

## Action and Reaction

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No Date

Scripture: Matthew 25:14-30; Matthew 16:21-28.

Text: Matthew 16:25, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; and whosoever will lose his life for my sake shall find it."

The great value of the sayings of Jesus as they are given to us rests upon the fact that they represent the common everyday experiences of life interpreted in terms of great principles that underlie all life. Here or elsewhere we find a living truth, of value today as it was in the time of Jesus, and has always been, a truth of universal application.

One of the most striking truths that we are made to see as we grow into manhood and womanhood is this, that in proportion as our interests widen and extend themselves and we come to direct our attention away from ourselves, and identify ourselves with the life and interests of others, our own life assumes new power, and we find a greater and deeper richness in living. You never find a person who is deeply and passionately in in [sic] another person, a work of service or a great reform, that is soon pessimistic or dissatisfied with life. You never find a person who is self-centered, introspective and uninterested in any person aside from himself that is not complaining, irritable and forever finding fault with the world. We cannot point to historic illustrations of this latter class of people because they are never able to rise to positions of importance, and if fortune happens to have placed them in responsible places in life they soon grow narrow, become contracted and depart from their world leaving behind only a disgraceful record of gradual decay. We can point to men all through history who illustrate so pointedly the former class that one feels sometimes as though all growth and progress in the world had been the result of men who in the service of the world have lost their life, only to find it returned to them with a thousand-fold richness, honored and

admired. All the great prophets, Amos, Hosen, Jesus, and countless others down through the centuries have been men who have turned themselves away from their own interests of {??} and self-seeking, and devoted themselves to the good of others, only to find that in that life of service they discovered the truest and deepest power of living. In our own day we have two notable examples of such a life. In the story of Booker T. Washington's life,<sup>1</sup> we find a man whose life is full to overflowing with all that makes life worthwhile. Do you ever hear him complain because the days are too long, or life is not satisfying? Do you ever see him {??} about for some kind of amusement in which he can kill time, and thus pass away the weary hours? On the contrary, his only complaint is that the days do not contain hours enough, and life is likely to be too short. In that book, *The Making of an American*,<sup>2</sup> we see the same truth brought out with such {??} as to make us believe that indeed the Kingdom is coming. Jacob Riis never complains about the commonplaceness of living, for he has a purpose in living that would keep him occupied if he lived to be as old as the pyramids of Egypt. One cannot breathe the atmosphere in which these men live without absorbing something of their abounding life. The reason why people who never do anything for others, or allow themselves to become absorbed in some {??} passion of life go in such numbers to hear such men lecture, and read is because they hope to enjoy vicariously the richness of an abounding life, and feel the atmosphere of joy and hope that surrounds a person who lives in the discovered life of service. More people become sick and discontented and die an untimely death from the lack of something to do, than from overwork. More institutions lose their hold, and decay because they fail to grasp at the idea of service than because they do too much work. The fundamental principle of all healthy living is expressed in these words of Jesus, and who understood better than he, "For whosoever would save his life shall lose it, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall save it."

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<sup>1</sup> Booker T. Washington (1856-1915), American educator, first President of Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, now Tuskegee University, and influential spokesman for Black Americans between 1895 and 1915.

<sup>2</sup> Jacob Riis (1849-1914), notable "muckraking journalist," published *The Making of an American*, in 1901.

But let us see how this works, this life of service. What is the first essential? What method must we follow in order to serve the world?

In the first place absolute self-suppression, absolute denial of the value of things that interest each one of us is an absurdity upon the face of it. A man who places no value at all upon his own life, upon his own thoughts, upon his own aspirations, thereby puts himself in a position of not being able to understand or appreciate or work for the truest and best interests of others. When you and I attempt to decide just how far it is right for us to devote ourselves to our own interests and do those things that seem self-centered and in violation of the regard for others, we must remember that we cannot do for others until we have first done something for ourselves, until we have absorbed into our own life something that would be of value to those whom we would serve. If any altruistic person should come to us and say, "I perceive that your power to appreciate art has not been cultivated. May I offer you my services?" In our enthusiasm we accept the kind offer, and lo! we discover that our kind-hearted friend can hardly tell an oil painting from a Sunday paper {???}. We dismiss him with as much courtesy as possible. In the same way we dismiss the unlearned teacher of any of the arts of life. But the climax is reached when we are approached by a soul of kind intentions who says, "You are in trouble. Something about your manner tells me that you need the comfort and sympathy that I ought to give." He proceeds to comfort us by trampling under his feet everything that is dear and sacred to us, simply because he does not know that a human soul can hide within its sacred chambers thoughts and sorrows and pains that are too sacred to be exposed to the gaze of one who does not understand and has never had a sorrow. We would thank such a one to keep his distance. In truth you and I cannot be ministered unto by one who has not ministered unto himself, who has no conception of the value of his own soul, of his own thoughts, his own hopes. A man who has nothing himself cannot serve us, nor can we serve others until we ourselves are something. Truly Emerson says, "The only gift is a portion of thyself. Thou must bleed for me."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> From Ralph Waldo Emerson's (1803-1882) essay, "Gifts," in his *Essays: Second Series*, published in 1844.

But how different it is when we come in contact with one who values his own life, who has worked hard and persistently to become what he is, who realizes the greatness of his own soul, the Divine origin of whatever in him speaks of things that are pure and eternal. While we reject the offices of one who has not noted life highly, we turn with open arms, and an inward longing, to one who has a high conception of his life.

I read with indifference the reports of conventions where thousands of women have assembled to consider problems of home life, but my soul is stirred to its depths as I see in the home the delicate touches that manifest the poetic conception of the home life. They are the unspoken confessions of a noble soul that finds its greatest joy in that place which alone in all the world is the castle. There I sit and drink in the pleasures that you can give me, because they are infinite pleasures to you.

We can share the delight with which a businessman does his work, or a skilled workman uses his tools, if we can but feel that he enjoys his work, and holds it in high esteem, and he can minister unto us because he has something to give. How we open our inmost natures to any man who values himself and his work. How we shut ourselves up and push from us the blasé dilettantist who affects to scorn all labor, and tries to impress us of his superiority by his indifference to mundane things!

The musician who has gained a glimpse of the beauty and charm of musical expression and puts his soul into the effort to speak to us through his music the deep thoughts and hopes that stir within him. We can listen for hours to the player who is bleeding for us, who is pouring into their playing all his power, all his passion, so that you and I may get a glimpse of the truth as he sees. A painter sees some great law of beauty or color in a bit of landscape, and with all the passion of his art he transfers that bit of landscape to the canvas for you and me to appreciate. He comes upon some person in who he sees some ruling passion, that colors and livens the whole soul, and he puts that face onto canvas that we may see the Divine in commonplace. Cecilia Beaux,<sup>4</sup> as she paints her portraits, has someone read to her some story or some beautiful passage of literature that stirs her soul to its depths,

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<sup>4</sup> Cecilia Beaux (1855-1942), American portrait Artist.

and in the midst of her sympathetic tears, she sees the face that she is painting as the expression of those great thoughts that are sweeping through her mind like the waves of a mighty sea. It is because she can see the greatness of the thoughts in her own life that she is able to see them in others, and give to others of her own greatness. No, only those who have justly appreciated the duties and obligations that they owe to themselves, can enter into the secrets of your life and mind, and minister unto our needs. They must bleed for us, or they cannot help us. To minister unto others, to serve them, to make them see with great ruling passion the beauty and glory of living, we must first see it ourselves and give ourselves up to it.

We do not have to wait until a certain standard of preparation has been attained before we give ourselves up to the life of service. We are so made that each one of us has something that is of value to others, some individual characteristic that distinguishes each individual from every other being in the world. The bit of his individuality is his {??} of fitness to become of service to the world in some capacity. What teacher has not at times felt himself the pupil as the pupil suddenly is transformed into the teacher as he has opportunity to display that power that is his. But in truth each one has his limitations as well, and feels the need of help, and instruction from others. So, as a matter of fact, as soon as we are, we are teachers, and pupils at the same time. As soon as we are able to realize this, we are in a fair way to appreciate that great teaching of Jesus. One never comes to a full appreciation of his own power until he is called upon to exercise it, and in exercising it he finds it expanding, and developing. The more the musician gives of his power, the more he has. The less he gives, the less he has. The more a reformer gives of that spirit within him that makes him a reformer, the more he has left to give. As he refuses to give, he loses that which he already had. Is not that the meaning of the parable of the talents. The man who put his talents out to service, finds that they double in value. He who refuses to put them to service finds that in due time they not only do not increase, but they actually become less and less until the talent has entirely disappeared, and the man stands before the world a complainer and a pessimist. There is a law of physics that says to each and every action there is an opposite and equal reaction. The very force that drives the bullet from the rifle also drives the rifle back in the opposite

direction from which the bullet goes, and with equal force. The distance which the two bodies travel will depend upon the ratio of the weight of the bullet to the weight of the gun. The same is true in our intellectual life. The teacher learns as much as the pupil. The very effort that he makes to impart his knowledge to others, reacts upon himself, and clarifies and fixes more firmly that which he would teach. Any service of goodness, or love done for another records itself upon the soul of the doer, as quickly and as accurately as comes the recoil of the rifle. That is a very dramatic and impressive expression of this idea in the character of Madam Defarge in Dickens' *Tale of Two Cities*.<sup>5</sup> Madam Defarge sits quietly behind the counter in the wine shop, and knits, knits, always knitting the record of conversation and events that take place in that little hidden out-of-the-way place in Paris. When the day comes and {??} Guillotine sits in judgement upon the victims of the Revolution, Madame Defarge unravelling, unravelling, and the unerring records of her testimony doom man after man to death. Each act, good or bad, each thought, pure or impure, each hope, selfish or unselfish, is recorded on one's own soul, and helps to make the sum total of what we are today, and fits us with the power with which we face tomorrow. This unerring law of action is forever at work. If the deed, the thought, the impulse is one of unselfish interest in another, not only is the other benefitted, but the Father who seeth in secret, will recompense this, but if the deed be mean, selfish and cruel, we will also be recompensed with a great accuracy.

Whosoever would save his life must take his talent, be it one, 2, 5 or 1000, and with that talent with which he has been endowed to serve the world, he must turn away from himself, and put his whole heart and soul into the mission of making others see that which makes life sacred to him. It may be in one capacity or it may be in another, but to that duty he is called, and to it he must respond if he wishes to find life rich and satisfying. If life seems commonplace and uninteresting, if time hangs heavy on your hands, if the world seems too bad to live in, and your own powers are not properly understood, let us turn away from those thoughts, rise above yourself and put your talent to use in the world, and behold the time will seem too short to do the things that we need to do, and we shall find in

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<sup>5</sup> Charles Dickens (1812-1870) published *A Tale of Two Cities* in 1859.

the world not the sin, and the wickedness that we thought was overwhelming us, but we will find goodness in every life, and the divine powers of everyone waiting for us to minister unto them, and show them the passion of our life, as the hungry audience hangs on the words of an active man like Booker Washington, or Jacob Riis, and absorbs something of the spirit of life that they have not but feel the need of. Not with less force does this same apply to this church. We have the talent, not one or two, or five, but a thousand, and the need that the world feels for our talent is so apparent, so forced home upon us by the despairing tone that characterized the churches that are in retreat before the rapid progress of the principles of Free Inquiry and individual authority, calls us to a service as noble as ever institutions had the opportunity of doing. I read an editorial this week in a denominational paper which said that the generation of young men and women that are growing into power now, are without any religious training or thoughts. They are indeed without the faith of a former day. But there are already within their minds the germs of a stronger deeper simpler faith, that shall make them servants and laborers in an age of deeper spiritual force than the world has yet seen. To that service we are called to show to those who are groping after light amid the ruins of history, the light which has shown, and is shining now with unequalled splendor in the midst of living active growing present. We have our talent. The world needs us. So let us forget ourselves, and turn to the needs of the world, and as we serve the world and bring light to them, they also will respond and bring light to us. Though we seem to lose our life for their sake, we shall find it in them riches and more beautiful and ever-growing and expanding. No greater truth of life has ever been spoken than this of Jesus, "For whosoever would save his life shall lose, and whosoever shall lose his life for my sake shall find it."