

Visions and Dreams

by J.R. Miller

The sermon explores the transformative power of visions and dreams, emphasizing the role of the Holy Spirit in inspiring action and service throughout life.

Scripture: Joel 2:28, Acts 2:17, Philippians 3:13

Topics: "The Role of the Holy Spirit", "Visions and Dreams"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the transformative power of visions and dreams in our lives, asserting that they inspire us to strive for higher achievements and greater beauty. He illustrates this through examples of artists, inventors, and historical figures like Columbus, who pursued their dreams despite skepticism. Miller encourages both the young and the old to remain active in their aspirations, reminding us that the Holy Spirit ignites our potential to dream and act. He warns against complacency and the misconception that prayer alone can realize our dreams, stressing the importance of action alongside faith. Ultimately, he calls for a life filled with divine inspiration, where visions lead to meaningful contributions to the world.

Transcript

We owe everything that is good and beautiful--to our visions. They lead us ever to higher things. They show us glimpses of character, of attainment, of achievement, beyond what we have yet reached, and the beauty or the excellence visioned before us--starts in us a discontent with our present state and a longing to climb to the loftier heights!

An artist has a vision of something lovely--and paints it on his canvas, or hews it out of his block of marble. An inventor has in his mind a dream of his invention, something which he believes will prove a blessing to the world. He thinks and broods, and at last gives the fruit of his thinking and brooding, a form that makes it practical.

Columbus was a dreamer. It was the belief in his day that there was nothing beyond the sea. He had a vision of a continent beyond, and heard the bidding, "Go and find it!" Learned men laughed at his dream--but he could not put it out of his mind, and, sailing forth, he found a new world. Thus all progress and all advancement, have been achieved. Men have dreamed and followed their visions and made them real.

One of the promised results of the coming of the Holy Spirit, was the bringing of larger, fuller life. "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." It is supposed that old men do not

dream any more. Their attainments and achievements are all in the past. But this need not be so. If this world were all, if death ended everything, there would be little use for the old to dream. They cannot do much in the small margin of life left to them. But death is not the end of life; it goes on beyond, infinitely and forever. Paul was an old man--but he was as full of hopes and enthusiasms as if he had been in the midst of youth. He was old when he described his scheme of life as forgetting things behind--and reaching forward to things ahead.

Let not the old man think for a moment, that his work is done, though he has lived his threescore and ten years, even though he is physically feeble. Let him keep his heart young, though his hairs are white. Let him keep his enthusiasms, though he is feeble and frail in body. Let him keep love in his heart, love for people, love for young people and children, sympathy with human need. Let him keep interested in others, not allowing himself to withdraw from active life, and then in a little while shrink away into a shriveled shell of decrepitude and uselessness.

Old people with ripe experience can be of great service to younger people. "Old men for counsel." Let the old people feel that their work is not yet done, that the world still needs them, that they have no right to lapse into indolence. "Your old men shall dream dreams", dreams of beauty, of helpfulness, of service--and then go out to make their dreams come true. Sometimes we hear it said, that miracles have ceased. This may be true in a sense--but it is not true that communication between heaven and earth has ceased. The ladder has not been taken down. God still puts into men's hearts inspirations, desires, hopes, longings. Every case of human need or distress that makes its appeal to us--is a heavenly vision, calling us to do an act of kindness.

There is a pleasant legend of Martin. He was a soldier. It was in the depth of winter. One bitter night a beggar, scantily clad, asked alms of the soldier. All he had was his soldier's cloak. Drawing his sword he cut the cloak in half, gave one part of it to the poor man and was content himself with the other part. That night he had a wondrous vision. He beheld Christ on his throne. Looking closely, he saw that the King in his glory was wearing the half of the cloak which he had given to the beggar that night. Amazed, he heard the King say, "This cloak, has Martin given to me."

Every case of suffering, of need, of sorrow, of which we become aware--is to us a vision of Christ himself in need, appealing to us for help. If we do the kindness that is required, we will be ministering to the Master himself.

Visions come to us also, in beautiful lives that we see and know. We all know someone who, every time we meet him, makes us want to live better. He does not exhort us in words, does not chide us with criticisms--but there is something in his mere presence, something that starts in us a vision of gentleness, of peace, of purity--which calls us to a truer, more beautiful life. One said of another, "When I meet him on the street, the air is sweeter, and life means more to me afterwards."

There are people in whose presence--crude men grow gentle, and profane men would not dare utter an oath. There are those who never have a reproof to utter or a sharp word even for men who have no regard for God, and yet in whose presence the worst men become subdued and quiet. Every rare beautiful Christian life, starts in all hearts--a heavenly vision which is followed unconsciously by those who see it. We do not know what we may be to each other. We do not know how our characters act on other lives. If we realized the meaning of our influence--we would never dare live carelessly.

"Your young men shall see visions." When the divine Spirit fills our heart--we have glimpses of a life we have not yet reached. The coming of the Spirit is to our lives--what the coming of spring is to the fields and gardens after winter. It brings an awakening, a quickening.

But there are UNheavenly visions--as well as those that are pure and spiritual. If it is the Holy Spirit who pervades our lives--our visions are holy. If it is the spirit of evil that is swaying us--our visions will be debasing. A vision of the world's need of Christ, inspires men with the missionary spirit. There is a tendency among too many Christian people to turn away from evil men--as if nothing could be done for them. But these are the very people, the sight of whom should most stir our compassion.

A thoughtful man was pacing the docks at Liverpool and beheld great quantities of dirty cloths lying in unregarded heaps. He looked at the unpromising piles--and then in his thought saw finished fabrics and warm and welcome garments made from them. Before long the vision had come true, and the outcast cloths began to be wrought into beautiful garments. When we look upon an outcast life, however hopeless it may be, we should think not of what it is--but of its possibilities, what it may become--a child of God, wearing the divine beauty. This vision will impel us to seek the life that is lost.

Some people dream beautiful things--and yet never make them real. Some seem to think that their prayers alone--will take the place of toil and self-denying struggle, in achieving their dreams.

There is much very shallow and empty talk about praying. You cannot pray yourself into a noble character. You cannot pray for the relief of some distress--and have the distress driven away. You cannot pray a vision--into a worthy reality. You cannot pray a beautiful dream--into a fine achievement. Sometimes prayer is not our duty.

Adam Clarke, the great commentator, was an early riser. A young preacher was talking to him about this habit, and said he was sorry he could not do the same. He wanted Mr. Clark to tell him how he did it. "Do you pray about it?" piously inquired the young man. "No," said Mr. Clarke, "I get up."

Some people who never get on with their ideals--want others who have learned to live nobly, to tell them how they do it. "How did you learn to live contentedly, without worry, without fretting, without fussing or anxiety? I suppose prayer must be the secret." The answer is, "No--I do it."

Prayer is always sacred. It has mighty power. "More things are wrought by prayer--than this world dreams of." But there are some things which prayer will not accomplish--you must DO them. God never works miracles in doing indolent people's work for them. Neither does he answer prayer for the realizing of one's fine dreams. Pray, certainly, for everything--but your own hands must work out your dreams! When an artist has a noble vision that he wants to see come into a great painting or a splendid statue--does he get down on his knees and pray his vision into the form? No! He spends months, perhaps years, in patient work--and at last he sees his ideal wrought into noble form.

When the Holy Spirit touches a human life--glory springs up in it. It becomes capable of great things. It rises to new power. We know what different men, Pentecost made of the peasant disciples. From being timid, fearful, afraid of a sneer, wilting under a girls taunt, frightened by a jibe--they became in a moment--brave, lion-hearted men, who feared nothing! From being without eloquence, without fine culture--they became at once mighty men filled with a new power by which they turned the world upside down!

Emerson said, "What I need is someone to make me do what I can." Few of us are doing--what we might do. We are not reaching up to our best in anything. What we need is someone who will make us do what we can. It ought to be a parent's constant effort with a child. It ought to be a teacher's work with a pupil. It should be the aim of our friend.

Some people seem to think that friendship does its best--when it pampers, shelters and protects. But the really best that any friend can help you--is to inspire and quicken you, to put visions of highest beauty into your brain, to start gleams of nobleness in your heart--and to make you do what you can!

God has given us these wonderful lives of ours--but we do not know how to use them. We touch them with our hands. We try education. We submit them to our friends. Wonderful indeed are these brains, these hearts, these minds, these hands. But we never find or bring out the best that is in us--until we let the divine Spirit breathe on us. When we are filled with the Spirit--our young men shall see visions, and our old men shall dream dreams. Then our lives shall reach their best!

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