

Sunday 2nd September 2018
What is your Vision?

I want to keep this short so that perhaps we will remember it better.

A few years ago, having a vision statement was all the rage. Companies spent fortunes on logo's and vision statements and it all created a sense of action and anticipated accomplishment. However, a vision statement is only of value if it is known and followed, if it is embraced and owned by the people within the organization in question.

The NY police department has the vision statement, 'To protect and serve,' but that has not prevented corruption and failure amongst some do these things. It depends on the people involved buying into the vision and paying whatever price it takes to follow it through. If the vision is demanding, then it ought to be worth the price required!

The Church of Scotland has a vision statement identical to the one on the back page of the church news sheet. One or two words have been left out in ours to save space, but otherwise it is the same. I won't ask for a response, but how many of us knew it was there? How many of us knew what it says? How many of us have bought into it and are expending time, energy and money to pursue it and see it accomplished? I have an opinion about that, but I'm not saying!

I spoke a long time ago about vision, about the vision that Jesus put before us. We find this in the Great Commandment and the Great Commission. The first says that we are to 'love the Lord our God with all our heart, and all our soul and all our strength all our mind.' We find this in Mark 12 verse 30. The other is to go and make disciples. This we find in Matthew 28 verse 16 and forward. I still think that this would be a much better vision statement of what the Church is to be about, because it is what Jesus tells us we are to be about!

However, it is difficult to come up with a vision statement that does justice to our God who is without beginning or end and who is beyond measurement or description. That makes any vision we adopt rather different from that of an ice cream manufacturer!

However, there is something that we need to consider, and to consider very deeply, and it is this. What is it that we should be thinking about and reacting to when it comes to vision?

I want to shout this to every Christian in the congregation or where-ever I encounter them, our vision should be and must be the Lord Jesus Himself and nothing else.

Our hymns agree with this, 'Be thou my vision,' and 'My goal is God Himself, not joy nor peace, nor even blessing, but Himself, my God.' These are only a couple of extracts as examples. Read a Hymn book, and we would find many such longings expressed.

It grieves me deeply that for so much of my life, I have gone after some worthy things and some worthless things, but in comparison to Christ, everything is worthless. Paul says that, as it happens, in Philippians when he says that he counts everything as rubbish in comparison to knowing Christ. I think that I am now understanding this so much more than before. Can you hear the longing of his soul in these words, it is the voice of a thirsty man, it is the activity of an athlete straining as he nears the finishing line, it is a deep passion.

Years ago, I heard a story, and here it is. As a pilot approached the airfield, he could see the lay of the land quite clearly, the landing strip and the access paths and the way to the terminal and so on. However, once he landed, he no longer had the vantage point of height and all the land was flat and grassy with no obvious path to his final destination and dismemberment. After a short time of inaction, a truck drove up in front of the plane with a sign on its back which read, 'FOLLOW ME.' The pilot increased thrust and the truck guided the plane to the airport terminal. That is what vision should be about, something we can follow to get us to our destination.

Once the plane had touched down, the main thing became getting to the terminal. Vision statements should keep before our minds what the main thing is, and then we are to keep the main thing, the main thing. It's hard to keep the main thing the main thing, especially if we do not know what the main thing is in the first place! Many businesses have gone broke because they did not keep the main thing as the main thing!

So what is the main thing? If our homes are the main thing, or our jobs, or our children's education, or our sport, our diet, our body shape, hair colour, car, garden, library, reputation, wealth, position, congregation, church building or power is the main thing, then we are going to wake up after death sad and impoverished. No matter how significant some of these things are, they actually come far behind a vision of God, because none of the things I have listed as examples are going to last, endure, or go with us into eternity! The only thing that we keep is our souls. We are given three score years and ten to prepare our souls for a long eternity. Our souls will either be godly or ungodly, and this will determine our destination, heaven or hell!

What then are we to do if we desire to follow Jesus' vision of love and service, how do we go about it? There are many things that could be said in answer to this, but we are given wise counsel in the book of Hebrews.

Hebrews chapter 2 and verse 9 tells us this. In life we do not see Jesus as Lord of every situation and circumstance – yet. So what do we do? We are to see Jesus. This means that we are to look at Him Incarnate, which is His being born into our human world, His death and exaltation to glory at the right hand of God above. Let me tell you what this shows us. Think of a lumberjack who has just cut through a huge tree. There is an almighty crack, and the tree begins to fall. Say that at the moment of the crack, you took a photograph and froze that moment in time. Now here is the question. If you looked at that photograph twenty years later, would you be justified to think that that tree has fallen to the ground a long time ago? Of course you would!

Our lives are like a moment. We never see so many things happen which are happening. However, no matter how long the tree takes to fall, once it is cut through, it will come down whether we live to see the whole process or not! When Jesus came to earth and died and rose again, a whole process was begun which is still in motion, and which will be concluded. This is what it means to see Jesus. It means that as we see Him exalted and alive at God's right hand, we believe that everything He has said and promised will come about even if we are here for such a brief blink of an eye that we only see a fraction of God's purposes outworked. Seeing Jesus gives us hope and assurance for life.

Hebrews chapter 12 verse 2 tells us to, fix our eyes on Jesus the author and perfecter of our faith. Fix our eyes on Jesus and He will lead us and show us the way just as the truck shows the way to the plane!

Have you ever played, follow the leader? It only works if we watch what the leader is doing. If we are looking round to see what other people are doing, or we are looking out the window, it will not work. It is the same sort of idea that Hebrews presents us with. As long as we have our attention fixed on Jesus, HE will guide us through the minefield of life, He will show us the trustworthy stepping stones across the river in flood. However, the moment we take our eyes off Jesus, we risk a wrong step, and if we persistently are inattentive, we may find that we have lost touch with Him completely.

All this is not a difficult concept to follow, but the picture and example needs to be fixed in our minds or else we will soon go astray and find ourselves lost in a big and hostile world!

Jesus spoke about the sheep who hear the Good Shepherds voice and will not follow the voice of another. Whatever else Jesus is telling us in this, He is telling us that there are other voices about calling out to us to come this way or that. We all know how many contradictory bits of advice are all about us, and it is the same in Church circles. I know of Churches who had all sorts of visions, to be the biggest Church in Europe, to show all other Churches how to do this or that, but all have gone astray because they lost sight of this, that our vision is firstly and lastly to be Jesus Himself!

Think of it this way. If we follow Jesus, will He not lead us in the right direction? Will He not lead us into the specific service that He desires us to do? I think that that is a safer way of going than trying to follow every idea that seems good to us, or trying to respond to every need that we become aware of. As I read Church History, I find again and again that it is the people who put the highest importance on the person of Christ that ended up doing most good. For example, the Wesley's went to America as unconverted men to be missionaries, and failed and came home dejected and defeated. However, they were later converted, and the discipline they had practiced as unbelievers came alive and they became devoted to Christ. The Methodist movement came was born, and it gave rise to all manner of social consequences. It was once the Wesley brothers got the vision of Jesus before their eyes and hearts that England was changed!

The media, books, DVD's the net and so on are full of places and people selling their programs of their take on the Christian life. Jesus in the Scriptures has given us His truth and it is Himself. Paul said that others should follow him as he follows Christ. We are to do the same, like Paul, follow Christ and so become and do what is pleasing to God.

Perhaps this seems like hair splitting to some, or as if I am saying that all should follow my take on vision. That is not what I am saying at all. I am saying that Jesus Himself must be the first and last focus of all our attention, Jesus as revealed in Scripture, and confirmed made clear by the Holy Spirit. Jesus is the beginning, the middle and the end of all things, therefore it is logical to say that this being so, we cannot miss out or lose out if we have Christ Himself as our vision.

The first step is to, 'see Jesus,' and, 'fix our eyes on Jesus,' and this we will look at next week, what this means and what we can do about it.