

Chapter Five

VISION

If we are to reach our life-destiny in Christ it is essential that we have a vision that sees beyond our circumstances. Our viewpoint is going to affect the way we live, whether it is a view of self (the inward look), our view of the world (the outward look), or our view of the Lord (the upward look).

The inward look

It has been said that ‘what you think you are, you are.’ This isn’t true, of course, for those who are deluded in sickness. Maybe you heard the story about the two inmates of an asylum.

“Hi” said one, “Who are you?”

“I’m Napoleon” his friend replied.

“No, you’re not.”

“Yes I am.”

“No you’re not!”

“Yes, I am!”

“Who told you that?”

“God did!”

“No, I didn’t!!!”

Sadly there are many in the Christian church just as blind to their true identity as those unfortunate inmates. However, it is not only visions of grandeur or pride that we must deal with, but also the opposite feelings of low self esteem. The quotation above is certainly true in this negative arena. When we think self-demeaning thoughts, we live in the same valley as those low thoughts. We point to the man with high opinions of himself and we call him “proud”, one whom God will surely bring down. However, we are quick to defend ourselves against accusations that we are too self demeaning, adding (with a little pride?) that we are called to be “humble”. All this does is show an ignorance of what humility is. It is not the opposite of pride - that is *false* humility - and is a sickness just as bad as its antithesis.

We are called to be ‘as humble as little children’ if we would be great in the Kingdom of Heaven. Children may play games and put on costumes and masks, but when bedtime comes, they take off the playthings and crawl beneath the blankets, once again weak and tired and needing a father’s cuddle and a mother to tuck them in. They revert to being ‘*just themselves*’. It’s only adults who keep the costumes and masks on, for we do not want others to see us as we know ourselves to be. The Bible calls that hypocrisy (Greek = *acting as another character*).

Think on this; the most humble statement in the Bible came from God Himself! When Moses asked Him, “Whom shall I say sent me when I talk to the Children of Israel?” the Eternal One replied, “**I AM that I AM!** Tell them that the **I AM** has sent you!”

Humility is knowing - and being - who you really are. No more, no less.

So who are you?

Assuming you are a Christian believer, one who is born again of the Spirit of God, the Bible has many wonderful things to say about you. Read the New Testament looking for the multitude of glorious things that are said to be the common riches of all believers. Many of these riches are dependant on some action of ours but most have little to do with our ability or maturity, but rather have everything to do with what Jesus has won for us on the cross, which the Father is glad to bestow upon us simply because He loves the Son.

I believe that every new believer should be taught the first chapter of the book of Ephesians early in his new life, so that he might know of his position “in Christ”.

We are chosen in Him, we have been adopted into God’s family, we are accepted because the Father loves Him. We are ‘seated in heavenly places’ in Him, far above all principalities and powers (of evil). Stop believing the lies of Satan about yourself and start believing what God says about you!

I was a sinner but the Bible tells me I am now a saint!

I was a slave to sin but I am now a son of God!

My sins are forgiven and I can call Him “Father!”

I once walked in darkness but now I walk in light!

I was dead but now I’m alive!

I was lost but now I am found - I belong!

I am a new creation(spirit), old things have passed away, all things have become new.

-- not because of anything in me, but because I am *in Him*.

Shout it from the housetops! Lift up your heads and sing! We’re children of the KING, Hallelujah! This life is but a short-term boot-camp preparing us to reign with our king and we can overcome because He lives in us, *Christ in us, our guarantee of glory*¹.

Satan will accuse you, bringing feelings of guilt and condemnation, but the truth declares that “nothing can separate you from the love of God in Christ Jesus.”² Whom are you going to believe - Satan, the father of lies, or the Holy Spirit, author of God’s Word?

Circumstances may weigh you down but you can be “more than conquerer through Christ who strengthens you”³. Do you believe this or do you prefer to believe your enemy, Satan?

One of the greatest tragedies in the Christian church is the number of believers who do not know who they are (in Christ) and who spend much time trying to justify themselves to God and to others. This is most sad when seen among leaders who are insecure in their position (often because God has not called them to be there), and who need to play the politics of church to hold on to their status. For such people it is very difficult to be the servant that the Master called us all to be. Instead they cling on to their ‘power’, often hurting other believers in the process. There is a Bible verse that has always struck me as being very important, yet when I have quoted it and asked my listeners where it is found in Scripture, none has been able to answer me. It reads as follows.

¹ Colossians 1:27

² Romans 8:39

³ Philippians 4:13

“Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hands, and that he was come from God, and went to God” (In other words, *“Jesus knowing who He was, where He had come from, what He was doing and where He was going*”) Do you know what comes next? (Don’t you hate it when someone puts you on-the-spot like this??) Look it up for yourself in John’s Gospel, chapter 13! He was secure in Himself and in His calling. We need to be similarly secure if we would be all the Lord wants us to be - flying like the eagle. It is easy to serve others when you know who and where you are yourself.

The Outward Look

What do you see when you look at human society - what is your world-view? When all around you seems to be in disarray, why are you surprised? You must recognise that this is the way of the world. It is a tired old creation, groaning and travailing in pain, under the leading of blind men, waiting for the day when its creator will return, bringing with Him the Sons of God.⁴

In the meantime, it will follow the religion of secular humanism, where man is the centre of his own universe and God has been banished to its circumference. Indeed in the post-Christian society we now live in, many would join with the liberal theologians of the early twentieth century, claiming that God is dead! Without the absolutes of accountability to One outside himself, man becomes the arbitrator of morals -what is right or wrong - and society wobbles from crisis to crisis.

I was in Scotland co-hosting a prayer concert with Ian and Peter, two Church of Scotland pastors. Ian’s spirit was very sombre during the evening so I asked him the reason. That day, the synod of the national church had voted to ordain homosexual men, something that both Ian and Peter believed to be contrary to Scripture. They, with many others were permitted to record their dissent on the official records but the motion had carried. I then asked Peter why he was not similarly cast down in spirit. His answer was enlightening. It was the parable of the glass half full - or half empty - of water. “When I arrived in this city twenty years ago,” he said, “you could find maybe two or three of our churches where the Gospel was faithfully preached. Today there are twenty-two!” “There is a polarisation taking place. Where there is greater darkness, there is also greater light.” He did not let his vision of the world rob him of his vision of the Lord.

At this moment, you and I are in this world but we are not of it. Do not expect it to accommodate you. Just as it didn’t receive the Lord Jesus, so it cannot accept you. However, the Lord has not chosen to take us from this world because He wants us to be His witnesses in the world. He knows that will be difficult for we have an active enemy, but He has prayed, and still does pray for us. “Father, I do not pray that You take them from the world, but that ***You should keep them*** from the evil *one*, for they are not of the world even as I am not of the world”⁵

Of course, believers should be involved in many aspects of the world - as salt to savour its unpleasantness and to oppose its evil; as a light to reveal its sickness and point the way to life. There will be some who will *fly like the eagle* in a God-given ministry within the

⁴ Romans 8:19

⁵ St John 17:15,16

institutions and organisations of the world. However, our **primary concern** is not this world, but His Kingdom among the peoples of this world.

We are not called to stand in the world giving witness of Christ; we are called to stand in Christ giving witness to the world!

Jesus spoke of five kinds of people whom He considers great in His kingdom. They are *servants, as children*, willing to be *last or least* and as the *younger*.⁶ Have you ever considered what it means to be ‘as the younger’? In the days of Jesus all the father’s property was passed on to the eldest son. His was the farm and all the cattle. The younger son could carry all his inheritance upon his shoulder such as the prodigal did when leaving home⁷. On his repentance and return to his father’s home, he considered himself not worthy to be his father’s son, but the old man received him with an embrace of love, new shoes, a coat and a feast. At this the elder son was angry. “Why have you killed the fatted calf for this waster?” he demanded. In reply, the father pointed out that all the fatted calves belonged to the eldest son. In fact all the farm was his. He owned the lot! In truth however, the farm owned him! He was not interested in repentance and forgiveness; his only interest was in what he owned. This is my farm! Don’t touch it! (Do you hear the echos? This is my ministry/ my church/ my program/ my choir! These are my sheep! Don’t rock the boat!) **Whose church is it, anyway?**

Being ‘as the younger’ means that we do not allow this world to own us, neither its positions, its possessions, its popularity, its fame nor its goals. We are ‘not of this world’, we are not ‘attached’, for we are ambassadors of another, higher world. This does not mean that we must not own property or accept honours when given to us. Indeed, the Christian should stand out above the crowd as one who does his work well and is worthy of honour, even by the world’s standards. However, though we might own the world, it must not own us and we hold on to it very lightly, so that when the Master calls us away, our attachment does not hold us back. When He calls us to fly like the eagle, we are not ‘grounded’ by attachments, commitments, ‘ropes’ woven over many years intercourse with the world and its ways.

We need to understand that this life - in this world - is only the boot-camp God has designed to perfect us for the real world of Eternity. He is looking for a people who will overcome in this life so that they might reign with Him in the next. We do not find it strange that men should suffer great stress and personal indignities when they are in training to become Marines, but we often begin to complain when our Master allows difficulties and a roaring lion⁸ to assault us in our training. We are too ready to compromise our preparation by seeking friendship with the world. However, when we are what the Lord has called us to become, we shall be overcomers, even in this world, and His Kingdom will be established *on Earth as in Heaven*. He will build His church and the gates of Hell will not prevail against it.

⁶ Mark 9:35; Matthew 18:4; Luke 9:48; Luke 22:26.

⁷ Luke 15:11f

⁸ I Peter 5:8

By the way, a ‘miawing’ cat will never catch its prey; a roaring lion is just as incompetent, except when we give him power by allowing his roar to affect our emotions and paralyze our actions. He uses fear, embarrassment, jealousy, envy, anger and like negative emotions to rob us of our victory. We need to learn to recognise his tactics and determine not to let these emotions hinder us. I spent a very enjoyable month in Nepal conducting a number of seminars for missionaries, and travelling across much of the country. In the city of Dharan, I was introduced to an elderly man who had been a pastor there for many years during the time when there was great persecution upon the churches. He had been arrested more than twenty five times and had been imprisoned seven times, the longest term being for eight years. Immediately upon his release from prison he would return to his village and begin to preach the Gospel once again. I asked him, “Weren’t you afraid of being arrested again?” His reply was “Why should I be afraid? The lion has roared its loudest!” He had the right vision - 20/20 eyesight in spiritual things!

It was Jim Elliot, one of five young men martyred in the jungles of Equador in 1959 who wrote shortly before his death, “He is no fool who gives up what he cannot keep to gain what he cannot lose!” Evidently, this world did not own him for he had a vision much higher than this world.

Jesus knew what the future of man on earth would be so He tells us that “when you see these things, **look up** for your redemption is near”⁹. Our vision needs to be upward.

The Upward Look

The world may claim in its blindness that ‘God is dead’ but the citizens of the Heavenly kingdom know a different reality. God is still on the throne and bringing all things to a climax, that *in the fulness of time He might gather them together in Christ, both which are in Heaven and which are on Earth.*¹⁰ He will fulfil His purposes.

In 2 Kings 6 we read of some trouble that the prophet Elisha experienced after informing his king concerning the plans being made by the Syrians to invade Israel. The Syrian king sent a great army to capture the prophet at the city of Dothan. When the sun was rising, the prophet’s servant rose from his bed and opened the windows to welcome the new day. Imagine his surprise and horror when he saw the city surrounded by the Syrian army. Circumstances were not very promising! The outlook was black. All the world seemed arrayed against the man of God.

“Alas, master! What can we do?” cried the servant.

Elisha rose from his bed, strolled to the window, viewed the enemy and prayed. No words of distress, no pleading for deliverance, no questions asked of God. Just a simple prayer, “Lord, open his eyes!”

And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man and he saw that the mountains around the city were covered with the horses and chariots of fire of the army of God. The King of Syria might send his great army but they would be no match for the man of God. With

⁹ Luke 21:28

¹⁰ Ephesians 1:10

God we are always ‘more than conquerer’¹¹ over all that the enemy or the world can throw against us. We need to look up to see that the hills surrounding our circumstances are filled with the armies of the Lord, just waiting His command to be released into the situation.

King David faced many days when everything seemed to be against him. King Saul had tried to kill him several times and had hunted him down after he had left the palace in Jerusalem so that, for years he had lived the life of a outcast. However, among the saddest days of his life was when he realised that his son Absalom was raising an army to depose his father from the throne of Israel. David records the evolution of his feelings in Psalm 3. - from the bleak outlook of v 1 (‘O Lord, I have so many enemies’) to the confidence of v 8 (‘The Lord is my deliverer!’). We must note v3 to see how this change of attitude came about. *“But you are a shield around me, O Lord, my Glory and the lifter of my head.”* Later he would write *“I will lift up my eyes unto the hills from whence my help comes. My help comes from the Lord!”*¹²

Whatever your circumstances, however the enemy may accuse you, however the world may offend you, lift up your eyes and focus on the realities of the Heavens. Your bridegroom is waiting, the banquet table is laid and we shall soon hear the trumpet blast inviting us to the marriage supper with the Lamb. Your Lord is in control and you can be confident *that ‘He who began a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ’*¹³. This is not positive thinking but a clear statement of our hope (ie; *an eager expectation of that which is certain.*)

Until then, He wants us to fly like the eagle!

You may have a healthy view of yourself, a realistic view of the world and a eager hope in the Lord, but what is your view of the church? Is she weak and ineffective; having little impact on your world? Has she become an organisation rather than an organism - the living Body of Christ? Is she program oriented rather than people conscious?

One of the great privileges I have, is to travel to many countries to minister to youth and church leaders. I want to shout it loud and clear that the church of Jesus Christ is alive and well, in many places. Everywhere I go I meet men and women who are accomplishing great things for God, though, of course, the secular media does not tell us much about these believers who are changing their world. What they have in common is a burden, and a great vision of what God can do through them.

As a young man Loren Cunningham had a vision. It was of waves of young people being released and arriving like the waves of the sea upon the shores of the world. He believed that God could motivate multitudes to go out with the two hands of the Gospel. They were to both speak out the good news and demonstrate the nature of Jesus by their actions. Today, Youth With A Mission is known throughout the world, having a mission force of about eight thousand staff serving in over fifty nations and having ministered in every country recognised by the United Nations.

¹¹ Romans 8:37

¹² Psalm 121:1

¹³ Philippians 1:6

So what is your vision?