DREAMS & VISIONS: GOD’S PURPOSE FOR OUR LIVES (PART 3)

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DREAMS AND VISIONS IN THE SONG BOOK

Many congregational hymns contain references to dreams and visions. The following are some samples from The Salvation Army Song Book:

‘Clear to faith’s vision the cross reveals beautiful actions of love.’

‘Before we taste of death / We see thy Kingdom come / O might we hold the vision bright / And make this hill our home.’

‘O for the time of Christ’s completed mission! / Throbs of its rapture reach us as we pray; / Gleams of its glory bursting on our vision / Speed us to labour, urge us on our way.’

‘We have caught the vision splendid / Of a world which is to be.’

‘Like the arching of the heavens, / Lift my thoughts above; / Turn my dreams to noble action, / Ministries of love.’

From this very small sample we can appreciate that not only do the actual words ‘dream’ or ‘vision’ appear, but they are linked with a certain expectation of commitment to these visions/dreams.

However, many of the songs we sing in church contain an emphasis on the imperative for Christians to commit to the mission. Even though the words ‘dream’ or ‘vision’ are not mentioned, the intention of the song is clear: Take some time to consider your involvement with God’s vision and determine your own personal vision.

No matter how we may feel about a personal mission statement, we must seek God’s purposes at all times. It is also imperative that we align ourselves to making a connection with that vision. This is not an optional extra like buying a motor car and deciding if we want a sun roof or not. Every Christian must engage with God’s mission and to see the world from His perspective. This will affect the way in which we engage with congregational worship. It will affect the way we are seen by our neighbours, and our friends and work colleagues. In fact, it will impact on all our relationships from that moment on, and we will know that we can never be the same again.

So then, what is God’s perspective? What is it about him that makes us want to identify with his purposes? Again we find in the Song Book (song 748) some understanding:

O Lord we long to see your face,
To know you risen from the grave;
But we have missed the joy and grace
Of seeing you as others have.
Yet in your company we’ll wait
And we shall see you, soon or late.

We sing with much enthusiasm, ‘I’ll go in the strength of the Lord’, but fail to prescribe what that will look like in everyday life. It can be frightening and quite scary. It can also be liberating and exciting as we participate as partners with God in bringing about his vision for our world.

We must bear in mind that at the very beginning, God looked at what he had created and saw that it was good. That is to say, he saw it as being perfect. We need to find a way of aligning our vision with this view of God’s vision. That it was perfect.

What has happened to this world that it has lost that state of perfection? It breaks the heart of God that this world has become somewhat less than he intended it to be: perfect.

How can we recapture this vision and to align ourselves once more with this perspective? What do the young people of the church need to do to recapture this kind of vision and what kind of dreaming do then old people need to engage in so that they can be in tune with God’s dream once more?

Perhaps we can learn from the past and go on to achieve God’s mission by examining a little more closely what was happening at that time.

In the instance of Peter and his ‘creepy crawley’ vision when he learned that the good news of the Gospel was for everyone and not just for the Jewish community. We can detect a significant shift in his thinking.

Indeed we can see ‘the vision splendid’ of which we sing coming into Peter’s mind. He was quite strong in his defence that he had not eaten anything that was unclean or not kosher. The Holy Spirit took hold of him and he quickly changed his view once he learned there were men downstairs waiting to see him having been sent on their mission by Cornelius.

It was now up to him to have his vision confirmed as he responded to the prompting of the Spirit that day.

THE CASE FOR DREAMS AND VISIONS IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Not so long ago, Steve Jobs, the co-founder and former CEO of Apple, passed away. This is the company that gave the world iPad, iPod, and Macintosh computers. He died at the age of 56 after battling pancreatic cancer.

O Lord we long to see your face,
Various journalists describe him as a dreamer and a visionary. David Jean (Adelaide Advertiser) wrote that ‘Steve Job’s visionary mix of computer and marketing genius changed the world.’ And in the same newspaper Sam Kelton said, ‘Steve Job’s dreams were large enough to change the world yet small enough to hold in your hands.’

My, wouldn’t I like that to be said of me, that I had a vision to change the world and left something behind which demonstrated this.

Walt Disney president Robert Iger said, ‘Steve Jobs was an original with a thoroughly creative, imaginative mind that defined an era.’

It is one thing to read about dreams and visions from yeystereyear, but what is the argument for such experiences today? To what extent can church leadership be reliant on the dreams of its old people and the visions of its young people in this century?

The younger generation seem to capture the vision more readily than those who are older. The older generations seem to want to retain the status quo or even the way things used to be. While we can be concerned about throwing the proverbial baby out with the bathwater, we must guard against holding on to previous traditions just for the sake of it. This was the issue for Peter in the ‘creepy crawley’ vision. It was previously thought the gospel was only for those with a Jewish background.

What we must consider is whether we want to have a dream or a vision of what the world could be like and commit to making the change.

Glenn Chapman offers the following on Steve Jobs: ‘Steve Jobs touched so many lives that people around the world turned ‘Sad’ upon the news of his death, pausing to share thoughts about the charismatic innovator who shaped modern culture.’

Tributes poured in from notables such as US President Barack Obama and Bill Gates. However, it was the scale of outpouring from ordinary people around the world hammering out characters on Jobs’ own inventions that was staggering.

Facebook member Pallav Desai wrote on the page, ‘I say it was more than a product—it was a fight of a person who battled cancer; who was thrown out of his company, and still came back and showed the world iWAS, iAM an individual, iWILL change the world!’

Is it any wonder that such an individual had a major affect upon so many people in his lifetime? He expressed a desire to change the world and who would dare to argue that he has not done that? Steve Jobs’ creative mind has made a significant change to the electronic world and the way in which we engage with it.

And isn’t it true of those people who have made their mark down the corridors of time? People like Christopher Columbus, who was not convinced that the world was flat, and Thomas Edison who racked up a remarkable number of inventions in his lifetime. Others come to mind, like the early settlers of Australia who faced extraordinary odds to settle and establish this land.

It seems to me that the people who make their mark on life by virtue of their specialist life of interest are possessed with a vision or a dream to make this world a better place. They are convinced that they can make a difference and commit themselves to making it happen.

Now the questions arise, ‘What drives them? Who are they that they can come forth with such life-changing objectives?’

First, they are passionate about the idea or its association with a product. They set about establishing the reason for change to occur and they pursue it and ‘sell’ the idea to others.

Secondly they recruit interest and support from colleagues, acquaintances and friends. Some of these will commit financial support on the basis of ensuring the idea will have enough resources to see it come about.

Finally, they do not let failure deter them from their chosen objective. They fight on and learn what they can when something doesn’t quite go according to plan.

Overarching everything is their passion that this ‘thing’ will change people’s lives for the good.

The dreams and visions of the people who call themselves Christians should carry with them the same elements as those above. We must be passionate about all we do. We must secure the support of other interested parties and when everything doesn’t quite turn out right, we don’t give up.

William Booth, Founder of The Salvation Army has said: ‘I consider the chief danger which confronts the coming century will be religion without the Holy Ghost, Christianity without Christ, forgiveness without repentance, salvation without regeneration, politics without God and heaven without hell.’

Booth has planted before us the potential travesty of what is good and right about our experience of God. God is good and he is good all the time. If his Kingdom is to grow it must be on his terms. We must capture God’s dreams and visions for the world.

The Founder expanded on his vision in a well-known speech given not long before his passing:

‘While women weep, as they do now, I’ll fight; while children go hungry, as they do now, I’ll fight; while men go to prison, in and out, and out, as they do now I’ll fight; while there is a drunkard left, while there is a poor lost girl upon the streets while there remains one dark soul without the light of God I’ll fight; I’ll fight to the very end.’

Clearly, William Booth had a vision of a world that would be better than the one he saw back in 1912, the year that he died.

Others refer to a better world in an interesting manner. Novelist Ken Follett, in his latest book Fall of Giants (built around the events of WWI) comments on a better world:

‘But somehow the picture of that nine-year-old [girl] pathetically imitating a come hither smile wrenched his heart. It made him weep for his country. We are turning our children into prostitutes, he thought, can it possibly get any worse?’

In the Melbourne Herald Sun newspaper on 10 December 2011, Wendy Tuohy had an interview with Kristina Karlsson, who runs a stationery business in Australia and New Zealand. In response to one question she responds: ‘Having a crystal-clear vision of what you want to achieve is essential. Let it guide your decision making and your team, and when times get tough—and they will—your vision will be strong enough to pull you and everyone else through.’

This is the kind of thing we need to capture for God’s work through his people on Earth—His Church!

How can we capture God’s vision/dream for the world in which we live? How can we embrace his call to do something that will make a difference?