

“GOD-VISION”

(Habakkuk 2:1-3)

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[PROP NEEDED: “Alice in Wonderland” video clip]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 8-18-24]

--I--

1. **[VIDEO CLIP from Disney's *Alice In Wonderland* (1951)** -- Alice: “*I just wanted to ask you which way I ought to go*” Cheshire Cat: “*That depends on where you want to get to.*” Alice: “*Oh, it really doesn't matter.*” Cheshire Cat: “*Then it really doesn't matter which way you go.*” (Total Time: 0:21) Found with Closed captions at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_heFIAa3hA0&list=WL&index=11&t=87s]

A--“*If you don't care where you're going, then it doesn't matter which way you go to get there*” -- that's wisdom from the Cheshire Cat in Disney's 1951 classic movie *Alice in Wonderland*.

B--But that may be in a children's movie, it's still good wisdom for life itself, whether we're talking about individuals, families, businesses, nations, or... churches.

C--Maybe you've heard it before... “*If you aim for nothing, you always hit it!*”

D--Well, that's why (for the next 2 weeks) I want to share about the importance & power of Vision from God -- of knowing *where* we're going and *how* we're going to get there.

2. Well, in today's scripture from the Old Testament book of Habakkuk, we find another articulation of this same sort of advice and wisdom.
3. Now, I'll grant that Habbakuk is probably NOT in most of our lists of "top 10 favorite books of the Bible" (at least not in mine). So let me start by sharing a few things.

A--Habbakuk was a sixth-century BC prophet writing in Jerusalem who'd been told by God that He would use the wicked Chaldeans (aka "Babylonians") to punish the Hebrew people for their unfaithfulness.

B--In the first chapter of his book (that we didn't read), Habakkuk complains to God about the apparent unfairness of this -- of using a *more* wicked people to punish a *less* wicked one; it didn't seem right.

C--And in today's scripture from Chapter 2:1-3, we find part of God's response to that complaint. Listen to what Habbakuk writes...

"I I [meaning Habbakuk] will stand at my watchpost, and station myself on the rampart; I will keep watch to see what he [meaning GOD] will say to me, and what he will answer concerning my complaint. 2 Then the Lord answered me and

said: 'Write the Vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it. 3 For there is still a Vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay.'"

[The Word of God for all people. **Thanks be to God.** PRAYER]

D--Now, in these verses, God essentially is essentially saying, "*Yes, the Chaldeans ARE wicked, and they'll have to answer for it one day. But right now, Habakkuk, YOUR role is to WRITE DOWN the Vision that I'm giving so that its clear both to you and to your people, and so that you can WAIT and TRUST in me to act in MY time to accomplish it.*"

E--Obviously I'm paraphrasing greatly. But I think His is point is to tell Habbakuk (and us today) that ***there is power in the naming and articulating of a Godly Vision.***

4. Now, in *next* week's sermon I'm going to be introducing and sharing some thoughts about OUR CHURCH'S newly adopted Vision.

A--But in the meantime, using today's scripture, I want to offer four observations about the qualities and characteristics of all God-given Visions --...

B--...Whether it's a Vision given to a church, a Sunday school class, a ministry group, a marriage, a family, or even a business... these are some characteristics that should identify that Vision as authentically biblical and God-centered.

--II--

5. First, a true Vision from God is always **SPECIFIC**. And by that, I mean TWO things:

A--It's specific, number one, *because it's given by God to His people at a particular point of time* in their history.

1--That means that a Vision is NOT the same thing as a Purpose/Mission (which -- besides occasionally re-articulated -- remains *constant* over time).

(a) The purpose of the U.M.C. is to "*make disciples of Jesus Christ for the transformation of the world.*"

(b) And how we've recently articulated that at Cornerstone is that we are "*A Christian community reflecting the love of Jesus by Nurturing individuals, Connecting groups, and Impacting our world.*"

2--But a Vision (like the one I'll be talking about *next* week) *changes* over time -- it refers to *what God is MOST calling us to do & be in the IMMEDIATE future in order to FULFILL our mission.*

B--But not only is a Vision specific because its given to God's people at a specific time in their history, but its also specific *because it is PRECISE*. How does God put it to Habbakuk in Verse 2? ... "Write the Vision; make it plain on tablets, so that a runner may read it."

1--A Godly Vision, you see, is not vague, generic, or so complicated that it takes a PhD or rocket scientist to figure out what it means.

2--No. Its simple to understand and clear enough that -- as God tells Habbakuk -- even someone in motion could read it!

C--And as the rest of the verses explain, this specificity not only solidifies our *direction*, (giving us a set of PRIORITIES) but also keeps us "on task" as we move forward. ¹

6. A second characteristic of a God-given Vision is that it's also always **SELFLESS** -- that is: its focus is not *inward* on meeting OUR needs and wants, but *outward* on trying to meet the needs of OTHERS.²

A--Remember that Habbakuk's original complaint against God was that God should destroy the wicked *Chaldeans* instead of the Hebrews. But if we think about it: *that* was really a very *selfish* prayer -- a prayer about what *Habbakuk* wanted, rather than what about what *God* wanted.

B--And aren't a lot of our prayers, dreams and visions the same -- they are things that WE want, rather than prayers and dreams and visions about what GOD would want to do *through* us!

C--A poet once put it this way:

*"I need a truer vision, Lord, a vision filled with Thee
To see the needy world again with eyes willing to see.
A world where people are hurting and hungry every day,
A world that's ready and waiting to hear what You would say.
I need a wider vision, Lord, a vision filled with Thee.
To see that lonely woman down the street from me.
The teenager who's all mixed up, the child who's been abused,
The day to day cares in my neighborhood: Lord, I want to be used.
Give me a new vision, Lord, a vision filled with Thee,
To see the world and my neighborhood as Your eyes would see.
Help me use my gifts, dear Lord, in ways that glorify You,
To act with loving kindness towards those with a different view.
A truer, wider, new vision, Lord -- that's what I need
To carry out Your commands in word and thought and deed."* ³

D--As we'll see next week, God's Vision for Cornerstone is NOT necessarily something that will make US comfortable, but WILL be something to help us reach OTHERS for Jesus -- it will help us "*reflect the love of Jesus*" in our own, unique way.

7. Finally, though, not only is a Godly Vision specific and selfless, but it also **SEES THE FUTURE (S-E-E-S) -- in other words, it is forward/future-oriented.**

A--In Verse 3, God tells Habakkuk, "*there is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie*" -- I.E., it looks to the *future*, not the *past*.

B--Godly Vision is NOT about repeating "the good ole' days" of what we *used to have or do*. And its not even about *continuing* the good things that we're doing right now!

C--No. True biblical Vision invites us to the creation of things that are NEW for the purpose of moving into the *future*.⁴

D--Christian author Thomas Hawkins once wrote that "*Without a compelling vision that draws us into the future, we are content to hug the shore, rather than take the risk of setting out into the deep waters.*"⁵

--III--

8. Now there's a lot more I could say about the characteristics of a Godly Vision.⁶ But from today's scripture in Habakkuk 2, we learn that God-given Vision is always: (#1) Specific; (#2) Selfless; and (#3) it Sees the Future.

A--Again, I'll be sharing next week about the specific, selfless, future-oriented Vision that we believe God is inviting Cornerstone UMC to have for the next 2-5 years, in the meantime I want to ask: ...

B...What Vision/Dream has God given to YOU for *your* own personal life? for your marriage? for your family? for your work or school relationships? for the friendships you have here in your church or community?

C--Whatever it is, my prayer is that we will all take time to consider not only WHAT that Vision is, but also HOW it helps us to glorify the Lord.

9. [VISION PRAYER: "*Lord, we long to know and do your will as individuals, families, and as a church here at Cornerstone U.M.C. Grant us the vision to see your plans for us, and the courage and boldness to carry them to completion. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*"]

10. [SUGGESTED CLOSING HYMN: UMH#454, Open OUR Eyes, That WE May See (*Have A/V ministry alter all singular pronouns to plural on screen*)

ENDNOTES:

¹ I once read an article which suggested that only 13% of all people have specific goals and plans for their lives, and that only 3% of these write their goals down. The article went on to say that those 3% who WRITE their goals down tend to accomplish them at a rate 500-100 times MORE than the 10% of people who have goals but never write them down (Cited from an article in the category “Vision” in Bible Illustrator, Parsons Technology, 1990). I don’t know exactly where they got their figures, but I DO know that they’re right on target -- that goals and visions which are specifically NAMED are more likely to be accomplished than those which are not.

² As a result, a God-given Vision is NEVER “institutional” or merely focused upon “maintenance.” For example, a “vision” that says “*We want our church to stay open, and keep doing what we’ve always done*” is NOT a true God-given vision. Neither is a “vision” that says “*We want a new building so that we can hold all of our current members.*” No. Instead, a true vision might say, “*We want a new building as a tool to reach all the people in our community who’ve not YET heard the gospel.*”

³ Dimension magazine (Winter 1986).

⁴ Thomas Hawkins says, “*Visions invite us to build commitments around what we desire, not around what we fear*” (Thomas R. Hawkins, The Christian Small-Group Leader, Discipleship Resources, p. 52). So, for example, a “vision” of simply solving today’s space problem is not a true vision. Instead, a true vision might be that we envision something so forward-looking that it creates even MORE space problems because of all the NEW people coming who’s lives we’re touching.

⁵ Thomas R. Hawkins, The Christian Small-Group Leader, Discipleship Resources, p. 56.

⁶ For instance, one additional quality that could be said to apply to a Godly Vision is that it is **LOFTY** -- that is: while it’s grounded in reality, it’ll also be at least somewhat grandiose. From the perspective of 6th-century BC Jerusalem, Habakkuk could hardly have imagined how the mighty Chaldean/Babylonian Empire (then at its height of power) could EVER be chastised and punished by God. But history tells us that less than 100 years later this empire was conquered and overrun by the Persians led by King Cyrus II -- Habakkuk’s lofty vision came true. In the same fashion, someone once suggested that when we pray for vision, we should “*Envision something so great that it is bound to fail unless God be in it!*” [Author of this quote unknown. However, author John Haggai once expressed a similar thought: “*Attempt something so impossible that, unless God is in it, it is doomed to failure*” {John Haggai, cited in James S. Hewett, Illustrations Unlimited (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc, 1988) p. 40}]. In the same way, Dwight L. Moody once told his son, “*If God’s going to be your partner, you better make BIG plans*” (Cited in Bible Illustrator, Parsons Technology, 1990); “*Only he who can see the invisible can do the impossible*” [Frank Gaines, cited in Edythe Draper, Draper’s Book of Quotations for the Christian World (Wheaton: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1992), Entry #11733]; “*The future belongs to those who see possibilities before they become obvious.*” (The Marketing Imagination, cited in Bible Illustrator, Parsons Technology, 1990); Henry Ford once said, “*I’m looking for a lot of men with an infinite capacity for not knowing what can’t be done*” (Henry Ford, cited at Ryan C. Nielsen’s website “Pastor2Youth.com” at www.pastor2youth.com/Illustrations/V/vision.html.) You see, while it DOES need a sense of grounding in reality, a true Godly Vision must NOT simply be something we can accomplish in our OWN strength or ability. Instead, it must leave room for God to work and to do what WE consider impossible.