

THE ABSOLUTE NECESSITY OF A CLEAR VISION

"Without a vision the people perish" - Prov. 29:18, *KJV*

INTRODUCTION: Some say that this proverb circulated for perhaps hundreds of years in the oral tradition of Israel, but it may have been written down in the time of Hezekiah. If so, it comes in its present form from a time when the nation was in difficult circumstances. That was a day of potential greatness for the Kingdom of Judah, but it never realized its possibilities for real greatness; in spite of spurts and starts in some right directions, it always seemed to sink back into failure.

Today, likewise, we live in a time of crisis in education, in statesmanship, in economics, and so forth, and we desperately need leaders and people with an absolutely clear vision of where we should be headed and how we are to get there. This is true in the church as well as in the state. It is illustrated in denominational controversies that too often center around who is going to have the power to control, without a supreme concern for how power is to be exercised under the Lordship of Jesus Christ for the extension of his cause in a lost world. ~~We have the world, the flesh, and the devil against us already, and we don't need to divide our forces and waste our energies in quarreling and arguing against one another in the body of Christ.~~

I. The Meaning of our Text (Prov. 29:18).

A. "The people are made naked; stripped of their ornaments and so exposed to shame, and also stripped of their armor and so exposed to danger."

B. The people REBEL, not only against God but against their rulers.

This is a rebellious and revolutionary age.

C. The people are idle, or they play.

D. They are scattered as sheep having no shepherd, for want of the masters or assemblies to call them and keep them together (Mk. 6:34).

E. They are destroyed for lack of knowledge.

(NEB = "no one in authority")
RSV = "where there is no prophecy (revelation), the people cast off restraint."
(or "break loose" NEB)

II. The Perishing Condition in Our Day.

A. In the church

1. Pastors have no clear spiritual vision.

Lam. 2:9, "Prophets find no vision from the Lord."

II Chron. 16:9, the ancient prophet spoke to a King of Judah: "For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show his might in behalf of those whose heart is blameless toward him." ~~The prophet told the king that he had done foolishly in relying on the king of Syria for support instead of relying on the Lord God, but the Judean king was angry with the prophet and put him in prison.~~

Some pastors who do have a clear vision from the Lord are not the ones who are called on to preach ~~in the White House or~~ at their denominational conventions, assemblies, or conference.

They are more likely to be rejected and humiliated by the world who rejected and crucified their Lord.

2. People are perishing today because they are not being fed true spiritual food; too often what they hear from their TVs, radios, and pulpits is mere pious-sounding emotionalism without any sound theological or scriptural depth or reality. ~~We are now living in the days prophesied by Amos, "Behold, the days are coming," says the Lord God, "when I will send a famine on the land; not a famine of bread, or a thirst for water, but of hearing the words of the Lord."~~

3. According to 2nd Peter 1:9, Christians can go blind spiritually when they fail to grow spiritually. If you fail to grow spiritually in the grace and knowledge of Jesus Christ, and if you fail to supplement your basic saving faith with virtue, knowledge, self-control, steadfastness, godliness, brotherly affection, and genuine Christian LOVE, you will become blind and shortsighted, and ~~will gradually forget about the redeeming and cleansing blood of Jesus.~~

4. It is true on a national level that without a clear vision we shall perish. We need an absolutely clear vision of our potential enemies, external and internal; we need a clear vision of our weaknesses and vulnerabilities, and we need to know what must be done about these things. We need a crystal clear plan for the solution of our many problems; we need a national agenda for preserving, enhancing, and sharing the religious and civil blessings and freedoms of our heritage.

~~This time of the year we hear much on one side from those who talk loudly about the trouble our country is in, and from the other side about how we never had it so good. Who is right? In some ways, BOTH are right. We do have some problems; and we have, at the same time, much that is right about our country, for which we should be very grateful. But things are not totally bad or completely good. But regardless of which side you tend to identify with in the main, we must all recognize that we need an absolutely clear national vision.~~

E. We also need an absolutely clear vision in the world at large.

1. Many say at this point there is little we can do to influence other countries in the world. But just think for a moment about how America is in fact influencing other countries these days, in dress, in music, in technology, in business enterprise, and in many, many other ways.

If we can do this in other areas, why can't we have more influence in religious, spiritual, and moral values and practices? We suspect that the answer to that haunting question is that perhaps our own spiritual and moral values and practices are not as well-conceived, or as strong and consistent in our own society as they should be.

2. Regardless of how you explain the situation or what you have to say about it, lost souls are perishing by the hundreds of thousands every day that passes.

3. The ratio of missionaries to population in the world is decreasing.

* Some preachers and pastors haven't learned much about putting their best foot forward. They should try it more often. As someone said in the press several months ago, "Putting your best foot forward at least keeps it out of your MOUTH!"

* A noted national leader in the field of education has said, "The very essence of leadership is that you have to have a vision."

Some christians moan and complain that the day of miracles is over. There really is no such thing as a "Day of Miracles" in God's sight. Miracles are simply the supernatural operation of God, and He is TIMELESS. He has seen fit to perform different types of miracles to suit His purpose in different periods of earthly time, but His supernatural power is always the same in all generations. And wherever He regenerates a human heart, or saves just one soul, there you have a MIRACLE! God is still doing mighty works in the world. If He is not doing them in your life it is probably because of your unbelief. The only thing in existence that can limit the power of the Lord Jesus Christ is our unbelief, which is often our false assumption that we can manage in our own strength and wisdom, and without the help of His spirit.

4. Corruption and degradation is found wherever Christ is not known.

5. The tragedy is that few in the church or out of the church seem to care.
The searching question for our times is that of Lamentations 1:12, "Is it nothing to you, all ye that pass by?"

III. What is the Reason for this Condition?

A. Because pastors have not preached and taught so as to awaken their people from their spiritual slumber, or to make Christians aware of their personal responsibility to reach and win the lost to Christ. *

B. Some Christians actually think they do have a vision for lost souls, but they are deceiving themselves. They give lip service and minimal support to the cause of Christ, but they are not greatly burdened for the lost, and it has been years since they won anyone to Christ.

Some have no genuine concern for the Savior's command to evangelize the world because they have no real love for Christ.

They are not really CONTROLLED by the love of Christ, as Paul wrote in 2nd Corinthians.

~~For others, their lack of real love for Christ is shown by the fact that they do not obey his commandments, and Jesus himself said these two things are absolutely related (Jn. 14:15).~~

IV. What is the Remedy for this Situation?

- A clear vision **

A. We Christians need a first class, absolutely clear vision of Jesus Christ.

Jesus said, "He who has seen me has seen the Father" (Jn. 14:9).

When we get such a vision of Jesus Christ, we tend to lose all our selfish ambitions and desires. vvv

B. We need a vision of lost souls and of immature Christians who are without a shepherd, or a church, and without any Christian fellowship and learning and growth opportunities.

C. Too many churches, denominations, and ambitious preachers have lost their vision of eternity, of Jesus Christ, and of lost people, and so have lost any spiritual power they might have once had.

Many of them have not gone into apostasy, heresy, or into gross immorality.

They have allowed the good to become the enemy of the BEST that God has for them.

Many churches are today occupied with many causes that are GOOD, but somewhere along the way they have lost the power and blessing of God's Spirit.

We can appreciate the sexton of a High Church who rang the funeral bell by mistake just before the regular preaching service. "It makes no difference," he said; "the church is dead anyway!"

"Ichabod" might be written over many a beautiful sanctuary, for the glory has departed.

It is a sad day when churches or ministers lose their spiritual power. But sadder still is their plight if, instead of recognizing their loss and repenting of their sin and recovering their lost power, they work doubly hard in the flesh so that maybe no one will suspect that anything is wrong. But God knows, and even the world knows that something is badly wrong.

And proud and stiff-necked religious leaders go on spreading cold cream on cancers and dusting off their pharisaical sins with a powder puff!

They need to cry out for God's mercy and forgiveness before it's too late!

C. Too many churches,...

D. We need a vision of eternity, including a hell without God and a Heaven with his blessed presence; we need to keep this in proper perspective with the transient and temporal things of earth and time and space and human physical experience.

CONCLUSION: A young lady once said to her aunt, "I can't seem to get interested in the church or in missions." Her aunt answered, "No, dear, you can't expect to. It is just like getting interest in a bank; you have to PUT IN something first. And the more you put in--time, money, prayer, or service--the more the interest grows."

We must not only get the vision, but we must do something about it.

We must not be disobedient to the heavenly vision (Acts 16:10).

Vision without work is VISIONARY.

Work without Vision is MERCENARY.

Vision AND work is MISSIONARY.

And this combination is honoring to our God.

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