

[BUILD]

“... arise and build”

Nehemiah 2:20

Family Devotion
Week Three

VISION FOR THE FUTURE



SEEING THE IMPOSSIBLE

Historical records are filled with the amazing (and often amusing) words of men whose vision was clouded on some important subjects...

On World Population...“The population of the earth decreases every day, and, if this continues, in another ten centuries the earth will be nothing but a desert.” Montesquieu, 1743

On Anesthesia...“The abolishment of pain in surgery is a chimera. It is absurd to go on seeking it today. Knife and pain are two words in surgery that must forever be associated in the consciousness of the patient. To this compulsory combination we shall have to adjust ourselves.” Dr. Alfred Velpeau, 1839

On Aviation...“The demonstration that no possible combination of known substances, known forms of machinery, and known forms of force can be united in a practical machine by which man shall fly long distances through the air, seems to the writer as complete as it is possible for the demonstration of any physical fact to be.” Simon Newcomb, astronomer, 1903

On the Atomic Bomb...“That is the biggest fool thing we have ever done. The bomb will never go off, and I speak as an expert in explosives.” Admiral William Leahy to President Harry Truman, 1945

Though well meaning, these men just didn't see things in the right way. They looked at the natural world and concluded that certain things simply were not possible. As we consider their words, let's be admonished to not look at the spiritual world and conclude that certain things are not possible; for, with God, all things are possible.

Today, pray with your family or a friend about the need to have 20/20 spiritual vision. And pray that in our capital stewardship campaign the entire church family will experience the unifying power of seeing and believing God for something that is beyond what we could ask or think.

LOOKING ABOVE AND BEYOND - PART ONE

Imagine the scene....

Jesus is gathered with a small group of followers on a hillside overlooking the area surrounding our church. With a sweeping gesture of His hand, He says “Some think there are still four months until harvest, but I say, lift up your eyes and look on the fields, for they are white already to harvest.” The followers squint their eyes, straining to see what Jesus sees, but they recognize no gleaming fields of grain. Only brick and mortar, wood and shingles, roads of asphalt and streams of vehicles. With puzzled expressions they turn to Him, as if to ask, Where exactly is the grain ready to harvest? Knowing their hearts, He says, “I’m not talking about a physical harvest of grain, but a spiritual harvest of people.” Patiently, He continues, “Dear ones, you must look above and beyond the distractions to see the people. It is to them that I came to give life and give it abundantly.”

Of course, this scenario did not literally occur anywhere near our church. But the pattern for it did happen nearly two thousand years ago; for when Jesus had this kind of conversation with some of His disciples, He was establishing an enduring principle. There is really no difference between those believers of the first century and we of this century. Just as He wanted them to see the spiritual harvest, He wants us to do the same today. And, just as they needed to look above and beyond, so do we.

Right now, at this crucial moment for the ministry of our church, God is checking our vision. As we embark upon our stewardship campaign, He’s determining if we can see what He really wants us to see. And He’s challenging us to be obedient to Him as we do what spiritual vision demands that we do. Today, ask yourself and those closest to you, What can we do to check our spiritual vision and ensure that we see what is right?

LOOKING ABOVE AND BEYOND - PART TWO

As we look above and beyond, we see thousands upon thousands of people all around us who need the message of salvation. Some, like overly-ripened grain, are falling away, never to be redeemed. Many, many more are waiting to be harvested by loving laborers. In the next decade, the demographic experts say that our community will continue to explode with thousands of new residents. Who will reach out to these precious souls with the good news of Jesus?

We must take on this challenge. We must invite them in “from the highways and hedges.” We must open our hearts to receive them with love and acceptance. But we have a difficulty that must be overcome: more laborers are needed for this harvest. Our home is not big enough. We must have more space for more people. We must add on to our house in order to welcome more souls into God’s Kingdom. How can we do this? First, by seeing this as a challenge and not a problem. This, too, demands the right spiritual vision. We must look above and beyond. In the months ahead, we are going to believe God together to give us the insight – and the foresight – to do great things for His sake.

Today, share with your family or a close friend, the name of one person you envision being reached with the Gospel – someone you are praying will one day worship the Lord with us in our new home.

FAMOUS LAST WORDS

Moments before the resurrected Jesus returned triumphantly to heaven, He left His disciples with this promise: “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth.” After He spoke these words, Jesus ascended before their very eyes.

With this scene fixed in your mind’s eye, consider this question: Was Jesus’ promise only for those disciples who were physically present that day and heard His actual words? The answer carries vital implications for us as believers in our church today.

Those who were assembled with Jesus that day were no doubt profoundly affected by everything He did and said following the Resurrection. They took it all to heart. But the promise wasn’t exclusively for them, any more than the hundreds of other promises in God’s Word were meant only for the relative handful of people who originally heard or read them.

In the New Testament there is what we might call a “pass-it-on” principle: what we receive in spiritual truth and blessing we are to pass on to others. The imperative of Jesus’ Great Commission is to make disciples – to impart to others the essentials of faith in Christ and obedience to him. That is our church’s primary commitment.

In the “true” Lord’s Prayer, recorded in John 17, Jesus prayed for spiritual fruitfulness and unity among the disciples. And He said, “My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you.” The plan and the promises of God encompass all believers, not just those who were blessed to literally see and hear the Messiah.

Pray today that our entire church family will have the spiritual vision to see the reality of these truths and to act in obedience to them.

SEEING THE GOD WHO IS GREATER

Who knows the full extent of what God has in store for our church? Only God does! But He longs to reveal more and more of His plan to us as we act in faith and see that He is greater than all.

Acts, chapter 4, describes the bold ministry of Peter and John, and the price they paid for proclaiming the Message. Because they would not keep quiet about their Lord...because they were convinced that their silence would carry eternal consequences...because their faith was in the One whose Name is above all others... they didn't give up or give in. Although the authorities demanded that they cease to teach about Jesus or even to speak His name, they refused and were persecuted.

When Peter and John were released that day, they returned to their fellow Christians and joined them in praying to the God who is Greater. All the believers recognized the risks they were taking, but in the larger context, the threats didn't matter. Consequently, their prayer was not filled with expressions of anxiety; instead, it overflowed with the promises of Scripture. Their emotions and thoughts were anchored in the reality of who God is. No one pretended that the circumstances were pleasant, but everyone confessed two essential truths – that God is sovereign and that He is forever the Creator.

The same God to whom those first century disciples devoted their lives, that same Sovereign Lord and Creator, is our God. And when we pray to Him we are confessing confidence in the One who is Greater. In response to our prayer He can create new dispositions in the hearts of our opponents. He can create a thirst for Jesus in the hearts of those who once rejected the Gospel. He can create circumstances to override the prevailing circumstances. And He can do all this because He is greater than all.

We face mountainous challenges. How must we respond? With the spiritual vision to see that He, as the God who is greater, can cast those mountains into the sea or reduce them to a plain path. Pray with someone today about a “mountain” you are facing, and pray also about the “mountain” we face in our important capital campaign. Let's believe God together!