

Illumination

by Richard E. Bieber

The sermon challenges believers to actively pursue and live out their vision of Christ through faith, self-denial, and service to others.

Scripture: Isaiah 6:8, Matthew 4:19, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 16:24, Mark 2:14, John 10:11, Acts 26:19

Topics: "Following Jesus", "Daily Discipleship"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the importance of holding on to the heavenly vision given by God, as seen in the lives of the disciples who left everything to follow Jesus. He emphasizes the need to answer the call, deny oneself daily, and actively live out the vision of Christ in our lives, seeking to glorify God in all we do.

Transcript

"Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision, but first to those at Damascus, then at Jerusalem and throughout all the country of Judea, and also to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God and perform deeds worthy of their repentance."

Acts 26:19-20

Why did Andrew, Peter, James and John leave their fishing boats to go off with Jesus? Peter didn't check with his wife. James and John didn't ask their father for permission. They just left.

What made them so sure that it was worth it to leave everything to go with this man they hardly knew? They had received a vision. Those nets loaded with fish told these fishermen that they were face-to-face with the Holy! Jesus was not just another prophet. Something about him drew them. He had begun to give them eyes to see. And what they saw was a vision of the kingdom.

A similar thing happened to Levi, who was far from a fool. No wonder his family was upset when one day, all of a sudden, he ups and leaves his tax office and goes off to join the disciples of Jesus. What makes a man turn his life upside-down in an instant? Levi saw something in Jesus that the average Israelite could not see. Levi's eyes had been opened to see the face of God in Jesus.

Am I beholding a vision or an illusion? If I abandon my whole life to following what turns out to be a lie, my vision was an illusion. The man or woman who travels across deserts and mountains to find their "pot of gold" at the end of the rainbow, may think they're pursuing a vision. But the moment comes when they

realize that they were misled. Did they see that pot of gold? What they saw was an illusion.

Once a person has seen Jesus with the eye of faith, and heard him speak his timeless words, they can never return to a place of ignorance.

They have seen the light and have been marked by it forever. Even if, decades later, this person decides to walk away from the vision, something of the Lord's glory remains in the heart. They may be able to go back to their old life, but they can never go back as somebody who is ignorant. They go back as somebody who has seen the light and rejected it. It is impossible to forget the vision of Christ once you have seen it.

The life which streams from his face, the words that he speaks, the breath that he breathes upon you, is breathed upon your spirit forever. And yet, it is possible to neglect the vision, to belittle it, to disregard it, to disobey it, to push it away from you until the vision of Jesus no longer guides your steps or guards your heart.

If we were to look down into the gully on either side of the narrow road that leads to the City of God, and behold the human wreckage, we might ask ourselves,

"What made them do this?"

"What caused this man who was walking on the edge of the swamp, to die there when he knew the way out?"

"What caused this woman to stumble into the flaming wilderness, when the true path was clear to her?"

"What caused this youth to die of thirst half a mile from a mountain spring, when he knew the way?"

Perhaps the man who died out there on the edge of the swamp was caught up in his own vanity. He saw a chance to build up his image, so he compromised the truth of God for the sake of his career.

The woman who died up there in the flaming wilderness was lured from the path by impatience. Things weren't happening fast enough, so she took on more than she could handle.

That youth began to mistake lust for thirst, and lost his way.

When we lose our way, the cause is simple: we forsook our vision. It was there, but we turned away. The vision was crying out to us, but we got busy with other concerns.

As long as Jesus is your joy, your life, your God, your friend, no discouragement, no fear could compromise your heart. But when you turned from the vision and focused on "more important things" the vision began to fade.

The glory that caused those chains to break, that stirred your heart with faith in the Crucified and Risen Lord, is no longer the center of your being.

What happened to you? Did you finally wake up and become "reasonable"? Or did you lose your grip on the most precious gift you ever received?

Think. Try to remember. The Father is waiting for you to find your way back to the vision.

Should someone be reading these words who has never had the vision, be certain of this: there is nothing the living God wants more for you than for you to receive a glimpse of glory. If you will climb down from those heights of vanity and humble yourself before God, crying out for light, he will pour heaven itself into your souls and open your eyes.

He will cause you to behold the Crucified and Risen Lord Jesus as your Master.

You will begin to hear words from his mouth that will lift you into Life.

He will flood your soul with the Living Water of his Spirit.

Of course, that's the easy part.

The hard part is to hang on to the vision once you have received it. And that part is up to us. To hang on to this vision and keep the vision of the Lord bright, there are three things which we have to do every day of our lives until we come to the gates of the City of God.

First, we have to answer the vision.

There are people who will be reading these words who have seen something of God. You've seen it, but you have not done anything with it.

After the disciples saw those nets come up, breaking with a supernatural load of fish, they answered the call Jesus put on them. Every day of their lives from then on, these men had to leave where they were and what they had to follow Jesus, farther and farther into the center of God's will, always giving up something else, always leaving another position, constantly moving on, never stopping. Some of us, in contrast, haven't moved an inch in 20 years.

You have to keep moving; as the Lord moves you move. You move or the vision fades. Isaiah, as a young man, saw a vision of Yahweh, the God of Israel, high and lifted up. He knew that this was not just a momentary gift, it was a call.

"Whom shall I send? Who will go for us?" came the voice of God. "Here I am, send me!" cried Isaiah, and that day marked the beginning of a life spent in the service of God. Isaiah gave himself over to the vision.

The question is not, "Have you seen the light", but "are you following the light God has already given you? Are you pursuing the vision which has already come? Are you giving everything over to speed toward the vision which keeps calling you forward?"

Secondly, if we are to keep the vision of the Lord fresh, we have to deny ourselves every day.

Once the disciples had a clear vision of who he is, Jesus began to reveal what the vision would cost them. Peter declares, "You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God," and immediately Jesus begins teaching them how this vision will sooner or later nail them to a cross.

"If anyone would come after me, let them deny themselves, take up their cross, and follow me."

In order to stay on the track of the vision, you have to deny yourself. Otherwise you will become preoccupied with yourself, your plans, your ambitions, your religious ideas, your theology, your frustration. You will get bigger and bigger, until you crowd out the vision of Christ.

We begin every day by denying ourselves. And as circumstances come our way through the day, we have to deny ourselves. Some of us are so in the habit of asserting ourselves, standing up for ourselves, defending ourselves, that there is no room for the vision of God.

We hear folks in Christian circles these days stressing how important it is for us to love ourselves. "Oh, Lord help us to love ourselves!" Did you ever hear Jesus talk like that? All we ever hear Jesus say is deny yourself, die to yourself, unless a grain of wheat falls to the ground and dies it abides alone, but if it dies, it brings forth much fruit.

Lose yourself in a vision of the Lord of Lords. It's the only way. You don't need any help to love yourself, but you do need God's help to die to yourself. Only when you are dead to yourself, you will be free from yourself. Stop wasting time trying to accept yourself. If you're upset with yourself, it's because you have failed to live up to your cherished image of yourself, get over it, and get on with your life!

Die to yourself and you will be set free. But dying to self is not something that happens, once and done. It's a death that is repeated over and over again.

Somebody hurt your feelings? Die to yourself and praise God. Somebody walks past you without calling you by name, die to yourself and thank God. Somebody laughs at some stupid little thing you did, die to yourself and praise the Lord. They forgot to invite you to the shower? Well, well, well! Die to yourself.

Finally, we need to live the vision every day.

"Let your light so shine before men that they may see your good works and glorify, not you, but your Father who is in heaven."

"I was not disobedient to that heavenly vision," says Paul. "I proclaimed it right away in Damascus, in Jerusalem, then all of Judea and then to the Gentiles."

You don't light the lamp and then hide it under your bed.

If you have a vision of the Christ who seeks the lost, live that vision by seeking the lost with him.

We come away from church service..... "O, what a wonderful insight! Jesus seeks the lost. Isn't that wonderful? He carries a little sheep in his arms!" Until we stumble over a little sheep as we walk out of the bible study. "Get out of here, I'm busy! I'm on my way to lunch."

You had a vision of the Christ who feeds the hungry! So pursue the vision and live the vision, by getting out there with Jesus and doing the same! You have a vision of the Christ who heals, don't forever be talking about healing, do something! Talk less about healing and do more.

You say, "I don't have the power to heal." Fine, then visit the sick, pray for the sick, lay your hands on the sick, give them a glass of water. Who knows? That glass of water may turn out to be a sacrament. You had a vision of the Christ who lays down his life for his sheep, don't just ponder it, pursue the vision! You lay down your life for the sheep. Don't sit on your vision. Live it!

Can we honestly say that we have been faithful to the vision of Christ that God has given us?

God help us to answer the vision, to deny ourselves and follow the vision, and live the vision of the Lord Jesus which God has given us.

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