

Seeing Farther Than You Can See

Matthew 2:1-2

July 14, 2019

Passage about the Magi in July? Are we celebrating Christmas in July? Well, even if we do, there is nothing wrong with it. But that is not exactly what I have intended. What I want to talk about today is about the people who had vision and the impact they made. The people who saw farther than what other people saw, the people who saw beyond what was obvious.

Imagine for a moment that you are standing in front of a pile of scrap cardboard, used tires, old pipes, old car parts, street signs, and other thrown-away items. What comes to your mind as you look at them? Junkyard, landfills, trash, litter, or eye-sore? Well, if you think of any of these, I would agree with you. Yet there are people who looked at them and saw new homes. The late Professor Samuel Mockbee (1944-2001) was an American architect and co-founder of the Auburn University Rural Studio program in Alabama. Mockbee and his students actually made lovely, functional, low-cost public buildings and homes out of these items. Then they donated those buildings to the community and to the poor residents in Alabama. They turned scrap cardboard, old car parts, used tires and other scrap items into real functional homes. To be honest, the thrown-away items are not the only items they use. They use other building materials; but they also use thrown-away items. For example, for the outside wall of one of the buildings they built, they used thrown-away car windows.

Some of these homes are attractive enough to be featured in architecture magazines. What Auburn University's Rural Studio program does is to provide real homes for the people. The students in this program learn to see value in all things, including what other people consider trash, and to create something beautiful and lasting.¹

Some people look at discarded car windows and see trash while these students see building materials. That is what makes the world of difference. What you see and how you see it makes the difference between garbage and a new creation. Seeing things differently, seeing hope in misery, is what vision is. Vision is seeing farther than what you normally see. It is to see beyond the obvious.

¹ <https://visualculture09.wordpress.com/2009/10/21/samuel-mockbees-rural-studio/>

The power of vision is the power of change. It is the power to create something new. Nothing significant happens without vision. This world yearns for the people with vision, the ability to see beyond the obvious.

You know the Christmas story of the Magi who followed the bright star and came to Bethlehem to pay homage to Jesus. I am sure you heard that story many times. If these Magi saw a bright star in the sky, I am sure there were others who saw the same star. If the star was uniquely bright, wouldn't you think other people wonder about the star? If nothing else, people must have said, "Wow, look at that!" I am sure other people must have seen it, too. Perhaps they might have admired it, but they did not see anything beyond the bright star. They did not see any significance in it. They did not know that it indicated the birth of a new king. They did not leave their homes to search for the newborn king, but the Magi did. What was the difference? Vision.

Vision shapes our lives and guides our actions. Our vision is one of the most powerful factors that determines who and what we become.

Our vision of what it means to be a parent or mate or a friend largely determines the relationship we will have with other people. Even in marriage if the couples do not share the vision of what that marriage is to be, then they won't be able to live together.

During my vacation, Paula and I visited many National Park and National Monuments. One of the places we visited was Colorado National Monument, an absolutely gorgeous place. From the entrance to the Visitor Center, there was about 20 miles of drives along the cliff. It was a very scary drive with an awesome view.

A man named John Otto came to this place in 1906 and was totally captivated by the view. It was love at first sight. He dedicated his life to build trails and to promote this place, because he believed it should be a National Park. I am glad that there was such a person to prepare the way for other people to visit that place and enjoy. John Otto's vision to make that place a National Park was a great vision. When his vision was different from his wife's vision their marriage did not last. About five years after John Otto found this place, he married an artist from Boston named Beatrice Farnham on June 20, 1911. They got married in the middle of the canyons, at the base of Independence Monument. But their marriage lasted only a few weeks. John's life was very different from Beatrice's romantic

ideal. She said, “I tried hard to live his way, but I could not do it. I could not live with a man to whom even a cabin was an encumbrance.”²

When you have a clash in vision, you cannot stay together. Because vision is what holds people together, whether that is a marriage, or a church, or a nation.

Vision shapes us, shapes a nation, creates a movement, molds an institution. Our vision or lack of vision affects the entire human experience. The way we live, the way we manage our finances, the way we manage our time, all of it is determined by the vision we have or by the lack of it.

Vision doesn't have to be something big and enormous. It could be simple and even very personal. It will shape us and make our lives meaningful.

Leo Buscaglia (1924-1998) was a professor who taught about human relationships. He once told a story that happened while he was teaching at University of Southern California. He had a student who was very smart and filled with potential. Joel was his name. Joel, with all that potential and brilliance, had lost the meaning and purpose for living.

Joel was a Jew who had been brought up in the Jewish faith, but like many young people he drifted away from his faith. Not only God was absent in his life but also the religion practice. His family was comfortable financially and he had great potential as an engineering student, but he had this emptiness in his life. Somehow, he was convinced that it was meaningless to live like that. So, he decided to end his life.

On his way, he stopped by Leo's office. Joel told Leo that he had lots of money and was very comfortable financially. He had been accepted at several of the top engineering schools to work on a Master's degree. He had everything going for him. I am sure he was the envy of a lot of people. He was very handsome looking, too. Women circled around him all the time. Yet he had nothing inside. There was no passion, no vision, no joy, no enthusiasm, no peace, no harmony.

Leo said, “Before you take your life, I want you to visit some old people at the Hebrew Home which is adjacent to our campus.”

“What for?” Joel asked.

² <https://www.nps.gov/colm/learn/historyculture/john-otto.htm>

Leo said, “You need to understand life through the eyes of your heart.”

“The eyes of my heart?” asked Joel.

“Yes, you need to experience what it is like to give to those who have lost their connection to a meaningful life. Go to the desk and ask if there are people there who have not been visited for a long time by anyone. You visit them.”

“And say what?” Joel asked.

“I don’t know,” Leo said, “Tell them anything that will give them hope.”

Leo did not see Joel for months. In fact, he forgot about him. Then one day, he saw him coming from a bus with a group of seniors, some of whom were in wheel chairs. Joel had organized a trip to a baseball game with a group of his senior friends who had not been to a game in years. Leo and Joel chatted for a moment, and as Joel was leaving, he said, “Thanks for helping me find the ‘eyes of my heart.’”³

Seeing life with new eyes. Vision is not just for young people. It is for everyone. It is to see new possibilities in the lives of people around us. I hope we all find the eyes of our heart.

³ King Duncan, “A New Vision”, www.esermons.com