

Renewing our Vision during Tough Times

Introduction:

This morning I want to continue on with the theme of renewing our vision both personally and corporately. Without vision the Bible tells us that people perish and lose self-control in life. However with God inspired vision apart of our lives there is nothing too difficult for God and his followers.

Vision allows us to see and experience a bright and optimistic future. True vision that comes from God requires an authentic faith and the belief that with God I can do all things for his glory. The challenge to see vision reach its full potential requires courage and the ability to put all the details into action.

Several weeks ago we looked at the power of worship to renew one's life and passion for God. For most of us, looking at worship as a means to an end is not all that difficult. After all, as believers, we all enjoy a personal relationship with God – experiencing his greatness and his nearness. Remember these two words as related to worship:

- Transcendence (describes God who is beyond our limits in thought or belief; to exist above and apart from the natural world): ***the aspects of God that exceed human power to grasp...***
- Immanence (describes God as existing in and extending into all parts of the created universe): ***the aspects of God that he reveals to, and in, humans...***

As we renew our vision with God through the means of worship, our focus must be on God not on the vision. Our worship experience must be participatory, spiritual, and genuine and lived out as a lifestyle. The Spirit will pour out his life to us, apprehending us with his love and freedom. Our truth in worship must be sincere in our praise of him, while fulfilling his purpose and vision for our lives and ministry.

Today's sermon will address the renewing of our vision through the tough times we all experience in life. It is my belief that we can all grow and experience a renewed vision of God for life and ministry through the means of worship and revelation. However, some of the greatest lessons of life come from the most difficult circumstances. It is in the midst of the challenges that God often reveals himself in new ways to us. They are times in our lives when we feel like we have lost all hope for a bright and positive future. We may feel like a failure, or that we are not smart enough. Or maybe we are too smart for our own good. We may feel like we are disqualified because of this character fault or because of that bad attitude or decision. Consider the following individuals who endured many struggles and failures before realizing their full potential...

- General George Washington lost two-thirds of all the battles he fought in the American Revolution before he won the war. He went on to become the first President of the United States.
- There was another guy who graduated 42nd out of a class of 43. Then he went out and conquered Europe. Napoleon.
- There's a guy who lost almost every election he ran for – except for one when he was elected President. Abraham Lincoln. He lost more than he won.
- Edison tried over 200 different elements before he figured out what was the right element to use in the light bulb. Over 200 failures before he had a success.
- In 21 years, Babe Ruth hit 714 home runs but he struck out 1330 times. He struck out nearly twice as often as he hit a home run. He once said, "Never let the fear of striking out keep you from taking a swing."

Lessons learned through challenging times:

There are several stories of Scripture that highlight to me some very important lessons learned as related to fulfilling God's dreams and vision. All too often we avoid the challenges of life that are needed to develop our character. Without godly character we won't have the ability to sustain the plans that God has for our lives. Therefore God is constantly committed to making us more like his son in order to see his purpose and grace fulfilled.

The first story is seen in **Genesis 22**. God tests Abraham by commanding that he take his only son Isaac, whom he loved, and go to the land of Moriah, and offer him there as a burnt offering. **He said to his servants, "Stay here with the donkey while I and the boy go over there. We will worship and then we will come back to you."**

Isaac was the fulfillment of vision for Abraham as it would be through his offspring that the nation of Israel would arise. There are times of testing that come our way where God asks us to sacrifice the very thing that gives us a future and a hope. Isaac was Abraham's future and hope.

One of my thoughts relating to Abraham is this: the focal point of his future and vision became so centered on Isaac that God needed to remind him who gave him the promise of being a great nation. So God gave him a huge test to walk through and experience. Imagine being Abraham sacrificing his son and the promise of God. Imagine being Isaac looking into his father's eyes as he lay on the altar. This test seems to be far beyond reasonable. And yet in a great act of obedience and suffering Abraham raises the knife to sacrifice Isaac.

In that moment of decision God reveals himself to them as Jehovah who sees and provides – Jehovah Jireh. The vision of a bright and glorious future returns to Abraham and Isaac as God sees their need and provides a ram for the sacrifice.

The lesson learned as related to renewing our vision is profound. We may have experienced failure or setbacks just like Abraham, and yet God sees our situation and is waiting to provide a solution to the problem. Or maybe God is asking us to sacrifice our very passion and vision.

What do you need to sacrifice to God in order to see his perfect provision?

The second story that God brings to my mind is that of David and Goliath as penned in **1 Samuel 17**. The Philistines had gathered their forces to fight against the Israelites. On either side of the Valley of Elah they taunted and threatened each other. Until one day the Philistines send out their champion Goliath. Over nine feet tall and armed to the teeth and supported by an armour bearer, Goliath defies the army of the Living God for forty days and nights. The gauntlet is thrown down. Goliath declares, "Give me a man and let us fight each other." Whoever won the challenge would become the victor and the other army and nation would become subservient.

David was away from the battle tending his father's sheep while his three oldest brothers were off to war with King Saul. Jesse, David's father, would send him to the front lines time and again to bring supplies to the troops, especially his brothers. On one such occasion, David hears the defiance of Goliath and sees the fear upon the army of Israel. **David asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"** We know the story carries on with his brothers despising him and David coming before Saul. He tries on the King's armour which does not fit and then goes out to fight Goliath with his staff, five smooth stones and a sling. **David said to the Philistine, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied. ⁴⁶This day the LORD will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head..."** We know that David strikes the giant right between the eyes, cuts off Goliath's head with his own sword and brings about great victory for Israel.

There is a great lesson for us to learn here today. David was a man of vision. He had already been chosen by God and anointed by Samuel as King. Now he is confronted by a giant opposing God and his people. David may have come to confront Goliath in the Name of the Living God, but none-the-less, he would have felt great tension personally in the fight. With God's help and courage he wins...

One of the lessons we can learn this morning is simple; the Israeli Army was making excuse after excuse, based on their fears and their self preservation. God does not permit making excuses. We need to learn to face and overcome the giants that confront our lives.

In a recent survey of Discipleship Journal, readers ranked areas of greatest spiritual challenge to them. These are listed in this order:

1. Materialism
2. Pride
3. Self-centeredness
4. Laziness
5. Tied were: Anger/Bitterness/Sexual lust
6. Envy

7. Gluttony
8. Lying

To some degree these are giants that we all face at some point in our lives. The challenge is to not let these giants thwart the vision of God for our lives. We need to be as ruthless with these giants as David was with Goliath. We need to cut off their heads and bring about far-reaching victory in our lives.

What giant do you need to kill in order to God's dream and vision fulfilled in your life?

In Conclusion:

In our lifetime we will all experience moments of challenge and stress that will stretch us to our limits. Our ability to overcome these obstacles will determine the depth of God's purpose and grace being fulfilled in us.

Hebrews 12:1-13 - Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. ² Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. ³ Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.

⁴ In your struggle against sin, you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. ⁵ And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons:

"My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, ⁶ because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son."

⁷ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? ⁸ If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. ⁹ Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! ¹⁰ Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. ¹¹ No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

¹² Therefore, strengthen your feeble arms and weak knees. ¹³ "Make level paths for your feet," so that the lame may not be disabled, but rather healed.

In Application:

Let's take a moment and ask ourselves again these two questions...

What do you need to sacrifice to God in order to see his perfect provision?

What giant do you need to kill in order to God's dream and vision fulfilled in your life?

Communion...