

Where There Is No Vision The People Perish

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"Where there is no vision, the people perish; but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. "-Proverbs 29:18.

I think this text, like many in the Bible, is sometimes used incorrectly. "Where there is no vision, the people perish." When we come to read a text from the Bible, it is always good to see exactly what God is talking about.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." In the first place, the word "vision" used here has to do with the Word of God. Where there is no Word of God, where there is no message of life, the people perish, is the primary interpretation of this passage.

This passage is used just in that manner in other places in the Bible. For instance, in I Samuel 3:1 we read, *"The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision."* You remember in the Old Testament God sometimes spoke audibly. God does not speak audibly today. I believe when John was on the Isle of Patmos, God gave the book of the Revelation. His Revelation was complete to mankind. God does not speak audibly today. He speaks through His Word. All that God has to say to us, He says through this blessed Book-the Bible. There was a day, intermittently in the history of man, in which God spoke audibly to people. We read, "The word of the Lord was precious in those days; there was no open vision." God was not speaking audibly at that time. I read in Lamentations 2:9, *"her prophets also find no vision from the Lord,"* that is, no message from God.

I want to use this text from Proverbs as I believe it has been used in the minds of people down through the years. *"Where there is no vision, the people perish."* I think that it speaks of another kind of vision-a work of God in the hearts of men and women. That is of tremendous importance.

I read, for instance, of the day of Pentecost. In Acts 2:17 God speaks of the kind of vision that I have on my heart, the vision that I could wish every man and every woman and every boy and girl who is saved and who knows the Lord Jesus Christ could have.

In Acts 2:17 we read,

"And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh: and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams."

Now that is the kind of vision that I am talking about this morning. God said the work of the Spirit shall be that *"your young men shall see visions."* Paul spoke of visions. Paul said in Acts 26:19, *"I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."* It is the "heavenly vision," seeing things God wants us to see, that I am tremendously interested in. "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

When you speak of visions, there should be a word of caution. Sometimes people think that they have messages from God, when, I am sure, sincere though they may be, they have not heard from the Lord. I think because sometimes the Lord's people eat too much too late at night, they have some wild dream and the next day lay it on God.

For instance, there was a good lady whom we loved very much. She was a spiritual mother to us. She said, "I was about half asleep the other afternoon when I had a vision." She was going into detail how she was sitting, which I am sure, didn't matter to anyone. She said, "In my vision, you were to be the pastor of the church."

I didn't say much to her, but I got to thinking, Her church already has a pastor and I am sure God didn't say anything to him about it. God always authenticated His visions which He gave to people. I was already pastoring a church and one was enough. God hadn't said a word to me. So I dismissed her vision from my mind.

I am not talking about that kind of a vision. "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision," Paul said. That vision was fourfold and if I had the time I would deal with this fourfold heavenly vision.

He had a vision of himself.

He had a vision of himself. He had never seen himself before. He looked upon himself as religious, proud and arrogant. He thought that he was something and somebody, but God knew he was only a sinner. One day God knocked him off his horse literally. He groveled in the dust, blinded by the indescribable glory of God. There on the ground he saw himself as a Hell bound sinner and cried out, "Lord, who art Thou, and what do You want me to do?" He saw himself.

He saw his service.

He saw the service that God would use him in, once he was saved.

He saw his separation

He saw the separating act of God's power lifting him out of the world and placing him into the body of Christ, giving him a job to do for all eternity.

He saw a vision of Jesus Christ.

He saw a vision of Jesus Christ, the like of which he had never seen before. "I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision."

That is the kind of vision that I want to talk to you about in this message,

"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. "-Proverbs. 29:18.

I. We Need to Have a Vision of Lost Souls

I do not think that there has ever been an hour in the history of the church when the people of God needed to have a vision of souls that are lost like that vision is needed in this day and hour. You listen to the conversation of Christians, and you listen to the preaching of preachers, and you are bound to come to the conclusion that the church today, the modern-day church, yes, even the fundamental, Bible believing church of this hour, does not have a vision of souls that are lost.

God gave that vision to Paul. Acts 16 is one of the most dramatic chapters in the Bible. Things happened. People were saved. Families were baptized. Cities were stirred. Earthquakes happened. Prayers were answered. Jails were destroyed. And the work of God went on. Chapter 16 of the book of Acts is a great chapter.

In that chapter, inverse 9, I read, "*And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.*" We need to see what Paul saw that night. When God brought a man to stand before Paul, he heard that night that man say, "Come, help us." That is a vision every Christian needs to see. We need to hear the cry of the lost souls of this world, still crying after two thousand years, "Come, help us." That is the cry of lost humanity.

He saw a vision of a man saying, "Come, help us," and Paul set out to follow that vision. Into Macedonia Paul went, and there at Philippi a mighty revival took place. People were saved; people were baptized; the church was born; the work of God went on, and these lost souls began to hear the message of truth.

God give us a vision of lost souls! Jesus saw them. Listen, if you want to see what Jesus saw, if you are interested in what Jesus is interested in, you are going to have a vision of lost souls. Matthew 9:36 says, "But when he saw the multitudes, he was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."

Listen, Jesus saw the multitudes. He didn't see them as prospective votes. He didn't see them as statistics. He saw them as souls. Friends, the church of Jesus today needs to see a vision of lost souls. How many Christians today do you hear talking about missionary work? How many Christians today do you hear talking about visitation work? How many Christians today do you hear talking about revival? How many Christians do you hear today in the average church praising the Lord for souls that are being saved? The lack of all this is an indication that we need a vision of lost souls.

I wish that we could have the vision today that David Brainerd had. He died at the age of 29, but he had a vision of the Indians who were lost and without God. He saw them not just as enemies to the white man but as souls for whom Christ died. The color of their skin meant nothing to him. He saw them as people who would go to Heaven or to Hell. He knelt in the snow and prayed until consumption gripped his frail body. But people came to Christ.

I read of one old Indian who used to follow David Brainerd seeking to do him harm, but he saw him kneel in the snow and lift his hands to God and his heart toward Heaven and pray, "O God, may these red men be saved." At the age of 29, with tuberculosis literally eating his body away, he laid down his life, but he is remembered today as a man who had a vision for the souls of the Indian people.

We need a vision like Livingstone had when he went to that dark continent of Africa. In his day some had never seen the face of a white man. They said, "We never knew we were black because we never had seen a man who was white until David Livingstone came." All the years of his fruitful life, he

walked among them. He braved the rigors of that land, the diseases that racked his body, the fever that almost killed him. He loved them to God until thousands were saved. They found him dead in the little pup tent, kneeling at his cot, praying, "O God, give me Africa!"-a prayer he always prayed. He died, literally, on his knees.

They lifted his body and sent it back to England, to be buried in Westminster Abbey. In the middle aisle where kings and important people of history are buried, lies the body of David Livingstone. The natives said, "His body belongs to England but his heart belongs to Africa. Leave it here." So his heart was taken from his body and buried in the soil of Africa. That was where his heart was.

I ask you this morning, "Where is your heart when it comes to the souls of men?"

We need a vision that Hudson Taylor had when he went to China. After some twenty years in China, in 1880 there were 70 missionaries and 70 preaching stations because of the work of Hudson Taylor.

Taylor had put, "God first in my life," on every piece of his luggage he put on the boat. He meant by that that God had given him a vision of China.

We need a vision like William Booth had when he saw the neglected derelicts of the slums of London. He left the formal church in London and out into the slums he went to start the Salvation Army.

We need a vision, my friends, of lost souls. I thank God for the souls that are saved in the Emmanuel Baptist Church. I never take it for granted when a little boy or girl, or a man or a woman, a youth or a family, or man and wife, walk the aisles to trust Jesus Christ as their personal Saviour. I thank God for every precious soul that is saved.

But I cannot help thinking of the hundreds who have never won anyone. I cannot help thinking of those people who never make an effort to get people down the aisles to kneel at Calvary and to be saved. When the news came to me recently of the death of the father of one of the ladies in our church, I thanked God I could remember the day I went into the home and had the privilege of leading that elderly man to Christ. I thank God that I shall not have to go empty-handed into the presence of the Christ, who gave His life for me.

Listen, my friends, where there is no vision, souls are lost. Where there is no vision, God said, people perish! The lack of vision on the part of the church means the destruction of men and women in this city of Pontiac. We need a vision of lost souls.

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II. We Need a Vision of the Judgment Seat of Christ

When people talk about judgment, usually Christian people, they think of a Great White Throne judgment, when people are lost and stand before a holy God and the books are opened and the names are read and they are then assigned to the lake of fire forever. But there is another judgment in the Bible never mentioned very much and that judgment is not for sinners but for saints. It is called the judgment seat of Christ. Paul often spoke of it. Romans 14:10 says, ".for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ." My Christian brother and sister, may God grip your heart with the truth that every believer will stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

You say, "What is that judgment all about?" It is not to determine whether you are saved. That is as settled right now as it will ever be. If you are God's child, it will never come into question whether you are a Christian or not. Then God will not deal with you as a sinner; He will deal with you as a son. At the judgment seat of Christ, God will deal with His children. That is why Paul says in Romans 14:12, "So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God." I wish the Holy Spirit would take that verse and burn it indelibly into our hearts. So then every one of us shall give an account to God.

Many times Christians are treated wrongly by other Christians. Sometimes they want to get revenge, but remember that God says, "*Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord.*" (Romans 12:19)

I got a letter from a man the other day telling me how he had been wrongfully treated a few weeks ago. Then he said in his letter, "I am amazed that these Christians still go unpunished." I have not written him yet, but when I write I will tell him that they may go through this life unpunished. He may never see the chastisement of God upon them. But I will tell you one thing: The hour will come when God will punish Christians who have done wrong.

"So then everyone of us shall give account of himself to God." Oh, how absurd for that Christian to say, "I will do as I please. I will act as I will. I will treat others as I choose. No one can make me do differently." Remember the judgment seat, my friends.

You say, "Well, what will happen? Will I lose my soul?" No, you won't lose your soul, but God's Word says you will be saved "so as by fire." (I Corinthians 3:15)

In II Corinthians 5:10 we read, "*For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ,*" but I think the verse before that has something important to say about it. Verse 9 says, "*Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.*" I am told that this is translated,

"Therefore we labour that we may be well pleasing to him." Then God's Word says, "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ."

Here, my friends, is an important thing in the life of a Christian. Please God. Do right. Be sure that God is pleased with you. You may ask why this is important. The judgment seat of Christ, that is why. You see that proud Christian who can do as he pleases, he thinks. Wait a minute-the judgment seat of Christ. You see that Christian out in the world who says, "Why, I am not going to be a fanatic like those people in the Emmanuel Baptist Church and be so straight laced." Wait a minute-the judgment seat of Christ.

Do you please the Lord? That will be the thing at the judgment seat of Christ. We need a vision of the judgment seat of Christ. I don't think many people are thinking about it. I don't think many saved people ever think of the judgment seat when a man's works shall be placed there. A Christian's work, his life, shall be placed there, tried and examined. God's Word says, *".saved; yet so as by fire."* The wood and the hay and the stubble will be burned up and only the real thing will stand the test of the judgment seat.

I read the story of a man in the London subway. Hundreds of people were trying to get a ticket to the subway. One man said to the ticket agent, "Does all this bother you?"

He answered, "No, there is only one thing that concerns me."

The man asked, "What is that?"

The ticket agent pointed up and said, "To please that one up there."

The man who was asking looked up and there on the door of the ticket office was "Superintendent." He stood there and thought a moment of what the ticket agent had said about wanting to please the one up there.

That ought to be the testimony of every Christian. Does all this bother you? No! Only one thing concerns me-to please Him up there. Why? The judgment seat of Christ.

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III. We Need a Vision of the Horrors of Hell

Third, Christians need to see a picture of what Hell is like. Christians today act like they do not believe that sinners are going to Hell. Unsaved people do not act like they believe that at the end of a Christless life there is an eternal Hell. I believe with all my heart that we need a vision of the horrors of Hell. The Bible says so much about it, yet people think so little about it.

I could take the Bible and show you that when Jesus talked about Hell, He never talked about it as much to the unsaved as He did to the people of God or at least to Christian people. I believe when Christians have a vision of the horrors of Hell and what the Bible teaches about it, it will make them the right kind of Christians.

I heard an old-fashioned preacher say one time, "If we had more preaching of Hell from the pulpit, we would have less living like Hell in the pews." I believe we need in America, and we need in fundamental churches, a crusade of old-fashioned, red-hot Bible preaching on the horrors of Hell. It would get people saved and wake them up and make soul winners out of the people of God.

I want to ask and answer three or four questions out of the Bible on the subject of Hell. Perhaps we will get it on our hearts, as God knows it should be.

Where is Hell?

So many people say, "Where is Hell?" The Bible answers that question in Matthew 11:23, *"And thou, Capernaum, which art exalted unto heaven, shalt be brought down to Hell."* Hell is down. Heaven is up. Hell is opposite from Heaven. The Bible teaches us that Hell is down. Many times in the Bible it is emphasized that Hell is down.

I never will forget an experience I had that made me appreciate being saved. Some years ago we were visiting in a little town called Puteoli in Italy, where Paul came in on his way into Rome. While we were there someone said, "While you are here, you ought to go up into the mountains and visit some lava pools." We went into the mountains near this little Italian town and there was what was called "Little Sulphatara." There was boiling hot lava coming up out of the earth. There were barricades all around it and the guides kept cautioning people. We watched this lava keep boiling up out of the earth. The guide said, "That's 800 degrees Fahrenheit. If one of you were to fall in this pool of molten lava, we would never find the wrist watch from your arm or the buttons from your clothing. You would be immediately destroyed."

I stood there watching this boiling out of the bowels of the earth and I thought on all the teaching of the Bible about Hell, the home of the unsaved, separated from God, eternally tormented. You know, it is an undesirable subject, but it is a Bible subject.

Where is Hell? Hell is down. Where is Hell? It is at the end of a Christless life.

When is Hell? When does Hell begin?

When is Hell? When does Hell begin? It begins the moment the unsaved person leaves this world. Jesus told about two men in Luke 16. One was a beggar; the other a rich man. Some people get the wrong impression about this. One was a poor man; the other a rich man. Some people think that the poor man was saved because he was poor and that the rich man was lost because he was rich. That has nothing to do with it. Some poor folks will go to Hell and there will be some rich people in Heaven. Jesus said the beggar died and was carried by angels into Abraham's bosom. The rich man died and in Hell, he lifted up his eyes, being in torment. Out of a life of sin, into the torments of Hell. Hell is at the end of a Christless life.

I have had people say to me, "Preacher, how can you explain how a God of love, a God of grace, a God of mercy, a God who loves people-how can He ever put people in Hell?" God doesn't put people in Hell. People put themselves in Hell! A God of love gave His Son to die on the cross of Calvary that people might be saved and not go to Hell.

Jesus is talking about Hell in Matthew 25:41: *"Depart from me, ye cursed, into everlasting fire, prepared for the devil and his angels."* Hell is a place primarily prepared for the Devil and his angels. People are going to spend eternity in a place where God never wanted them to go. God is a God of love. He doesn't want people in Hell. Hell is prepared for the Devil and his angels.

Who is going to Hell? Who is in Hell?

Then some people ask the question, "Who is going to Hell? Who is in Hell?" Revelation 21:8 says, "But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whore mongers, and sorcerers, and idolaters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death."

I was talking to a man not long ago. I told him, like any Christian would tell an unsaved person he was trying to lead to the Lord, "There are only two places to spend eternity-one is in Heaven, the other is in Hell."

He said to me, "Who said so? Who said there is a Hell?"

I said to him, "Jesus said so."

In Mark 9:43-48 five times we read where Jesus said, *"The fire is not quenched."* Jesus said it, the holy Jesus, the tender Jesus, the Jesus who died on the cross for the sins of man. He said, "Where the fire is not quenched."

I was visiting in a home some years ago where there was a drunkard husband and father. He drank up his money and his little children went without the necessities of life. There was his little discouraged wife poorly clothed, home poorly furnished. You could see it was the result of a drunken life. As I talked to that mother about being saved, she said to me, "Preacher, I believe I am getting my hell here on earth."

I said, "No, lady, no one gets his hell here on earth. You get your Hell hereafter."

A person who rejects Jesus Christ is going to a place in eternity where Jesus said the fire is never quenched. It never goes out.

Oh, sometimes intellectuals (they call themselves), people who have religion and emphasize culture and refinement, say, "Well, I don't like to hear talk about that."

But that is not the way you do about other things. We tell our little children, "Now, that hot stove will burn." We correct our little child as he stands by the fire and we say, "It will burn." We tell them it is dangerous. It will kill them. We point to the street where the automobiles run and say, "Those cars will hit you and kill you." We point to the water and say, "Be careful; you can drown in it." And the Word of God points to Hell and says to the sinner, "I warn you, that is where you will go if you are not saved." Every single lost man and woman without Jesus Christ is a candidate for Hell. We need to think about it. We need a vision of it.

I read a story that took place during World War II. It is said that when London was being bombed, and it looked as if she would be bombed into the ocean by the German Air Force, with people running and screaming for shelter, a woman was heard to say, "This is hell." A Christian man heard her and he said, "No, Ma'am, this is not Hell."

She said, "How do you know?"

"I saw a man giving out some tracts a short while ago. There will never be a tract given out in Hell. I saw some Christian people that I knew on this block headed for shelter. And there are no Christians in Hell." He said, "In Hell there is no hope. Someday this will all end, but Hell-never. I know that this is not Hell and I thank God that I know I am not going there." And he told the woman about the message of hope.

We need a vision of Hell. I think if you, Christian friend with loved ones who are lost, could see them dancing and burning in the fires of the infernal and eternal Hell, surely that would move your heart.

Think of your neighbors, your lost family, lost without God and in Hell. Surely we need a vision of what it means for lost souls to go to Hell.

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IV. We Need a Vision of the Church and Its Importance

I am just absolutely positive that there are a good many people who do not give the emphasis to the church of Jesus Christ that God gives to it in His Word. I know that some may go too far and they might even emphasize the church above the head of the church. I would not want to be guilty of that. But the Word of God emphasizes over and over the local church and its importance.

Who is in the church?

Who is in that church? People who are born again. The people of God. Jesus said in John 3:5,7, "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, Except a man be born of water and of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God. . Marvel not that I said unto thee, Ye must be born again." Born-again people, bloodshed, Spirit-indwelt, born-again people make up the body of Christ-the bride of Christ.

What is the purpose the church?

What is the purpose of it? I talked to a man in my home the other night who said, "I am a Christian but have never joined a church and never expect to. There are too many imperfect people in it." Such people take the church of Jesus Christ too lightly.

I think the purpose of the church is to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth. In Mark 16:15 Jesus gave the church's purpose: "And he said unto them, Go ye into all the world, and preach the gospel to every creature."

Why do I need the church?

Why do I need this body of people that is made up of born-again people, whose purpose is to take the Gospel to the ends of the earth? The Word of God answers that in Acts 20:28: ".feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood." In the church of God you are fed spiritual food.

You cannot get spiritual food anywhere else. You say, "Well, I can stay home and read my Bible." Yes, but Jesus said where two or three are gathered together, He is in the midst of them. The Word of God speaks of them who speak often one with another. God says a book of remembrances is made of those who meet together and speak in His name. The Word of God says, "*Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together*" (Hebrews 10:25).

I don't believe that there is any such thing as a Christian not needing the church of our Lord Jesus Christ. It is where you are fed; it is where you have fellowship; it is where you grow; it is the base of your operation of service for the Lord.

Who should join? Only born-again people. Only saved people. I used to be critical of people who used certain expressions. Down South years ago I used to hear folks tell about what happened in the church. "We had a revival and there were twenty additions to the church." I used to piously say, "Well, additions to the church are not the important thing. Getting them saved is the important thing."

The thing about it is that those people knew that. I didn't have sense enough to know that they knew it. They were speaking Bible language even more than I was. For the Bible says in Acts 2:41, "*Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.*"

So people got saved in the Bible and there were additions to the church. They joined the church. I have always felt that there is something wrong with a Christian, if he really is saved, who won't join a Bible believing church. He is not scriptural. They were added to the church. "*And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved*" (Acts 2:47).

A fellow joins a lodge or a political party, but about the church of God, he says, "Well, I can get along just as well without joining." I think we need a vision of the church of God-the body of Christ- and its importance.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he. "-