

THOUGHT AND ACTION

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Thought and Action by Phillips Brooks

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I WANT once more to read to you these words from the eighth chapter of the Gospel of St. John :

“ As He spake these words, many believed on Him. Then said Jesus to those Jews which believed on Him, If ye continue in My word, then are ye My disciples indeed ; And ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free. They answered Him, We be Abraham's seed, and were never in bondage to any man : how sayest Thou, Ye shall be made free ? Jesus answered them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Whosoever committeth sin is the servant of sin. And the servant abideth not in the house for ever : but the Son abideth ever. If the Son therefore shall make you free, ye shall be free indeed.”

There are two great regions in which the life of every true man resides. They are the region of action and the region of thought. It is impossible to separate these two regions from one

another and to bid one man live in one of them alone and the other man live only in the other of them. It is impossible to say to the business man that he shall live only in the region of action, it is impossible to say to the scholar that he shall live only in the region of thought, for thought and action make one complete and single life. Thought is not simply the sea upon which the world of action rests, but, like the air which pervades the whole solid substance of our globe, it permeates and fills it in every part. It is thought which gives to it its life. It is thought which makes the manifestation of itself in every different action of man. I hope we are not so deluded as men have been sometimes, as some men are to-day, that we shall try to separate these two lives from one another, and one man say, "Everything depends upon my action, and I care not what I think," or, as men have said, at least, in other times, "If I think right, it matters not how I act." But the right thought and the right action make one complete and single man.

Now we have been speaking, upon these Monday noons, with regard to the freedom of that highest life which is lived under the inspiration of Jesus Christ and which we call the Christian life. We have claimed that it is the highest of all lives because it is the freest of all lives, that

it is the freest of all lives because it is the highest, and it may be that we have thought that it was true with regard to the active life in which men live, it may be that we have somehow persuaded ourselves, that it has seemed to us as if there were evidence that a man who lived his life in the following of Jesus Christ was a free man in regard to his activity. But now there comes to us the other thought, and it is impossible for us to meet together as we have met together again and again here without asking with regard to the other region of man's life and how it is with man there, for there are a great many people, I believe, who think that while the Christian faith offers to man a noble sphere of action and sets free powers that would otherwise remain unchanged, yet when we come to the region of thought or belief, there it is inevitable that man should know himself, when he accepts the faith of Jesus Christ, it is inevitable that there the man should become less free than it has been thought that he was before the blessed Saviour was accepted as the Master and the ruler of his life. Men say to themselves and to one another, "Yes, I shall be freer to act, I shall be nobler in my action, but I shall certainly enchain mind and spirit, I shall certainly bind myself to think away from the rich freedom of thought in which I have been inclined to live." We make very

much of free thought in these days. Let us always remember that free thought means the opportunity to think, and not the opportunity not to think. We rejoice in the way in which our fathers came to this country and in their children perpetuated the purpose of their coming, in order that they might have freedom to worship God. Do we worship God? Simply to have attained freedom and not to use freedom for its true purpose, not to live within the world of freedom according to the life which is given to us there — that is to do dishonor to the freedom, to disown the purpose for which the freedom has been given to us. I want to speak to you then, while I may speak to-day, with regard to the freedom of the Christian thought.

I want to claim, that which I believe with all my soul, that he who lives in the faith of Jesus Christ lives in the freest action of his mental powers, and there sees before him and makes himself a part of the large world into which man shall enter, in which he has perfect liberty and can exercise his powers as he could never have exercised them without. It is not very strange to think that men should have sometimes come to think that the religion of Jesus Christ was a slavery that was laid upon the mind of man, because very often those who have been the disciples of that religion, those who have been the

preachers and exponents of that religion, have claimed just exactly that thing. They have seemed to say to themselves and to one another, to the world to which they speak, that man does give up the powers of his reason when he enters into the powers of his faith, when he enters into the great realm of faith. Led by some sort of influence, led by some heresy with regard to the capacity of man, or with regard to the dealing of God with man, or with regard to the purposes of man's life upon the earth, they have been content to say that man must give up the power of thought in order that he might enter into the Christian life and attain to all the purposes of the Christian discipline, they have been content to say that man must give up the noblest power of his nature in order to enter upon the highest life. Well might a man hesitate, hesitate whatever the blessings that were offered to him in the fulness of the Christian experience, if he were called upon to give up that which made the very centre and glory of his life, that which linked him most immediately to the God from whom he sprang. It would be as if in the storm the ship should cast over its engine in order to save its own life. The ship might be saved a little while from going down in the depths of despair, but it never would reach the port to which it had been bound; it never would accom-

plish the purpose of the voyage upon which it had set forth. Let us put absolutely away from us all such thoughts. Let us come under the inspiration of Jesus Christ Himself, who says to us, in these words which we have repeatedly read to one another, that it is the truth that is to make us free, and that the entrance of the man therefore into that freedom is the largest freedom of every region of man's life.

I want to speak to you of the way in which my Master, Jesus Christ, appeals to the intelligence of man, of the way in which He comes to us in the noblest part of our nature, and claims us there for our true life within Himself. I would feel altogether wrong if I let you depart, if I allowed you to meet here with me week after week and say these words which I am privileged to speak to you unless I did thus claim that the Christian life is the largest life of the human intellect, that in it the noblest and central powers of man shall attain to their true liberty. It is given for us perhaps to ask ourselves for one moment why it is that man thinks, is ready to think, that he must give up the very noblest part of his life, his powers of thinking, in order that he may enter into Christianity. It seems to me that there are certain reasons for it which we can see; but how fallacious those reasons are! Is it not partly because man, when he is called upon