

THE IMPORTANCE OF DREAMS AND VISIONS

Dreams and Visions

Part 1

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The message this evening is going to come from the book of Acts. Chapter 2:14-21. This is the Day of Pentecost when all those who were gathered in the Upper Room had received the Spirit and the outsiders wanted to know what it was that had happened. *“Then Peter stood up with the eleven, raised his voice and addressed the crowd. ‘Fellow Jews and all of you who are in Jerusalem let me explain this to you. Listen carefully to what I say. These men are not drunk as you suppose. It is only nine in the morning. No, this is what was spoken by the prophet Joel. In the last days God says, “I will pour out my Spirit upon all flesh. Your servants both men and women I will pour out my Spirit in those days and they will prophecy. I will show wonders in the heaven above and signs on the earth below – blood and fire and billows of smoke. The sun will be turned to darkness and the moon to blood before the coming of the great and glorious day of the Lord. Everyone who calls upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.”’”*

In this series on “Dreams and Visions” I feel a little bit like I’m setting out to sea on uncharted waters. I have the vision that perhaps Columbus had when he set out to discover the new land. He had an idea of where he wanted to go but he wasn’t sure exactly how it would all transpire. He indeed had no knowledge of the length of the trip or the difficulty of the trip. The theme that I am ministering to you on these next five Sunday nights is not a theme of which I have given explicit teaching on before. Although I’ve talked about bits and pieces over the years. But it is a new thing within my heart to simply take off on and talk to us about dreams and visions in our life. I want to take the next number of weeks to encourage you to set out on uncharted seas with me. Whatever your experience with God at this moment that you would trust the Holy Spirit to lead you into new territory in your life.

I would like for us to have a fuller understanding of the Lord’s work in our life. I wanted to avoid the word “deeper”. We often say of things of the Spirit – there is a deeper life. When I was a kid growing up in the Pentecostal church we would often have meetings called Deeper Life Meetings. The implication was that wherever you had been up to that point hadn’t been deep. But now you were getting into depths. Sometimes the problem with that terminology is that it recreates a second century phenomenon called Gnosticism, which is the Greek word for knowledge. Many believers thought they had to be in to some super secret knowledge and experience that no one else in the body had ever received before you could really know God and be in contact with Him and be spiritual. So I wanted to avoid that word “deeper” and simply say it is available – fuller experience is available for us.

I think the way that I can illustrate it is holding in my hand some floppy disks, which are used on the little computer that I operate. These particular disks which I hold in my hands are disks on which there is information. All I need to do is to plug this disk into the computer, give it the right set of signals and out will come particular things on the various disks. I can access the information on these disks. It’s available to me.

But fortunately there are more than three disks that are available in the world. I keep discovering new things and keep wanting to write new things and say new things and understand a greater dimension of the Lord. These are disks, which are non-filed disks. Nothing has yet been stored on them. They’re waiting to receive information. If I want information from them, it’s no use. I

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can plug them in but it has no information to give me. I can only access the disks that store information that has been put upon it.

I thought what a marvelous example of this territory we want to look at in Dreams and Visions. All of us in our spiritual experience have certain items of information and experience that are already available to us. They are there. The problem with spiritual life is that many times we become content with what simply God has revealed to us in the past. But we need to step out and have fuller experiences with God that expose us more to his person than we've ever been exposed to before so that we might be continually more complete in him. And that we might grow in the knowledge of our Lord.

I'd like to see in this series God create in you a larger access file.

Tonight's message is not my normal, straight line, homiletical type with three to seven points. But it represents as we go along a kind of flow of interaction with the scripture and with spiritual experience.

I'd like to start with the scripture which I just read in discussing the theme of dreams and visions. Acts 2:14-21. I want to make several comments upon that text that provides understanding for us.

Realize of course initially just looking at the text that Peter uses this as a fulfilled word from the prophet Joel that describes the phenomena on the day of Pentecost. The descent of the Spirit upon the 120. And the speaking in other tongues. You will realize that Joel says and Peter quotes "in the last days." Verses 17-18 is what I would call the A.M. of the last days. Verses 19-20 are the P.M. of the last days. And verse 21 is the summary for both the A.M. and the P.M.

Contrary to modern popular use of the term "the last days" which relates the last days to something that began in 1949 or 1967 or 1983, the term "last days" in the scripture is that period of time which commenced from the Day of Pentecost and continues until the Lord returns. The beginning of that last days segment of human history, between the revelation of Jesus in the flesh and the revelation of Jesus from heaven, the interim between that is marked by a descent of the Spirit upon all flesh. It is concluded by cosmic signs. When the Son of man himself shall return and heavens and the powers in the heavens themselves shall be shaken. As long as we see the Spirit being outpoured upon us we know that we are in that phase of time in the last days in which God is pleased to give his Spirit to us.

I think a second observation I would make about this text is that of all the available scriptures in the Old Testament to apply to the Pentecostal phenomenon which is described at the beginning of Acts 2 it is remarkable that the Holy Spirit causes Peter to choose Joel 2 to describe the event. I'm a little bit surprised maybe from looking at it from a rational side that the Lord didn't have Peter quote from Isaiah. "With stammering tongues I will speak to the nations [to the people]" that would seem to me to be an appropriate scripture. Paul indeed uses that in the text in 1 Corinthians regarding tongues.

But instead Peter is led by the Holy Spirit to quote this passage from Joel 2, a prophecy that refers not to tongues, a phenomenon that is happening in the day of Pentecost but a prophecy that refers to visions and dreams and prophecy itself occurring in both men and women.

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Which leads me to the third observation. In regard to this test – your young men shall see visions and your old men will dream dreams – there is nothing at all new about that. People have always dreamed dreams and people have always seen visions. Whether they have been Christians whether they've been before Christianity members of the Judaic faith, people have always dreamed dreams and had visions. People that study dreams indicate that the average one of us dreams about a thousand major dreams a year. About 95-99% of them we don't remember. That doesn't include all the fragments of the dreams. All the dream research that's gone on with REM – Rapid Eye Moment – indicates that we dream considerably during the night. Even people who say they don't dream dreams. In fact if you don't dream, when they've done these experiments of light upon people and their sleep habits and every time they get into REM and wake them up and do that over a period of days these persons become very panicky, hallucinatory, and psychotic. They need something that the dream world of sleep gives them in terms of the resting of their subconscious or unconscious or whatever you want to call it aspect of man.

You have to look at this scripture and say what is the scripture saying in regard to vision. In answering a curious crowd in regard to all these people that are speaking in tongues and the fact that Peter in quoting Joel would reference that scripture which refers to dreams and visions may be an indication that something more is involved in the level of our being than simply natural dreams and natural visions. Could Peter be here saying that the Holy Spirit in the last days is going to be accessing that side of our nature of our psyche that is non rational, intuitive, sees things in symbols and pictures, operates in that arena of human personality that cannot be explained logically and analytically. When you look at all the gifts of the Spirit as described in 1 Corinthians 12:8-11 they operate within this sphere of our being which is beyond reason. Not contrary to reason but beyond reason. Things like, for example, faith and healings and miracles and prophecy and discernment and tongues and interpretation of tongues as well as even the gifts of wisdom and knowledge which can occur in remarkable ways without normal learning processes having gone on to perform them.

Thus when the scripture here uses the words “dreams and visions” in Acts 2:17-18 I want to understand these words as more than simply a literal reference to the things we see at night and the day dreams we have in the light time. But I would like to see these in their expansive meaning to describe that level of spiritual experience which goes beyond the logical, the inductive, the rational side of our being.

Several things have intrigued me with the development of this theme and have motivated me to look at this aspect of our spirituality and our spiritual expression.

One is a growing recognition in the last few months to look back over my own personal history and see that what I am enjoying this evening is a direct result of a visionary experience. On the logical side of me, the rational side of me completed a doctrinal work, which led me the assumption that for the rest of my life I would be serving as campus pastor at Evangel College in Springfield, Missouri. My parents always seemed to move ever 2 or 3 years and I thought the greatest, highest thing one could enjoy in life is roots and stability. After 2 months in the new job to be sitting in the chapel at an evening meeting and to look across the expanse of the auditorium and see in the distance bathed in the spotlight glowing on it the portrait of Jesus on the cross painted by one of the students I heard with my ears a speaker speaking. But with an

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inner voice suddenly everything else in the room faded. I felt a definite inner witness that said “George, look around. This is not going to be your place of ministry much any longer.”

It was a word that stunned me. At first I wanted to reject it as some sort of strange thought. But God then confirmed with events that this indeed was his will, to change a course of direction, which I had been set upon. The dream continued as the Glad Tidings Assembly of God gave me an invitation to become its pastor – a church that stands at the back of this current church in terms of its developmental history. I sat down one day after a time of prayer and I literally was seized upon by the Spirit and wrote a word of prophecy which I’d never done before or since, which the Lord spoke to my life giving me a particular scripture. I wrote it out. It came to 4 pages hand written. It was an indication of what the Lord wanted to do if I made this step. I finished that and I felt definitely the presence of the Lord.

At the same time I was going through this experience in my logical rationale side, which I hope is getting more sharply honed as I get older, I was making a list of reasons why I should stay where I was and a list why I should leave. The list for staying was 2 pages hand written. And the list for leaving was 2 pages handwritten. On the rational side they totally canceled one another out. But it was an inner revelatory experience that persuaded me that the Lord had something else for me.

I am reminded as we look at what the Lord is doing in the congregation, what he’s doing in providing us this facility that God works in our lives in the way that he himself works. Out of nothing God creates. Out of nothing God has a picture, God has an idea, God has a concept. Out of that idea or picture or concept he creates the things that are. So that the things that are real are not the things that are seen but the things that are unseen. Behind the reality of that which we enjoy is the fact that a dream and a vision came first. I am persuaded that God is no respecter of persons and God deeply wants to operate in our life by giving us a dream. By giving us a vision. By planting images in our mind. It may be positive memories. But he wants to give us pictures and associations, which create in us goals and dreams which are born of him to shoot toward.

That certainly is one thing that has been going on in me as I’ve wanted to get into this series.

Another thing that has motivated me to look at it, and tonight is kind of introductory in character, is the development of right brain and left brain studies. Now the neurosurgeons and psychiatrists who do research in the area of the brain are telling us that the brain although having complementary relationships to one another seems to move and operate on two dimensions. The left side of our brain is more analytical. It organizes information. We may call it the “intellect”. On a spiritual level we may say it brings us into a knowledge of God’s truth. It is inductive. The right side of our brain tends to be more emotional, creative, intuitive and “spirit led.”

So often it is the case that people divide these functions away from one another so that part of the body of Christ becomes all left brain and no experience. No relaxing in the Lord’s presence. No room for spiritual gifts. A shoving of those phenomena into the apostolic age or getting them into the back room where people can’t see them. We’ve become very uncomfortable – the left brain does – with that kind of phenomenon.

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On the other side of the body of Christ there are people who operate all on the right brain. The Lord is talking to them every minute and angels are telling them what to buy at the grocery store. They're dreams and visions oriented people.

God wants us to operate with our whole mind. Not just be half brained.

It's interesting this study on left brain-right brain research does not necessarily mean we have new truths because of new scientific discoveries. Rather I think these studies give us new insight on the spiritual experiences God has intended for us. I now for example in looking at some of the phenomenon of the right brain have not only a scriptural reason for speaking in tongues but have psychological reasons for it as well. I'm amazed at how continually discoveries corroborate the scripture. True science indeed always corroborates agrees true scripture.

All experience must be brought into correspondence with the word. Therefore people who get into the right brain and never check it out with the left brain are doing something very, very wrong. As kind of a way of introduction I'm interested in this theme because of my own personal experiences. I'm intrigued with left brain-right brain research.

And thirdly, I've become increasingly aware as I've looked in my own life that the gifts of prophecy and the interpretation of tongues gifts which the Holy Spirit has given me that these gifts very much function on a visionary level. People sometimes who do not know especially the function of the gift of the interpretation of tongues may think that when interprets a tongue he is translating what is said in the way that a United Nations translator might take a speech and translate it. The idea of interpretation while certainly incorporating the understanding of translation can go way beyond that. I have found in spiritual experiences of interpreting tongues and of giving prophetic words that invariably the Lord puts within the inner recesses of the mind almost as though there was a laser like projector within the apparatus of the mind that projects the picture upon that black back drop. As the prophecy or the interpretation proceeds that vision becomes a very living instrument. You start with just a phrase. You start with kind of seeing dimly at first. But as you progress in the flow of the Spirit it becomes real. It has body. It has parts.

A fourth thing that leads me into looking at this is a conversation I had several weeks ago with Dr. Cho, the pastor of the world's largest church. Dr. Cho is a great believer in visions and dreams. As I was talking with him I asked him if he was aware of left brain and right brain findings. He wasn't so I shed a little bit of summary with him. His comment to me after that was very intriguing. He said it did not surprise him at all that that sort of research was being developed since his experience had been that western society – American and European society – was all left brain. That's why we've produced the great scientific discoveries we have. We're analytical and sequential. But he said, if you notice western society has not produced the world's great religions. The world's religions have come from the east where people think conceptionally and visually.

Loving God with all of our heart and soul and mind and strength involves opening ourselves to God on every level. Peter says the promise or the gift of the Holy Spirit is "for you and for your children and for all who are afar off." So the prospect of loving God in ways that perhaps transcend any experience we've had thus far is part of the Lord's promise for us. Experiencing

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the gift of the Spirit, which of course brings us in the arena of activity that goes beyond what can simply be the sequential and the logical.

There are two texts as part of the message this evening I want to share with you additionally from the book of Acts which demonstrate the breakthrough of God into our lives. A breakthrough that is independent of our reason and even independent of our experience. That is independent of what we've experienced up to this moment.

In the book Dreams: A Way to Listen to God the author says that he has gone through the New Testament and categorized the gifts of the Spirit into five different dimensions. I don't necessarily agree with the categories. He lists the activity of the Spirit in the New Testament as falling into these categories – healing, discerning of spirits, dreams and visions, extrasensory perception such as like Peter had when Ananias and Saphira lied to him, and tongue speaking and prophecy. He went on to count the verses of the New Testament and came to the conclusion that 7957 verses comprised the New Testament and out of that number 3874 or roughly half of the verses touch on one of these five categories. Therefore if one divorces these aspects from their personal experience they're in effect divorces half of the New Testament from their life.

He then shares some things I think I can point out to you from Acts 9 and 10. Two key experiences in the early church which cannot be explained from the left side of the brain. Which can only be explained as an invasion of the Spirit into that realm of our personality that our logic doesn't have access to but the Spirit has access to. Two moments when the church was irrevocably changed – the conversion of Saul of Tarsus and the call of Peter to go to Cornelius' home.

Look at the dreams and the visions kind of phenomena. Verses 3-7, Paul on the road to Damascus has a vision and falls to the ground and has a conversation with the Lord. In fact, he will later say that he was not disobedient to the heavenly vision. In verses 10-11 a disciple by the name of Ananias in Damascus has a vision. That vision tells him to “go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul for he is praying.” By the way, a vision from God can be corroborated. Ananias had a vision that there was a man on Straight Street in house of Judas. And you know it's a real vision if you go to Straight Street and Judas has a house and a man named Saul is in there praying. But if you have a vision that says go to Straight Street and go to the house of Judas and find Saul and you go to Straight Street and there is no house of Judas but there is a house of Justus instead and Saul isn't there but Damatian is, you have not had a real vision from God. You have eaten too much before you've had the vision. This is a problem. People have visions but don't check them out with the other side – the left brain – and get into trouble. Vision from God will be corroborated if it's from God.

The next thing we know, still speaking to Ananias the Lord says regarding Saul in verse 12 “In a vision, Saul has seen a man named Ananias come and place hands upon him and restore his sight.” Saul had a vision on the road to Damascus, an appearance of the risen Lord. Ananias has a vision saying, Go to Saul's house. And in the vision to Ananias the Lord is saying, Now Saul has a vision that you're going to come to him, a vision within a vision. Ananias needed some revelation. Nobody wanted to go to Saul's place.

Then in verses 17-18 Saul is healed and filled with the Holy Spirit. Try reading the story without these phenomenon. See what sense you can make of it. I'll try. I'll start at 9:1 “Meanwhile Saul

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was still breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. He went to the high priest and asked him for letters to the synagogues in Damascus so that if he found any there who belonged to The Way whether men or women he might take them as prisoners to Jerusalem. As he neared Damascus on his journey [strike the visionary experience] as he neared Damascus on his journey he fell to the ground [jump to verse 7]. The men traveling with Saul stood there speechless. [That's a phenomenon you can see rationally.] Saul got up from the ground but when he opened his eyes he could see nothing so they led him by the hand into Damascus. For three days he was blind and did not eat or drink anything. In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias [strike, strike, strike – strike all the way down to verse 17.] Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands upon Saul he said [strike everything he said because it's all the result of a vision.] He [Saul] got up and was baptized. After taking some food he regained his strength.” Strike the dreams and visions, the supernatural phenomenon out of that text and how in the world did the church ever get this man Saul. Makes no sense.

Go over to chapter 10 and see the next significant event, which was the conversion of Cornelius, the first gentile to be fully received. The great issue in the early church was the reception of gentiles. It was a turning moment. Cornelius, a non-Jew has a vision of an angel. By the way, a true angel can be distinguished from a false angel in many ways. One of the real ways, the most reliable is that a true angel communicates a sense of awe. Cornelius was in awe and in fear, verse 4, of the angel. In all New Testament stories of angels they must assure someone not to be afraid. If you think you've had a visit with an angel and you felt chummy with the angel it weren't an angel! If you've had an extended conversation with an angel which gave you a book to write I would say also you haven't had an experience with an angel. Sorry, friends. But that's not a biblical precedent for angels. Angels do not communicate that kind of teaching revelation. They are directional. They say go here or go there or give a word of comfort or cheer. But they're not involved in the teaching ministry. We never read of God giving angels the gift of teaching.

You have an angel giving Cornelius supernatural information which people might call extrasensory perception. He said who he was to contact and where he was. Peter at the house of Simon the tanner in Joppa. Cornelius then acted in great faith.

Meanwhile as he sends two people – servants and a soldier – have you ever thought about that? What a wise man he was! If he had sent two soldiers and a servant Peter might have gotten scared. But he sent two servants and a soldier.

Meanwhile the next day at noon, Peter himself has a vision, which makes him open to the servants and the soldier. Then later when they meet while Peter is preaching the Holy Spirit comes upon all who hear the message and the believers are astonished that uncircumcised people have received the Spirit and are speaking in tongues.

Try to tell this story and leave out dreams and visions. Leave out supernatural revelation. Leave out tongues and prophecy and what do you have left. Very little. You have verses 1 and 2 and a few verses in between and that's it.

I've said Lord, in as much as all through the pages of the New Testament you find this type of supernatural phenomenon going on is it not your will for our lives to make us more open to experience you? Is it possible that we have settled into categories, comfortable categories in our

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relationship with the Lord which have become very convenient and very predictable. And the Lord, through the Holy Spirit and through the witness of scripture begins to call us out and lift our vision to something else. I shudder to think of what would have happened in the history of the church if Peter had not kept a moment of prayer that day when the Lord wanted to give him a vision, a supernatural appearance. I have said to myself, time and time again Lord, it surely is the case that there are people in this community whom you are sending us to as well but is it possible that because we have sort of closed the doors to you with our busyness that we may not be as open as we should be to encountering you in a phenomenal way.

Someone recently commented to me “You Americans are so busy you have always got your list of things to do for the day.” Many cultures do not have that list of things to do. Again we function very much in that rational world. But the Spirit while not ignoring that rational word and while the word of God comes to us in what is called propositional truth a set of statements about God which we accept and perceive to be true it is nevertheless the case that the Spirit goes way beyond that and transcends that.

My sole concern for this message is to awaken within us if it is not awakened a hunger to experience more of God. A hunger to let the Holy Spirit have access in more ways to our personality than he does now. So that we might truly love the Lord with all of our heart, with our soul, with all of strength and that there might not be deficient in any aspect of our spirituality that which the Lord desires for us. I have never particularly liked this term that I’ve grown up with. I thought it sounded braggadocio. I thought it made people who had belief in Pentecostal phenomenon, book of Acts phenomenon sort of say we’ve got more than you all and we’re proud of it. It is the term “full gospel.” I have resented that term. I think it has represented to our fellow brothers and sisters in the evangelical community that we’ve got more of the gospel than they and they’ve only got half gospel and we’ve got full gospel. Although I know what we mean by the word and I know that was not the original intention I’ve had a problem with the term. And you’ve never heard me as a pastor ever use that term. I would never convey to anyone that their experience with Jesus Christ is partial gospel. It may be seed gospel. It may be Christ developing within them. The person may not have experienced all the potentiality that God has. But the gospel is the gospel. And it’s either full or it ain’t.

Given all of that, there is a sense in which that phrase “full gospel” communicates a meaning to us. It says that all that’s written in the scriptures that we may have as believers is meant for us. None of it is to be denied us. In our spiritual experience we need to encounter the Holy Spirit afresh and anew and very real. We’re not to be incomplete in anything God wants for us. We’re to be open completely to the Holy Spirit, always checking the experience of the Holy Spirit with the written word but yet open to the Holy Spirit.

We open ourselves, Lord, now as individuals to you. And as a congregation to you. This is a night in which we focus on dreams and visions. In which our theme is we dedicate for the future. What is it, Lord, you have for us an individual persons? What is it you have for us as a church? Have we taken time to know? We do that now, Lord. In our heart of hearts we purpose to be in the Spirit on the Lord’s day. I pray that within every life here you will awaken that aspect of our being that only the Holy Spirit has entrance to. While we value learning, while we value study, while we value diligence in the pursuit of scholarly discipline, while we realize that in all those arenas the Spirit likewise is at work creating the scripture, giving us the understanding to know it and to know God. We realize also Holy

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Spirit of God that you long for us in an experiential way. That even as a husband and wife desire one another in experience so you, Lord God, have made us for yourself and desire on the deepest level of our being intimacy with us. In our world of busyness, unbelievable scheduling and routine of mornings which are filled with activity from the alarm clock to late evening sign offs you call us in the midst of our space in life to be intimate with you, to know you on deeper levels, fuller levels. Lord, we make ourselves available. Come upon us, cause us Lord to walk with you and know the refreshing joy of your presence all the gifts of your Spirit specially designed for us that we may be whole and complete. Restore our soul O God.

[end of tape]