

# The Disciple's Vision

by John Henry Jowett

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of having a vision of the golden age in our work, and how it shapes our tasks, regulates our activities, and brings about unity, peace, and security.*

**Scripture:** Micah 4:1-4, Micah 4:6

**Topics:** "Spiritual Vision", "Christian Leadership"

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## Description

John Henry Jowett preaches about the importance of having a vision for the future, drawing from Micah 4:1. He emphasizes the need to envision a 'golden age' in our minds to guide our present actions and endeavors. Whether it's in parenting, teaching, or ministering to the marginalized, having a clear vision of what could be shapes our efforts and influences those we serve. Just like great reformers and influencers throughout history, we are called to see beyond the present circumstances and work towards a better future, focusing on spiritual values, unity in worship, transforming destructive forces into constructive actions, and providing comfort and peace for all.

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## Transcript

"But in the latter days it shall come to pass." Micah 4:1

"But in the latter days it shall come to pass. ..." The prophet lifts his eyes away to the latter days to gain refreshment in his present toil. He feasts his soul upon the golden age which is to be, in order that he may nerve himself in his immediate service. Without the anticipation of a golden age he would lose his buoyancy, and the spirit of endeavour would go out of his work. Our visions always determine the quality of our tasks. Our dominant thought regulates our activities. What pattern am I working by? What golden age have I in my mind? What do I see as the possible consummation of my labours? I may be keenly conscious of what I am working at, but what am I working for? What do I see in the latter days? There is your child at home. You are ministering to him in your daily attention and service. What is your pattern in the mind? How do you see him in the long run? How looks he in your mind's eye? What sort of a man do you see in you boy? How would you fill up this imperfect phrase concerning him, "In the latter days it shall come to pass ...? Have you ever pained his possibilities? If you have no clear golden age for the boy your training will be uncertain, your discipline will be a guesswork and a chance. You must come to your child with a vision of the man you would like him to be, and the vision will shape and control all your ministries. Our visions are our dies, quietly, ceaselessly pressing against the plastic material of the lives for which we labour. Our vision of possibilities helps to shape the actuality.

There is the scholar in the school. When a teacher goes to his class, be it a class of boys or girls, what kind of men and women has he in his eye? Surely we do not go to work among our children in blind and good-humoured chance? We are the architects and builders of their characters, and we must have some completed conception even before we begin our work. I suppose the architect sees the finished building in his eye even before he takes a pencil in his hand, and certainly long before the pick and the spade touch the virgin soil. It is built up in the imagination before he cuts the first sod. It must not be otherwise with our children in the schools. Again I say, we must be able to complete the unfinished phrase: "In the latter days it shall come to pass ..." We must deliberately fill in the blank, and see clearly the consummation at which we aim. That boy who gives the teacher so much trouble; restless, indifferent, bursting with animal vitality, how is he depicted as man in your chamber of imagery? Do you only see him as he is? Little, then, will be your influence to make him what he might be. You must see a golden age for the boy, a splendid prime, and so every moment your ardent vision will be operating to realize itself in the unpromising material of the present.

Let me assume that your work is among the outcasts. When you go to court and alley, or to the elegant house in the favoured suburb, and find men and women sunk in animalism, trailing the robes of human dignity in unnamable mire, how do you see them with the eyes of the soul? "In the latter days it shall come to pass. ..." What? To the eye of sense they are filthy, offensive, repellant. That like are their faces, and what sort of robes do they wear in the vision of the soul? Do we address the beast as the gentleman-to-be? Are we dealing with the "might-be" or only with the thing that is? Sir Titus Salt was pacing the docks at Liverpool and saw great quantities of dirty, waste material lying in unregarded heaps. He looked at the unpromising substance, and in his mind's eye saw finished fabrics and warm and welcome garments; and ere long the power of the imagination devised ministries for converting the outcast stuff into refined and finished robes. We must look at all our waste material in human life and see the vision of the "might-be." I took out a little sentence the other day from a book I was reading, a sentence which roll from the lips of one of the unfortunate women who so greatly add to the sins of our great cities. Some man had done her a courtesy, spoken to her in kindly tone and manner, and surprised and thrilled her cold and careless heart. "He raised his hat to me as if I were a lady!" The man had addressed her as she might be, and the buried dignity within her rose to the call. He spoke to her in the language of the golden age, and she lifted her eyes to the vision revealed.

Surely this was the Master's way! He is always calling the thing that is by the name of its "might-be." "Thou art Simon," a mere hearer; "Thou shalt be called Peter," a rock. To the woman of sin, the outcast child of the city. He addressed the gracious word "daughter," and spoke to her as if she were already a child of the golden age; her weary heart leapt to the welcome speech. And so we have got to come to our work with visions of the latter days, glimpses of the "might-be," pictures of the golden age, or the cheap and tinsel present will never be enriched. Take your child, your scholar, or the outcast man in the court, or the degraded man in the villa, and get well into your mind an heart a vision of all they might be. Spend time over it. Work it out line upon line. Make it superlatively beautiful and noble. Then, with that vision of the latter day, address yourself to the present day; and your vision will dominate your very muscles, and every movement of service will be a minister of elevation and refinement.

I am not surprised, therefore, that all great reformers and all men and women who have profoundly influenced the life and thought of their day have been visionaries, having a clear sight of things as they might be, feeling the cheery glow of the light and heat of the golden age. Abraham, amid the idolatrous cities of his own day, had a vision of the latter days, and while labouring in the present, "looked for the city

which hath foundations whose builder and maker is God." The Apostle John, in the Island of Patmos, while impressed with the iniquity of Rome seated on her seven hills, and drunk with the blood of saints, saw through the Rome that was to the Rome that might be, "The Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, made ready as a bride adorned for husband." And so has it been through all the changing centuries right down to our own time. In my own city of Birmingham forty years ago, when North and South America were locked in bloody strife, and it seemed as though the future were pregnant with nothing but quarrel and discord, John Bright lifted the eyes of his countrymen to the glory of the latter days, and unfolded to them the radiant colors of the golden age: "It may be but a vision, but I will cherish it; I see on vast federation stretch from the frozen north in unbroken line to the glowing south, and from the wild billows of the Atlantic westward to the calmer waters of the Pacific main. And I see on people and one language, and one law and one faith, and over all that white continent the home of freedom and a refuge for the oppressed of every race and every clime."

And so the prophet Micah, in a book that is crowded with severity and denunciation and indictment, and noisy with thunder and frightful in its lightning, still lets us hear the music of the latter days, and permits us to contemplate the vision of the golden age in which he travailed and toiled: "In the latter days it shall come to pass... "What are the characteristics of the golden age to which the prophet was looking with hungry and aspiring spirit? "The mountain of the Lord's house shall be established in the top of the mountains, and it shall be exalted above the hills." Then in the golden age emphasis is to be given to the spiritual. The mountain of the Lord's house is to be established at the top of the mountain. I think of Durham city as an emblem of the prophet's thought. Away in the lower reaches of the city there is the river, on which boats are plying for pleasure and recreation. A little higher up on the slopes are the places of business, the ways and byways of trade. A little higher there is the castle hill, on which the turreted tower presents its imposing front; but on a higher summit, commanding all and overlooking all, there rises and towers aloft the majesty of the glorious old cathedral. Let me interpret the emblem. The river is typical of pleasure, the ways of business are representatives of money, the castle is the symbol of armaments, the cathedral is significant of God. In the latter days the spiritual is to have emphasis above pleasure, money, armaments. In whatever prominence these may be seen, they are all to be subordinate to the reverence and worship of God. Military prowess and money-making and pleasure-seeking are to be put in their own place, and not to be permitted to leave it. First things first! "In the beginning God." This is the first characteristic of the golden age.

"And many nations shall come and say: Come and let us go up to the mountain of the Lord and to the house of the God of Jacob, and He will teach us His ways, and we will walk in His paths." Then the second characteristic of the golden age is that people are to find their confluence and unity in common worship. The brotherhood is to be discovered in spiritual communion. We are not to find profound community upon the river of pleasure or in the ways of business or in the armaments of the castle. These are never permanently cohesive. Pleasure is more frequently divisive than cohesive. At the present time we have abundant evidence that commerce may be a severing ministry among the peoples of the earth. And certainly we do not find union in common armaments. Two nations may fight side by side today, and may confront each other tomorrow. No, it is in the mountain of the Lord's house the peoples will discover their unity and kinship. It is in the common worship of the one Lord, in united adoration of the God revealed in Christ, that our brotherhood will be unburied, and we shall realize how rich is our oneness in Him.

"And they shall beat their swords into ploughshares, and their spears into pruning hooks." Then the third characteristic of the golden age is to be the conversion of merely destructive force into positive and constructive ministries. No energy is to be destroyed: it is all to be transfigured. The sword is to become a ploughshare; the weapon of destruction an implement of culture. I saw a picture the other day which was intended to represent the re-enshrinement of peace. A cannon had dropped from its battered carriage and was lying in the meadow, rustling away to ruin. A lamb was feeding at its very mouth, and round it on every side the flowers were growing. But really that is not a picture of the golden age. The cannon is not to rust, it is to be converted, its strength is to be transfigured. After the Franco-German war many of the cannon balls were re-made into church bell. One of our manufacturers in Birmingham told me only a week ago that he was busy turning the empty cases of the shells used in the recent war into dinner gongs! That is the suggestion we seek in the golden age: all destructive forces are to be changed into helpful ministries. Tongues that speak nothing but malice are to be turned into instructors of wisdom. Passions that are working havoc and ruin are to be made the nourishes of fine endeavour and holy work. All men's gifts and powers, and all material forces, are to be used in the employment of the kingdom of God.

"They shall sit every man under his vine and under his fig-tree." That savours of Bournville! Yes, and Bournville is in the prophetic line, and has got something of the light and color of the golden age. There is to be a distribution of comforts. Life's monotony is to be broken up. Sweet and winsome things are to be brought into the common life. Dinginess and want are both to be banished. There is to be a little beauty for everybody, something of the vine and the fig-tree. There is to be a little ease for everybody, time to sit down and rest. To every mortal man there is to be given a little treasure, a little leisure and little pleasure. "And none shall make them afraid." And they are not only to have comfort but the added glory of peace. The gift of the vine and fig-tree would be nothing if peace remained an exile. There are many people who have both the vine and the fig-tree, but their life is haunted and disturbed by fears. In the golden age peace is to be the attendant of comfort, and both are to be guests in every man's dwelling.

And now mark the beautiful final touches in this prophet's dream: "I will assemble her that halteth, and I will gather her that is driven out, and her that is afflicted." They are all to be found in God's family. "Her that halteth," the child of "ifs" and "buts" and fears and indecision, she shall lose her halting and obtain a firm and confident step. "And her that is driven out," the child of exile, the self-banished son or daughter, the outcast by reason of sin; they shall all be home again! "He gathereth together the outcasts." And along with these there is to come "her that is afflicted," the child of sorrows. The day of grief is to be ended, morning shall be the thing of the preparatory day which is over; "He shall wipe away all tears from their eyes and sorrow and sighing shall flee away."

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