

"DREAMING GOD'S DREAM"

Acts 16:6-10

© 2022 Rev. Dr. Brian E. Germano

[PROP NEEDED: Picture of Disneyland, CA]

[Cornerstone U.M.C.; 7-24-22]

--I--

1. **[11am ONLY]** Read Text: Acts 16:6-10 and Pray
2. In the 1940s, there was a father who spent many Sunday afternoons visiting local fairs and amusement parks with his two young daughters.

A--But during these, he noticed that while he there was plenty of entertainment for the children, there was little for adult parents, often leaving them quite bored.

1--So, soon a dream began to take shape in his mind about a place where parents and their children could come and have fun *together* as a family.

2--In 1948 he shared this dream with his co-workers, and for the most part they thought that he was a little crazy.

3--Undaunted, though, he continued to share his dream, and by 1953 he'd acquired enough investment money to begin to make his dream a reality.

B--What followed were many "insurmountable" problems and challenges, but on July 17, 1955, the result was the grand opening of this... **[SHOW DISNEYLAND PICTURE]**

1--The man's name, of course, was Walter Elias Disney, & the place (soon called the "*the happiest place on earth*") became known as Disneyland, California.¹

2--And though Walt Disney died in 1966, from his initial vision has grown a worldwide family entertainment industry that today includes 12 major parks, 7 motion picture companies, 10 TV and digital streaming networks, several sports teams, a cruise line, & in 2021 earned nearly \$67.4 billion in revenue.²

C--History records that at the 1982 opening of the EPCOT theme park in Orlando, FL, a reporter remarked, "*Isn't it too bad that Walt Disney didn't live to see this?*" And Mike Vance, creative director of Disney Studios, is said to have replied, "*He did see it -- that's why it's here today.*"³

D--You know, as Walt Disney's story reminds us, the concept of **VISION** is absolutely essential to any individual or group seeking to reach their highest potential, whether for a nation, community, company, or even a marriage and family.

3. [9am ONLY... Well, today's scripture teaches us the same thing. Let me read you what we find in God's Word from Acts 16:6-10...

6 Paul and his companions traveled throughout the regions of Phrygia & Galatia because the Holy Spirit kept them from speaking the word in the province of Asia. 7 When they approached the province of Mysia, they tried to enter the province of Bithynia, but the Spirit of Jesus wouldn't let them. 8 Passing by Mysia, they went down to Troas instead. 9 A vision of a man from Macedonia came to Paul during the night. He stood urging Paul, "Come over to Macedonia and help us!" 10 Immediately after he saw the vision, we prepared to leave for the province of Macedonia, concluding that God had called us to proclaim the good news to them.]

[BOTH SERVICES...] You know, as we heard in today's scripture, if we're to achieve God's mission and calling in the world, it's vital for God's people (His Church) to have Vision, as well -- to "*Dream God's Dream*" as today's title puts it.

A--Think about it, if Paul had *not* responded to the vision he had one night of the man across the Aegean Sea in Macedonia (Greece) calling to him to come help him, Paul may never have ever crossed over and begun preaching to the Greeks, or Romans, which eventually led to the gospel being shared with us today!

B--In other words, we are here as Christians today in Coweta County, GA in 2022 because someone (Paul) responded to God's Vision!

4. Yet, what IS Vision? WHY do we need it? And what can our church do to go about getting it? That's what I want to talk about briefly in today's message.

A--In Joel 2:28-29 (NRSV) God says "*Afterward, I will pour out my spirit on all flesh; your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, your old men shall dream dreams, and your young men shall see visions.*"

B--In this passage, first we see **a few things that biblical Vision IS and IS NOT.**

--II--

5. First, we learn here that biblical Vision is NOT about just *repeating the past*, or even bring "*trendy*" in the present.

A--You know, over the years at my churches, I've heard members say things like...

1--"Preacher, if we could only do things like we did in the 'good 'ole days' 10-20 years ago.. or like we did when so-and-so was Pastor... then we'll be fine!"

2--OR... "Let's just continue doing what we've always done! If it ain't broke, don't fix it!"

3--OR... "Preacher, they do things this way at Southside Church, or Newnan First Methodist, or some other church down the road, so we should too!"

B--Yet, Joel reminds us that biblical Vision is not just about rehashing the *past*, or repeating or mimicking what we or others are doing in the *present*.

C--No. Biblical Vision always involves something *new* and unique for *us*.

6. The Hebrew term for Vision here and throughout the Bible literally simply means "*to be what God wants you to be*,"⁴ which is why one of the best definitions I've heard of biblical Vision is that it's "***A gift of God to His people enabling them to see something before it is.***"⁵

A--What I like about this description is how it highlights that true *biblical* Vision (like the "*prophecies, dreams, and visions*" of Joel 2) is something that *God* gives NOT just to a single individual (like a Pastor) who then "sells" it to everyone else, but instead is something plants in the hearts of God's *people*.

B--Sure, it might be that an individual or group that *represent* God's people are the first to *identify and articulate it*, but in the end it's just an articulation of the Vision God has planted in the hearts of *all* of His people -- i.e., it's always "*shared Vision*."⁶

--III--

7. So **WHY do we need it in the first place, then?** Why not just continue doing things "*the way we've always done them*"? Well, there's really two ways to answer to this:

8. First, there's a theological answer: we need Vision *because God is a Vision-sharing God*.

A--Think about a few examples from scripture:

- 1--There's Abraham's vision and call to leave his home and journey to a new land;
- 2--Moses vision to lead Israel out of slavery into the "promised land";
- 3--Ezekiel's vision of the valley of dry bones, representing a restored Israel;
- 4--Isaiah's vision of the exiles one day returning home to Jerusalem;
- 5--The vision and promise of a Messiah, fulfilled finally in Jesus himself;
- 6--There's today's Bible story from Acts, where Paul has a vision of a man calling from Macedonia (Greece) across the Aegean Sea to come help him, resulting in Paul doing just that and taking the gospel to Europe for the first time.
- 7--And what about the book of Revelation, in which the Bible itself culminates in many powerful visions of hope for the future?

B--My point, you see, is that God communicates with and challenges His people through *Vision*, calling them to become *more* than they *already are*.

9. But there's also a practical answer as to why you and I need Vision in life.

A--The King James translation of Proverbs 29:18 says "*Where there is no vision, the people perish*", meaning that if we *don't* have it, the ultimate result is death -- death of a marriage, of a business, of a nation's soul, or even of a church! ⁷
 (Rick Warren: "*Where there is no vision, the people head to another parish!*")

1--in other words, if we want to continue to reach people for Jesus, then to take us successfully into the future, we CANNOT just depend on the feel-good memories of the past, or the current inertia of the present.

2--As someone once put it, "*We can't become what God wants us to become by remaining who we are.*" ⁸

B--No, we instead have to be willing to listen for the *new things* that God is calling us to. And the specific *way(s)* by which God *conveys* those things is called "Vision."

--IV--

10. You know, Cornerstone UMC has a proud history dating back 30 years, when members of this community saw God's Vision and heard His call for a new church here at what was then the newly developing area of Coweta County called Thomas Crossroads -- some of you were here then and remember those days!

A--And over the years, you and others continued to develop and refine that call and Vision to become something *new* and more for the people who would come and live here, and the result was a vibrant church here.

B--And while the global pandemic and other challenges over the last few years have caused us to go through a pruning process, remember that (as with trees) the most effective growth usually comes *through* pruning.

C--So now, we're at an important crossroads in our history where we have to decide *how* we want to grow after our pruning.

D--And to do that effectively, we're going to need to hear from God. In other words, we're going to need to "*Dream God's Dream*" for a new Vision for Cornerstone UMC:
 ...a vision *rooted* in the past, but *stretching* towards the future; ⁹
 ...a vision that doesn't so much seek to *repeat* who we have *been*, but to *discover* who we can *become* by listening to and hearing from God.

11. Now, this won't happen overnight. It'll take time, energy, money, and a lot of prayer!

A--So, the next year or so, I want to initiate a process with you and our church leadership by which we -- *together* -- can listen for, hear, discover and then begin to implement God's new Vision for us as a church.

B--But *before* we do that (and, in fact, in *order* for us TO do that), I as your new Pastor need to know *you* better as a church congregation, & *you* need to know me better, too.

1--Of course, hopefully you've already heard in Andy's recent announcement videos that one of the ways your church SPR Committee hopes to accomplish this is by hosting a series of "*Get to Know You*" cottage meetings in member homes and via Zoom over the next month or so (more about this soon).

2--But, right now I want to introduce another way for me at least to get to know *you* and what you value and feel should be a priority here at our church...

3--I'm going to ask the Ushers **NOW** to hand out a "*Get to Know Us*" pastor survey for you to take home, fill out & return in-person or by mail, or you can complete it online using the QR code or weblink at the bottom of the page.
*[for those of you worshipping online today, please visit the link at the bottom of your screen and you'll be taken to the same survey]*¹⁰

4--We'll have this survey available on our church Facebook page and other places for the next month so you can complete it. But please do take time to let me know your thoughts on the four simple questions there as I get to know you.

12. In the meantime, please remember that we can't become who God wants us to *become* simply by remaining who we *are*. Instead, God needs us to "*Dream God's Dreams*" for our future! Will you join me, together, in doing just that?¹¹
13. [PRAYER: "*Lord, we long to know and do your will. Grant us the vision to see your plans for your church and the courage and boldness to carry them to completion. In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.*"]
14. **[Suggested 11am closing hymn: UMH#451, *Be Thou My Vision*]**

ENDNOTES:

¹ From the article "Disneyland: From Dream to Reality" by Katie Mason, found in Animation Magazine, Issue 3.9 (December 1998).

² Information gathered from several sources: <https://www.titlemax.com/discovery-center/money-finance/companies-disney-owns-worldwide/> , https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Walt_Disney_Television , <https://gotthisnow.com/does-disney-own-a-sports-team> , <https://www.statista.com/statistics/224397/quarterly-revenue-of-the-walt-disney-company/>

³ Cited by Haddon W. Robinson in Leadership magazine, Spring 1993, p. 48.

⁴ The Hebrew term is "*hizayon*" (Strong's Dictionary of the Bible term #h2384). In fact, the rest of the book of Joel goes on to convey what God wants to shape Israel into becoming in order to reach the world through them. As pastor and author Dick Wills notes, "*It is not what you are now that is important, but what God wants you to be and what you can be with faith*" (Dick Wills, cited in his book Waking to God's Dream, p. 16).

⁵ Share by former North Georgia United Methodist pastor Rev. Daniel Slagle, now serving a United Methodist church in Texas. There are many other definitions of vision, as well. For example, Jonathan Swift once wrote that "*Vision is the art of seeing things invisible*" (Jonathan Swift, cited in Leadership magazine, Vol. 15, no. 3). Another author said that "*Vision is merely hope with a blueprint*" (Author unknown, cited in Leadership magazine, Vol. 15, no. 3). Church leadership consultant Lovett Weems says that vision is "*A picture of a preferred future... which grows out of a [group's core] purpose*" (Lovett Weems, cited in his book Church Leadership, pp. 39 & 41).

⁶ Leadership consultant George Barna describes it this way: "*Vision is the ability to understand the history, the present condition, and the potential of the church, and to conceive a plan for action that will maximize the ministry potential. More often than not, vision is a result of having spent much time absorbing the facts about the community, knowing the resources upon which the church can call (people, funding, facilities, equipment, etc.), and devising sound but creative strategies for moving forward. Vision always entails progress: it is never satisfied with the status quo*" [--Barna, cited in How to Find Your Church, p. 104].

⁷ In one of my doctoral classes, Dr. Lovett Weems described the life-cycle stages of that all organizations and groups go through:

Stage 1-- Vision, where all energy is spent on chasing a dream/vision;

Stage 2--Growth, where there is still a lot of "dream energy," but some energy is now spent on *essential* institutional concerns;

Stage 3-- Maintenance, where inordinate attention now given to institutional concerns, and little attention is paid to the cultivation of vision;

Stage 4-- Unacknowledged Decline, in which those inside the organization fail to acknowledge decline because inertia has kept the organization "coasting" in growth for a while. However, the failure to cultivate vision has already begun to fatally cripple the organization;

Stage 5-- Recognized/Acknowledged Decline. By the time their decline is recognized, the organization lacks the critical mass of vision necessary to pull out of the "nose-dive" and prevent eventual death;

Stage 6-- Crisis/Death. In the words of Proverbs 29:18 says, "where there is no vision the people perish."

[--Dr. Lovett Weems, described in the Doctor of Ministry class "Ministry and Leadership" at Saint Paul School of Theology, Kansas City, MO, June 2000]

Weems' point is that since all organizations and groups (including business companies, churches, and denominations) go through this same cycle, the only way to avoid plunging into the decline and death stages is, every once in a while, for them to take the time to re-discern and recast their original vision.

⁸ Lovett Weems, cited in his book Church Leadership, p. 38. In a similar vein, what Goethe once said about individuals can be equally applied to the church "*If you treat an individual as he is, he will stay that way, but if you treat him as if he were what he could be, he will become what he could be*" [Goethe, cited in Leadership magazine, Vol. 15, No. 3].

⁹ Visions for the *future* never mean that we have to "*toss the baby out with the bathwater*". No. While we pursue God's NEW visions for us, remember they always carry within them the "spiritual DNA" of our past history and heritage.

¹⁰ The survey has the following content: *"Please help Pastor Brian get to know and better understand our church's core values and priorities by sharing your honest, anonymous feedback about the following four questions..."*

- 1. If there's one thing you hope NEVER changes about Cornerstone UMC, what would it be?*
- 2. If you could wave a magic wand and CHANGE any one thing about Cornerstone UMC, what would it be?*
- 3. As we share the gospel of Jesus in our community and world, what do you feel should be the PRIMARY VISION of Cornerstone UMC for the next 5 years?*
- 4. What's the best piece of ADVICE you could give Brian as our new Pastor?*

Please turn your completed printed survey either to the church office or in the offering plate. If you prefer to complete a digital copy, please either scan the following QR code with your smartphone, or visit the website to the right... <https://s.surveyplanet.com/3tlw899m>"

¹¹ Three specific things we can do NOW as we begin this "Visioning" process are:

#1--First and foremost, **PRAY** and ask God for a vision for our church. Pray *"Lord, what do you want us to BE or BECOME or DO for you in the future?"*

#2--Second, **MAKE TIME TO DREAM** -- after all, it's hard to hear God's voice or discern God's vision if we don't specifically take time to do this. Another way of thinking of this is to get into a spiritual posture of openness and trust in God. Get into a mind set in which you are spiritually prepared to receive responses, answers, and confirmations from God about His vision for us as a church and congregation. Consider the example of God speaking to Job in a dream: *"God is greater than any mortal. Why do you contend against him, saying, 'He will answer none of my words'? For God speaks in one way, and in two, though people do not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on mortals, while they slumber on their beds"* (Job 33:12b-15).

#3--**WAIT ON GOD** -- the process of getting a vision from God can't be rushed; it takes time; it's messy and rarely clear-cut; and but as we trust God and listen through our waiting, it WILL be given to us. Remember Habakkuk 2:3 -- *"There is still a vision for the appointed time; it speaks of the end, and does not lie. If it seems to tarry, wait for it; it will surely come, it will not delay."*