

Vision – Radical Connections

VBC

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Nehemiah 1

VISION SERIES FOUR, CONCLUSION

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“Living Above Conformity and Compromise”

Above my desk is a picture titled *Preikestolen*, Norwegian for “Pulpit Rock”

I look at it often and dream

- For it is a reminder of an experience I had one late October afternoon in Norway
- I was at a church conference that was boring me stiff
- And there was this inward call, an invitation to leave it all for something much better
- (I get these impulses at most conferences)

A ferry, a bus, a taxi ride later, and a two hour climb, and I was at the top of an immense rock, that looks like a pulpit

- Standing tall - some 2000 feet above the fjords below

All alone, surrounded by such breathtaking beauty, I was suddenly overwhelmed with this masterpiece of God’s creation

- And something inside came alive—like something I was made for
- Because I was—and YOU WERE

Is it not fair to say--we were all created for the rarified air of summits—for higher ground?

- FOR A WORLD OF BEAUTY AND WONDER AND INTIMACY AND ADVENTURE

What explains the popularity of Eldridge’s books (*Journey of Desire*, *Wild at Heart*) is simple:

- There’s something in all of us that yearns to live life above the plains, at another level
- Jesus touched on this in John 10:10 when He said, “I have come that you might have life and have it more abundantly.”

What God intended for us—He intended for the church

- To aim for higher ground
- In God's letters to His churches—He exhorted
- Don't conform to the world
 - Excel still more
- Rise above listlessness and LIFELESSNESS, above the constraints of conformity and compromise, status and quo, routine and mediocrity
 - To use Eldridge's words - recover DESIRE
 - Dream new dreams

So, we've been dreaming together these past few weeks about God's future for this church

- Something that is good, for envisioning is a necessary work
- If we are without a vision—WE ARE WITHOUT A FUTURE
 - For a vision is a future
 - The stories of Scripture (as well as history) are filled with visionaries
 - The likes of Joseph, Caleb, Jabez, Paul, Deborah, Nehemiah
 - The Tim LaHaye and Ken Overstreets (men in my life)
 - Who taught me to refuse to accept things as they are
 - Those who caught a glimpse of higher ground, of a future
 - Of a purposeful life
 - What did they see?
 - What must we see?

1) SEE LIFE FOR WHAT IT IS, vs.1-3

- All visions begin here
- Nehemiah began here
- He saw the world of his day, and it was a mess (vss. 1-3)

Nehemiah's brothers and sisters returned home from exile—to a place that historically had symbolized Israel's greatest hopes--JERUSALEM

- The seat of divine kingship
- The place of God's glory
- But there was nothing glorious about it now
- They not only felt the vulnerability of a wall-less city
- They were accosted by those who resisted change
 - By mindless hearts more concerned with maintaining the ruins than building a wall
 - By graceless spirits intent on spreading their dis-grace (vs. 3)
- When "he heard", Nehemiah was shaken (vs. 4a)

Leonard Sweet makes the point that vision is first of all ears

- That hear, listen - TO THE WORLD AS IT IS

If we are to be a church that imagines, that envisions a radical future

- We too must FIRST listen - hear and see life for what it is
- We must discern our times and understand our culture
- And if we will, we will see something Nehemiah saw
- DISREPAIR
 - Lots of people - and lots of families - and lots of nations - and lots of churches in A MESS
 - Churches who have stopped dreaming - many of us know such churches
 - Hanging on to tired methods and inane traditions and outmoded approaches
 - Inward, irrelevant, institutional - what Jesus described as "old wineskins"
 - Where as in Nehemiah's day, forces are afoot to preserve the ruins
 - People determined to preserve the past at the expense of the future
 - Fighting over organs and drums, liturgy and PowerPoint
 - Congregants jockeying for influence and control, instead of expending its best energy in resisting the onslaught of a godless world view
- No wonder our age is referred to by some historians as post Christian – the church has lost its voice
- And, like Nehemiah - so we must mourn

But visionaries are hopeful types, who see more than the WORLD AS IT IS

- They see something else we must see

2) SEE GOD FOR WHO HE IS

- For when we do, we can see beyond the chaos
 - Nehemiah got his eyes on God - and saw what you and I must see
- A) That no matter how great the mess, nothing OVERWHELMS GOD (vs. 5)
- Nehemiah saw the greatness and grandeur of God
 - Do you see this?
 - That our God does whatever He wills
 - He who marks the heavens and weighs the mountains in a balance – and regards the nations as a drop in a bucket - can do the impossible
 - Nehemiah saw this: that the only thing that limits God is our unbelief

He saw--

- B) That God hears our pleas and knows our hearts (vvs. 6-7)

C) That no matter how much we have failed God in the past, even if we are at the farthest horizon, His grace and His mercy and His faithfulness can more than heal us and bring us home (vss. 8-10)

- Listen: What emboldened Nehemiah to pray as he did still stands
- What encourages us to pray and dream about our future is simply this:
 - Did not Jesus make this staggering claim, that the church would Be His ongoing presence?
 - His primary means for transforming the world?
 - Didn't Jesus say – "I will build my church - and it will be so expansive with energy that not even the gates of hell shall prevail?"
 - Did not Jesus say, "I go to the Father, and greater things I will do through you because I am sending My Spirit?"
- How can we not but occasionally envision the future and ask, "God what would you have us do now?"

It's when we see our world, see our God

3) SEE CALLING FOR WHAT IT IS

- As Nehemiah listened to his passion - as he saw the need, as he rehearsed his theology proper - he heard a summons, a call
 - And Nehemiah rose to his calling (vs. 11)
 - CREATE THE CIRCUMSTANCES THAT WILL GIVE ME SUCCESS!
 - Open the doors that appear to be closed
 - Use me to build this wall!
- Behind this petition was a man who could see God using him
- Who could sense God infusing his heart and mind with meaning and purpose
 - Here was a wine taster - who got caught up in the idea that life can be a lot more than tasting the difference between Chardonnay and Merlot
 - He could see a wall rebuilt, a city remade, a people restored, and himself in the center of the action
 - So he answered the summons
- Leonard Sweet: "Leaders are neither born nor made—THEY ARE SUMMONED"
 - They are called into existence by circumstances-called to, enlisted in a vision
 - Those who rise to such an occasion are leaders
- If you are a Christ follower - you have been summoned
 - First to respond to God's forgiveness
 - Second, to how He wants to uniquely use you and your gifts to impact this world for Jesus

- It's true of churches as well
 - The question is this: "Will we see our calling for what it is?"
 - Will we embrace the future God has for us?
 - Will we live large on the stage God has for us?
 - Will we stand in the gap and say "God - Your church could do so much more to advance Your kingdom"
 - There are so many graceless churches - and a world of increasingly broken people
 - So many that have no idea what worship is - and a world that is increasingly empty
 - So many passive congregants, and a world filled with people who want to count
 - So many focused on themselves, while the world is crying out for the strong to strengthen the weak

If we will—we then need to see one more thing

4) SEE COST FOR WHAT IT IS

- Visions don't merely happen
- There has to be risk, faith, promise, buy in
 - Nehemiah was willing to forego his own status, comfort, personal aggrandizement to serve God
 - Willing to separate himself from the world's expectations – and yield to God's
 - Willing to attend to God rather than stoop to kings
 - Willing to deal with mocking, derision, innuendo, discouragement, intimidation, and seduction

- Illustration: In the book "Burden of Yale '09"
 - It tells us a man named William Borden
 - Heir to the Borden dairy farm estate
 - He was a millionaire - HS
 - Gift - went around the world
 - AND HE SAW THE WORLD AS IT WAS - a mess
 - Somewhere in all of this, his faith grew, and at about the same time, HE SAW GOD FOR WHO HE IS
 - And began to see GOD'S CALL FOR WHAT IT WAS
 - To go back to the desperate, wrote - NO RESERVES
 - Went to Yale - led a student movement
 - Offered numerous high paying jobs - but he kept his vision - NO RETREATS
 - Studied at Princeton-headed for China - to reach Muslims
 - Stopping in Egypt to study Arabic - contracted meningitis, and died - at 26
 - But before he died, knowing he could not make his goal, he wrote—NO REGRETS

- He SAW THE COSTS FOR WHAT THEY WERE - and willingly paid

I don't know all that this vision will cost—I just know it will

- It will call for our time

- It will demand of the resources God has given us to steward

Will you sign on?