

The Power of Vision

Message for Sunday, January 22, 2017
by Bruce Fraser

Scripture: Matthew 22:37-40, 28:19-20

Children's Message: John 6:38 "For I have come down from heaven not to do my will but to do the will of him who sent me."

Does anyone here know how to ride a bicycle? Ask one of them, "How do you make the bicycle stop?" To them, that will be pretty obvious: put on the brake. "But how exactly do you put on the brake." Likely answer: "Pull the brake lever."

Yes, that's right. But bikes weren't always like that. Way back in the old days, when I was growing up, we put the brakes on by pedaling backwards. I know that sounds weird, but that's how it worked. Pedal forward to make the bike move forward; pedal backwards to make the bike stop.

And then one day I was visiting my aunt and uncle who had a new bike. I asked if I could take it for a ride. It was one of the very first bikes that had brakes operated by hand. They showed me how to use it, and I said, "OK, I get it."

Away I went riding down the street. I came to a busy intersection, and I needed to stop for traffic. Can you guess what happened? ... I pedalled backwards, and sailed right through that intersection without even slowing down. Lucky for me the traffic stopped, and no one was hurt.

Now: did I deliberately disobey my aunt and uncle? Not really. I tried to stop, but just forgot and did it the way I had always done it.

That makes me think of what it means to obey God.

Jesus said that his aim in life was to obey the will of God. And Jesus says that's what we must do also. My aim in life should be to obey the will of God.

That means that I may need to change some of the ways I've always done things, some of my habits. Maybe they're not even bad habits, but God has an even better way for me to learn.

Message "The power of vision"

Here's a story from Russia, from the time when the czars were in power. A priest was walking along the street in Moscow, near the Kremlin palace, when a royal guard stopped him at gun point. The guard demanded to know: "What is your name? Why are you here, and where are you going?"

The priest gazed quizzically at the soldier and then asked, "How much do they pay you to do this work?"

The soldier, somewhat taken aback, replied, "Why, three kopeks a month."

"I'll pay you 30 kopeks a month if you will stop me every week and ask me these same questions," the priest said.

I love it! This is something which all of us should be able to answer, both individually and together as a church: "Who are we? Why are we here, and where are we going?"

1) Jesus was a person of vision

Jesus certainly knew the answer to those questions. There are many places in the gospels where Jesus tells what was his mission. The starting point was nothing profound: just simple obedience to his heavenly Father:

John 6:38, New Living Translation:

"For I have come down from heaven to do the will of God who sent me, not to do what I want."

Below are some of the scriptures where Jesus gives his vision of what his life was meant to accomplish.

Luke 4:18-19, New International Version:

[Jesus read from Isaiah,] "The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to bring good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim release to the captives and recovery of sight to the blind, to let the oppressed go free, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favour."

Luke 19:10, New International Version:

"The Son of Man came to seek and to save the lost."

Matthew 5:17, New International Version:

"Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them."

John 10:10-11, New Living Translation:

“The thief’s purpose is to steal and kill and destroy. My purpose is to give life in all its fullness. I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.”

Matthew 20:28, New Living Translation:

“For even I, the Son of Man, came here not to be served but to serve others, and to give my life as a ransom for many.”

John 3:16-17, New Living Translation:

“For God so loved the world that he gave his only Son, so that everyone who believes in him will not perish but have eternal life. God did not send his Son into the world to condemn it, but to save it.”

This was the vision that spurred Jesus into action. It also spurred him to anger when he saw religious leaders of his day dwelling on petty rules and regulations, and completely missing the big picture. That’s what vision does: it helps you to see the big picture, and it motivates you to action.

2) Jesus’ vision for the church

The vision we follow can’t be just any old idea that someone comes up with. When Jesus had completed his work and ascended to heaven, he made it clear that his mission was to continue. Our vision must be consistent with Jesus’ vision for the church. This vision is in two summary verses, the Great Commandment, and the Great Commission.

The Great Commandment

Matthew 22:37-40, New Living Translation:

“You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind.” This is the first and greatest commandment. A second is equally important: “Love your neighbour as yourself.” All the other commandments and all the demands of the prophets are based on these two commandments.

The Great Commission

Matthew 28:19-20, New Living Translation:

Go and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit. Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you. And be sure of this: I am with you always, even to the end of the age.

We can take these two paragraphs and distinguish five purposes in them.

Jesus’ teaching	Our Purpose
You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind	Worship
Love your neighbour as yourself	Ministry
Make disciples of all the nations	Evangelism
Baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit	Fellowship
Teach these new disciples to obey all the commands I have given you	Discipleship

We need to always keep these purposes in front of us, so we know why we’re here and where we’re going.

Junior Church leaders: when a child interrupts your carefully prepared lesson and says, “This is boring. Can’t we do something else?” — remember what you’re there for. What is your vision for the class? Maybe there is a better way to accomplish it... or maybe you should stay with what you’ve got. But always remember: where are we going?

Youth leaders: when the kids are acting up and you’re frustrated because it feels like you’re not getting anywhere — remember what you’re there for. Do the youth know what your vision and your purposes are? Once they see the big picture and get excited about it, they may be more eager to move towards it. Then again, they’ll still be full of raging hormones...☺

Council and committee members: when it seems like you’re dealing with the same issues over and over and over again, and not making any progress — remember what you’re there for. Where does all this fit in the big picture? Is it even important?

3) Put the picture and principles into practice

There’s one more obvious step. It’s fine to have a vision, and to have purposes and goals. But if it’s only talk, it doesn’t mean very much. We need to act on it.

Johnson & Johnson is one of those great American corporate classics. Three Johnson brothers started the company in 1886 with fourteen employees. Johnson & Johnson today has 127,000 employees worldwide and \$70 billion in sales each year.

Johnson & Johnson has produced some of the world's most well-known brands, including Johnson's Baby Powder, which was introduced in 1893; Band-Aids, introduced in 1920, and Tylenol, in 1960.

Their purpose statement is contained in their "Credo." It was written about 70 years ago by Robert Johnson, then company president. It talks about their corporate responsibility to their customers, employees, the community at large, and lastly their shareholders. It talks about honesty and integrity being important values. Making a profit is at the bottom of the list.

In 1982 the company faced a crisis. Someone had opened some bottles of Tylenol, put poison inside the capsules, and sealed them up again. Whether it was done at the factory, on the drugstore shelves, or somewhere in between, no one knew. Seven people in Chicago died before authorities were able to trace it back to the Tylenol bottles.

What should they do? They had no way of knowing how many bottles had been tampered with; if the culprit was doing it to still more bottles. They could recall and destroy every bottle of Tylenol that was on store shelves or in warehouses — but their head of finance cautioned that would cost them \$75 million!

A few weeks before this incident, the president of Johnson and Johnson had sent a memo to all the presidents of all the divisions and subsidiaries, asking if they still believed in the Credo, and were following it. All replied in the affirmative.

There wasn't time to call an emergency meeting of the Board of Directors. The president simply made the decision. The order went out: "Take all the Tylenol out of the system." They also immediately implemented a new system of sealing bottles to make them tamper-proof.

When reporters later asked how he could decide so easily and so rapidly on such a major decision, his replied, "I was practicing what we agreed on in our Credo."

When you have a vision, and you see where you want to go, the way to get there becomes much clearer.

Still, that decision took courage. That's what vision is like. That's what faith is like. That's what makes being a Christian so exciting: it involves going out into unknown territory.

I'll close with a quote from Norman Vincent Peale.

If you think little, and believe little, and pray little, you will come out little. But if you think big, and believe big, and pray big, you will come out big. To start thinking like that requires a leap of faith.

Someone once said that there are two kinds of church people: the "saints" and the "ain'ts". The saints think big, believe big, and pray big. The "ain'ts" think little, believe little, and pray little. They are the ones whose every move is hedged by limitations, and every action is determined by fear.

"It ain't possible!", they say. It just won't work. Sure, Jesus said to go into all the world, feed the hungry, and forgive our enemies — but it won't work.

"We ain't done it that way before!", they say. Every innovative program, every creative idea is immediately rejected. The old way is the only way.

"I ain't gonna help!", they say. They've served their time. The task is too hard. They don't have the talent for it. We don't have the money for it. They're too old, too young, too short, too tall, or too bald. Whatever the excuse, they ain't gonna do it.

Well, the "saints" have a message for the "ain'ts". It is possible. There are new ways to do it. And the power to do it is not dependent upon your talent, but upon your surrender to the will of God. That is the way of the cross.