

THE SUSTAINING VISION



God is Our Refuge Eric Holmlund

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning nor crying nor pain any more, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 21:2-4

When we first taste the labor of the harvest and experience what it feels like to move through that devastated spiritual battlefield with help from God....

When we begin to experience what it's like to be able to see beneath the surface of people's "comfortable lives" to the actual anguish in their souls...

To hear the cries of their hearts...

When we begin to taste the joy of discovering that it is within our power to raise devastated souls and give them living water from the divine spring, who is Jesus...

We can hardly believe it! It takes us back.

That we are actually bringing people from darkness to light and from the power of Satan to God!

He who believes in me, the works I do he shall do also. And greater works than these will he do because I go to the Father.

We see these words fulfilled....

on our jobs, in our neighborhoods, among our relatives and friends.

Now, if these newborn souls could all be quickly tucked into the City of God, safe from all danger and temptation, it would indeed be a happy ending.

But time is the enemy. Months stretch out into years and years into decades. And one day we wake up and discover that for all our efforts in the harvest field, raising people from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan to God, we haven't even scratched the surface.

As far as the eye can see from north to south, east to west, lifeless bodies are scattered across the desert floor. And among these spiritual corpses are some of the very people we gathered to the Lord Jesus. What's wrong?

Moreover we ourselves, who have been laboring with such enthusiasm, begin to grow weary. The joy is drained from our faces. We start to snap at each other. Opportunities are missed. Sometimes we walk by people who desperately need us and we don't even see them.

"How long do we have to wait before the harvest is over?" you say.

"I would have thought that by this time we would have arrived at the City of God."

"I'm sorry, but I'm tired. I'm going over by that boulder and I'm going to lie down in the shade and rest for a couple of days."

Two weeks later somebody walks by the boulder and sees your body lying there almost dead and realizes that if something doesn't happen very quickly the vultures are going to be picking at your bones.

They rush to the spring and come back with two flasks of water and pour them down your throat, "Here, my friend, drink."

And as you begin to revive, you say, "Thank you. Thank you. Whatever happened to me? I can't understand what went wrong."

"You lost your strength because you lost your vision," explains your rescuer.

"While you're working in the harvest, make sure that you never lose sight of the City of God. That's where your home is. That's where your king is. That's what you were made for, and you will only be able to continue your labor if you keep your eyes focused on the goal."

To be able to...

heal the sick,
raise the dead,
cleanse the lepers,
cast out demons,
to freely give without expecting in return,
to never wear out or grow weary,
we need to be driven by a sustaining vision.

To be upheld by that vision through the long seasons of weariness and drought.



Vision Jana Binning Green

We need to see the City of God, our ultimate destination and our present source of supply.

We need to stay under the yoke with our Master and hear him continuously reminding us to "seek first the Kingdom of God," which is the City that waits for us at the end.

If we fail to see the City of God,

... if we fail to stop from time-to-time and listen to the music that floats out from its tower,

...if we fail to breath the atmosphere it sends forth to us,

...if we neglect to drink from that stream of living water that flows from beneath its gates,

... we will lose our strength and we will sink down into death.

But precisely what does it mean for believers in the twenty-first century to continue to have a vision of the city of God?

Three things are necessary:

1. We have to have our eyes focused there.
2. We have to make sure our treasure is there.
3. We have to make sure our name is there.

First, if we are going to have a vision of the City of God that remains, we are going to have to fix our eyes there continuously.



Then the presidents and satraps sought to find a ground for complaint against Daniel with regard to the kingdom; but they could find no ground for complaint or any fault, because he was faithful, and no error or fault was found in him. Then these men said, "We shall not find any ground for complaint against this Daniel unless we find it in connection with the law of his God." Then these presidents and satraps came by agreement to the king and said to him. "O King Darius, live forever! All the presidents of the kingdom, the prefects and the satraps, the counselors and the governors are agreed that the king should establish an ordinance and enforce an interdict, that whoever makes petition to any god or man for thirty days, except to you, O king, shall be cast into the den of lions. Now, O king, establish the interdict and sign the document, so that it cannot be changed, according to the law of the Medes and Persians, which cannot be revoked." Therefore King Darius signed the document and interdict. When Daniel knew that the document had been signed, he went to his house where he had windows in his upper chamber open toward Jerusalem; and he got down on his knees three times a day and prayed and gave thanks before his God, as he had done previously.

Daniel 6:4-10

If ever there was a man who had reason to be discouraged under the pressure of problems, and dangers, and enemies, and misunderstanding, and ingratitude, it was Daniel. The only way this man could survive was to get away daily and look toward the City of God, which for him was Jerusalem. And even though he knew that he was being watched and his life was in danger, he continued to do it because, "What's my life worth if I forget Jerusalem?" And so he would climb to his chamber, open the windows that faced west toward Jerusalem, fall to his knees and pray, giving thanks to God. Daniel kept his vision alive.

And his vision kept him alive.

If you and I are going to keep our vision alive, we need to do the same.

The stronger the opposition,
the more hassles we endure,
the more we experience the pressure of time,
the more problems that crop up,
the more ingratitude that throws itself against us, the more urgent it is
that we discipline ourselves to look toward the City of God.

Our Father, who art in heaven....

"But I thought God was everywhere," you say.

He is, but heaven is his headquarters, his throne, and our destination.

Heaven is the City of God. Heaven is the goal toward which we move

- another dimension
- a place where the promises we wait for will be totally fulfilled.

Heaven is not "pie-in-the-sky bye-and-bye" because *we taste heaven now*.

We taste it, but we're not there yet.

The reason we gather with other believers week by week, is to be given by God a *foretaste* of the City of God.

In fellowship with others, even with all the confusion and disruptions that take place in our assemblies, God gives us a taste of heaven.

He gives us bread and wine, which is the banquet of the New Kingdom
– the Body and Blood of the Lamb, indeed, but also the foretaste of the coming glory.

He pours out upon us the Holy Spirit who is the atmosphere of heaven itself. And by this means we continue to keep our vision bright.

God help us to be faithful!

Second, if we are going to continue to have a clear vision of the City of God, we have to make sure that our treasure is there.



Where your Treasure is Full of Eyes

Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Matthew 6:19–21

Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 12:32–34

Certainly, if we need transportation, there's nothing wrong in saving money to buy a car. If our roof leaks, save to get the thing fixed or install a new one – it's not sinful.

Whatever it is that we need in the material realm save for it, buy it.

But keep in mind that, if we're not very careful, we begin to get caught up in "things."

If we are not careful, we get so bogged down with the cares, and the riches, and the pleasures of this life that we lose our vision of the City of God.

Jesus says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasure on earth"; for many people the "treasures on earth" have to do with mammon – money. But it is not always money. It may be money, or it may be something that money can buy. Or it may be something that money can't buy.

Your treasure might be your status in the fellowship.

Your treasure could be your "success" as a harvester in the kingdom.

Or your "grasp of scripture."

Or your "spiritual gift" now used in the service of your ego.

Your "work" for the Lord, which has subtly become your private kingdom. We need to be on guard.

Suppose we invent a new "ambulance" for the harvest field that can rescue the lost ten times faster than before. This "gospel ambulance" can pick up a hundred souls a day!

Suddenly, we're worried about how to finance our gospel ambulance.

How to keep it in repair. Now we're into fund-raising.

And where are our hearts? Has our "gospel ambulance" distracted us from the real focus?

Hence, the Master keeps encouraging us to continuously trim down. To make sure that we neither get too complicated nor too comfortable.

Fear not, little flock, it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions, and give alms; provide yourselves with purses that do not grow old, with a treasure in the heavens that does not fail, where no thief approaches and no moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also.

Luke 12:32-34

God help us to continuously make sure that our treasure is in the City of God and in nothing else.

The third and final essential, if we are going to keep our vision of the City of God, is this: our names have to be hidden there – hidden in the City of God.

To him who conquers I will give some of the hidden manna, and I will give him a white stone, with a new name written on the stone which no one knows except him who receives it.

Revelation 2:17b

He who conquers shall be clad thus in white garments, and I will not blot his name out of the book of life; I will confess his name before my Father and before his angels.

Revelation 3:5

If our lives are "hid with Christ in God", this especially includes our names.

If we are born again and walking with Jesus, our names do not belong to this world; they belong to the City of God.

There is no way I can go through this world, even the religious world, trying to enhance my name, and still keep my vision of the City of God.

Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed by thy name.

Matt 6:9

Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth...(angels, men, demons)...

Phillipians 2:9,10

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but to thy name give glory...

Psalms 115:1

But our tendency is to do the very opposite; to scoop off at least a "percentage" of glory for ourselves. Our "commission" as servants of God!

Our name then becomes a cumbersome weight as we walk through the harvest field seeking to lift people out of their bondage, and out of their disease, and out of their darkness. How can we do these things with integrity and still worry about our name?

When we drag names through the harvest field with us, a strange thing happens. Instead of reviving these broken lives, we begin exploiting them.

These are the people whom we raised up! We put labels and tags on everybody we were instrumental in saving or helping.

The minute we catch ourselves letting our names get in the way, it's time to abandon them again to the City of God.

If we are followers of Jesus, we have no name in this world. Our name is hidden with our Lord in the City of God. Our name is swallowed up in the glory of his name.

We are... the voice of one crying in the wilderness,

"Make straight the way of the Lord."

Until the day when we are safely inside the gates of the City of God, we will be tempted to become so engrossed in our labors, so busy trying to protect ourselves from the dangers of this world, so taken up with our own importance that we lose our vision.

May God help us never to let a single day go by without renewing our vision.

-- in Jesus' name, fixing our eyes afresh each day upon the City of God,

-- daily making sure that our treasure is only there...and not "here."

-- daily yielding our name to be hidden there.

And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband; and I heard a loud voice coming from the throne saying, "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them and they shall be his people, and God himself will be with them; he will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning or crying nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away."

Revelation 21:1-4



Throne Room Worship courtesy of Eric Holmlund

If we fail to look beyond this world to the destination of our journey, we will soon grow weary and faint by the way.

But when we remember daily, who it is who has prepared a place for us in the City of God, who it is who is soon coming for us, we will renew our strength in the midst of our labors.

We will mount up on wings of eagles.

We will walk and not grow weary.

We will run and never faint.

A prayer:

Father, help us run the race without growing weary,
To endure the long periods of monotony without losing heart,
To deal with each crisis that comes along, and still remain fresh.
Enable us to be thankful in season and out of season.

To minister to the ungrateful, never looking for anything in return.
To keep our hearts fixed on the City where true joy is to be found,
Our expectations centered on your throne,
Our minds ruled by your Spirit,
Ever beholding the face of your beloved Son, our Lord, Jesus.

Amen

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WHO WAS SLAIN
HAS BEGUN HIS REIGN