

“Imagine All the People”
February 9, 2003
Dr. Jerry Nelson

Who can live without hope?

He’s 19 years of age, intelligent, strong and handsome.
But this past Tuesday his picture of the future faded to
black and he took more than enough pills to fall asleep
never wake up.

Few can live for long without imagining a future better than the
present.

- It seems we are programmed to anticipate the future.
- We look forward to the end of the day.
- We anticipate the weekend.
- We can hardly wait for the end of the semester.
- We think if we can just get through this experience or this
period of time, it will be better.

And in our better moments, when we think thoughts larger than
merely about ourselves, we want to anticipate a brighter future for all
humanity.

Through all of human history men and women have dreamed
large dreams of the future – a future better than the present.

John Lennon captured that hope many years ago in his song,
“Imagine”

“Imagine there's no heaven

It's easy if you try

No hell below us

Above us only sky

Imagine all the people

Living for today...

Imagine there's no countries

It isn't hard to do

Nothing to kill or die for

And no religion too

Imagine all the people

Living life in peace...

You may say I'm a dreamer
 But I'm not the only one
 I hope someday you'll join us
 And the world will be as one

Imagine no possessions
 I wonder if you can
 No need for greed or hunger
 A brotherhood of man
 Imagine all the people
 Sharing all the world...

You may say I'm a dreamer
 But I'm not the only one
 I hope someday you'll join us
 And the world will live as one."

I may fault his theology but I can't miss his desire; a desire shared by all of us who look beyond our present circumstances and beyond the present condition of the world.

Look at history's attempts to shape a better future:

- Woodrow Wilson's "League of Nations",
- Franklin Roosevelt's "New Deal",
- Lyndon Johnson's "Great Society"

And the dream for a better future never dies.

But is such hope justified or is it simply an unquenchable human fantasy?

We've hoped so much, for so long - to what end?

Wars still erupt with ever-increasing frequency.

Human suffering continues unabated.

Prior to WWII many, even Christians, thought everything would gradually get better until finally peace and prosperity would be fully ushered in.

But as the evils of Hitler's concentration camps were being discovered one German pastor wrote,

“(Who today) can utter the words “human progress” without getting a flat taste in his mouth? Who can still believe today that we are developing toward a state in which the kingdom of God reigns in the world of nations, in culture, and in the life of the individual? The earth has been plowed too deeply by the curse of war, the streams of blood and tears have swollen all too terribly, injustice and bestiality have become all too cruel and obvious for us to consider such dreams to be anything but bubbles and froth.” (Thielicke 62)

Is that it? Do we stop dreaming? Do we stop hoping?

What’s your picture of the future?

- Is it blank?
- Is it merely bigger salary, bigger house and more exotic vacations and a retirement to match?
- Or is your picture of the future bigger than that?
Dare you dream as large as John Lennon did?

“Imagine no possessions
I wonder if you can
No need for greed or hunger
A brotherhood of man
Imagine all the people
Sharing all the world...”

I share your hope John Lennon.

But I wonder have you hoped in the wrong ways?

Have you hoped without God?

Have you, have we, imagined a future growing out
of our own efforts rather than a future designed and
inaugurated by God?

We of Southern Gables are involved in missions around the world because we have a hope, we see a future.

But the picture of the future we see is not painted by wishful thinking, as altruistic as that wishful thinking may be.

The picture of the future we see has been painted by
God.

In Hebrews 11, God gives us a great list of historical characters who SAW something others didn't see.

But before listing some of those people, the author tells us **how** they saw what others don't see.

Hebrews 11:1 "Now faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see."

Just as our eyes are the physical organs by which we see what is around us SO faith is the spiritual organ by which we see the future.

That is spiritual "vision".

They saw the future and they were so convinced it would come to pass that they lived their lives accordingly.

But then notice Hebrews 11:6 "Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him."

God says faith is imperative - absolutely necessary.

But notice the **faith is not just faith in faith as if believing something strongly enough will make it happen** – this is faith in God; believing that what God said will happen, will happen.

And here's the point:

Though they could not see it with their physical eyes and even though they might not see it in their lifetime - they conducted their lives, they invested in that future - because they believed it would come.

What picture is so compelling that they would live their lives in obedience to God even when they would not experience it in their lifetime?

Here is how the Apostle John described it:

Revelation 7:9 "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb"- the Lord Jesus.

Can you picture millions, maybe billions, of people standing before the throne of Jesus?

If every person was given 8 square feet of space in which to stand and 5 billion people were standing, do you know how much area would be required?

5 billion people could stand in an area from here to Colorado Springs and it would only be 24 miles wide.

If a throne were to be elevated only a few hundred feet, 5 billion people could stand within eyesight.

Imagine it!

The Apostle John sees that day when millions, maybe billions from every people group in the world will stand worshipping the Lord.

And what will it be like?

This present earth is beautiful, too beautiful to take in sometimes, but according to the Apostle Peter the new earth will make this present earth pale in comparison.

What will it be like?

In this new place only that which is just and right will take place. John in Revelation 21 writes, "Nothing impure will ever enter it. Nor will anyone who does what is shameful or deceitful."

The sins of person against person to which we are so prone now will be gone.

No slander, gossip, defaming, lying, cheating, abusing, hurting. It will all be gone.

All injustice, which so many have suffered, will be gone. The wrong will be made right.

What will that heaven on the new earth be like?

In Revelation 7 and 21 we are told God will wipe away every tear from our eyes. There will be no more hunger or thirst or death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.

Imagine!
 Imagine all the people.
 Imagine our God receiving the praise that is due him!

Yes, John Lennon, I can imagine!
 But what I can imagine is not wishful thinking.
 It is the promise of our God.

That is why **Von and Deleen Newcomb** gave up a career, family and friends here in Denver and moved to Bishkek, Kyrgystan –
 Because they have a picture of the future that includes Kyrgyese people standing around that throne.

That is why **Wayne and Amy Losey** are in Central Asia, literally risking their lives –
 because they have a picture of shepherd people standing before that throne.

That is why **Peter and Stephanie Engle** are working in a country openly hostile to the Gospel –
 because they have a picture of those tribes gathered with us around the throne.

And the point can be illustrated over and over again.

Everyone lives with a picture of the future.
 May ours be shaped by God rather than selfishness or wishful thinking.
 May ours be worth living for because it is worth dying for!

Our Father who art in heaven,
 Hallowed be thy name.
 Thy kingdom come,
 Thy will be done
 on earth as it is in heaven