

THEODORE ROOSEVELT, A DOER OF THE WORD

“Be ye doers of the Word and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.”

Compiled by

Buddy Dano

Divine Viewpoint

www.divineviewpoint.com

Theodore Roosevelt: A Doer of the Word

One of Theodore Roosevelt's closest friends for years, was a man by the name of Jacob Riis, who worked with him while he was a Police Commissioner in New York. When Jacob Riis was asked about Roosevelt's creed, he said, "Mr. Roosevelt's creed? You can find it in a speech he made to the Bible Society a year ago" and then he went on to quote part of the speech.

"If we read the Book aright," he said, "we read a Book that teaches us to go forth and do the work of the Lord in the world as we find it, to try to make things better in the world, even if only a little better, because we lived in it. That kind of work cannot be done, except by a man who is neither a weakling nor a coward, by a man who, in the fullest sense of the word, is a true Christian, like Greatheart, Bunyan's hero."

"Better faithful, than famous" used to be one of Roosevelt's characteristic sayings, wrote Jacob Riis, in his life with the former President, and he concluded, "It has been his rule, all of his life."

When our troops made ready to sail across the seas, the New York Bible Society distributed among them little pocket Testaments, and they asked Roosevelt to write a message which would go with each Testament. He wrote the following:

"The teachings of the New Testament are foreshadowed in Micah's verse: 'What more doth the Lord require of thee than to do justice, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God.' He then made application of that verse by saying: 'Do justice, and therefore fight valiantly against the armies of Germany and Turkey, for these nations in this crisis stand for the reign of Moloch, and Beelzebub on this earth. Love mercy, treat prisoners well. Succor the wounded. Treat every woman as if she were your sister, care for little children, and be tender with the old and helpless. Walk humbly, you will do so if you study the life and teachings of the Saviour. May the God of justice and mercy have you in His keeping.'"

Theodore Roosevelt believed that the most perfect machinery of government would not keep us as a nation from destruction, if there is not within us, a soul. He said, "**No abounding material prosperity will avail us, if our spiritual senses atrophy. The foes of our own household, shall surely prevail against us, unless there be in our own people, an inner life which finds its outward expression in a morality, not very widely different from that preached by the seers and the prophet of Judea when the grandeur that was Greece and the glory that was Rome, still lay in the future.**"

In his farewell address to his countrymen, Washington said, "Morality is a necessary spring of popular government, and let us with caution indulge the supposition that morality can be maintained without religion. Whatever may be conceded to the influence of refined education of minds of peculiar structure, reason and experience, both forbid us to expect that national morality can prevail in exclusion of religious principle."

When Owen Wister, a friend of Theodore Roosevelt, meditated upon an important confession, and finally put the matter to Mr. Roosevelt, he exclaimed, "Never indulge yourself on the sinner's stool. If you did any harm, that won't undo it, you will merely rake it up. The sinner's stool is often the only available publicity spot for the otherwise wholly obscure egotist."

The following day, Owen Wister said to Mrs. Roosevelt, "If they treated Theodore as they deal with certain composite substances in chemistry, and put him in a crucible, and melted him down until nothing of him remained at the bottom of the crucible but his ultimate, central, indestructible stuff, it's not a statesman that you would find, or a hunter, or a historian, or a naturalist, they would find a Preacher Militant." Mrs. Roosevelt agreed.

At Elkhorn Ranch, the long silences and stretches of solitude had much to do with the mental growth of Theodore Roosevelt as a

young man. There he read and wrote and thought deeply. His old guide, Bill Sewall, was asked, not long after, about his opinion of Roosevelt as a religious man. "I think he read the Bible a great deal. I never saw him in formal prayer, but as prayer is the desire of the heart, I think he prayed without ceasing, for the desire of his heart was always to do right."

Roosevelt said he always had a horror of words that are not translated into deeds, or speech that does not result in action. In other words, he believed in realizable ideals and in realizing them; in preaching what would be practicable and then practicing it.

He put the same idea in somewhat different words in a speech in that very campaign of 1916 when he said, "Of course, the vital thing for the nation to remember is, while dreaming and talking both have their uses, these uses must chiefly exist in seeing the dream realized and the talking turned into action. Ideals that are so lofty as always to be unrealizable have a place, sometimes an exceedingly important place in the history of mankind, if the attempt at least partially, to realize them is made, but in the long run, what most helps forward the common run of humanity in this work-a-day world, is the possession of realizable ideals and sincere attempt to realize them."

The supreme test of a Preacher is and always will be, the power of the Gospel which he expounds, to guide his own actions. In other words, does he practice what he preaches? There is logically or illogically, justice in the popular conviction that there is something the matter with adjurations which totally fail to determine the acts of the man who utters them." Roosevelt revealed in his life how he himself practiced the strenuous, the virtuous, the patriotic life, in the pursuit of realizable ideals which he preached.

"*Be ye doers of the Word, and not hearers only,*" was his favorite text. He could afford to preach it boldly and without shame.

"Success," he said, "does not lie entirely in the hands of any one of us. From the day the

tower of Siloam fell, misfortune has fallen sometimes upon the just as well as the unjust. We sometimes see the good man, the honest man, the strong man, broken down by forces over which he had no control. If the hand of the Lord is heavy upon us, the strength and wisdom of man shall avail nothing, but as a rule, in the long run, each of us come pretty near to getting what he deserves, each of us can, as a rule, there are of course exceptions, finally achieve the success worth having. The success of having played his part honestly and manfully, of having lived so as to feel at the end, he has done his duty, of having tried to make a better place to live in, rather than worse, because he lived, of having been '*a doer of the Word and not a hearer only,*' still less a mere critic of the doer."

"Every man has in him, unless fate is indeed hard upon him, to win out that measure of success, if he will honestly try. No people on earth have more cause to be thankful than ours, and this is said reverently; in no spirit of boastfulness in our strength, but with gratitude to the '*Giver of Good,*' who has blessed us with the conditions which have enabled us to achieve a large measure of well being and of happiness. To us, a people it has been granted to lay the foundation of our national life in a new continent. We are the heirs of the ages, and yet we have had to pay few of the penalties which in old countries are exacted by the dead hand of bygone civilization. We have not been obliged to fight for our existence against any alien race, and yet our life has called for the vigour and effort, without which the manlier and harder virtues whither away. Under such conditions, it would be our own fault if we failed, and the success which we confidently believe the future will bring, should cause in us no feeling of vainglory, but rather a deep and abiding realization of all which life has offered us; a full acknowledgement of the responsibility which is ours, and a fixed determination to show that under a free government a mighty people can thrive best, alike as regards the things of the body and the things of the soul."

“Much has been given us, and much will rightfully be expected of us. We have duties to others and duties to ourselves, and we shirk neither. We have become a great nation, forced by the fact of its greatness into relations with other nations of the earth, and we must behave as beseems a people with such responsibilities. Toward all nations, large and small, our attitude must be one of cordial and sincere friendship. We must show not only in words, but in our deeds, that we are earnestly desirous of securing their good will by acting toward them in a spirit of just and generous recognition of all their rights, but justice and generosity in a nation, as in an individual, count most when shown, not by the weak, but by the strong.”

“While ever careful to refrain ourselves from wronging others, we must be no less insistent that we are not wronged ourselves. We wish it because we think it is right and not because we are afraid. No weak nation that acts manfully and justly, should ever have cause to fear us, and no strong power should ever be able to single us out as a subject of insolent aggression. Our relations among ourselves are more important than our relations with other powers of the world. Such growth in wealth, in population, and in power as this nation has seen during the century and a quarter of its national life, is inevitably accompanied by a like growth in problems which are ever before every nation that rises to greatness.”

“Upon the success of our experiment much depends. Not only as regards our own welfare, but as regards the welfare of mankind. If we fail, the cause of free government, free self government throughout the world will rock to its foundations, and therefore our responsibility is heavy, to ourselves, to the world as it is today, and to the generations yet unborn. Unless democracy is based on the principle of service by everybody who claims the enjoyment of any right, it is not true democracy at all.”

“The man who refused to render, or is ashamed to render the necessary service, is not fit to live in a democracy; and the man

who demands from another, a service which demands from another, a service which he himself would esteem it dishonorable or unbecoming to render, is to that extent, a true democrat. **No man has a right to demand a service which he does not regard as honorable to render, nor has he a right to demand it unless he pays for it some way. The payment to include respect for the man who renders it. Democracy must mean mutuality of service rendered and of respect for the service rendered.**”

“A leading Russian revolutionist, an opponent of the Bolshevik, came to this country from Vladivostock. He traveled the Siberian railway. The porter on his train refused to get him hot water, or to black his boots, stating with the true Bolshevistic logic, that ‘democracy meant that nobody must do anything for any one else and that somehow his union would turn him out if he rendered such service.’ Now, this Bolshevik porter was foolish with a folly that can only be induced by prolonged and excessive indulgence in Bolshevism, or some American analogue, but the root trouble in producing this folly, was the fact that under the old system, the men whose boots the porter blacked, looked down on him for blackening them.”

“Now, are we entirely free from this attitude in America? Until we are, we may well make up our minds, that to just that extent, we are providing for the growth of Bolshevism here. No man has a right to ask or accept any service, unless under changed conditions, he would feel he could keep his entire self respect, while rendering it. Service which carries with it the slightest implication of social abasement, should not be rendered.”

For a number of years, Theodore Roosevelt lived on a ranch in the old time cattle country. He also visited at the house of a backwoods, lumberjack friend, from time to time. In both places, he lived under the old-style American conditions. All of them worked and their social distinctions were based entirely on individual worth, but they accepted as a matter of course, the difference in degree of

service rendered ought to at least roughly correspond to the difference in reward. Each of them did most of the purely personal things for himself, but no one thought of any necessary work as degrading. Roosevelt recalls once, when there was a lull in the outdoor work, he endeavored to be useful, in and around the house. He fed the pigs, and on an idle morning, he blackened all the boots. Ordinarily, the boots did not need blackening, most of them were not that kind. On this occasion he started and with an enthusiasm that outran his judgment, he blackened the dress boots of everyone, of both sexes. He coated them with a thick, dull paste, and only a few of them were shiny, with the paste coming off freely, on whatever it touched. As a result he lost, temporarily, not merely the respect, but even the affection of all the other inmates of the house. However, he did not lose caste because he had blackened the boots, He lost caste because he had blackened them badly; but he was allowed to continue feeding the pigs, and he quoted: "The pigs were not so particular, as the humans."

"Now there is no more reason for refusing to bring hot water, blacken boots, serve a dinner, make up a bed, or wash clothes," Roosevelt stated he had cooked and washed clothes often, but "neither wisely, nor well," than for refusing to shoe a horse, run a motor, brake a train, sell carpets, manage a bank, or run a farm."

A few centuries back, men of good lineage felt they "lost caste," if they were not in trade or finance. In some countries they feel so today. In most civilized lands, however, the feeling has disappeared and it never occurs to any one to look down on any one else because he sells things. The same feeling, we should obtain, and as we grow more civilized, we will feel that way about other kinds of service.

This applies to domestic service. "It is as entirely right to employ house maids, cooks, and gardeners, as to employ lawyers, bankers, businessmen, cashiers, factory hands and stenographers; but only on condition that we show the same respect to the individuals, in one case, as in these other cases. All relations

between employer and employee should be based on mutuality of respect and consideration. Arrogance met by insolence, or an alternation of arrogance and insolence, offers but a poor substitute."

"Isaiah, the seer, the man of vision, condemned ritual and formalism and exalted conduct, when he thundered," said Theodore Roosevelt, "*Hear the Word of the Lord, to what purpose is the multitude of your sacrifices unto Me? I delight not in the blood of bullocks, your appointed feasts, My soul hateth. Cease to do evil, learn to do well, seek justice, relieve the oppressed, judge not the fatherless, plead the widows.*"

"Amos, no son of a prophet," said Roosevelt, "but a laboring man, a herdsman and a gatherer of sycamore fruit said: '*Hear ye the Word, I despise your feast days, I will not accept your burnt offerings, but let judgment run down as waters, and righteousness as a mighty stream, hate the evil, and love the good, and establish judgment in the gate.*'"

"What is this," Roosevelt continued, "but the instance on the great law of service. In peace and in war, we must spend and be spent. In the endless battle for right against wrong, deeds not words alone, shall save us."

"*By their fruits ye shall know them,* is a teaching," Roosevelt said, "of the Sermon on the Mount, and James," he continued, "spurring the unctuous professions of righteousness by those who do not make good what they preach; by those who profess a faith which is dead, which was never alive, because it bears no fruit in works, sums up the matter by insisting, we must be doers and not hearers only, because '*pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father, is this: to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world.*'"

"The test," he said, "of our worth is the service we render. Sacrifice, yes, as an incident of service, but let us think only of the service, not of the sacrifice. There never yet was a service worth rendering that did not entail sacrifice, and no man renders the highest service, if he thinks overmuch of sacrifice. Let us pay

with our bodies, for our soul's desire."

Theodore Roosevelt stated his whole concern at that time, was practically the same concern that Amos, Micah, and Isaiah had for Jerusalem, nearly three thousand years ago. "In those days," he said, "a prophet was very apt to get himself stoned. Nowadays, he merely excites the ire of the persons who would otherwise read the magazine or newspapers in which his prophecies appear, but he has not any business to damage his newspaper or magazine. I am not sure the prophet business can be combined with keeping up circulation, and moreover, I know when a man with strong feelings and intense convictions, reaches a certain age, he is apt to get a cat cornered, as regards the surrounding world and therefore his usefulness ceases."

"I am quite prepared to feel, now that I am sixty years of age, it would be to the interest of everybody that I should cease being a prophet, and become the far pleasanter, and more innocuous person, a sage. But, as long as I am in the prophet business, I wish to prophesy."

Now his conclusion, Roosevelt illustrated what he meant by "*being a doer of the Word and not a hearer only.*"

"Now friends, this is rather elementary. The word of command, you understand, is a platitude. Every adjuration to man in a great crisis to bear themselves well, is such a platitude, but it is a mighty useful platitude to translate into action. It is rather elementary, but after all it gives the exact analogue to what I mean should be our attitude in civil life. The Preacher, whether he is in the pulpit, or whether he is a lay preacher, whether he is a professor, an adviser, or a lecturer, the preacher is really trying to give the Word of command, the Word of direction and encouragement to the men whom he is addressing. If he gives the Word simply to get for himself, a sense of intellectual satisfaction at having given it, and if his hearers listen to it, only as

they would to any other form of entertainment, then it is not worth while for him to have spoken, and it is not worth while for them to have listened."

"The only value in a speech comes from there being effort made with measurable success to translate the words into deeds. Of course, the man who preaches decency and straight dealing, occupies a peculiarly contemptible position if he does not try, himself, to practice what he preaches, and on the other hand, the men who listen to him, you here, should realize that if they treat listening to a lecture about their duties, as a substitute for performing their duties, they would better have stayed at home. The value of what is said, arises solely from the effort measured to realize it, in action."

"We are fellow countrymen of Washington and Lincoln, of Lighthorse Harry Lee and his great son, of Paul Revere. These men were of diverse ancestry. Their forefathers came from England, or Ireland, or Scotland, or Holland, or France, or Spain, but they were Americans and only Americans, in the face of any, and every, foreign foe."

"We are also, and just as much, the fellow countrymen of Muhlenberg and Custer. There is no more typically American figure in the Revolutionary War, than that of Muhlenberg, the American of pure German blood and the Pastor of a Lutheran Church at the outbreak of the revolution."

On the Sunday after the call of arms came, he mounted his pulpit, he admonished his flock that there was a time for prayer and a time for battle, and the time for battle had come. Casting aside his frock, he appeared in the uniform of a Colonel of the Continental Army, and on many a stricken field he proved his valor and devotion."

"He proved his Americanism by his deeds. His undivided loyalty was given to one flag, to our flag."