

“That All May See Christ”

Vision Series for EBC

Good morning! Beginning today we are going to take a short break from the typical pattern of teaching we do here at EBC. As many of you know, over the course of the last year the elders have been going through a process of seeking the Lord for future direction of our church. That process is still ongoing, but we wanted to take some time over the next several weeks to share with you how we sense the Lord leading us in terms of the wider vision, mission, and core values that we believe God is calling us to. Many of you have participated in the listening sessions that Graham Slater has lead over the last several months. On behalf of the elders, I want to say thank you for your participation and thoughtful feedback, as it has helped shape our understanding of what our church’s strengths, opportunities, and core values are at a congregational level.

Presently, my task will be to take the next few Sundays to share with you the vision and mission statements that we as elders feel captures and reflects who we are as a church, and the direction that God is taking us. Since we want to ground everything we do in scripture, I will seek to share with you biblical foundations which undergird our vision and mission. So, to begin, let me share the Vision and Mission with you:

Vision

That Christ would be seen by all

Mission

To bring pleasure and glory to Christ Jesus by expressing his life, obeying his will, and advancing his kingdom.

Next week, God-willing, I will start to unpack the mission statement and share the why, the how, and what of our vision. For the rest of our time together this morning, my plan is to provide a biblical foundation for our vision – of Christ being seen by all - and what this means for us a church and individual followers of Christ. I will explore 3 broad themes:

God’s Plan

God’s Method to Achieve His Plan

God’s Fulfillment of both the Plan and the Method through Christ

God’s Plan: to dwell among His beloved creation in fellowship and love.

In my opinion, the key text summarizing the whole purpose of God, is found in a book of the bible most people don’t generally turn to for inspiration: Leviticus. Now, when you understand Leviticus within wider framework of the biblical story, and how sacrifice, the priesthood, and the tabernacle/temple anticipate Christ, its very encouraging. But, at certain points it does get a little tedious. However, in chapter 26, there is a set of verses that are critical for understanding the wider purposes of God for not only Israel, but salvation in Christ. Lev. 26:11-13

So how does God intend to make this kind of relationship with His people a reality?

God’s Method: establish a sacred place/location where such a loving fellowship and union can take place.

Beginning in Genesis, the Old Testament records how God establishes specific places for His “name” (presence) to dwell among His people. *Eden (Gen. 1-3), Altars (Gen. 12:8; 13:3-4; 26:3-*

4; 35:14; cf. 28:19), *Tabernacle* (Exod. 15:17; 40:34-38; Deut. 12:5-6; 11, 14, 18, 21, 26; 14:23, 24; 16:2, 6-7; 26:2; Lev. 26:11-13), *Temple* (2 Sam. 7:9; 12-17, 24; 1 Chron. 17:14, 22; Kings 6:13; 8:16, 27-30).

The purpose of these places (the temple) can be summed up in what David writes the Psalms: Psalm 27:4, Psalm 42:2, Psalm 63:1-2. Following the destruction of the first Temple, the prophets spoke of a restoration of “paradise” (a new Eden) in Zion (Jerusalem) in which the whole earth would be blessed (Isa. 51:1-3; Ezek. 36; Joel 3:2; cf. Isa. 66:18-20). Even though God’s people were regathered in the land with a new temple under leaders like Zerrubabel, Ezra, and Nehemiah, the conditions which the prophets spoke of had still not yet come about.

However, with the advent of Jesus...

God’s Fulfillment of both the Plan and the Method through Christ

How does God’s plan to be “seen” by His people become fulfilled through Jesus? Lets explore what the gospel-writers tell us. Turn with me to the first chapter of John’s gospel.

Jesus reveals the Father: John 1:1-5, John 1:14-18. Now lets go to His prayer for the people prior to His crucifixion in John 17.

Jesus becomes the “place” where we “see” the Father: John 17:24-26 (John 14:1-3; 18-24). Summary: to be with Jesus is to be with God (the Father); “see” Jesus is to “see” God (the Father). Now turn with me to John’s final letter, Revelation, wherein he records what will happen at the end of human history when Christ appears again. Rev. 22:1-5 This, my friends, is the future we are waiting for! While all of this sounds well and good in theory, practically speaking, how do we “see” Jesus and God in the here and now? Must we wait until His future return for “all to see Christ”? Not necessarily! Lets go to Paul’s second letter to the Corinthians to see Paul connect the idea of “seeing Christ” with Christian growth/maturity in the present age.

Paul and “beholding” Jesus (seeing by faith): In 2 Corinthians 3, Paul contrasts the old covenant under Moses - wherein He had to veil Himself in order keep the Israelites from seeing His glory – to the new covenant under Christ. 2 Corinthians 3:16-18. Paul links the gift of the Spirit with Christ; and says that the Spirit of the Lord (Christ) sets us free (removes the veil/sinful blinders) and enables us to see His glory, to behold His glory, and in doing so, we become transformed people. So Paul says, in effect, **YOU BECOME WHAT YOU BEHOLD. YOU BECOME WHAT YOU BEHOLD!**

According to Paul, spiritual growth happens as we become more and more enamored with the glory of the Lord Jesus. Conversely, if our vision of Jesus is clouded by sin – if we are enamored with something other than the Lord Jesus – then that will stunt our growth. Paul lived with Christ-shaped desires. Christ, His presence and glory, became the center of His desires and hopes. By beholding/seeing the glory Christ, believers desire for Christ increases while their appetite for sin decreases. 2 Corinthians 3:18 evidences a Spirit-created relationship between the risen Lord and believers, one that transforms believers into Christ’s image from one degree of glory to another.

So, the words of my favorite hymn then are ones that Paul himself would be in total agreement with:

*Be Thou my vision, O Lord of my heart
Naught be all else to me, save that Thou art
Thou my best thought, by day or by night
Waking or sleeping, Thy presence my light*

Application: How to “See/Behold” Christ

But this all raises an important question for us: how do we “behold” the glory of Christ? Must we, like Paul, have a Damascus road experience or see him in dreams and visions? Thankfully, Paul provides us with another way. What I want to do is summarize some of his key points from 2 Corinthians under 3 headings:

Meditation

Supplication

Affliction

Meditation: “Seeing/Beholding” Christ by faith

2 Cor. 5:1-9 *“It is by beholding the glory of Christ by faith that we are spiritually edified and built up in this world, for as we behold his glory, the life and power of faith grow stronger and stronger. It is by faith that we grow to love Christ. So if we desire strong faith and powerful love, which give us rest, peace and satisfaction, we must seek them by diligently beholding the glory of Christ by faith. In this duty I desire to live and to die. On Christ’s glory I would fix all my thoughts and desires, and the more I see of the glory of Christ, the more the painted beauties of this world will wither in my eyes and I will be more and more crucified to this world. It will become to me like something dead and putrid, impossible for me to enjoy”* – John Owen

Supplication: “Seeing/Beholding” Christ in prayer

2 Cor. 1:8-11 Answered prayer. When we pray, we see God’s activity in our lives. When we moved from KS, we had a prayer list we created. Everything, down to the tiniest detail – a new dog for Tori. God answered every single one of them. What a testimony! We see Him in prayer. What are you trusting Him for? Don’t give up praying.

Affliction: “Seeing/Beholding” Christ in suffering

There is much that Paul says about suffering in this letter, but I want you to see the link he makes between suffering and “beholding/seeing”. 2 Cor. 12:7-12 (4:7-10; 4:16-18). Christ becomes our strength in weakness. Our body – as a jar of clay – holds a treasure which, despite being buffeted and beaten, displays the magnificence of Christ as we hold onto Him amidst the difficulties and trials of life. These momentary trials are working out for us an eternal weight of glory!