day before glory, and some people's pain—are in pain and they can't look away. But what—the work we do on Saturday is going to determine whether we move with pain or purpose.

How can faith get a person, get a nation through what's to come? Here's what my faith has taught me. Scripture says, "As iron sharpens iron, so one person sharpens another person." That's what faith and friendship has taught me.

And friends in South Carolina, like Jim and Emily Clyburn, I could not be standing here, I would not be standing—that's not hyperbole—I would not be staying here in this pulpit were it not for Jim Clyburn.

And although somewhat presumptuous of me, neither of us would be standing here without Emily, who we all miss dearly, and who actually made Jim endorse me. *[Laughter]*

[The President looked up toward the ceiling.]

Thank you, Emily. *[Laughter]*

South Carolina friends like Fritz and Peatsy Hollings, who believed in me when I got through one of the most difficult times of my life. When I was a 26-year—or -9-year-old kid, I got a phone call saying my wife and daughter were dead and my two boys were not likely to live.

Well, guess what? Jim, Emily, Fritz and Peatsy, and so many friends in South Carolina have always been there for me, and especially in those Saturdays when I felt all hope was gone; those days when I buried pieces of my soul—my wife, my daughter, my son Beau, who was the attorney general of Delaware; when I felt like there was just a black hole in my chest sucking me into it—anger and rage that I felt at the time.

But then, friends—your friends bear witness. They see your pain. They pick you up to help you get to Saturday—to Sunday, from pain to purpose.

I felt that faith of—friendship when I prayed with this congregation—when they play—played with the congregation and prayed with the congregation of Mother Emanuel.

I went there and tried to confront [comfort; White House correction] them on my own Saturday, but it was they who ended up comforting me, as we arrived together and found grace together. Moving from pain to purpose strengthened my faith in the service of others, to "love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and soul and all thy mind" and "love thy neighbor as thyself."

Very easy to say, but very hard to do. But in the words—in those words are the essence of the Gospel, is the essence of the American promise: the idea, as was mentioned earlier, that we're all created equal in the image of God and deserve to be treated equally throughout our lives.

My dad used to say, "The greatest sin of all is the abuse of power."

We've never fully lived up to that commitment, but we've never walked away from it either because of you and your ancestors before us, who followed light of the north star even in the darkness.

After this service, I'll be visiting the International African American Museum. It captures the ongoing story of redemption. I'll tour the exhibits, and I'll speak about the power of history to make real the promise of America for all Americans. But this morning I'd like to talk about the essential piece of redemption: the power of mercy and justice.

With experience, wisdom, conscience, compassion, and science, we know how healing and restoration from harm is the pathway to the kind of communities we want to live in, where there's fairness, justice, accountability in the system; where the people we love go through hard times, fall down, make mistakes, but we're right there to help them get back up.

We don't turn on each other. We lean into each other. That's the sacred covenant of our Nation. We pledge an allegiance, not just to an idea, but to each other. That's who we're pledging allegiance to.

That's how I viewed my decision to issue more individual pardons and commutations than any President in American history. To inspire an end to Federal death penalty by commuting most of those sentences to life in prison without parole. To commute the sentence of individuals serving disproportionately hard, long, and harsh sentences for nonviolent drug offenses compared to the sentence they would have received today in commuting [committing; White House correction] that crime. To show mercy for individuals who either did their time or a significant amount of time and have shown significant remorse and rehabilitation. To understand that supervision after release is critical to provide accountability and support, while knowing that Government supervision over a very long time serves neither the interest of the person or the public.

These decisions are difficult. Some have never been done before. But, in my experience, with my conscience, I believe, taken together, justice and mercy requires as a nation to bear witness; to see people's pain, not to look away; and do the work to move pain to purpose, to show we can get a person, a nation, to a day of redemption.

But we know the struggle toward redeeming the soul of this Nation is difficult and ongoing, the distance is short between peril and possibility, but faith—faith—teaches us the America of our dreams is always closer than we think. That's the faith we must hold on to for the Saturdays to come.

We must hold on to hope. We must stay engaged. We must always keep the faith in a better day to come. I'm not going anywhere. I'm not kidding.

So, to the people of South Carolina, thank you for keeping the faith. It's been the honor of my life to serve as your President, the highest honor for Jill and our family.

Audience member. Yeah, Jill! [*Laughter*]

The President. And as I close out this journey with you, I'm just as passionate about our work as I was as a 29-year-old kid when I got elected and wasn't old enough to serve yet. I'm in no ways tired.

I've always heard before: "We've come too far from where we started. Nobody told me the road would be easy." "I don't believe—[*applause*]. I don't believe He brought me this far to leave me." My fellow Americans, I don't think the good Lord brought us this far to leave us behind.

As we celebrate Dr. King's legacy and generations before and since—women and men, enslaved and free—we have to remember one of his favorite hymns: "Precious Lord, take my hand through the storm, through the night, and lead me into the light."

Well, God bless you all, and may God protect our troops.

I owe you big. As they say where I come from, you all—you're the guys that brought me to the dance.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.

NOTE: The President spoke at 12:31 p.m. In his remarks, he referred to Rep. James E. Clyburn; and former South Carolina State Sen. Marlon E. Kimpson.

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