

Perpetuating the Vision of God

Several years ago a young preacher went out west to hold a revival and start a church in a town that was bereft of an authentic Gospel witness. The initial protracted meeting went very well, with the blessing of the Lord. Many souls were birthed into the Kingdom of God and backsliders were re-claimed. The meeting was so effective that the only saloon in the town closed down. Conveniently, it was transformed into a building to house the now thriving church. Spiritual as well as numerical growth continued for three or four years, then sadly the people became comfortable with the way things were becoming. There was a very nice fellowship of God's people who had much in common. The desire to continue to grow slackened. The Lord burdened the young preacher to preach again and again from Proverbs 29:18, "*Where there is no vision, the people perish*" (Proverbs 29:18). He wanted the people to capture God's vision, rise up and go on for God in continuing to see people convert to Christ and grow in His grace. One day he made a homemade, but impressive sign of wood. He added letters carved of wood placed in the foreground that spelled out the first part of Proverbs 29:18, "*Where there is no vision, the people perish....*" The preacher placed it above the door so that everyone leaving the church would see the sign and be reminded of our duty to fulfill the Great Commission. For two years the man of God pled with the people to have a vision, but they never shared his burden. One day he received a call to go further west to a people willing to grow and do something for the Lord. With broken heart, he resigned and took the new pastorate, which flourished under his leadership. A few years later the pastor was traveling through the town where his first pastorate was and walked into the old building which in the throes of revival had been converted from a saloon to a church house. As he walked in, it was like walking into a lone structure of an old ghost town. He saw dust all over the pews and cobwebs in the corners. He remembered each family and reminisced where they sat. He saw the old piano. He walked up to the pulpit, where he had faithfully preached the Word of God and the Gospel of Jesus Christ. As he stood there, he began to weep profusely over the now obsolete church. He cried out loud, "Why, God? Why?" As he was asking this question, God seemed to give him his answer. As he composed himself, he lifted his downcast head from the pulpit and his eyes focused on the homemade sign he had so meticulously made years earlier. It was in perfect condition, except the first letter in the verse had fallen off and instead of reading "Where" it now read "Here." Pathetically, it was a sad commentary on what had happened: "Here there is no vision, the people perish." It is as true today as it was in that old western town.

What causes us to lose our vision?

1. Complacency

The Bible warns, "*Woe to them that are at ease in Zion, and trust in the*

mountain of Samaria, which are named chief of the nations, to whom the house of Israel came!" (Amos 6:1). Israel was content to deplete their own livestock investment rather than take the initiative and go out hunting as they lived the very comfortable life that never sacrificed nor invested for the generations to follow. Amos said it like this: *"That lie upon beds of ivory, and stretch themselves upon their couches, and eat the lambs out of the flock, and the calves out of the midst of the stall"* (Amos 6:4).

2. Shifted Responsibility

This is often the elephant in the room that is never addressed. Some think, "Well, this is why we have a pastor -- to win our souls for us." The pastor is a shepherd. Technically, the shepherd does not give birth to other sheep. He encourages the sheep and is midwife to them, but sheep give birth to other sheep. Every pastor I know is a soul winner, but he cannot do it alone.

The Bible says, *"When I say unto the wicked, O wicked man, thou shalt surely die; if thou dost not speak to warn the wicked from his way, that wicked man shall die in his iniquity; but his blood will I require at thine hand"* (Ezekiel 33:8). Paul said, *"And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publicly, and from house to house"* (Acts 20:20). Then later in that same chapter he said, *"Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men"* (Acts 20:26). We cannot shift our personal responsibility to be a witness. We shall be held accountable. This leads us to our next reason we lose our vision.

3. Failure to See the Long-Range Reward

We live in such an instant gratification society that I fear the attitude is rubbing off on the Church of the Living God! When we follow Jesus, we will often feel the pain of the cross. Did not our Lord tell us, *"And he said to them all, If any man will come after me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow me"* (Luke 9:23). Yet, in truth, when we follow the Lord, knowledge of the reward in the kingdom yet to come is most gratifying!

"For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad" (II Corinthians 5:10). II Peter 3: 10-13 says, *"But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, Looking for and hasting unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat? Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness."* Everything surrounding us will one day be burned up. Paul said, *"While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporal; but the things which are not seen are eternal"* (II

Corinthians 4:18). Peter's question is most pertinent here: "...*Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness?*" (II Peter 3:11b). We need to be people who see beyond the temporal. I know it is used enough to be qualified as a cliché, but so true, when it comes to eternity: "Only one life 'twil soon be past; only what's done for Christ will last.

Let's get a vision for what God wants to do with us in this place. In approximately 433 AD at the peril of his own life, Patrick was bent on evangelizing the Celtic peoples of Ireland. High King Logaire of Tara had decreed that no one was allowed to light any fires until a pagan spring festival was launched by the lighting of a fire on the Hill of Slane. Patrick chose to honor God and lit candles anyway in spite the threat of death. King Logaire was so impressed with Patrick's brave devotion, he let him continue his missionary work unhindered. One story says that Patrick was happily singing a song that spoke of his vision of and for God and the king heard him. In the 8th Century, Dallan Forgaill penned the words to *Be Thou My Vision*, as a tribute to St. Patrick's wholehearted loyalty to God. I love all the stanzas of the song, this is perhaps my favorite that should challenge us to receive and perpetuate a vision for God:

Riches I heed not, nor man's empty praise,
Thou mine Inheritance, now and always:
Thou and Thou only, first in my heart,
High King of Heaven, my Treasure Thou art.

-Pastor Pope-

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