

The Heavenly Vision

~Other Speakers G-L: Aaron Hills:

In spite of the stares of the wise, and the world's derision, Dare travel the star-blazed road, dare follow the Vision.

The world is a vapor, and only the Vision is real -- Yea, nothing can hold against hell but the Winged Ideal. --
Edwin Markham

We are in a world where the whole course of things tends to secularize and degrade whatever is angelic in the soul. Aspiration is depressed, judgment is warped, conscience is drugged, faith is one, and hope is slain by the incessant grind of earthliness.

Whatever tends to stimulate the moral nature and bring men into higher condition than belong to their ordinary experience is a preparation for seeing invisible things as really and clearly as if they were visible. These visions -- for such they are -- come in innumerable ways: sometimes by a flash of truth upon the aroused intellect, sometimes through the quickened affections, sometimes through the awakened moral sentiments, sometimes through the excited imagination. A thousand things and occasions can play upon the corded soul and lift it above itself, till sordid cares are forgotten, and the burdens that have depressed the spirit are thrown off, and the Son of God breaks the chains of Satan that have bound him. He then stands and looks for a brief space with clear eye upon spiritual and eternal things. Clouds disappear, mists vanish, the glamour of unrealities is dispelled, and for one moment he sees as in the light of God.

How blessed a thing it is that there is in the nature of man that out of which may come these heavenly visions! How gracious that God kindly uses this possibility for moral ends, and arrest at times the attention of the soul and fixes it upon eternal things! Peter had such a vision when God would take narrow bigotry out of his heart and teach him the sublime truth of the common fatherhood of God and the brotherhood of man.

Little Samuel had such a vision when God would make the child acquainted with himself, and cause him to be the mouthpiece of Jehovah to a guilty house and a fallen people. It was Samuel's call and induction into office as the prophet and reformer of Israel.

Gideon had such a heavenly vision when God would lead him out of obscurity and timidly and fearfulness of heart, and clothe him with power for leadership and deeds of daring.

Saul, the mad bigot, breathing out threatening and slaughter, hating Jesus and His followers, in spite of manifold evidence of Christ's divinity and the innocence of His disciples -- this excited, half-insane fanatic received a sudden vision of the glory and divinity of Jesus, and the wickedness of his persecutions, and the awful folly of vision smote him and made him fall before the pierced feet. He bowed his will in submission, and his life was forever changed. John, imprisoned on a barren and desolate isle for Christ's sake, filled with sorrow over what seemed the impending doom of the kingdom of God, receive a comforting vision of the Son of Man's reigning in supernal glory, overcoming the prince of darkness, and setting up His eternal kingdom of light and love. The aged apostle gathered hope, and sent his comforting message and loving warning to the churches to prepare them to resist the onswEEPing persecution of the pagan emperor.

Such were visions, and such their varied purposes in other days. God for similar ends is sending them yet. Some illustrations of the working of God's Spirit and providences will throw light upon this subject.

A college student in England had neglected his studies, rioting at night with dissipated companions, and sleeping in the classroom when he ought to have been listening. A fellow student came into his room one morning before he had risen from his pillow and solemnly said to him in the name of Jesus: "Paley, you are a fool! You are wasting your opportunities. Do not throw away your life. I have no talent, but you can make of yourself what you will." Years afterward Paley wrote: "I was so struck with what he said that I lay in bed until I had formed my plan for life. I ordered my fire to be always laid at night. I arose at five o'clock in the morning, and read steadily all day. I allotted to each portion of the day its proper branch of study, and became Senior Wrangler." What an hour that was when God sent to that young man a vision of his possible greatness and impending ruin! A resolution was formed that converted a wrecked and dissipated young man into a consecrated scholar and one of the most stalwart defenders of Christianity, till all time and all eternity will be debtor to his influence.

Sometimes souls are aroused by special providences to hear the voice of God and change their destiny. Such

was the case with both Lord Clive and Garfield. Lord Clive, the founder of England's great Indian empire, landed in India a wild, reckless youth with a purse empty and a character lost by dissipation. Weary of life, which was a disgrace to his friends and a burden to himself, loading a pistol and putting the muzzle to his head, he drew but only to flash the powder in the pan. Renewing the priming once more he put his finger on the trigger and the muzzle to his brow, and was about to draw when, impressed by his remarkable escapes, he laid the pistol down, saying, godless and graceless man as he was, "Surely God intends to do some great things by me that He has so preserved me!" Thus the failure of the deadly weapon to take his life was the voice of God to his soul, and made him the founder of a Christian empire.

So with Garfield. The reading of a bad book fired his youthful mind to leave the society of his prayerful mother and have a sensational career at sea. He went to a vessel on Lake Erie to seek service as a sailor. The captain cursed him and the sailors jeered at him so brutally that he was abashed. He then thought to begin lower down by service on a canal-boat. He fell or was knocked into the fourteen times the first trip, and he could not swim. One night in some way, while he was handling the rope, it caught in the crevice of the boat by kinking and then slipped suddenly and threw him into the dark waters where none could see him but God. He caught the slack rope as he sank, when it suddenly straightened and, climbing hand over hand, he regained the vessel. Another kink in the rope had caught in the crevice and saved him. Drenched as he was, he sat down in the darkness to think. He threw the rope into the crevice six hundred times and it would not kink again. He said to himself: "I might throw this rope ten times as many times without its kinking, so there were six thousand chances against my life. Against such odds Providence alone could have saved me. God therefore thinks my life is worth saving, and if that's so I will not throw it away on a canal-boat. I'll go home, get an education, and become a man." Thus again a striking Providence aroused a reckless youth to a sense of his worth, by which a Christian statesman was saved to the world.

Oh, these experiences that heaven's messages into the soul these VISIONS that lifts the curtain of destiny and turn wandering and tardy feet into the path of divine appointment! How gracious they are! What benedictions from heaven!

And they come to Christians also as a kindly call to a higher and fuller life. It was the prayers of two holy women, pleading for Moody's anointing with the Holy Spirit for special service that brought him his heart-hunger for God, his vision, and all that he afterward became. It was in the gray dismal morning in London that the holy Mr. Studd came to and F. B. Meyer's room and moved him to welcome the Holy Ghost in all His blessed fullness into his heart. Dr. Wilbur Chapman says: "I had had visions of this power of the Holy Spirit, and glimpses of what I might be if I were 'filled with the Spirit,' but all this time, as it was with the disciples at Ephesus, was a great lacking." At last by reading a tract received a vision of how to receive the blessing and he bowed and entered in.

The prophet Isaiah had a vision of the holy God and a holy heaven, and was convicted for HOLINESS, and received the blessing. It is the hour of all hours to a believer when this vision and call to holiness comes. The late Professor Drummond says: "The departure of the soul from God begins when the believer rejects the tender of holiness. He thus turns away from God to face the perils of moral deterioration and death. It means moral suicide and ante-mortem damnation."

Mr. L_____ stood high in the church of which a friend of mine was pastor -- a preacher of full salvation. A revival wave of the holiness kind struck that church, and it brought to Brother L---- the vision of a clean heart. But he held off and advocated the growth theory. He stood for a time face to face with God, and the issue consciously rejected sanctification. He soon began to neglect the house of God. The family altar went down. Zeal for the church waned. Another revival came, in which his own children were converted, but he dodged it. The faithful pastor urged upon him present holiness as the only reliable thing in the midst of life's uncertain. But he refused all pleadings and persuasions, holding out against the call of God. A few weeks later he fell from a tree and was killed instantly.

A minister of unusual gifts and power had a humble brother in his church who was blessedly sanctified. The minister, like the prophet Isaiah, got convicted for a clean heart. He took the humble brother in his carriage out to a grove and asked him to pray for him. But he was not quite willing to pay the price for the unspeakable gift; he felt that the consecration required was too much. The heavenly vision had come, and sanctification was rejected. In the course of time this talented minister lost his power and his sweetness, became bitter and full of the spirit of persecution against holiness. He turned that humble brother out of the church, and hated the cause he represented. Now that minister is a backslidden wanderer in a distant state; while the humble, sanctified brother has become an evangelist known from ocean to ocean

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Oh, this vision -- this call to holiness -- it is the touch of God and the breath of heaven to the soul! If any reader of these lines has seen the truth, has felt the call, I beseech you, be not disobedient to the heavenly vision." "He that despiseth, despiseth not man but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit." It is an awful, a fatal thing to quench the Spirit of God.