

## I HAVE A VISION

A sermon delivered by Batsell Barrett Baxter on September 22, 1963 at the Hillsboro Church of Christ, Nashville, Tennessee, and heard over radio station WLAC at 8:05 P.M.

There is a story of an old Indian chief who had three sons. Desiring to give his possessions and his blessing to the one of those sons who showed the greatest prowess and the greatest promise, he called them to him one day and pointed to a very high mountain that stood out bold against the sky. He told each of the boys to climb as far as he could climb and then to bring back something to show how far he had gone. The first of the boys came back with a white wild flower. The father knew that it grew above timberline. The second came back with a red flint stone. The father knew that it had been picked up near the top. The third boy was a little longer in coming back and when he got back he had nothing in his hands. "Father," he said, "where I went there was nothing to bring back. But I stood at the summit and I beheld a great valley with two shining rivers that eventually join the sea." The old Indian replied, "My son, it has been the ambition of my life that one of my sons should see what you have seen. You have nothing in your hands, but you have something far more important--you have a vision in your soul. This is the greatest thing."

George Bailey told this story a few years ago when he returned from a trip of some 50,000 miles across and around the Pacific Ocean. He had gone north to Alaska, then west to Japan and Korea, south to China, the Philippines, New Zealand and Australia, and then home by way of Hawaii. When he was home he told the story of the old Indian father and then said, "As I stand before you today I have nothing in my hands, but I have a vision in my soul."

Somehow this story seems appropriate here today. It has been a long summer. I have seen several other countries and many of the states of our own union. I have become familiar with many new facts. I have been a part of many conversations. I recall deep impressions. Most significant of all, I see great masses of people. So, I come home after 18,000 miles of travel, as it were, with nothing in my hand, but with a vision in my soul.

I have a vision of a world that has great needs. There are the basic elemental needs of food, shelter, clothing and the necessities of life. I have seen dirty children on the east side of London and the tenement houses that stretch on for miles with never a front yard large enough to serve as a play area for children. Beyond those countries where I have been there are scores of others where poverty is even greater. We are reminded of Jesus' words in Mark 14:7, "The poor you have always with you." This truly is one of the world's great needs, for half of the people of the earth go to bed hungry every night.

### Sensualism

But there are deeper needs. I think of the world and its sensualism. The impressions are more vivid than before. During this particular summer it was almost embarrassing to read the newspapers in Britain. The moral decay spread across the pages of the papers, in lurid accounts telling of the exposes that almost toppled, and may yet topple, a political party. But it is not only in Britain that there is moral decay, or as the Bible speaks of it, "the lust of the flesh." It is disturbingly common throughout the world. We remember the words of the apostle Paul to the Galatians, chapter six, verses seven and eight, "Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. For he that soweth unto his own flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth unto the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap eternal life."

### Materialism

Another of the impressions is of the materialism of our world. Secularism has engulfed Great Britain, but it has also engulfed our country and the rest of the world. I think of a brief, fleeting glance into the gambling houses of Nevada with their seemingly endless rows of slot machines and their countless patrons. I think of our large cities with their magnificent expressways and their overabundance of cars and factories and houses. The materialism of our day is perhaps the greatest danger we Christians face. Again we think of the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:26, "For what shall a man be profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and forfeit his life? of what shall a man give in exchange for his life?" This fits with something Jesus said, as mentioned in Luke 12:15, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth." Then there comes a choice statement from the pen of the apostle John, I John 2:15-17, "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eye and the vainglory of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world." And then he says, "The world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever." Along with the great sensualism there is this great materialism. Both are sins. They are all about us, they are throughout the world, and they will sweep us away unless we are vigilant in our guard.

### Tensions

The problems of the world do not stop here. They go on to include the great tensions between nations, and in this particular year, the intense racial tensions. As we think of these tensions we remember other words of our Lord. In John 13:34-35 he said, "A new

commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another, even as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another." The badge of the Christian is love toward all men. I have said that these are parts of a vision of a world with deep needs. It is really a vision of a world in need of Christ. Like the apostle Paul, we, too, have a Macedonian call (Acts 16:9-10). The great commission is also still in effect. The need of our world is to hear Christ.

### A Great Church

I have another vision. It is a vision of a great church. If this vision were the only vision it would be depressing, but I have a vision of a great church with qualified, zealous elders and deacons and 1250 members who hold up their hands. It is a great church which might well be characterized by Paul's phrase in Titus 3:1, "Ready unto every good work." It is a church that gives more than \$100,000 a year for others. This vision is of the many who so faithfully come and give and sing and pray and live their Christianity. You are a beacon light in England and in so many other places. Beyond you there are other great congregations, some larger, many smaller, but like you in dedication to the Lord. It is these congregations which make up the Lord's church which are the hope of our world. Paul spoke of the church as "the pillar and ground of the truth." (I Tim. 3:15).

### Young People

I also have a vision of a great host of young people. Some of you are here today and others are scattered throughout the land. You have some wonderful experiences just ahead of you. Some of them will not be easy but they will mold and make you into what God wants you to be. As we think of young people we cannot begin to think of their full potentials, the possibilities that are within each one, especially in the earlier formative years.

In looking back at some of the young people I have known over the past ten or twelve years, I find grounds for great encouragement. I think of a boy from California, who preached during his student days for a small church just outside of Nashville. Carl Thompson is in Ethiopia preaching the gospel of Christ there today. I think of Glenn Martin, who is in Nigeria in his second term of work. I think of Charles Moore and the five thousand miles he drove one spring to find a congregation that would sponsor him so that he could go to Sicily to preach the gospel. I think of Deiter Alten who was a most brilliant student. He is back in Hamburg, Germany, preaching to his own people--one of the greatest preachers of this generation. I think of Philip Slate in London. With his special talents and deep consecration, he is deeply impressive in the right kind of way. He is a representative of Christ in that second largest city of the world.

On the other side of the continent and across the Pacific, I think of Billy Smith who gave up his secular job with an airline and came back to college even though he was mature in years and had a family. He finished his training and is now in Japan as a missionary. I think of Haskell Cheshir, full of zeal and full of ideas as he works in Korea. In the Philippines there is Rafael Aquillar teaching in a Bible school every day in the week and preaching to his own people. These are just a few of the young people who a few short years ago were wondering what they would do with their lives and where they would spend them. Now they know.

We hope during this year that those of you who come to worship with us will have your minds filled with wholesome, uplifting ideas like Paul described in Phil. 4, when he said, "Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honorable, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report: if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think of these things." (Phil. 4:8). We hope that your values will be conformed to the values that God mentions in his book. We hope that we can help you find the vision of the jobs that need to be done and the inspiration and the faith to go out and do them. Heed Solomon's words, "Remember also thy Creator in the days of thy youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them." (Eccles. 12:1). I have seen a vision of a world that is in great need, but I also see a vision of great congregations and great numbers of young people, larger numbers than ever before, who are ready to go out and meet that need.

### Just An Individual

Someone says, "Well, I am just one, I am just an individual." So was Moses, but you remember his record. He was just one, but what a turn he gave to history because he yielded himself to God. Or maybe you think of Joseph who because of his purity, his righteous life and his dedication to God became governor of Egypt. Or maybe you think of Daniel who rose from being a foreigner in a strange land to being one of the prime ministers in three different regimes because of the quality of his life. Or maybe you think of Paul who went out and preached throughout the whole Roman empire in one generation. It was not their power that made them succeed. As Paul said, "I can do all things through Christ that strengtheneth me." (Phil. 4:13).

The potentials within one individual are tremendous. They can be evil as well as good. I remember seeing the Reich chancellery in Berlin after it had been blown to bits, but in that building Hitler almost conquered the world. Or you can think of Karl Marx, or Vladimir Lenin. They were individuals. On the good side in our own land you can think of Henry Ford, who by introducing mass production revolutionized industry and the living habits of a nation. Or you can think of Thomas A. Edison. Through his experiments in a laboratory in East Orange, New Jersey, he added half a dozen hours of daylight to everybody's day. You can go on and on. These were just individuals. As a band of God's people we need to see a world that is in great need and then we need to go out and do something about it. It all begins as we give ourselves to God.

## The City of God

I see a vision of a great city, a city toward which we are going. Some of us will cross over during this year. For others of us it will be next year or next decade or perhaps, for a few, next century. May we have the vision to see God's city, to become God's children and then to live and work for him so that someday we can live with him. Nothing is as important as this. Our journey begins with the dedication of our lives to the Lord. Some of us are not yet Christians. Come, confess your faith in Christ, repent of your sins, be buried with him in baptism. Others of us may need to rededicate our lives to the Lord. Come, begin again to serve the Lord. It may be that others have moved among us and would like to be a part of this church. Whatever your relationship to the Lord, if you need to change it, this is a wonderful time in which to do so. The Lord's invitation is for you. Hear it and accept it now!