

Proverbs 29:18 says that where there is no vision, the people perish. The context of that verse is that when there is no awareness of, or concern for, the things of God, those people are lost, without hope, and destined for destruction. Those of us who have a biblical worldview can see the dangers that presents for our culture, our country, and the world.

The bible says that the fear of God is the beginning of wisdom, but we look at what has happened to America over the last fifty years and we ask, "Is there no fear of God anymore?" Our country's first public schools used the Bible as their primary textbook, but in the 1960's the law of the land became, "Keep the Bible out of the public schools." Heaven forbid that we teach our children the principles of God's word. Instead, in increasing measure, our nation's textbooks have been filled with New Age philosophy, the doctrines of evolution, socialism, and every sort of pseudo-science to explain away the necessity of a creator God.

During that same time period, my generation cast off all moral restraint, and many became self-absorbed, pleasure seeking, pagans. The God ordained marriage institution was cast aside in the name of free love. There was a shift from worshipping God to the occult, through the use of psychedelic drugs. The gift of life was exchanged for a woman's right to choose. Political correctness supplanted simple truth. Financial responsibility gave way to slavery to debt.

Government policy created an entitlement mindset that has imprisoned far to many in poverty with little hope of ever being set free. Moderation and restraint have been replaced with "Let the liquor flow." The words fidelity, morality, and commitment find little use in our vocabulary as adultery, fornication, and divorce have taken their place.

As it was in the days of Noah, as it was in the days of Sodom and Gomorra, so it has become today. As a culture we are loosing touch with God. There is no fear of God among many. There isn't even an acknowledgement that He exists, and so, the people perish. What the world needs today is a fresh vision, the light of Christ, as presented in the gospel message. Jesus said that we are to let our light shine for the whole world to see. We share the good news so that others may turn from their sins, and turn towards God. We help them to make the shift from a secular worldview to a biblical worldview through our personal testimonies. Only then can there be vision, hope and life.

In our passage this evening we going to see what can happen when a person gets a vision of God, and Christians share the good news. Please read Acts 10:1-8.

The central theme of the book of Acts is the spread of the gospel through the personal witness of those who believe. As we work through each section, we see the progressive revelation that the gospel is for all people. Jesus' sacrifice covers the sins of all who place their faith in Him. In our passage this evening, Luke introduces us to a man named Cornelius. He was a Roman commander of 100 men in a regiment of 600. Like the Ethiopian eunuch, he was a God-fearer. That means that he was not a Jew by birth, or a convert to Judaism, but he worshipped Yahweh, the God of the Jews. He was a devout man, who feared God, along with his whole household. He gave money to the needy and prayed continually.

There was just one problem; he was still lost in his sins. From a worldly perspective we might argue that he was a godly man. He believed in God. Cornelius was a man of prayer. He was a good guy who blessed others with his generosity. By all accounts, he had a good sense of morality, and piety. But we have to remember that personal righteousness does not save; only Jesus saves.

When we are reminded of this truth, we understand that folks that we consider to be really good people, still need Jesus in order to be saved. Going to church does not save, doing good things, or being a good person does not save, only Jesus saves. There is a great big world out there that does not have this vision. If they have any concern about God at all, they still trust in a doctrine of salvation of their own making, based upon their collective life experience, and wishful thinking. In order to be respectful of other's beliefs, there is a popular doctrine in our culture that there are many ways to get to heaven. If that is true, then each one of us can create our own reality, and make our own plan of salvation, with ourselves as the judge.

But if we have a biblical worldview, we know that Jesus said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life, no one comes to the Father but by me." We have the good news, that God, in His grace, has done something for us, so that we can be saved. God sent His Son, Jesus Christ, to be a sin offering, a perfect sacrifice, so that through faith in Him, we might be forgiven of our sins, sealed with His Holy Spirit, and receive the promise of eternal life.

The lost world does not have this vision, so we who have been saved must share the vision for the sake of the lost. In a world of darkness, we have the light of the truth of God's word, and the message of forgiveness, love, grace, and eternal life. How will anyone know, if we do not tell him or her? Without vision, the people will perish.

Cornelius caught the vision when an angel of the Lord appeared to him. He stared at him in terror and said, "What is it Lord?" The angel answered, "Your prayers and your alms have ascended as a memorial before God."

Within this passage we see another important biblical principle. Those who seek God, find Him. Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given unto you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and the door will be opened unto you." He also said, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock, if anyone opens the door I will come in." When we consider these verses in context we begin to understand the dynamics of a person entering into a personal relationship with the Lord. Jesus desires to come through the barrier, the door, into a person's heart, but He waits until each person opens that door to invite Him in.

But, before a person will invite Christ into his or her heart, that person has to catch the vision, and seek Him. In the case of Cornelius, he was already seeking the Lord with all of His heart, but he had an incomplete understanding of how to be saved. An angel of the Lord appeared to him, and gave him specific instructions of what to do, so that he could have a complete vision of how to be saved.

There are those who think of God as uncaring, mean, or vindictive. They base their criticism on a question. "What about those who never have an opportunity to hear the gospel? Is God justified in sending them to hell?"

Let me answer the second question first. God doesn't send anybody to hell. We all deserve hell and eternal separation from God because of our sin. The wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Not everyone thinks of himself or herself as a sinner. They don't have the vision. They don't know, or won't accept the truth. They refuse to humble themselves before Holy God, and beg for His forgiveness. But, when a person catches the vision, and they seek the Lord with all of their heart, God will make a way for that person, so that they can come to know the truth.

We spread the truth by sharing our personal testimonies, and the gospel message. We falter, however, because people don't always respond to our message in the way that we hope. Sometimes, sharing the love of Christ is met with hostility. But, this is a central theme in the book of Acts, and we should not think that it would be any different for us today. If through our

witness we do not win someone to Christ, we have still exposed him or her to the truth. With continual exposure to the truth, we pray that they will catch the vision, and turn to Christ in order to be saved.

Cornelius sought the Lord with all of his heart, but even when the angel appeared to him, he was still lost in his sins. He needed a deeper understanding, before he could make the commitment necessary for him to be saved.

God gave Cornelius specific instructions, "Send men to Joppa, and bring one Simon who is called Peter." Have you ever wondered what would have happened if Cornelius had not followed through, and sent for Peter? What happens today, when people catch the vision, but do not follow through?

Salvation, and a personal relationship with God, is tied to a progressive revelation. It begins with vision, but as a person begins to understand, each element comprehended requires a step of faith. In Greek, the word translated as faith is both a noun and a verb. Faith implies action. Steps of faith are real world indications that a person is catching the vision and it is a necessary part of the salvation process, as well as an essential element in maintaining a continuing personal relationship with the Lord. The bible says that without faith, it is impossible to please God. We have to believe that God exists. We have to accept that the Bible is God's word. We receive Jesus in faith, as Savior and Lord, and then we live the rest of our days in faith, trusting Christ for our salvation, and His lordship over our lives, so that we can live for God.

Notice that the Lord's instructions were specific. God revealed exactly what must be done in order for Cornelius to take the necessary first step of faith towards salvation. So Cornelius did exactly what God told Him to do. God's word is specific. God's plan of salvation is specific. God's plan for our lives is specific. This is wonderful news if you are a born again Christian, because we have the word of God, and His Holy Spirit to instruct us on God's specific will. When we live our lives with a biblical worldview, we do not have to live in the grey area, because it becomes clear to us what is right, and what is wrong. It is equally clear to the person who first catches the vision, as to what he or she needs to do next. Even without a full understanding, a person who seeks God with all of his or her heart will be set on the right path toward salvation.

As we wrap up this portion of the scripture, I want to point out that Cornelius sent two of his servants, and a devout soldier from among those who attended him. In Greek, the word devout is an adjective that may be applied to all three of these men. Later we find out that when Peter came, Cornelius invited all of his family and friends to hear Peter proclaim the gospel, and the scripture implies that they all received Christ as Savior and Lord.

Luke records this event so that the reader understands that the gospel spread even to a Gentile Roman Centurion, all of His family, and all of His friends. This scripture reminds us that the gospel is for everyone, and meant to be shared with everyone. The scriptures convict us that we must be bold in our witness, and that we must share Christ without prejudice. Through sharing our faith, we spread God's vision for a lost world, so that people who catch that vision might have an opportunity to be saved.

We are all sinners by nature and by choice. But, God so loved the world, that He gave His Only Begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him shall not perish, but have everlasting life. The bible teaches that if we confess and repent of our sins, He is faithful to forgive us, and cleans us of all unrighteousness. If we invite Jesus into our heart as Savior and Lord, He will save us, seal us with His Holy Spirit, be with us through every circumstance of life, and give us eternal life with Him in glory.

If there is anyone here who has not surrendered his or her life in faith to the Lord Jesus Christ, the vision has been cast. Even now, Jesus knocks at the door of your heart, so that you have an opportunity to be saved. For those of us who are sure of our salvation, the scripture challenges us to be more faithful in our witness, so that the lost world may catch the vision and be saved.