

Keeping the Vision

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon urges believers to actively maintain and live out their vision of Christ through daily practices of self-denial and service to others.

Scripture: Matthew 4:19, Luke 5:27, John 8:12, Acts 26:19, 2 Corinthians 3:18

Topics: "Following Jesus", "Gods Will"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the importance of holding on to the vision of Jesus once it has been revealed to us. He emphasizes the need to answer the vision by following Jesus daily, denying ourselves, and proclaiming and living out the vision in our lives. Bieber warns against neglecting, belittling, or disobeying the vision, as it can lead us astray from the path of God's will.

Transcript

Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but declared first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of repentance.

Before Jesus calls us to follow him, he first gives us a vision of who he is.

Why, for instance, did Andrew, Peter, James, and John leave their fishing boats and go off with Jesus? What made these men think that it was worth it to leave everything and go with him?

Out there on the lake, before they ever brought their boats to land, Jesus gave them a vision. When that net came up loaded with fish these men knew they were looking at glory. And out of that glory came a call.

Or take Levi...Levi was no fool. So when one day he just up and leaves his tax office and goes off to join the disciples of Jesus. his family was concerned. Is Levi still sane?

What would make a man do such a thing?

Vision!

Levi sees something when he looks at Jesus that the average Israelite does not see -- Levis' eyes have been opened to see beyond human flesh when he looks at Jesus.

Of course, there is also such a thing as illusion. The man or the woman who travels across deserts and mountains seeking a pot of gold at the end of the rainbow may think that they're following a vision. But one day they discover that their pursuit was false -- they've been misled. Some folks spend their entire lives in pursuit of a "vision" which is simply an illusion.

The person who has seen Jesus with the eye of the Spirit knows that they have seen the glory of God. They have a vision which can never be erased from the mind. Should they decide to turn away from Jesus and go back to their old life, they can never obliterate the memory of that blazing light. Something of the vision remains in their heart to their dying day.

Once we have seen, we can never return to our former ignorance. If we go back to our former way of life, we return as someone who has seen the light and rejected it. There is no such thing as forgetting the vision of Christ once you have seen it. The light which streams from the Master's face, which burns in the words he speaks, in the breath that he breaths upon you, brands itself upon your spirit forever.

And yet, it is possible to neglect the vision,

to belittle it,

to disregard it,

to disobey it,

to push it away from you, until you arrive at the place that the vision of Jesus Christ no longer guides your steps or guards your heart.

We look down the gully on either side of the narrow road that leads to the City of God....

We observe the footprints of the people who have turned aside from the Way of Truth....

and ask ourselves,

"What made them do this?"

"What caused this man dying the swamp to lose his way?"

"What caused this woman to end up in that flaming wilderness?"

"What caused this youth to perish from thirst half a mile from the spring?"

It may be that the man in the swamp fell through his own vanity. Perhaps he saw a chance to advance his career, to build up his image, compromising the truth of God, and losing his balance.

The woman perishing in the flaming wilderness, was lured from the path by her impatience. Things weren't happening fast enough, so she took a "short cut

That youth was sidetracked by lust, and perished of thirst.

Behind every life that stumbles from the path there is really only one reason:

They abandoned their vision of the Lord Jesus for something

more immediately gratifying.

As long as we can see Jesus,

As long as Jesus is real to us as the Christ of God,

As long as he is our joy, our life, our God, our Friend -

no lust or discouragement, or fear, or any other enemy of God can get a foothold in our hearts.

It is when the vision begins to tarnish, when it becomes blurred, when it begins to lose its power (because we are no longer paying attention to it)...then the shadows creep in.

Doubtless, most of the people who are reading these words have already received a vision of the Lord Jesus. At some point in your life your eyes were opened. Even if you don't see as clearly now, there was a time when you saw Jesus as the Messiah. The evidence that Jesus is the Messiah, that he is alive from the dead, that he is victor over sin, death, and the power of the devil, is still burning in your spirit like a smoldering fire -- a fire that only needs to be stirred to come back to life.

You can still remember a day when your chains were broken, your eyes were opened, when something happened to you that caused you to know God. It was a revelation straight from heaven. God touched your eyes, opened your ears, moved on your heart to give you this vision. And it is this vision, which still has the power to transform you, if given a chance.

"But we beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord are changed into that same image from one degree of glory to another by the Spirit of the Lord."

And if it should be that there is somebody reading these words who has never had such a vision, God is able to open your eyes to his Son right now, just as he opened Peter's eyes. If you are looking for Truth, if you are willing to abandon yourself to the Truth, you will be visited by light from the World Beyond. God himself will open your eyes

But receiving the vision is the easy part. Vision is a gift from God. God does all the work. All we have to do is climb down off our high horse, become a child and hold still while God reveals to us who Jesus is.

The hard part is to hang on to the vision once we've received it. And here's where we have to start doing some maintenance work. To hang on to this vision and to keep it bright, there are three things we have to do---every single day of our lives until we come to the gates of the City of God.

First, we have to answer the vision.

There are all kinds of people who have been shown something from God, but they've done nothing with what they've been shown.

After the disciples had seen Jesus supernaturally fill their net with fish, they did something. That vision was a call, and they answered it. They answered it that very day....and every day for the rest of their lives.

From that moment, these men leave where they are and what they have, and follow Jesus ever more deeply, farther and farther into the center of God's will - always giving up something else, always leaving another position, constantly moving on, never stopping.

And there are people reading these words who haven't moved an inch in twenty years, or 5 years, or 6 months.

You've got to keep moving! As the Lord moves, you move!

As a young man, Isaiah sees a vision of Yahweh, the God of Israel, high and lifted up in the temple. Isaiah knows that this is not just a "wonderful spiritual experience" - this is a call!

"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" says the Lord

"Here I am, Lord. Send me." answers Isaiah.

That day marked the beginning of a life that was spent following, responding to, giving himself over to the vision of the Lord.

So the question is not, "Have you seen the light?"

The question is, "Are you following the light God has already given you?"

"Are you pursuing that vision?"

"Are you selling yourself out, giving everything over,

speeding toward that vision God has already caused you to behold?"

Secondly, if we are going to keep the vision of the Lord bright -- or in some cases, regain the vision we once had -we have to deny ourselves every day.

The instant the disciples catch on to the revelation that Jesus is the Christ, ("You're the Christ, the Son of the Living God"), immediately Jesus begins to train them to deny themselves take up their cross daily and follow.

In order to stay on the track of the vision you've now been given, you have to deny yourself. Otherwise you will become preoccupied with yourself -- your plans, your ambitions, your religious ideas, your theology, your frustration with the half-baked saints around you.

Self gets larger and larger, until it crowds out the vision of Jesus, which becomes smaller and smaller until it's tucked away in a corner and forgotten.

When we get up in the morning, we begin the day by denying ourselves and offering our bodies as a living sacrifice to God.

In the circumstances that come our way through the day we deny ourselves, yielding to the will of the Lord.

Some of us are in such a habit of expanding ourselves,

and asserting ourselves,

and standing up for ourselves,

and fighting for ourselves,

and defending ourselves,

and arguing for ourselves

that there simply is no room for the vision of God, even though we are very "religious."

We hear many people in Christian circles these days talking about how important it is for us to love ourselves...even asking for God's help, "O, Lord, help us to love ourselves!"

Did you ever hear Jesus talk like that?

All we ever hear Jesus say is, "Deny yourself. Die to yourself."

"Unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies, it abides by itself, but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit."

Lose yourself in a vision of the Lord of Glory - that's the only way to true life.

You don't need any help to love yourself.

But you need the help of God's Spirit to die to yourself.

Only when you're dead to yourself are you free from yourself. Stop trying so hard to "accept yourself." The only thing you're upset about is your inability to live up to that glorious image you have of yourself. You're angry because you don't look as good as you think you should---to yourself or anyone else. Die to yourself and you will be set free from this narcissistic preoccupation with yourself.

And that's not something that happens "once and done". That has to happen continuously.

Somebody hurts your feelings; die to yourself and praise God.

Somebody walks past you without calling you by name; die to yourself and pray God's blessings upon them.

Somebody laughs at some stupid thing that you did; die to yourself and praise the Lord.

They forgot to invite you to the shower; pray God's blessings on the shower.

Every slight, every rejection is turned into an exercise in self-denial.

The third thing we need to do, if the vision of the Lord is going to be preserved in us, is proclaim the vision and live that vision every day of our lives.

You don't light a lamp and then shove it under your bed.

"Let your light so shine before men that they will see your good works and glorify (not you, but) your Father who is in heaven."

"I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision," says Paul, "but I proclaimed it (right away) in Damascus, then in Jerusalem, then in all of Judea and then to the Gentiles."

So if you've had a vision of the Messiah who seeks the lost, live that vision and proclaim that vision by going out toward Jesus, the Messiah who seeks the lost, and seek the lost with him.

We come away from Bible studies, exclaiming, "Oh, what a wonderful insight! Jesus seeks the lost. Isn't that wonderful! He carries the little sheep in his arms."

...Until some little sheep gets in my way, and I mumble, "Step aside. I don't have time for you right now. I'm on my way to lunch."

"Do you love me? Feed my sheep."

Care for them. Seek the lost. Bind up the crippled. Strengthen the weak."

You have a vision of a Messiah who feeds the hungry. Pursue the vision. Live the vision by getting out there with Jesus and doing the same!

You have a vision of a Messiah who heals. Don't be forever talking about healing. Do some healing yourself! Talk less about healing and do more.

You answer, "I don't have the power to heal!"

Then visit the sick, pray for the sick, lay your hands on the sick, give them a glass of water. That glass of water will be a sacrament, straight out of heaven.

You've had a vision of a Shepherd who lays down his life for his sheep. Don't just admire him. Pursue the vision. Begin laying down your life for the sheep.

Don't sit on your vision. Live it! Shout it from the housetop!

To be able to see Jesus of Nazareth as the Son of God is entirely his problem. And the Lord Jesus is able to reveal himself. "Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, Peter."

....To Peter or to me, or to you. He is able to open our eyes - quite able to make us see.

Our job is to keep that vision bright. Can we honestly say that we have been faithful to the vision of the Messiah that God has already given us?

God help us this day to answer the vision;

to deny ourselves and follow the vision;

to proclaim and live the vision, which God has already given us of His Son.

A prayer:

Father, we pray for any man or woman reading these words who cries out to see the Messiah whom he has not yet seen. Grant that the hand of your Son will touch their eyes that they may see....open their ears that they may hear the voice of the Shepherd.

Father, we ask that those who have lost touch with their vision may be moved to stir up the gift that still lies within them as a smoldering fire

For those who are struggling to keep the vision alive and fresh every day, grant a new outpouring of your Spirit upon them now.

Strengthen us to rise up and live in the light of the Lord, doing his will this day and all the days until we see him coming in glory.

Amen.

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