

What is the World is God Doing?

1/19/97

Dr. Jerry Nelson

He described part of his life as follows:

Five times I have been given 39 lashes with a whip.

Three times the authorities have beaten me with sticks.

Once my enemies stoned me.

I have been shipwrecked three times and I have spent a day and a night in the ocean.

During my many travels I have been in danger from rivers, robbers, religious leaders and foreigners.

My life has been in danger in cities, in deserts, at sea and with people who only pretended to be colleagues.

I have worked and struggled and spent many sleepless nights.

I have gone hungry and thirsty and often had nothing to eat.

I have many times been cold from not having enough clothes to keep me warm. (parphrased from 2 Cor 11:24-27)

Many of you recognize the man who wrote this as the Apostle Paul.

Here was a man with sufficient pedigree, education and connections to have lived a very different life - one in much greater ease - yet he was determined to follow Jesus.

In fact he started out in life going a different direction - one that brought him privilege and power.

But he gave that up for sacrifice and hardship - WHY?

She was a little woman, safely tucked away in a quiet convent in Albania - not a care in the world.

But she left the security of the known to take up a life in the worst of the slums of Calcutta, India.

There, for more than 40 years, unrecognized by the world, she labored in disease and heat to hold and care for the dying that no one else would even touch. WHY?

Why do an apostle Paul or a Mother Theresa give up the safety of the status quo and the perks of the present to launch into lives of sacrifice and discomfort?

Why do people still today give up home and family to move half way around the world to live, sometimes, in difficult conditions to serve as missionaries?

Why do Von and Dellene Newcomb give up a promising career in professional photography with all the financial security it offers, or Bill and Laurie Bolthouse leave a comfortable medical practice, to pack up their families to move to Kyrghystan and Albania?

Why do all these people make such decisions?

Vision! That's right - Vision!

What is vision? Or as former President George Bush called it "The vision thing".

The great band leader and jazz musician, Duke Ellington, was once asked to define rhythm.

He said "If you got it, you don't need no definition. And if you don't got it, ain't no definition gonna help." (Barna p28 Without a Vision...)

Fortunately "vision" is not so hard to define.

Vision is a clear mental picture of the future.

It is the ability to see the future in your mind so clearly that you make decisions today based on that future.

Vision is a portrait NOT of how things presently are but of how they will be.

I have read that the artist Michaelangelo saw in his mind the figure of now famous David sculpture in the block of marble and then just chipped away all the rock that didn't belong.

I have read that Mozart heard the great oratorios in his head and then just wrote out the notes.

They saw the future and it dictated the present.

What is your picture of the future?

Maybe another way of asking that is:

What is your purpose for living?

What picture of the future makes your life worthwhile today?

What picture of the future did Stephen have when we find in the book of Acts that he was willing to die rather than give up his preaching the gospel?

His conviction regarding the future were worth more than his life in the present - Why?

There is real truth in the statement: "People are only as effective as their vision of the future."

But not all visions are equally accurate.

An Islamic Fundamentalist may strap explosives to his body and walk into a crowded restaurant blowing himself and others to pieces because he has a mental picture of the future.

His vision may be of a world dominated by Islam or of himself in Paradise because of his selfless act.

But what if his picture of the future is wrong.

A lot of people have vision but too often the future they envision is either inaccurate or else pointless.

For some the extent of their vision is a new car, a new house, a better job, a luxury vacation or a comfortable retirement.

WHAT vision we have of the future is crucially important.

I don't want to spend my life investing and even sacrificing for what makes no difference.

I like the title of the book: What in the world is **God** doing?

Now that raises an interesting idea - What if I knew what God was doing? What if I knew God's picture of the future?

What if I could align my vision with God's vision?

What picture does God have of the future?

That's the one I want to adopt and live for.

Surely God's picture of the future is more accurate and more worthy than any I could imagine.

I know John Elway is not God not even with a small "g" but if I was playing a backyard pick-up game of football and John was on my team I know I would want to use John's game plan rather than mine.

What is God's plan?

I want you to look to the Scriptures with me to see once again "what in the world God is doing" so we can realign our priorities to his.

We start with the Lord's prayer because Jesus, as God, shows us that God definitely has a picture of the future:

I do not believe Jesus' prayer was an idle one.

Jesus' first sentence was a matter of fact: "Our Father who is in heaven, holy is your name."

The father is in heaven and he is holy.

But the second sentence was a request - "Your Kingdom come"
- Oh, Father bring about your Kingdom!

When Jesus prayed these words, what do you think he was asking?

When he added the next phrase "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven" what do you suppose he was requesting? What did he mean?

Jesus had in his mind's eye a vision, a picture of what will be.

He saw the Kingdom of God completed- God reigning supreme in all the world.

Please look in your Bible at the book of Revelation - chap 5

Revelation is a book written by the apostle John.

At the beginning of the book we are told that Jesus gave John this picture of the future.

Look at 5:9-10 A group bows before Jesus on the throne and says,
READ

Look to 7:9-10 READ

Look now to Rev 21:1-4 READ

That's Jesus picture of the future - that's what he and his followers firmly fix their eyes on - and that picture makes a difference in the present.

I want you to see THAT has always been God's picture of the future.

Let me remind you of the major people and events of Biblical history:

Adam and Eve
 Abraham (about 2000 B.C.)
 Moses (about 1500 B.C.)
 David (about 1000 B.C.)
 The Prophets (800 - 500 B.C.)
 The coming of the Messiah
 The Church
 The second coming of the Messiah

And through this whole time we see God's one goal - the fulfillment of his vision for the future.

Let's go back to Abraham:

Jesus believed the promise made to Abraham (now 4000 years ago) that through Abraham's descendants "all the peoples of the world would be blessed".

Please find Genesis 12 in your Bible.

Why did God choose Abraham and bless Abraham? Listen carefully to Gen 12:2,3 "I will make you a great nation and I will bless you.. and all peoples on earth will be blessed **through** you."

We are tempted to think of the Old Testament as a book **by** Jews, **about** the Jews and **for** the Jews.

I think, likewise, many evangelicals think of the church as existing

primarily to meet the needs of Christians:

We become so preoccupied with meeting our perceived needs, so concerned about getting all the blessings God has to offer, that we begin to think of Christianity as primarily God's means to give **us** what we need and want.

Thinking that God saved us to bless us.

Maybe we move a level beyond that and think of Christianity as God's means for preparing and fitting us for heaven.

And so we give ourselves to spiritual disciplines, and godly living.

Thinking that God saved us to make us holy.

Is it God's intention to bless us? Of course!

Is it God's intention to make us holy? Of course!

But why does God not simply save us and take us to heaven?

What is his purpose in blessing us and helping us to become more like Christ?

We tend to think two thirds of the Bible was written for a little group of people and ignores the rest of the human race.

Yes, it is true that much of the Old Testament is written about a little group of people but it is **not written just for them**.

The Bible is the story of God working to reach people from the whole world.

Please note I am not saying that God will save every person - I am saying that God's picture of the future includes people from every tribe, language, nation and people group of the world.

To clearly make the point that God's vision for the future is to bless **all** the **peoples** of the world, it is noteworthy to see what come just before this great promise of Gen 12:2-3:

Look at Chapter 10 of Genesis:

Here you have a listing of the nations, the peoples, of the world - not just the Jews.

In Chapter 11 we read about how and why God scattered those peoples all over the earth

Having specifically listed all the peoples of the world, in Chapter 10, God then introduces us to Abraham.

Now again, what is God's purpose with Abraham?

To carve out a little group and let the rest of the nations go?

NO!

Genesis 12 through the rest of the Old Testament is God's dealing with **one** people whom he desires to use to reach **all** peoples.

That truth is repeated over and over again through the pages of the Old Testament.

To see just a few of those reiterations of the **vision** of God and the **plan** of God, look with me please at Isaiah 49:6.

This is written 1000 years later.

The Hebrews had time and time again failed to be a light to the nations.

So God sends the prophet Isaiah to remind them again of their purpose. Listen to his words:

"It is too small a thing for you to be my servant to restore the tribes of Jacob and bring back those of Israel I have kept. I will also make you a light for the gentiles that you may bring my salvation to the ends of the earth."

God did not call the Hebrews, the Israelites, the Jews primarily to privilege, he called them to service.

They were called to glorify God among the nations.

Israel was to be a living demonstration of the way God created

people to be.

They were to demonstrate a right relationship with God.

They were to demonstrate a right relationship with each other.

Israel was to be a missionary people - proclaiming their God to the ends of the earth - to all the nations.

From the beginning, God's heart has been for the whole world!

But again they failed to be the light God called them to be.

But God's picture of the future remained clear:

Jeremiah said it this way: "That all nations would be gathered to the name of the Lord and walk no more after the evil imaginations of their hearts."

Daniel reflected God's picture of the future when he spoke of God allowing earthly governments to extend their conquest over great parts of the earth.

In Dan 7 he uses the picture of four great beasts rising out of the sea and each more powerful than the former devouring the one before until Daniel saw last of all, one like the "Son of man" appear - the messiah - who would displace all other authorities and would rule in a kingdom over all peoples, nations and languages forever.

Scores of times in the Old Testament that future is foreseen.

Jesus' "vision", Jesus' picture, of the future would certainly have included the prophecy of Habakkuk 2:14

"Describing the age to come he says of it: "For the earth will be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea."":

The New Testament likewise informs us of what the future looks like:

Jesus is the one who said in Matthew 24:14 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached to all nations and then the end shall come."

And again it is God's intention to use his own people to accomplish

that.

Listen to Mt 5:14.

"You are the light of the world. People do not light a lamp and put it under a bowl. Instead they put it on its stand, and it gives light to everyone in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and glorify your Father in heaven."

Using language strikingly similar to the language used of Israel when she had been called to be God's light to the nations (Ex 19:6), The Apostle Peter tells the purpose of God's church on earth (2:9):

"But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light...

vs. 12

"Live such good lives among the pagans (the nations) that, though they accuse you of doing wrong, they may see your good deeds and glorify God on the day he visits us" - that is when Jesus comes again.

The Church, including all Christians, has not been called primarily to privilege (though there is great privilege)- we have been called to serve.

Christians are called to be living demonstrations of the way God created us to be - rightly related to God and to each other.

The church has been called to be a missionary people - proclaiming our God to the ends of the earth.

Jesus prayed "Your Kingdom come" because Jesus saw the future when the whole earth would be filled with His glory.

-when every knee would bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

There may be many years between now and then, there may be much suffering among God's people, there may even be a great tribulation, but the fulness of the Kingdom of God is coming -

What was predicted in the Old Testament and what Jesus died and rose again to bring about **will come to be.**

In that day the Yeltzens, the Majors, the Husseins and the Clintons, the presidents, the premieres, the kings, and the chairmen will not compare - The King of kings, the Lord of Lords will reign here on this earth.

Jesus said "I will build by church and the gates of hell will not overcome it."

There is coming a day when, as the hymn writer put it:,
 "Jesus shall reign where ere the sun his successive journeys run" - in other words - from one end of the earth to the other.

And how will that fullness of the Kingdom come about?
 How will that for which Jesus prayed come to be?

God has given to His Church the mandate of "world evangelization -
 "This gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all nations and then the end will come."

World Evangelization is how God has ordained that the fulness of the Kingdom shall come about.

That Kingdom that Jesus envisions, that all Scripture describes, is brought to pass by the people of God reaching out to the all the peoples of the earth with the good news of Jesus.

Every witnessing New Testament believer and every New Testament missionary knew exactly what they were doing -
 They were helping to bring about the completion of the Kingdom of God.

It is that to which **we** are called by God.

To us is given the privilege to be God's means to bring about the completion of the His Kingdom - the universal rule of the Lord Jesus over all the earth.

That is the future.

That is the only accurate vision of the future - God's vision.

I want to be part of what God is doing. And I want you to be part of it.

To do anything less is to miss the reason for life.

I want to invest where it will count forever.

How do we respond?

What are our priorities in life?

How are those priorities evidenced?

In this month-long emphasis on World Evangelization we want to bring the message right down to specific responses:

Praying? Please look at Eph 6:19-20

We are called to pray for the effectiveness of the gospel.

Is that part of your everyday praying?

Giving? Please listen to I Cor 9:11: "If we have sown spiritual seed among you, is it too much if we reap a material harvest from you?"

We are to give to further the gospel.

Evangelizing? Acts 1:8 "you shall be my witnesses..."

It is a characteristic of a Christ-follower that they tell about Jesus.

Going? Mt 28:19-20 "Go and make disciples of all nations..."

Are we personally to go? Are we to be involved in sending others?

Part of our response is our responsibility to those of our church who ARE going.

We call our response to them - "Kingdom Connection" - us connected to our staff missionaries for the purpose of the Kingdom of God.

Under the chair at the left end of the row are more copies of the Kingdom Connection brochure. Please pass those down the row and take one if you have not yet received one.

In it you will find information about our three staff missionary couples. We need your specific response to helping us support these couples in prayer and with money.

These staff missionaries are not supported out of the general fund - only by the commitment and giving you designate for them.

One of those couples will come now to give us a brief update on their plans. (Bolthouses 8:00)