

The Thunder of Silent Faithfulness

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Part of the Series
The Influence of Little Things

“We treat God with irreverence by banishing Him from our thoughts, not by referring to His will on slight occasions. His is not the finite authority or intelligence which cannot be troubled with small things.

There is nothing so small but that we may honor God by asking His guidance of it, or insult Him by taking it into our own hands; and what is true of Deity is equally true of His Revelation. We use it most reverently when most habitually; our insolence is in ever acting without reference to it, our true honoring of it is in its universal application.” Ruskin.

“I expect to pass through this life but once. If there is any kindness or any good thing I can do to my fellow-beings let me do it now. I shall pass this way but once.” William Penn

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Schliemann, uncovering marbles upon which Phidias and his followers carved out immortality for themselves, has not been more effective for the increase of knowledge than those excavators in Egypt who have uncovered the Rosetta stone, with other manuscripts of brick and marble. Of all these tablets and tombs, none are more interesting than one picturing a national festival in the Jewish capital. On his canvas of stone the unknown artist portrays for us Herod's temple with its outer courts and columns and its massive walls.

We see the public square crowded with merchants and traders, who have come in from the great cities of the world to this festival. With solemn pageantry, these Jews, who were the bankers and merchants of that age, march through the streets toward the gate that is called Beautiful. In the magnificent parade are men notable by their princely wealth in Ephesus and Antioch, in Alexandria and Rome.

We see one advancing with his retinue of servants, another with the train which corresponds to his wealth. One group the artist portrays as characteristic. Advancing before their lord and master are four servants, who lift up, in the presence of admiring spectators, a platter on which lies a heap of shining gold. The murmur of admiration that runs through the crowd is sweeter to the old merchant's ear than any music of harp or human voice.

Passing by the treasury, what gifts are thrown on the massive table! How heavy the bars of gold! What silver! What pearls and jewels! How rich the fabrics and hangings for the temple! As at

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St. Peter in the sixteenth century, so in Christ's day it seemed as if the whole world were being swept for treasures for enriching this glorious temple.

But when the lions of the procession had all passed by, there followed the crowd of stragglers. From this post of observation we are told that Christ saw a poor widow advancing. With falling tears, yet with exquisite grace and tenderness, she cast in two mites, or one half-penny, then passed on to worship him whom she loved, unconscious of the fact that she had also passed into immortality.

For the noise of the gold falling into the resounding chest has long since died away. Jerusalem itself is in ruins. The old temple with its magnificence has gone to decay. The proud thrones and monarchies have all fallen into dust. But the silent faithfulness of this obscure woman is a voice that thunders down the long aisles of time.

A thousand times she has encouraged heroism in poet and parent. Ten thousand times she has been an inspiration to reformers and martyrs! Love and faithfulness have preserved her deed and lent her immortality. In the very center of the world's civilization stands her monument. For her Arc de Triomphe has been built in the human heart. Her monument does not appeal to the eye; it is not carved in stone; yet it is more permanent than gold, and her fame outshines all flashing jewels. While love and admiration endure, the story of her humble faithfulness will abide indestructible!

The great Italian first noted that only three times did Christ stretch out his hand to build a monument, and each time it was to immortalize a deed of humble faithfulness.

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Once, a disciple gave a cup of cold water to one of God's little ones, and won renown. Once, a woman broke an alabaster box for her master, and her deed has been like a broken vase, whose perfume has come out for two thousand years, and shall go on spreading sweetness to the end of time. Last of all, after the rich men of Alexandria had thrown their rattling gold into the treasury, a poor widow threw a speck of dust called two mites, and this humble deed gave her enduring remembrance.

It seems that immortal renown is achieved not so much by the single deed of greatness as by humble faithfulness to life's details, and that modest Christian living is in small deeds and minor duties.

Ours world is one in which life's most perfect gifts and sweetest blessings are little things.

Take away love, daily work, righteous sleep, and palaces become prisons and gold seems pathetic.

The classic poet tells of King Midas, to whom was offered whatever he wished, and whose greed led him to choose the golden touch. But, his blessing became a curse. Getting dressed in the morning, he found himself shivering in a coat made with threads of gold. Going into his garden he stooped down to breathe the perfume of the roses, and the petals became yellow points that pierced his face. At breakfast, the bread became metal in his mouth. Lifting a goblet the water became a solid mass. Swinging his little daughter in his arms one kiss turned the child into a cold statue. A single hour was enough to drive happiness from Midas' heart. In despair he begged the gods for simple things. He asked for one cup of cold water, one piece of simple fruit and his little daughter's loving heart and hand.

Wisdom without life's little things is unable to bring happiness,

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just like great riches. The wisest of men have also been the saddest of men.

History tells of many beautiful and gifted girls who have married scholars for their great intelligence, fame and position. When these honors were theirs they awoke to discover that all were less than nothing. Home and fame became dungeons in which the soul sat and famished for love's little courtesies. Their lives were devoid of the small kindnesses that love provides.

Down in a corner of a window of an English palace may be found faint lines scratched with a woman's diamond. What a tragedy in those words, "My prison." It seems the sweet girl, Jane Grey, entered her palace with a happy heart, but her lord had no time for her. Hers was the palace; hers also a thousand rich gifts called titles, lands, castles, maids of honor, dresses, jewels. Yet because the castles held no sweet courtesies the journal of that beautiful girl reminds us of some young bird that beats with bloody wings against the bars of an iron cage.

For life is made up not of a few intense joys, but of many small and gentle joys. Great happiness is the sum of many small drops. God makes the days that are full of mighty and tumultuous joys to be few and far between. For intense and great joys exhaust. All who seek intense pleasure will not find enjoyment, but yearnings for enjoyment.

Happiness is in simple things; a cup of cold water, health and a perfect day; dreamless sleep, honest toil, the respect of the worthy, the caresses of little children, a love that increases with the increasing years.

Our appreciation of the principle that greatness of any form is an accumulation of little deeds will be freshened by an outlook

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upon nature's method.

Science has found that earth's every atom has been slowly polished by an infinite artisan and architect.

If we descend into the sea we will find that the reefs and islands against which the tides of the Pacific dash in vain are built of coral insects, whose every organ exhibits the delicate skill of a diamond or snowflake.

If we stand on the broad plain where men build cities we will see that each flake of the rich soil represents the perfect crystallization of drops of melted granite. If we go to the top of the tallest mountains, there we find that the mountain has its height and majesty through particles themselves weak and little.

If ages ago the sages said, God is in the still small voice, now science reaffirms the declaration that omnipotence is revealed not so much through the awful cataclysms and earthquake forces, as through the silent agents and hidden processes that make the plains to be fruitful and hillsides to be rich in corn.

In the past astronomy has been the favorite science, emphasizing the distant stars and suns. Now look at the science of chemistry, emphasizing atoms and elements. Journeying outward to the stars in pursuit of the footsteps of God, man's vision faints and falls upon the horizon beyond which are unknowable splendors. Journeying inward on the wings of the microscope, we find that there is another realm of beauty beyond which the vision of man cannot pierce.

For even in the microscope the last discernible particle dies out of sight with the same perfect glory on it as on the last star that glimmers in the skirts of the universe. If God is throned in the

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clouds, He is also on His throne in the drop of dew and His palace is in the bud and blossom.

The history of nations and individuals teaches us that the greatest gifts are poor and empty and the most impressive talents are worthless if the small things are not done, if the two mites are not given. For life is ruined by little unfaithful moments, and torn apart by little errors.

The broken columns and marble heaps in places where there were once cities, represent destructions not so much through tornadoes and earthquakes as through small vices and unnoticed sins.

In modern life also life's chief wastes are through little enemies and foes. It is a minute bug that steals the golden berry from the wheat; it is a tiny germ on the leaf that ruins the budding peach and pear, it is a rough spot on the potato that filled Ireland with fear of famine; it is a worm that bores through the planks of the ship's hull and scares the old sea captains in ways the approaching battleships could not.

The enemies of human life are not enemies that fill man's streets with banners and charging cannon. We wage war against the dust mote ambushed in the sunbeam; we fight against weapons hurled from those battleships called drops of impure water; we wrestle with those hosts whose broadsides rise invisible from foul streets, or fall from poisoned clouds. The great catastrophe that overtook Holland many years ago is not explained by a tidal wave that pierced through the dikes; the disaster was through the crawfish that opened tiny holes and, slowly weakening the mighty dikes, let in the rushing sea.

It was a small error that robbed the generations of one of

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man's divinest pictures. Five hundred years ago the monks made tight and strong the roof above the room where Da Vinci's "Last Supper" was housed. A thousand tiles were fastened down and all except one were perfect. The one hid a secret hole. When months had passed and the driving storm came from the right direction, the rain found out that hidden fault and, rushing in, a flood of drops streamed down over the wall and made a great black mark across the noble painting, and ruined the central face forever.

Human life is ruined through the absence of humble virtues and the presence of little faults.

There is no man so great, no gift so brilliant, but if it is whispered that there is a falseness in the life of the hero, then immediately his greatness is dwarfed, his eloquence becomes a trick, his authority is impaired. It is the absence of little virtues and sweet domestic graces that rob the hero of their power over us. Harshness and pride in the hero makes their refinement and culture seem but skin deep.

We give honor only to the greatness that is also goodness. To amazing talent and power the hero must also add tenderness to his family, kindness to the weak, unfailing sympathy to all. No hero is a complete hero until he is also gentle, stooping to give his two mites to the weak, bearing to the weary his cup of cold water, always mindful of those with greater need.

Most great reforms are the humble deeds of humble persons, taken up and repeated by an entire people. The final victories for liberty and religion are written on monuments and celebrated in song and story, but the beginnings of these achievements for mankind are often given over to obscurity and forgetfulness

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Today we make much of the “Red Cross” movement. It's beginning was the simple act of two English girls boarding the steamer that was to carry them to the Crimea. On the distant battlefields, with their deserted cannon, wounded horses and dying men, at first these gentle girls seemed strangely out of place. The hospitals were full; neglected soldiers were lying in the thickets, where they had crawled to die. With no hesitation these brave girls moved across the battlefields like angels of mercy.

Many years have passed. Now these nurses and thousands of other volunteers bring hope to every battlefield, and minister to every stricken area in the world, for the story of that sweet girl has filled the earth with “King's Daughters.”

Talented men march in millions, but truly impressive men are few and far between. Many scientists--one Newton. Thousands of poets--but the Elizabethan eras are separated by centuries. As each continent has but one incredible mountain range, so the outstanding minds stand isolated in the ages. If great men are infrequent, the world's need of great men is just as infrequent.

Society advances in happiness and culture, not through striking, dramatic acts, but through myriads of unnumbered and unnoticed deeds.

Even the heroes dying upon the battlefield do not ask for Plato or Bacon, but for a cup of cold water. We also ask for a friend bringing a mite of sympathy and a cup of cold water. Let's confess it--we are all famishing for love and the kind word that says: “In your Gethsemane you are not alone.”

God secures for us our happiness, not through speech about the heavens and firmament, but through the comfort that comes through speech over little things.

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He feeds the birds, adorns the lily, clothes the grass, numbers man's troubles. He is the Shepherd seeking the one sheep, the father waiting for the lost son. His kingdom is a little leaven working in the world's dough, His truth being no larger than a grain of mustard-seed. Above each little child bows some guardian angel showing the face of its heavenly Father.

And He who unites grains of sand to make planets and rays of light for amazing suns, and blades of grass for the solid beauty of field and pasture and drops of water for the ocean that brings every continent its dew and rain, teaches us also that great principles will organize the little words, little prayers, little aspirations and little services into the full-orbed splendor of an enduring character and an immortal fame.

Happily no one needs to journey far, spend large amounts of money or search long for opportunities of humble faithfulness. Into our lives each year come thousands of people. Passing along the streets these lonely people see even your pets have a gentle hand to care for them. Each dog has some owner's name engraved on their collar. But for many, weeks pass by, and no person gives a friendly smile, no hand is stretched out in a small, gentle kindness, and often the thought is bitter: "No one actually cares for me."

The person who sits in the seat beside you asks only that the newspaper is shared in kindness. You might give to the discouraged one a smile that says; "Life was once tough for me too, but be of good cheer, you will get over this." Such friendliness is the two mites that are remembered forever. For if each must fight his own battles, face for himself the visions of doubt, and kill them; if each must be his own surgeon and pull the bullet from the soul, still sympathy is a precious gift. It is given to each person to give the cup of tenderness to the warrior sorely wounded in life's battle.

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In ancient times when men's cabins were built on the edge of the wilderness, not yet cleared of the wild animals, sometimes the little children wandered from the path and were lost in the forest. And then the cry of terror revealed the awful danger that threatened. This caused the mother to speed out with blazing speed and place her body as a shield against the enemy. Daily these scenes are re-enacted, not in songs and dramas, but through the work of those who rescue the helpless in our midst. What hope our little deeds bring.

Silent faithfulness. Those small, seemingly inconsequential things we do each and every day. From the heart, from our character or from our desire to build the hopes and dreams of others are the steps up the majestic stairway.. These small and silent faithful deeds create the thunder crashing around the world remembered for generations.