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The Motive Power of Vision

Earl Clement Davis

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Subject: The Motive Power of Vision.
 Scripture: Exodus 3¹⁻², Revelation 21¹⁻⁷.
 Text: Revelation 21¹: And I saw a new
 heaven and a new earth: for the
 first heaven and the first earth
 had passed away."

Last Sunday I tried to lay emphasis
 upon the plain every day duty of
 having a job, i.e. of doing something
 for some thing. I tried to bring
 out the manliness and the volubility
 of such work. But at best there
 was an atmosphere of something
 lacking in that conception. It was
 no doubt that many asked them-
 selves, "Why?" Why all this work?
 I can see that I must work, but
 what is there of permanent value
 to inspire us and lead us

through the hardship? We
saw the apparent necessity of doing
over every day doing, and doing
it well, but still there lurked
in our minds that ever present
"why."

So = why I want to suggest what
seems to me to be the supplement:
any idea that makes our con-
ception of work more complete
and rational.

We hear so much in these days about doing the things that lie nearest at hand; of looking out for the present and letting the future take care of itself that one wonders sometimes if we have not adopted as our motto of life those attractive lines of Thoreau / Whittier. "Take the work, and let the credit go; / nor heed the roar of a distant drum."

We have revolted very strongly from that old conception that this world is a place of barren, sin and wickedness, that life here is at best but an evil, to be endured rather than to be cured. The old conception that it is our duty to turn away from the world, to keep our lives pure and unspotted from its evil

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influences, to turn our backs
upon its joys and pleasures, in order
that we may enjoy a greater pleasure
a fuller life in the here after, that
old conception I say is no longer
tenable. We force cost it aside
as irrational in light of the
plain facts of life.

We begin to see that this world
with all its wickedness, sin
and suffering is not wholly
bad, such that whether or no
we must live here. So we
are learning that this world
is pretty much the kind of a
place we are wishing to
wake it. If it is a world
of sin and strife, it is so
because we wake it so.
If it is a world free and

acceptable unto God, it is because we make it so.

More and more our efforts are being turned in the direction of working this present world that we live ~~in~~ ⁱⁿ ~~was~~ a place of purity and nobility. We are placing great emphasis upon the idea of the Kingdom of God upon earth. Our efforts are directed to the duties involved in working life here finer, and more noble. We are very largely engaged in efforts to relieve the degrading conditions of the poor, to educate the ignorant, to make our social and political institutions better. We are learning that the good life is lived not by withdrawing from the world, but by entering

into its manifold interests,
and making it better.

But in casting aside the old
conception, and turning to the
new is there not a grave danger
of losing sight of and forgetting
a great truth that that lies
at the bottom of the old point
of view? Under the inspiration
of that old conception, men of
history have been able to
endure great hardships, to
survive great sorrows and
afflictions, yes. to meet and
welcome with terrible death
with out fear. For centuries
it has been the motive
power for heroic living
and heroic dying. In
casting aside the old, may

there not be a danger of casting with it some of the good wheat?

While we are confining ourselves to the duties near at hand; while our problems of education, reform and social justice are demanding our attention, there is one factor that we may easily overlook. Does not the motive power, the inspiration for accomplishing all these tasks come from a vision of better conditions of peace and living of a rich and fuller life in the far away future? Is there not a danger that, as we emphasize the performance of daily duties, we shall lose sight of the vision that is the source of all our power for doing. In fixing our eyes upon the ground at our feet, we

forget the beautiful landscape which stretches out upon all sides. It is only by looking up from time to time that we can understand the extent and greatness of our work. These momentary glimpses of the future, this vision of a new heaven and a new earth, are the sources of the great motive forces of all activities. We, who have a hard task to perform to-day look forward to see the goal towards which we are working, and that vision carries ^{us} through the hard commonplace duty, because we can see that the performance of the duty is ~~but~~ ^{an} step towards the realization of the ideal.

The influence of such a power upon the great figures of History stands out in so pronounced a manner that I hardly need refer to them. Perhaps even now there stands clearly before your mind a picture of the life of Moses, the great law-giver. What a beautiful story of the influence of a vision his life presents. The thoughts of Moses in the enjoyment of his own freedom, turned constantly to his people Israel suffering under the burden and degradation of Egyptian bondage. We can almost see the workings of his mind as he brooded over their sufferings and sorrows. Out of the chaos

of such gloomy depressing thoughts these suddenly awakes the great vision of the people of Israel living in freedom and honor. Regardless of the stupor of his task, Moses, dominated by his new vision undertakes to free his people. With what results you know. Through hardships and difficulties great enough to discourage a nation, he follows the command of a vision, frees his people, and leads them towards the Promised Land. Moses had seen a new heaven and a new earth, and in that far away promised

Lord, slowly day by day the orbit heaven
 and the first earth were forcing
 away; slowly day by day the Seruobites
 were being emancipated from
 slavery.

Great as was the vision of
 power, Jesus of Nazareth had
 a greater one. Jesus, working at
 his carpenter's trade, could not
 keep his mind from dwelling
 upon the conditions of masses,
 and their lives. Slowly, out of
 his thoughts and his experiences
 there evolved a great vision.
 Jesus had a great spiritual
 insight into the relations of God
 and man. He saw the dawning
 of a new Kingdom of God, not
 temporal, but eternal; not material
 but spiritual, a Kingdom of justice

mercy and love, a kingdom of the fatherliness of God and the brotherliness of man. It was a great vision, and it took possession of Jesus' life, and controlled his every action. He had seen a deeper grander meaning in life, and the significance of that insight so permeated his life, that sacrifice for its realization, even the sacrifice of death, came not merely as a duty, but as a privilege. Jesus lived his life, not apart from the world but in the world, alive to all the interests of life, and enjoying all the richness and fullness that comes of a life of service and purity, but even before

him was that vision of a deeper and nobler conception of life. It was this vision, that inspired him to his noble holy life. To the realization he gave his whole life, does he heal the sick, his vision leads him; does he make the blind to see, his vision is before him; does he overturn the tables of the money changers in the temple, it is the vision that gives him the courage and the power. "Not my will, but thine be done" says Jesus in the crisis of his life. Jesus did the common every day things that men and women of his time were doing, but he lived within the influence of the great vision which gave him the strength and courage of the noblest life ever lived.

It is the same story over and over again. Generation after generation of human life has left its imprint upon history through the lives of its great men, who were dominated by a vision. The ancients paid great honor to their seers and prophets, and justly so, for their prophets revealed to them the visions which dominated and affected the motive force of the period. The great leaders of the past have been men of great visions, and progress has been possible, because the people have come to see which their leaders saw, and put themselves under the influence of them.

The same thing holds true to day, the men who are doing the great things in modern history, the men who are doing the things that will be remembered and revered, are the men who are dominated by the influence of a great vision.

What, for example, must be the vision which inspires Booker Washington to his almost superhuman labor? Are not his vision and task as great and as over-shadowing as the vision and task of Woe. Here are the millions of negroes in the death suffering in the bondage of ignorance and in-cofacity. The horror and degradation, the almost utter hopelessness of their condition for improved itself upon the

mind of all our people. Yet out of their very midst arises a prophet who understands their needs. Looking far into the future, this modern prophet sees a vision of his people living a life of self support, and self respect. Enthused and encouraged by this vision of a new heaven and a new earth, he begins his stupendous task. In less than one generation of men, we see a great beginning which assures the success of his plans. Booker Washington lead by this vision, backed by scores of brave supporters is carrying forward a movement, which bids fair to

surely out of the filth and degradation of Mulberry Bend there emerges a condition of more honest living, of higher morality, and better citizenship. The old conditions have faded away under the persistent and forceful leadership of a great vision.

Such visions are dominating the lives of all our great men of today. The motive force of all activity of all noble life comes from having a great vision, to which in moments of discouragement, and moments of doubt we turn for inspiration and guidance. We now perfectly well, that such a vision does not lessen the duties of

daily life, it rather increases them. But with our minds fixed upon a great vision, with the picture of a new heaven and a new earth before us, will not the obstacles and the difficulties of daily life seem less dangerous and discouraging. Will not the first heaven and the first earth fall away more rapidly?

Such visions belong to you and to us. We, too, look into the future to see a new heaven and a new earth, we, too, dominated by our vision. we transform our lives from inactivity and dissatisfaction into lives of glorious work and achievement.

As we sit in a quiet evening

thinking of some noble life, and
 dreaming dreams of the kind
 of noble men and women that
 we should like to become, are we
 not aroused to the determination
 of a greater activity and
 service. How often, when such
 a dry dream^{is} fresh in our mind
 we go to rest determined
 to do something worth while
 to-morrow. Yet when to-morrow
 comes, and our vision is
 thrust into the back ground
 by immediate demands,
 our good determinations
 are pushed aside with it,
 and the dry forces in the
 soul decaying way that other
 days have found. Each days
 work would be big work

were attractive, each burden
 would be made more light,
 each sorrow would seem less
 bitter, if we but allowed that
 vision of our to have a greater
 control of our actions. Some-
 where in the secrets of each
 human soul, there is a vision
 of noble work or work-
 hood, some dream of an
 hour when one is alone
 with God, and sees for a moment
 deep down into mysteries of life.
 That dream is sacred, and belongs
 only to one self, but it should be
 the guiding power of every moment
 of our life. It is a vision of our
 true noble self, let us give
 ourselves up to it, it will guide
 us into noble service, purity and love.

But there are other miseries which belong to all of us in common. We face grave problems of social and political nature in every town and state of our country. Corruption, dishonesty, bock-management injustice surround us on all sides. At times it seems as if the sun of liberty and honesty would be entirely lost from sight in the fog of corruption and selfishness. But so much the more faces the burden upon us. We must look into the future, and get a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, of a people among whom honesty, justice and peace prevail, - a vision of

the Kingdom of God upon earth. Then let us give ourselves over to the leadership, and guidance of that vision. If we live in a town where things are going wrong, let us exert ourselves to new labor, to greater effort, until the things are righted. If we are in a church where the spirit of service is dormant, let us put our shoulder to the wheel, and work, work, work. We have but to surrender body and soul to our vision, and a new heaven, and a new earth will begin to appear.

But there is a deeper and a more inspiring vision open to us if we are but awake to it. Moses had a vision of a new social and political life for his people. His vision has been

realized, and he passed away.

But Jesus had a greater vision. With his great insight into human life, and the nature of God, and God's love for mankind, Jesus had a vision of an eternal heaven, which would not pass away. He felt, as you and I feel, that the human soul is not created for a few days, and then to pass away.

That was the great vision of his life. Shall we not also hold to that great spiritual vision of Jesus? When we know how true to life were all of Jesus' visions, besides this one, when we remember how in other things which the ages have proved to be

true, that Jesus had a true and
 accurate conception of life, - still,
 we vote, I say, when we remember all
 this, held to this greatest of all
 visions, the vision of an eternal life.
 We accept his leadership in other things,
 but we do not accept it in this vision which
 transcends all our knowledge, and
 all our experience, but which meets
 a deep constant demand of our soul,
 which makes life seem real and
 complete. Here we know in fact
 but there we still know all. It is
 a vision that answers every inherent
 demand in man's nature, which
 fulfills our hearts desire, and
 makes life rational. In this
 great vision of an eternal life of
 love with God and man, we
 find the greatest motive power

26.

for a life of purity, justice
and love.

Revised.

Somers, March 1st 1903

Affleets Chapel " 2 1903

Marshfield Hills Sept. 20, 1903

The Motive Power of Vision

Earl Clement Davis

Danvers, MA

March 1, 1903¹

Scripture: Exodus 3:1-12; Revelation 21:1-7.

Text: Revelation 21:1, "And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; ..."

Last Sunday I tried to lay emphasis upon the plain everyday duty of having a job, i.e., of doing something for someone. I tried to bring out the manliness and the nobility of such work. But at best there was an atmosphere of something lacking in that conception. I have no doubt that many asked themselves, "Why? Why all this work?" I can see that I must work, but what is there of permanent value to inspire me and lead me through the hardship? We saw the apparent necessity of doing one's everyday doing, and doing it well, but still there linked in our minds that ever-present, "Why."

Today I want to suggest what seems to me to be the supplement, an idea that makes our conception of work more complete and rational.

We hear so much in these days about doing the things that lie nearest at hand; of looking out for the present and letting the future take care of itself, that one wonders sometimes if we have not adopted as our motto of life those attractive lines of Omar Khayyaam, "Take the cash, and let the credit go. Now heed the roar of a distant drum."²

¹ According to the notes on this sermon, in addition to delivering it in Danvers of March 1, 1903, Earl Davis also delivered it at Harvard's Appleton Chapel on March 2, 1903 and in Marshfield Hills on September 20, 1903.

² Omar Khayyaam (1048-1131) was a Persian polymath, mathematician, philosopher and poet. This verse is from Edward Fitzgerald's 1859 translation of Khayyaam's verse into English, *Rubalyat of Omar Khayyaam*, Verse Quatrain 23, Fitzgerald Stanza XIII.

We have revolted very strongly from that old conception that this world is a place of horror, sin and wickedness, that life here is at best but an evil, to be endured rather than to be cured. The old conception that it is our duty to turn away from the world, to keep our lives pure and unspotted from its evil influences, to turn our backs upon its joys and pleasures, in order that we may enjoy a greater pleasure a fuller life in the hereafter. That old conception, I say, is no longer tenable. We have cast it aside as irrational in light of the plain facts of life.

We begin to see that this world with all its wickedness, sin and suffering is not wholly bad, and that whether or no we must live here. So we are learning that this world is pretty much the kind of a place we are willing to make it. If it is a world of sin and shame, it is so because we make it so. If it is a world pure and acceptable unto God, it is because we make it so.

More and more our efforts are being turned in the direction of making this present world that we live in a place of purity and nobility. We are placing great emphasis upon the idea of the Kingdom of God upon earth. Our efforts are directed to the duties involved in making life here purer and more noble. We are very largely engaged in efforts to relieve the degrading conditions of the poor, to educate the ignorant, to make our social and political institutions better. We are learning that the good life is lived not by withdrawing from the world, but by entering unto its manifold interests, and making it better.

But in casting aside the old conception, and turning to the new is there not a grave danger of losing sight of and forgetting a great truth that lies at the bottom of the old point of view? Under the inspiration of that old conception, men of history have been able to endure great hardship, to survive great sorrows and afflictions, yes, to meet and welcome most horrible death without fear. For centuries it has been the motive power for heroic living and heroic dying. In casting aside the chaff, may there not be a danger of casting with it some of the good wheat?

While we are confining ourselves to the duties near at hand, while our problems of education, reform and social purity are demanding our attention, there is one factor that we may easily overlook. Does not the motive power, the inspiration for accomplishing all these tasks come from a vision of better conditions, of purer living, or a richer and fuller life in the far away future? Is there not a danger that, as we emphasize the performance of daily duties, we should lose sight of the vision that is the source of all our power for doing? In fixing our eyes upon the ground at our feet, we forget the beautiful landscape which stretches out upon all sides. It is only by looking up from time to time that we can understand the extent and greatness of our work. These momentary glimpses of the future, this [sic] visions of a new heaven and a new earth, are the sources of the great motive power of all activities. We, who have a hard task to perform today, look forward to see the goal towards which we are working, and that vision carries us through the hard commonplace duty because we can see that the performance of the duty is itself towards the realization of the ideal.

The influence of such a power upon the great figures of history stands out in so pronounced a manner that I hardly need to refer to them. Perhaps even now there stands clearly before your mind a picture of the life of Moses, the great law giver. What a beautiful story of the influence of a vision his life presents. The thoughts of Moses in the enjoyment of his own freedom, turned constantly to his people. Israel suffering under the burden and degradation of Egyptian bondage. We can almost see the working of his mind as he brooded over the sufferings and sorrows. Out of the chaos of such gloomy depressing thoughts there suddenly emerges the great vision of the people of Israel living in freedom and honor. Regardless of the stupendousness of his task, Moses, dominated by his new vision, undertakes to free his people. With what results you know. Through hardship and difficulties great enough to discourage a nation, he follows the command of a vision, frees his people, and leads them towards the Promised Land. Moses had seen a new heaven and a new earth in that far away Promised Land. Slowly day-by-day the first heaven and the first earth were passing away; slowly day-by-day the Israelites were being emancipated from slavery.

Great as was the vision of Moses, Jesus of Nazareth had a greater one. Jesus, working at his carpenter's trade, could not keep his mind from dwelling upon the conditions of men and their lives. Slowly, out of his thoughts and his experiences there evolves a great vision. Jesus had a great spiritual insight into the relations of God and man. He saw the dawning of a new Kingdom of God, not temporal, but eternal; not material, but spiritual, a Kingdom of Justice, mercy and love, a Kingdom of the fatherliness of God and the brotherliness of man. It was a great vision, and it took possession of Jesus' life, and controlled his every action. He had seen a deeper grander meaning in life, and the significance of that insight so permeated his life that sacrifice for its realization, even the sacrifice of death, came not merely as a duty, but as a privilege. Jesus lived his life, not apart from the world, but in the world, alive to all the interests of life, and enjoying all the richness and fullness that comes of a life of service and purity, but ever before him was that vision of a deeper and nobler conception of life. It was this vision that inspired him to his noble holy life. To the realization he gave his whole life. Does he heal the sick, his vision leads him; does he make the blind to see, his vision is before him; does he overturn the tables of the money changers in the temple, it is the vision that gives him the courage and the power. "Not my will, but thine be done," says Jesus in the crisis of his life. Jesus did the common everyday things that men and [sic] of his time were doing, but he lived within the influence of the great vision which gave him the strength and courage of the noblest life ever lived.

It is the same story over and over again. Generation after generation of human life has left its imprint upon history through the lives of its great men, who were dominated by a vision. The ancients paid great honor to their seers and prophets, and justly so, for their prophets revealed to them the visions which afforded the motive power of the period. The great leaders of the past have been men of great visions, and progress has been possible because the people have come to see which their leaders saw, and put themselves under the influence of them.

The same thing holds true today. The men who are doing the great things in modern history, the men who are doing the things that will be remembered and revered, are the men who are dominated by the influence of a great vision.

What, for example, must be the [vision] which inspires Booker Washington to his almost superhuman labor? Are not his vision and task as great and as overshadowing as the vision and task of Moses? Here are the millions of negroes in the south suffering in the bondage of ignorance and incapacity. The horror and degradation, the almost utter hopelessness of their condition has impressed itself upon the minds of all our people. Yet out of their very midst arises a prophet who understands their needs. Looking far into the future, this modern prophet has a vision of his people living a life of self-support, and self-respect. Enthused and encouraged by this vision of a new heaven and a new earth, he begins his stupendous task. In less than one generation of men, we see a great beginning which assumes the success of his plans. Booker Washington, lead by this vision, backed by scores of brave supporters in carrying forward a movement, which bids fair to be the most significant reform of the age. It is the motive power of a great vision that is leading them through the most discouraging and disheartening obstacles towards a certain success.

Mr. Jacob Riis, a reformer of another type, is doing a work of far-reaching influence. His knowledge of the conditions of life among the poor in N.Y. enabled him to see the sharp contrast between the lives of the "other half," and the lives of luxury and extravagance. Out of his thoughts there grew a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, in which greater comforts, justice and decency should prevail. Dominated by this vision he begins a reform. Slowly and surely out of the filth and degradation of Mulberry Bend there emerges a condition of more honest living, of higher morality, and better citizenship. The old conditions have passed away under the persistent and powerful leadership of a great vision.

Such visions are dominating the lives of all our great men of today. The motive power of all activity, of all noble life, comes from having a great vision, to which in

moments of discouragement, and moments of doubt we turn for inspiration and guidance. We know perfectly well that such a vision does not lessen the duties of daily life. It rather increases them. But with our minds fixed upon a great vision, with the picture of a new heaven and a new earth before us, will not the obstacles and the difficulties of daily life seem less dangerous and discouraging? Will not the first heaven and the first earth pass away more rapidly?

Such visions belong to you and to me. We, too, look into the future to see a new heaven and a new earth. We, too, dominated by our vision, may transform ourselves from inactivity and dissatisfaction into lives of glorious work and achievement.

As we sit in a quiet evening thinking of some noble life, and dreaming dreams of the kind of noble men and women that we should like to become, are we not aroused to the determination of a greater activity and service? How often, while such a day dream is fresh in our mind, we go to rest determined to do something worthwhile tomorrow. Yet when tomorrow comes, and our vision is thrust into the background by immediate demands, our good determinations are pushed aside with it, and the day passes in the same desultory way that other days have passed. Each day's work would be made more attractive, each burden would be made more light, each sorrow would seem less bitter, if we but allowed that vision of ours to have a greater control of our actions. Somewhere in the secrets of each human soul there is a vision of noble manhood or womanhood, some dream of an hour where one is alone with God, and sees for a moment deep down into [the] mysteries of life. That dream is sacred, and belongs only to oneself. But it should be the guiding power of every moment of our life. It is a vision of our true noble self. Let us give ourselves up to it. It will guide us into noble service, purity and peace.

But there are other visions which belong to all of us in common. We have grave problems of a social and political nature in every town and state of our country. Corruption, dishonesty, bad management, injustice surround us on all sides. At times it seems as if the sum of liberty and honesty would be entirely lost from sight in the fog of

corruption and selfishness. But so much the more puts the burden upon us. We must look into the future, and get a vision of a new heaven and a new earth, of a people among whom honesty, justice and peace prevail, a vision of the Kingdom of God upon earth. Then let us give ourselves over to the leadership, and guidance of that vision. If we live in a town where things are going wrong, let us exert ourselves to new labor, to greater effort, until the things are righted. If we are in a church where the spirit of service is dormant, let us put our shoulder to the wheel, and work, work, work. We have but to surrender body and soul to our vision, and a new heaven and a new earth will begin to appear.

But there is a deeper and a more inspiring vision open to us if we are but awake to it. Moses had a vision of a new social and political life for his people. His vision has been realized, and has passed away. But Jesus had a greater vision with his great insight into human life, and the nature of God, and God's love for mankind. Jesus had a vision of an eternal heaven, which will not pass away. He felt, as you and I feel, that the human soul is not created for a few days, and then to pass away. That was the great vision of his life. Shall we not also hold to that great spiritual vision of Jesus? When we know how true to life were all of Jesus' visions, besides this one, when we remember how in other things which the ages have proved to be true that Jesus had a true and accurate conception of life, shall we not, I say, when we remember all this, hold to this greatest of all visions, the vision of an eternal life? We accept his leadership in other things, let us accept it in this vision which transcends all our knowledge, and all our experience, but which meets a deep constant demand of our soul, which makes life seem real and complete. Here we know in part but there we shall know all. It is a vision that answers every inherent demand in man's nature, which fulfills our heart's desire, and makes life rational. In this great vision of an eternal life of love with God and man, we find the greatest motive power for a life of purity, justice and love.