

church times

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Why Do We Need A Heavenly Vision?

**"Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint;
But happy is he who keeps the law." (Prov 29:18)**

Why does man need a heavenly revelation or vision? Since man's fall, only a minority have walked with God; the rest do what is right in their own eyes, unaware that it is actually evil in His eyes. Man needs a heavenly vision in order to lead a godly life. In every age, God has been appearing, speaking and showing what He wants to do for man, and what He wants man to do for Him. Let us consider how those who have received such a heavenly vision have led a purposeful and godly life.

During Adam's time

God created man: both male and female. God blessed them and said to them: "Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it; have dominion over ... every living thing that moves on the earth" (Gen 1:28). God wanted them to rule over the earth for Him and express His glory. Then He put them in the garden of Eden and commanded them: "Of every tree of the garden you may freely eat; but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die" (Gen 2:16-17). But they were tempted by the serpent, disobeyed God and thus lost not only the authority to rule over the earth, but also the right to eat of the tree of life (to live forever) and were banished from God's presence (Gen 3:24). This is why man needs God's appearing and His heavenly vision.

Fallen man is sinful (Rom 5:12) and cannot approach God who is holy. God, however, revealed to Adam that man needed sacrifices to draw near to Him (Gen 3:21). So the requirement of serving God then was to offer sacrifices according to His will. For instance, Cain offered the fruit of the ground while Abel brought the firstborn of his flock and of their fat. God respected Abel and his offering, but not Cain and his offering (Gen 4:3-5). Cain offered the fruit of his labour with good intentions, but he forgot that the ground had been cursed (3:17). How then could he offer accursed things to God? The offering was not according to what God wanted. He could not accept it. God's salvation requires the shedding of blood, without which there is no remission of sins (Heb 9:22). Abel's offering was according to the heavenly vision and satisfied God's righteous requirement, so it was accepted. This is the way we should worship and serve God today.

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Be it from the newspapers or internet, we can see how colourful and interesting this world seems. Superficially, it appears that the world is progressing dynamically, especially in technology. However, moral values are on the wane. We witness all kinds of social problems all around us, eg family violence, gang fights, lawsuits between family members over money, divorce and infidelity, flirtation among the young, premarital pregnancy, indifference to the needy in trains or buses. It is indeed as what the Bible says: "In the last days perilous times will come: For men will be lovers of themselves, lovers of money, ... disobedient to parents, ... brutal, ... haughty, lovers of pleasure" (2 Tim 3:1-4).

These happenings remind us that our redemption is drawing near (Luke 21:28). In this issue, we feature a message on heavenly visions. May brothers and sisters be helped by it and know how to keep the Lord's word and lead a sanctified life in such an environment, amen!

The editors

During Noah's time

By Noah's time, all flesh had corrupted their way and God was sorry that He had made man. He told Noah: "The end of all flesh has come before Me ... I will destroy them with the earth." God pronounced the impending judgement, instructed Noah to build an ark, and made a covenant with him to save his family (Gen 6:6,12-18). Why did God speak only to Noah? It was because Noah walked with God and was a just man, perfect in his generations. Hence he found grace in God's eyes (Gen 6:8-9). This shows us that to receive His heavenly vision, we must walk with God like Noah did.

Noah obeyed God and faithfully finished what God had asked him to do, no matter if others disagreed. The rest of the inhabitants, on the contrary, while knowing about the building of the ark and the imminent judgement, remained indifferent, choosing to focus only on earthly matters like eating, drinking and marrying. They had no time for and even did not care about God's will. Eventually the judgement came and all perished except Noah and his family (Gen 7:23). Hebrews 11:7 testifies that "by faith Noah, being divinely warned of things not yet seen, moved with godly fear, prepared an ark for the saving of his household, by which he condemned the world and became heir of the righteousness which is according to faith." We should be warned!

During Abraham's time

By Abraham's time, idolatry was rampant. To gain His kingdom on earth, God appeared to Abraham, called him out of Ur of the Chaldeans (land of idolatry) and told him: "Get out of your country, From your family And from your father's house, To a land that I will show you. I will make you a great nation; I will bless you And make your name great; And you shall be a blessing. I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed" (Gen 12:1-3). This shows us that God's heavenly vision is not just to gain us individually but also corporately. He wants to gain a kingdom from Abraham's descendants.

Abraham obeyed the heavenly vision and remained faithful to the end: "By faith Abraham obeyed when he was called to go out to the place which he would receive as an inheritance. And he went out, not knowing where he was going. By faith he dwelt in the land of promise as in a foreign country, dwelling in tents ... for he waited for the city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb 11:8-10). God's promise to Abraham was fulfilled. He begot Isaac, who begot Jacob, who begot the twelve patriarchs. God blessed Jacob's descendants – Israel, who multiplied and grew very mighty. However, they came under Pharaoh's rule in Egypt and could not serve the true God or manifest His kingdom.

During Moses' time

God appeared to Moses in a burning bush; from this vision, he knew the I AM, the only true God (Ex 3:2-14). God sent him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt, that they might "know that I am the LORD their God ... that I may dwell among them" (Ex 29:46). After they had left Egypt and come to Mount Sinai, God called Moses up the mountain to reveal His will to him. God

told him to build a tabernacle for Him to dwell among the people, and to make everything according to the pattern He had shown him (Ex 25:8-9). God also gave Moses His laws, ordinances and commandments to teach the people to lead a sanctified life, and charged them to keep the Passover and offer sacrifices to Him in the place where He chose to put His name (Deut 16:1-2).

Moses obeyed God, led the Israelites to build the tabernacle according to His instructions, and set up the priestly service. The tabernacle was where God put His name and met with His people; it was sanctified by His glory. The service here was according to a heavenly vision, it was God's requirement of the Israelites which they should keep forever. Moses reminded them of it before they entered the good land: "When you cross over the Jordan and dwell in the land which the LORD your God is giving you to inherit ... there will be the place where the LORD your God chooses to make His name abide. There you shall bring all that I command you ... And you shall rejoice before the LORD your God ... Take heed to yourself that you do not offer your burnt offerings in every place that you see; but in the place which the LORD chooses, in one of your tribes, there you shall offer your burnt offerings, and there you shall do all that I command you" (Deut 12:10-14).

Thank the Lord, Moses was faithful in God's house. He did not disobey this heavenly vision which made him live for God and His will all his life. May the Lord lead the church to apply this heavenly vision of serving God in the church life today.

During David's time

David who knew God and the vision He had given Moses on Mount Sinai thought of God's ark in the tent while he dwelt in a palace of cedar. He desired to build God a temple, but God showed him that his son Solomon would build it instead. Nevertheless, he prepared the craftsmen and materials for the building – masons, woodsmen, stonemasons, stones, iron, bronze, cedar wood, gold, silver, all kinds of precious stones, marble slabs and his own special treasure of gold and silver – all out of love for God's temple (1 Chron 22:1-16; 29:2-3).

Furthermore, David prepared Solomon for the work by showing him the blueprint and encouraging him to be loyal and strong (1 Chron 28:9-19). David also commanded all the leaders of Israel to help Solomon, to set their hearts and souls to seek God, to build the temple and bring all the holy articles into it (1 Chron 22:17-19). David did all he could to fulfil God's commission to Moses on Mount Sinai, that is why God calls him a man after His own heart (Acts 13:22).

May God gain brothers in the church today to follow David's example, love His dwelling place, impart God's heavenly vision to the younger generation and train them to continue with the fulfilment of God's will.

During Solomon's time

Solomon received the heavenly vision from his father and started building God's temple in the fourth year of his reign (1 Ki 6:1). When the building was completed, he brought in the things which his father had dedicated and put them in the treasuries of the house of God. Then he assembled the elders and leaders in Jerusalem to bring the ark into the temple, and prayed on his knees

before all the assembly of Israel. When he had finished praying, fire came down from heaven and consumed the offerings, and the glory of God filled the temple. The Israelites bowed their faces to the ground, worshipped and praised God, saying: "For He is good, For His mercy endures forever" (2 Chron 5:1-2; 6:12-13; 7:1-3). God answered Solomon's prayer by consecrating the temple and setting His name, His eyes and His heart there perpetually (1 Ki 9:3). So God's promise to David was fulfilled and the temple in Jerusalem became the centre of Israel's service of God.

The time of the kings

The splendour of the temple in Jerusalem was short-lived, for Solomon disobeyed this heavenly vision when he was old. He had numerous wives and concubines who turned his heart after other gods. His heart was not loyal to God and he did evil in His sight, so God became angry with him (1 Ki 11:3-9). Except for a minority, most of the subsequent kings also did evil in God's eyes. King Manasseh, in particular, did much evil to provoke God to anger, e.g. he built altars for all the host of heaven in God's temple, made his son pass through the fire, used witchcraft and consulted spiritists and mediums (2 Ki 21:1-7).

The temple where God had put His name was utterly corrupted, which provoked Him greatly and brought about His punishment on Israel. Eventually, the Israelites were captured to Babylon and the nation of Israel was destroyed, fulfilling thereby God's warning to Solomon: "If you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes ... but go and serve other gods and worship them, then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples. And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss, and say, 'Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?' Then they will answer, 'Because they forsook the LORD their God ... and have embraced other gods, and worshipped them and served them; therefore the LORD has brought all this calamity on them.'" (1 Ki 9:6-9). May Israel's history be a warning to us in the church today.

Conclusion

The Old Testament shows us that since the Fall, God's desire has been that man will know Him and know His heart's desire. In every age therefore, He reveals His heavenly vision to man with the goal that he will respond to and co-operate with Him. From the examples over the ages, we see that the fulfilment of God's will depends fully on those who are willing to obey, consecrate their lives and do exactly according to the heavenly vision. May we in the New Testament learn from them, consecrate ourselves to Him and let God accomplish His will on us, amen!

(The message is based on a sister's personal spiritual pursuit and messages from the Youth & Young People's Meeting (pursuit of Old Testament characters) and the conference in Bangkok in October 2010.)

Church Conference in Bangkok – 22-25 October 2010

Thank the Lord, 17 brothers and sisters attended the conference. The theme was: The Heavenly Visions. "Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; But happy is he who keeps the law" (Prov 29:18). We live in an age of information and materialism. In such a technologically advanced and epicurean environment, if the younger generation does not see heavenly visions, it will be lost and will spend much energy and time in the world, having neither the desire for nor the knowledge of God and His will. Hence the church needs heavenly visions.

Our Father knows the temptations we face, so He leads the church to review the heavenly visions, not only helping the younger ones to desire such visions, but also the older ones to renew their visions. We considered the visions from the time of Adam to the second coming of Christ, as well as why God gave heavenly visions to certain people: they were servants according to His heart, who walked with Him, believed His word absolutely, led sanctified lives, remained faithful to His commissions and depended fully on Him. In the Bible, God Himself testified of their faith, so we should learn from their good examples.

(The recording is available from the audio service.)

Elderly's Outing – 17 November 2010

The few days before the outing had been rainy and some were worried that it would rain on that day too. Actually, we need not worry at all, for the God on whom we depend is faithful and caring. And we indeed experienced His faithfulness on that day. Many participants arrived at the hall before 8am, and the saints



The Elderly's Outing at the Chinese Garden

gathered together to pray for one another, the gospel friends, the weather etc. A couple who had to drop out at the last moment continued to ask for blessings on the outing.

More than 70 brothers and sisters, all in high spirits, joined the outing, including a 91-year-old sister who was suffering from poor vision and a few others who needed wheelchairs. Also present were a few young sisters who accompanied their grandmothers cheerfully. Thank the Lord, the saints and gospel friends mingled freely and were filled with joy. The Lord heard our prayers and blessed us with good weather: it was cool, rainy or warm at just the right time! Glory be to God! May more elderly saints take part in the next outing, and more young ones accompany their grandparents and enjoy the Lord's grace together, amen!



Singing praises to the Lord

Sharing:

As the friend I had invited could not make it to the outing, I was hesitant about joining it. When I was enjoying the Lord's word that morning, I felt a prompting to go prepare myself for it. But I ignored the prompting and continued reading. Then it came again and I just had to obey the teaching of the anointing.

As I hurried to the outing venue, I looked at the sunny sky and thanked God for it. But I also felt it would be too hot for the elderly, so I asked the Lord for a cooler weather. Indeed, it became cooler and we had a great time singing praises to God at the Chinese Garden and enjoying the Bonsai Garden under a cloudy sky. The greatest joy of all was sharing the story of Jesus' love with the gospel friends.

Then we continued experiencing the Lord's wondrous leading. On our way to the Science Centre, it rained, even quite heavily. But when we arrived, it stopped raining. And after lunch, it became very sunny, but we were not affected at all because we were already on our way home. Thank the Lord that His lovingkindness followed us all the way, amen!

Sis Grace Twan

Year End Students' Camp

– 28-30 November 2010

By God's grace and mercy, 53 youths attended the students' camp. The theme was: God's unceasing love and how we ought to respond to it. We learnt that loving the Lord requires more than our mere expression in words. It demands more importantly our action. When we say we love Him, we have to keep His commandments and depart from iniquity. There were also two meetings on the importance of baptism. Out of His great love for us, the Lord wants to save us not only from eternal perdition, but also from our self, sin, and this evil and perverse generation – through baptism. He wants to save us to the uttermost!

Not neglecting to keep our bodies healthy for the Lord's use, the camp was also packed with fun-filled indoor and outdoor games, as well as activities like hymn-singing, handicraft session on the making of photo frames for one another, and personal free time to come together to encourage and exhort each other. It was a joy to see many youths touched to call a hymn or pray aloud during the meetings. We give thanks and praises to the Lord for His leading, guidance and faithfulness throughout the camp, and pray that more youths will rise up to love the Lord and His church! Glory be unto His name!



The youths making photo frames for one another enthusiastically

Baptism (III)

In this issue, we look at the significance of baptism. All who were baptised must always remember this word: “Or do you not know that as many of us as were baptised into Christ Jesus were baptised into His death?” (Rom 6:3). This word looks backward, not forward. It is for all who were baptised. God informs them that when they were baptised, they died with the Lord, were buried with Him, and also resurrected with Him. The emphasis here is death; we ought to die with Him. The water of baptism typifies the grave. When you are immersed into the water, it means you are buried into the earth. And when you are raised from the water, it means you rise from the grave. Before the burial, you have definitely died, it cannot be otherwise. And when you rise up, you have definitely resurrected.

I have died

This is great news; when the Lord Jesus was crucified, He took us along and we also died on the cross. Before God, He finished us off. What do you think about yourself today? You must feel: “Oh, I’m impossible!” Those who do not know themselves are unaware of this. Those who know God and themselves confess this. When you know that you are sinful and hear of the Lord Jesus’ death, it is great news. When you see how wicked and hopeless you are, and hear that you have died, it is also great news. Thank God, this is the gospel! The Lord’s death includes you, you have died too, this is great news! Just as the Lord’s death is great news, so is my death. Just as the Lord’s death is a cause for joy, so is my death. If I heard that my Lord had died, my first thought would be to bury Him, like Joseph did (Matt 27:57-60). Likewise, when I hear that I have died, the first thing I do is to be buried. The first thought after death is burial. Death is not the end. You have died in Christ, so the first thing you have to do is to be buried.

I have resurrected

After you are baptised, you must remember that you have died. Because you believe in the certainty of death, you allow yourself to be buried. If you have not died, your heart is still beating and you are still breathing, you cannot be buried. To be buried, you have to be dead first. When the Lord Jesus was crucified, you also died. Because you believe that you have died, you ask others to bury you in the water. Because the Lord Jesus has resurrected and put the power of resurrection into you, you are regenerated by this power. The power of resurrection works in you and resurrects you, so you arise from the water. You are a resurrected man, no longer the old man. Today we need to look back at this matter frequently. Before I enter into the water, I believe I have died, so I go get buried. After I

arise from the water, I have the newness of life, so now I am on the side of resurrection. That side is death, this side is resurrection.

I am in Christ

There was a news article entitled: “One person, three lives”. It was about the killing of a woman pregnant with twins. In the Lord’s case, it is: “One Man, myriads of lives”. This is why the Bible keeps emphasizing “in Christ”. In that case, although the criminal killed only the mother, the children who were in her died too. Similarly, we who are in Christ also died when He died. God has put us in Christ: “But of Him you are in Christ Jesus ...” (1 Cor 1:30). So when Christ died, we all died as well. The basis for this is being in Christ. If you do not know what being in Christ is, you will not know what having died with Him means. How could the children die with the mother? By being in her. Likewise, God has united us in Christ, so when Christ died, we also died.

When this great news is preached to you, you must learn to know before God that you have died in the Lord, for you believe this is the truth. You are buried into the water and rise again. Now you are on this side of the grave, this is resurrection. Romans 6:11 asks us to reckon ourselves dead to sin but alive to God in Christ Jesus. This means we should consider ourselves to have died and also to be alive in Him. May brothers and sisters be brought onto this way once we are saved. Before baptism, we see that we have died, so we get buried in the water. After baptism, we see that we have resurrected, so we come to serve God.

(Abstract translated from “初信造就(上册)”, by Watchman Nee, Taiwan Gospel Book Room)

Testimony

How Great the Love that Sought Me!

Igrew up in a small village where there was just one Christian family in the midst of idol worshippers. My mother was a devout worshipper who would visit and present offerings in the temple at every festival. As for us children, these festivals were times of great celebration with feasting, stage performances and merry-making. The best part of these festivities was the snatching of coins. When actors threw coins from the stage, people swarmed like bees to snatch them and the quick and agile naturally got the most. That was both exciting and full of fun. When school examinations came around, I would listen to my mother and pray in the temple for good results and promotion.

I never yearned for the true meaning of life, but while staring at the vast sky and considering the wonders of nature, I did wonder: “How was this world formed? How did all things come to be? The sky is right before me, but why does it seem ever so out of reach?” At that time, information was not so readily available like today and I did not know where to look for answers, so I just put these thoughts aside. The Christian family preached the gospel to us, but we were not interested and did not spare a thought about believing in Jesus. From my textbooks, I knew Jesus as an advocate of universal fraternity. When I got older, I saw Him as the founder of a Western religion. Those who believed Him had betrayed their ancestors. Thus not only did I despise Christians in my heart, I even spat at their doors and mocked at them for sucking up to Westerners. Little

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did I know that in the eyes of the great Creator, my behaviour was pitiful, blind, and, as described in the Bible, foolish.

Thank God that in His forbearance, He had passed over the sins that were previously committed (Rom 3:25) and, in His good time, prepared a chance for a foolish one as me to awaken. When I was 19 years old, my kindly mother suddenly became aggressive one night. She wielded a hanger as if it were a sword and ordered us to kneel before her, proclaiming that she was a god from heaven. It happened so abruptly; we did not understand or know how to react, we could only cry. When my mother eventually calmed down, we were all totally exhausted by this experience. The next day, she was her usual self and seemed unaware of the previous night's happenings. After this incident, she often sang to relieve her sadness and carried around an almanac to tell fortune. After 7pm, she would become a different person and would leave home without telling anyone. One day, she even told us the monkey god Sun Wukong had instructed her in a dream to build him a temple. We told her Sun Wukong was just a fictional character from a book and she let the matter rest.

My mother's unusual condition made me worried and helpless. Therefore I was open to any means that could guarantee her safety. I prayed to our ancestors, a red paper with the word "God" written on it, a goddess in the temple, and even a picture which was supposed to be of Jesus. However, she got worse. The villagers said a deity's spirit was upon my mother because of her piety. As my understanding of the gods was based only on novels and movies, I was not fully convinced.

Meanwhile, my younger brother had become a Christian and we fought a lot because of this. I felt strongly our mother's condition was a result of his belief and once in a fit of anger, I threw his Bible into the rubbish bin. My brother, in spite of all this, did not give up and persisted to bring other believers home to pray for our mother. Once, one of them asked all of us to kneel and confess our sins and acknowledge that we were sinners. I did not agree with that – I did not set fire or steal, in fact I was quite obedient, how could I be a sinner? However, for my mother's sake, I forced myself to kneel. There was one thing that struck me whenever the Christians came. It was my mother's obvious fear. It was not that she was afraid of them, but it was, as I learnt, of the Jesus in the Bible, because an evil spirit had possessed her. I shivered and pondered: "If there are spirits in this world, then there should be a God. But who is the real God?"

I sought for an answer through prayer to the gods I knew. In the meantime, my mother's condition deteriorated and she turned against me, even suspecting that I was in collusion with our neighbours to harm her. While I was having a nap one afternoon, I was startled by the sound of something thrown into the room through the window. I awoke and saw, to my horror, a long parang knife! At that moment, I thought: "Why did my mother want to kill me?" Thankfully, I had locked the door to my bedroom, although I usually did not do so. Could God really be quietly protecting me? Then one day while I was on my bed considering all that had happened, the evil and sinful ways of my past suddenly came to my mind: bullying the neighbours' children, fighting with my family, making prank calls to harass my ex-boss (who went bankrupt and was unable to pay my wages), hating my teachers and so on. My eyes were suddenly filled with tears of regret and repentance, and I cried to the Lord Jesus: "Lord! I really am a sinner! Please forgive me!"

My father was struck with leukaemia when I was 17 years old, but the cancer was under control by the time my mother became sick. He was clearly very disturbed by my mother's condition. It took a toll on his health, for he suffered a relapse and died within a week. Before he was admitted into the hospital, he had stubbornly thought that he

would be betraying his ancestors if he believed in Jesus. However, my brother still brought his Christian friends to visit and pray with him. Praise the Lord that my father finally surrendered, was willing to pray and accept the Lord as his help. He experienced the Lord releasing him from suffering and he passed away the day after.

According to Chinese tradition, I had to be with my mother for the first seven days from my father's passing. I feared she would come at me again with a knife, and in my helplessness I could only pray again to this Jesus and ask for His protection. I vowed that if these seven days passed in peace, I would totally believe in Him. The seven days indeed went by peacefully, but I dismissed it as mere coincidence! I also had a dream. I was on a mountain where the sunlight was extremely strong. This light shone on me, but I resisted and refused to accept it. At that time, I did not understand what this meant. But since believing in the Lord, I know from the Bible what had happened: "And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it" (John 1:5).

Man's end is God's beginning. Soon after my father's passing, I began seeking to know more of this God-Saviour. So I opened the Bible, and Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth", appealed to me. Since young, I had yearned to know more about the origins of this universe but no one could unravel this mystery to me. This verse attracted me to continue reading the Bible and other spiritual books. Through these, I learnt more about God and the mysteries of this universe. It was no coincidence therefore when some believers invited me to a gospel meeting where the story of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-24) was preached. I was deeply moved. When the preachers called for those who were willing to return to the Father's embrace, my elder sister and I tearfully and purposefully stepped forward and accepted the Lord Jesus as our Saviour.

We moved from the eastern to the western part of Singapore for our mother's sake. We had thought she was well, but one night the strange condition occurred again. My younger brother asked me to pray with him, emphasising strongly on God's word: "For whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved" (Rom 10:13). We stood on the right and left of our mother, calling loudly on the Lord's name and praying. Then a miracle happened; my mother felt something leave her body, and saw it head in the direction of the kitchen and disappear. I was too afraid to open my eyes and just prayed incessantly till my mother calmed down. This experience confirmed that the Jesus I have believed in is the real Saviour. Soon my mother became clear of her salvation and was baptised. After 10 years, our whole family believed in the Lord, just as it is written in the Bible: "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom 8:28). Glory be to God!

Sis Zhuang



Announcements & Prayer Items

Gospel Meeting

Date : 5 Mar, 2 Apr, 7 May, 4 Jun 2011
Time : 7:30pm
Venue : Hall 1