

Following God's Dream

Introduction

This morning, some of the Elders have shared the vision that God has given them for Indian Valley. They have shared their hearts because I have asked them to share. This morning, I, too, have some thoughts about God's dream for us. I share these thoughts because I love you folks. In October of 1992 God called Carol and I to this faith family. When we followed this call, we committed ourselves first to Him and then to this body of believers. Now, I have no illusion about being the perfect person or pastor. I recognize that God has given me gifts and I seek to use them. I am also quick to acknowledge that I am limited. I cannot do all things and I cannot fix everything (although I confess that I sometimes try to fix everything). Sometimes I care so much that I do not say the hard things that need to be said – for example, sometimes I need to tell you (and me) to shape up before God. This morning I would like to talk straight with you. It is important that you know my heart – and more importantly, it is critical that we recover God's vision for us.

This dream or vision is not about a new name or added facilities or more exciting worship or greater service projects or even more dynamic preaching. This dream is about our dependence upon and faithfulness to God and our commitment to be His people. The key questions for us this morning are:

1. How desperate are we for God to move in our lives?
2. Are we willing to ask for and cling to the Holy Spirit to provide all that we need for living with and for Jesus (both individually and corporately)?

Let me be honest about some of my thoughts and feelings. I'm tired of the evil one's work among us. It shows us in some of our confused thinking (when we seek to blame others for our problems or our feelings). It shows up in the tensions between people (husbands and wives, children and parents, friends, and neighbors). It often shows up when we complain or grumble about something. It shows up when we judgmentally focus on the failings of others and neglect to assess accurately our own failings. It shows up when we "fight" about how things get done or don't get done. It shows up when our feelings get hurt. Peter reminds us that the devil (the accuser of the brethren - Revelation 12:10) prowls around like a roaring lion (1 Peter 5:8). Paul tells us that we are war with the ruler of the kingdom of the air (Ephesians 2:2, 6:12).

I become disappointed when people blame others for the situations they are in. I feel discouraged when people point a finger at some disparaging their motives for words or actions as if they can read the other person's mind. I become frustrated when I hear "debates" that focus on the character of another person rather than on the topic of discussion. I become distressed when leaders seek to lead and are criticized to the point of despair and defensiveness.

I am tired of persons complaining about the music or the announcement or even the message. The comment "I don't get anything out of the service" is really off target. The truth is we come to worship not to get but to give worship (praise, honor, and glory) to the only one who really deserves it - the Lord Jesus. I am increasingly disappointed in the increasing tendency toward inconsistent worship attendance. Such a practice suggests that corporate worship is really not that important. I tired of persons excusing their inattention in worship because they are tired (get enough rest to

prepare for worship) or that they have a hard time sitting that long. I am disappointed most of all because I believe that God's desire for His people is for so much more.

This week I read about the prophet Daniel. He was carried off into captivity in Babylon. He was among the brightest and best of the young men among the Jews. It was decided that he and his friends would be trained in the knowledge and practices of the Babylonians. Daniel and his friends determined that they would be faithful to God. After a unique "test" Daniel and his friends were found to be healthier and better nourished than the others in their class. In addition, "God gave them knowledge and understanding of all kinds of literature and learning. And Daniel could understand visions and dreams of all kinds" (Daniel 1:17). It was expected by the king of Babylon that the wise men of the day would be able to understand and distinguish between what was true and what was false. Daniel and his friends were God's proof that true wisdom comes from the fear of the LORD (Proverbs 1:7; Colossians 1:9). Throughout the story of Daniel we see this faithfulness to God no matter what the consequences. It is important to remember these stories, but it is also important to ask, "Why did these people end up in captivity at all?" Weren't these God's people? Wasn't God's job to protect His people? One reason for this captivity was unfaithfulness. The prophet Jeremiah predicted the captivity of the Jews. In Jeremiah 17 the prophet provides an illustration of why the captivity took place. We read in verse 23, "they did not listen or pay attention; they were stiff-necked and would not listen or respond to discipline." They were stubborn. About what were they stubborn? A reading of verses 19-27 tells us that they failed to be faithful in keeping the Sabbath. In this time people brought things to city on beast of burden. They lined up at the gates to

get into the city and they did it even on the Sabbath (Nehemiah 13:15-21). The Jews ended up in captivity in Babylon in part because they were unfaithful in keeping the Sabbath. Now why was the Sabbath necessary? It was and is not because God gets tired of dealing with us (Isaiah 40:28 tells us that God does not grow tired and weary). I wonder if the rest of which the Bible speaks isn't about laying our burdens at the feet of Jesus (Matthew 11:28) and anticipating eternity with Him? I wonder if this Sabbath keeping idea isn't more about ceasing our striving. Do we too often seek to please God by what we do? Do we too often seek to get everything done? I believe that this idea of Sabbath is about returning to God and allowing Him to control our days. I believe that faithfulness in things like the Sabbath reflect our trust in Jesus to handle our stuff. Too often we try to fix things by blaming others or blaming ourselves. Too often we try and try and try. I wonder if God doesn't call us to become desperate for Him.

When we turn to the NT I think we discover the key. First, when we recognize our inability to be faithful and to do all that we need to do to please God then we become desperate for God. Then, we can thrust ourselves at His feet and then He gives us the Spirit (John 14) to fill us with all that we need. When you think of people in the Bible from Moses to Esther to David to Daniel to Peter to Paul we can discover the truth of James 5:17 - "Elijah was a man just like us. He prayed earnestly (fervently)..." We are human like them. When the Holy Spirit fills us then we can pray and be people like Moses, Esther, David, Elijah, Daniel, Peter, and Paul. In fact, I agree with Francis Chan when he says: "God delights in showing up when His people are in desperate need of Him because that means no one else can steal His glory!"

It is my dream that we would be desperate for Jesus. It is my dream that this would mean that His peace would show up in our lives in ways that would surpass all our understanding (Phil 4:7). It is my dream that the fruit of the Spirit (love, joy peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control) would be seen in us by everyone that we meet. It is my dream that we could recover a faithfulness to Him that would cause us to stop blaming, stop complaining, and stop robbing the joy from others. It is such faithfulness that shows up in an attitude of thankfulness, willingness, and encouragement. It is a faithfulness that shows up in spiritual conversations that we have with one another and with others. It is faithfulness that displays itself in men who respect and love their wives, who treat their sons and daughters with dignity, who come along side one another in times of trial, who stand up and lead – especially older men to younger men (there is no time for retiring in the faith journey). It is faithfulness that shows itself in the lives of women who treat one another with respect, who dress with dignity (not flaunting the latest styles or their figures), who raise their daughters to be morally upright, who do not talk about other people. It is faithfulness in children and youth that honors parents and other adults by respecting them and volunteering to help them and engaging them in conversation. It is faithfulness in a body of believers that looks beyond itself to the needs of its community and the broader world (without getting caught up in the political rhetoric of the times). It is a faithfulness that shows up in people wanting to gather and participate in worship. It is a faithfulness that displays itself in smaller gatherings for accountability and prayer. It is a faithfulness that seeks out opportunities to serve. It is a faithfulness that is generous with time and money. It is a faithfulness that does not burden others with expectations. It is a faithfulness that seeks the best for others and for self. At its core it is a faithfulness that loves God with all

its heart, soul, mind, and strength. It is a faithfulness that is utterly dependent upon the Holy Spirit to be produced.

What does all of this mean for IV? It means that I believe that God's dream for us is that we would be faithful to Him. That we would be sold out to the Holy Spirit. That we would be desperate for time with God. What might this look like? It might mean Sunday mornings where we could worship and serve the community together. It might mean mixing up the small groups that exist so that others might join. It might mean more intentional times where men reach out to other men. It might mean women seeking to mentor younger women. It might mean working to more intentionally practice some kind of Sabbath so that the demons of busyness might be cast out. It might mean impacting sports in Harleysville so that no games are played on fields on Sundays. It might mean that a pavilion is built on the Jones' property to reach out with the gospel during tournaments. It might mean....

Jesus spent a great amount of time with twelve men. During one of the last times with these men, he did something quite unusually. In John 13 we read about Him washing the disciples' feet. Peter is overwhelmed by this. We should be overwhelmed by this story. The king of kings and Lord of Lords bowed His knee and rolled up His sleeves and washed the dirty feet of His dear friends. Can we do any less for one another?

My challenge this morning is that we seek together to be faithful to Jesus. If you accept this challenge then it means that you intend to depend upon the Holy Spirit to lead you to live differently (and more passionately for Jesus). It means that you need to have Him wash your feet. It means that you need to be willing to figuratively wash one

another's feet. If you accept this challenge then I invite you to become a member of Indian Valley's Order of the Towel. If you accept this invitation, you may come and receive a "towel" as a reminder of your call to renewed faithfulness. I would invite you to come now and receive a towel. (Elders come with your wives and give to one another. Members come to an Elder and their wife and receive a towel).

Keep this towel in some public place (or on your person) as a symbolic reminder of accepting the call to renewed faithfulness. Use it as an opportunity to tell others about Jesus. When you fail in your faithfulness use it as a reminder to return to Jesus.