

ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER THAN WORDS (From 'tick, tick...BOOM!')

Final Week of Our 2-Week Broadway Musical Series

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Rev. Richard Maraj

Rev. Richard Maraj: 'Morning again! And a shout out to everyone who tunes in and watches us online.

So there was this Amish family, and they go to a mall for the very first time. So the mom is looking for cotton fabric to make an apron and, while she's doing that, the father and their son just stand in amazement in this mall at everything they're seeing. They're absolutely stunned at everything they're seeing. And then the son points at these two silver doors that close and open, and asks the father, "*What is that?*" And the father had never seen an elevator before, and he said, "*Son, I have no idea what it is.*" And the son said, "*Do you think it's a time machine? I hear there are time machines; I saw a movie and they have that. Maybe it's a time machine.*" The father says, "*I don't have any idea, but it's absolutely miraculous the things that they have in the city.*" And so, while they're doing this, they notice an elderly woman on a walker pressing the elevator button, and then the doors open. She goes into the elevator, and the door closes, and they watch as the numbers go up. And when it reaches the top, they watch as the numbers come down, in reverse, and then the elevator doors open, and out steps this gorgeous 24-year-old. The father's jaw drops; his face is just in amazement, and without taking his eyes off her, he says to the son, "*Go get your mother!*"

[Congregation laughs]

Okay, that's a bad joke! It's a bad joke! But wouldn't it be great if life were that easy? Just press a button and, Shazam! You could have an improvement in any area of your life? I want to start this morning with a Scripture from the Apostle Paul that shares a common struggle that we all have in our lives. And here's what he says: "*My own behavior baffles me! I find myself doing things I know I shouldn't, and not doing things that I know that I should.*" Can anybody relate? How many people here have ever found yourself not doing things you know would be good for you to do? And how many have ever found yourself doing things that you know aren't good or healthy or positive for you?

How many people would admit that you have at least one bad habit – one thing you know that you shouldn't do – that you do habitually, and you've even tried to break that habit, and you couldn't... You just kept falling back into the old pattern? You know, it's interesting that Paul had this great awareness about the struggle that we have as human beings: us sometimes doing things that aren't helpful – that are more harmful and negative to us – and having a struggle, sometimes, in doing the things that are positive and helpful and beneficial to us.

That same idea is capture in a song in the Broadway musical, *tick, tick...BOOM!* And here's what it says:

Why do we play with fire?

Why do we run our fingers through the flame?

Why do we leave our hand on the stove,

Although we know we'll be in for some pain?

Why is it that we stay in jobs that aren't fulfilling? Why is it that we stay in relationships that we don't enjoy or find nurturing? Why is it that we give up on our dreams? Why is it that we sometimes don't even try? Why is it that we're afraid to take a risk? Why is that we shut down our hearts, and just close ourselves off? Why is it that – in so many areas – we live totally out of alignment with what our soul and our hearts are desiring?

I think the reason we do those things are two. Number one is fear. Sometimes we make some decisions or don't do some things because we have a fear: a fear of failure, a fear of messing up, a fear of losing what we have, a fear of making things worse, a fear of embarrassing ourselves. Fear really plays a huge impact on us. I'm sure every single one of us has had a hard decision to make, and we were afraid we'd make the wrong decision! Or we weren't quite sure what to do, so we made no decision at all! The thing about decisions: they're always going to cut off one option to have another. And sometimes we want both options! And so we end up trying not to make any decision at all. And sometimes

the fear of the unknown – of what will happen if we make the wrong decision – scares us into sometimes just playing it safe, and not making any decision at all.

And then there's also the fear of success! Sometimes we turn down great opportunities because we're afraid that we can't handle that much wealth or responsibility or success or greatness or demands on our time. So we choose to stay in our comfort zones, even if they're not as fulfilling as we want them to be.

The second reason we sometimes don't make the greatest choice is that we have some unhealthy conditioning and negative things imprinted on our lives: sometimes based in shame, sometimes based in feelings of unworthiness. Sometimes we make decision that sometimes support that feeling of shame or unworthiness. Sometimes we pick partners based on an example of what we saw: of maybe that yelling is equal to love in a relationship, and do and make some unhealthy choices based on conditioning that we got when we were young.

Today is the second in our two-week series looking at some songs from Broadway musicals. And today the Broad musical – as I mentioned – is called *tick, tick...BOOM!* It was written by Jonathan Larson; he's the one who actually wrote the music for *Rent*. And the play begins with a constant tick. Tick, tick, tick. And finally the lead actor comes out and says – while the ticking is going on – *"The sound that you hear is not a technical problem. It is not a musical cue. It is not a joke. It is the mounting anxiety of a man ... and I am that man."*

And so, his anxiety is from the fact that he is approaching his 30th birthday and feels like he hasn't done anything with his life. He wants to be a composer in musical theater, but he doesn't have much to show for it: hasn't had much success; has barely made any money; and is working as a waiter. And he's just struggling: should he continue on with this? Or should he go get a normal job? And then, besides his own struggle – and the "tick, tick, tick" is his own pressure of feeling he's got to make a choice, he's got to make a decision soon... Besides his own stress and pressure, his girlfriend wants to move out of New York and for him to get a regular job: for them to have a family and settle down, and just have a steady life. And same with his friend, who was an actor, and decided to go into marketing; he's making lots of money. And they're both telling him to settle down and to make a choice of something more consistent.

And so he doesn't know what to do. He has a hard time choosing and wondering what is the best choice: Security? Or the thing he loves to do? With security, he'll still have a good life, but it isn't what he absolutely loves to do. And even though he's struggling with it, he is not sure which one of the two to move forward in.

So this morning, what I want to do is talk about three principles and ideas that I get from this play, and the song, which is entitled, "Actions Speak Louder than Words." And the three things that we have – the powers to transform our lives – are the power of choice; the power of intention; and the power of action.

So let's start with choices. Somebody once said, *"We become the sum of all of our choices."* That where we are in our lives is directly related to all of the choices that we have made all along the way. That every single day we're making choices: about what to eat, about what to wear. About if we're going to complain and feel whiney, or if we're going to smile and be positive. If we're going to be encouraging; if we're going to shut ourselves off from people. We are constantly making choices every single day of our lives.

And in the song it says:

**Cages or wings?
Which do you prefer?
Ask the birds.
Fear or love?**

And so, every one of us has to ourselves a question: Am I choosing cages with my choices, and limiting myself and feeling trapped? Or am I choosing wings? Am I choosing freedom? To open my heart to be more joyful and playful?

You know, sometimes we have tough choices to make in life. But even at the worst time – when we think we have no choice at all – we always have a choice. Even if that choice is just the kind of attitude and outlook we have in how we handle it, we always have a choice.

Roy Bennett once said this: *“You are not a victim of the world; rather, you are the master of your own destiny. It is our choices and decisions that determine our destiny.”*

So the fact is, we need to look at our lives and ask ourselves: What are my choices? What have they brought me to? And what new choices do I make? What things do I need to choose again?

The thing about choices is that the unknown: we don’t know what it will bring. But until we make a choice, we don’t know where it will lead us. Making choices are powerful acts! They engage us; they move our lives forward; and they show us what direction is ours and what direction is not ours. So we shouldn’t be afraid to make choices. It is a powerful, wonderful gift that we have been given, to make choices.

In the Bible it says, *“Choose this day whom you will serve.”* And so, we can ask the question: Are you going to serve cages or wings? Are you going to serve fear? Or are you going to serve love? What is it that we choose?

The cool thing about this play is that, in so many ways, Jonathan is being pressured by life to choose: to make a choice about the direction of his life. Because he’s kind of straddling things. And I would say life is calling every one of us to make a choice: to make a decision. So where in your life is life calling you to choose? And are you willing to take time to get clear about what you want to choose, and the decision you want to make?

Now the thing about making a good choice, I believe, is that you need to be clear about what your intention is. I think clarity helps us make better choices! Sometimes we just want to go make a choice, but I think we need to sit with it and get a little more clear. Because I think a lot of us sometimes aren’t very clear about what we want! Sometimes we are very uncertain. Sometimes we are very vague and wishy-washy and second guessing ourselves, and don’t trust ourselves, so we kind of don’t know what it is that we want. When it says in Scripture, *“Ask and ye shall receive; seek and ye shall find; knock and the door will be opened unto you,”* the underlying message there is: Get clear about what it is that you want. Get clear about your intention. Get clear about your desire.

You know, the clearer we are in knowing who we are and what we want – and what is we are here to do and to create – the greater progress that we make. Thomas Carlisle put it beautifully when he said, *“The person with a clear purpose will progress even along the bumpiest road, and a person with no clear purpose will not achieve much, even on the smoothest road.”*

Lewis Carroll once said, *“If you don’t know where you’re going, then any road will get you there.”* It’s important for us to get clear about what it is that we want to create... What our intention is.

Often, to get clear, we ask people’s opinion; we hear all kinds of advice. We listen to societal norms. But the truth is, that creates a lot of noise in our head. And, ultimately, to make a clear choice we need to quiet our minds and be still, and just trust our heart. Trust our gut. And trust our spirit. Choices are easier with the more time we take to get clear about what our intention is. If we’re struggling in any area of our lives, we need to ask ourselves: What is my deeper desire here? What is the outcome? What is the experience? What is the feeling that I want to create? Or maybe even ask ourselves: What are of my life do I need to get a little clearer in? Where do I need clarity in my life? Because one of the things about clarity and a clear intention: it focuses your spiritual energy and your creative powers in a much more effective way. Somebody once said, *“The world clears a path for those who know where they’re going.”*

So what is your intention? And what is it that you want to get clearer about in your life?

And the last thing we’re going to talk about are actions. And the line in the song says – when choosing love or fear – it says:

Don't answer, because actions speak louder than words.

And it's so true! How many people here have ever had an idea – some brilliant idea – and you did nothing about it? And every single New Year's, we always say: spending more time with my family; losing weight; going to the gym; reading more are priorities. But after one month, we're not doing any actions, or doing any behaviors toward those goals.

What if the Wright brothers had just talked about flying? They just chatted about it? They wouldn't have been first in flight. What if Thomas Edison just pontificated about light? And not took the action to do the 1,500 experiments to actually discover the electrical filament? Einstein once said, *"Nothing happens until something moves."*

So where in your life do you need to take an action? Where in your life are you being called to take that step? To make that move? Not doing what it is we know is in us to do – or the things that we desire – the Bible, in the book of James, says, *"Not doing it is like looking at your face in the mirror and then, upon walking away, forgetting what you look like."* Every single time we don't do what our soul is calling – what our heart wants us to do – it's like forgetting who we are. It's like forgetting our nature. It's like forgetting our purpose.

I was reading this book this week, and it was called *The Power of Habits*. And they did this study on people who made incredible transformations in their lives, and did it rather quickly... from over-eating... all sorts of negative habits. And they had this young woman: her name was Lisa. Since she was 16, she'd been drinking regularly; she'd been smoking regularly; she was obese for the majority of her life. She couldn't keep a job; she'd never had a job more than a year. She had debt collectors... I mean, all the things you could think of that didn't go well were her. And now, she's sitting in front of them. She's 34 years old. She looks phenomenal: healthy, athletic. She doesn't drink [any more]; she doesn't smoke; she hasn't done that in at least four years. She's kept her job for 39 months. She has run marathons. She bought a house; she's engaged. Her life is incredible: a humungous change! And they wanted to know why. And she said, *"Well, the activating agent was my husband and I went for a holiday in Cairo, and he asked me for a divorce there, and I totally melted down. I totally lost it, got drunk, acted crazy. And a few days after he'd left, I realized that I just needed something. I was so lost and down."* And so she made her goal to come back to Cairo one year later and trek through the place, because she was too heavy and in not good shape with her smoking. So she gave herself one year. And her goal was to just change one habit. And the one habit she realized that she needed to do this trek and come back was to stop smoking. And, amazingly, by doing that one thing – stopping smoking – she started eating better. She started taking better care of herself. She started losing weight. She got more organized. She put more effort into her job. She was better at planning and saving money. And her whole life changed! And she said it wasn't about willpower; it wasn't about positive thinking. But it was about just changing one single bad habit into something good.

And what it does is create a "success cycle." When you break an old pattern, other patterns begin to improve. And they call it a "keystone habit." When you change a keystone habit – which is a habitual action – great things will happen. And equally, bad habits – habitual actions – can confirm and actually pull our lives down and pull us far away from what it is we want to see.

Business guru John Maxwell says, *"First, we make our habits... but then our habits make us."* Habits are so powerful! We are creatures of habit! And the more we do things – for better or worse – habitually, the stronger the impact they will have on our lives. Studies show that, if you want to transform your life, don't try to overhaul everything. Don't just try to use willpower. The best, most effective thing you can do is start with one bad habit: one habit that you want to change. Make it your focus.

And for you to change a habit – whether it is watching too much TV, or eating too much fast food, or staying up too late – whatever bad habit we want to change, we need to understand that there is always a trigger, there is a routine, and there is a reward. And when you look at your triggers, look at your routine, and look at your rewards – and know how to adjust them by just studying them a little bit – it will begin to change and transform that habit into something positive that you want to do.

Do you know there's a study which shows that the number one change in a positive habit that will have ripple effects is to make it a habit to make your bed up every morning? The practice of the care and straightening and organizing your

bed in that way actually has ripple effects of getting more organized and more efficient in the rest of your life. When your brain – in the beginning of your day – sees a made up bed, and comes to bed at night and sees it made up, it says the brain will configure itself to try to create more order and organization in our lives.

Another one is logging... making a habit to log all the food you eat every single day. Just logging it – and making it a habit – will begin to bring changes to the choices of the food we eat. It's really quite amazing how powerful habits are! We just need to use them to our benefit, and to focus those habitual actions into the most positive things that will support our lives in getting better and better and better.

When we use habits well, instead of spiraling down, our lives will begin to spiral up. So my challenge for you this week is work on changing one bad habit. Change one keystone habit, and see the ripples and benefits it will have in all areas of your life.

I wish I could tell you life was so easy you could press an elevator button, it would open, and there would be what you want. But it takes a little more work. But the great news is, we have three incredible powers: the power to choose. Make the choice you need to make in your life. The power to hold an intention and be clear, by going deeper and finding out what it is we really want. And the power to take action, and to use the power of our habits to bring greater things into our lives.

And that is the message from the play, *tick, tick...BOOM!* and the song, "Actions Speak Louder than Words."

God bless you!

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