

"A Vision or a Cause?"

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Mark 10:20-21, 28-30

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The story of "Faust" by the German writer Johann von Goethe remains an icon in world literature. Faust was a man who longed for romance, success, wealth, and adulation. Unable to find these or acquire these on his own, he made a pact with Satan. If Satan would grant Faust's wishes for money, power, and success...so he could enjoy all the rewards...then he would give his soul to Satan. Sure enough, the time came when Faust enjoyed marvelous romances, fabulous successes, much wealth, adulation, and great public esteem. However, when the time came and the Devil returned, seeking what Faust promised, Faust was unwilling to keep his end of the bargain. He did his best to put off Satan.

Whether intentional or unintentional, it seems many Christians often put off Jesus as well, as Faust tried to do with Satan. Oh we easily promise Christ—"Well, please, just one more of this, or one more of that, or a little bit more of the other, and then I will be Yours. I promise! Just wait a while longer...!" (*adapted from "The Needle's Eye," T. Peterson, CSS Publishing Company. Adpt.*) We are perhaps a bit too "Faustian" ourselves, as Jesus so ably reminds us. We tend to want to get but hesitate to want to give.

The question is, then, "What do we do when Jesus comes to claim us for Himself?" You see, Faust had a vision for how he wanted his life to be. Each of us probably also has a vision for our life—a vision or 2 or 3 or 4. This is fine, good, and well. However, there is a catch, and we often fail to realize it. But I will come back to that just a bit later.

God spoke to the people through the prophet Habakkuk, saying, "Write the vision; make it plain on tablets...For there is still a vision for the appointed time." (*from 2:2-3*) In the Book of Proverbs we find this famous statement, "Where there is no vision, the people perish"

(29:18). It seems self-evident, at least from a biblical perspective, that *vision* is important. Yet there is something beyond vision that is still more important. Again, I will get back to that in a few moments.

A true story—There is a man named Jack. He once had a dream—a "goal" for his life. One might say a vision. When asked, he would say without hesitation, "My ambition is to be a millionaire by the age of thirty!" He was not joking. Friends and acquaintances knew Jack had the will and the ability to achieve it. Yet today he is nowhere. Tough times hit. Jack would write that though he thought his vision would sustain him, it was not enough. Now beyond his 30s, his vision remains unrealized.

Another true story—There is a man named Fred who's vision for his life was even greater than Jack's. "My ambition," he would say, "is to help fund the salvation of the earth!" Not a vision one hears every day! He meant it, and still means it. Fred sees his successful business as a tool to accomplish great things for Christ. Both Jack and Fred faced difficulties. But Fred held tight to his vision and never lost his way in helping the world.

However, Fred's vision of making a better world for Christ has something Jack's vision lacked. That something...that difference...is one word. This "difference" also finds itself in the words of Jesus in today's scripture: "...for My sake and the sake of the good news." I suggest to you the word...the difference...is **cause**. A *cause* sustains a vision, not the vision sustains itself.

I often think back on my job at our Southwest Regional Office in Fort Worth during my years in seminary. My formal title was "Seminary Intern." My duties were windows, floors, bathrooms, toilets, carpeting, refuse (or "garbage"), tables, woodwork, lights, sidewalks, and parking lot...plus buying printing and cleaning supplies and then, of course, using them. Some would have called me a "custodial engineer." Others might have called me a "waste management specialist." My close friends at seminary regularly teased me about that job and insisted on calling me a janitor. I really did not mind, though. It was hard, honest work. That is how my parents would have seen it, and consequently that is how I saw it. I also discovered that at a church I served while in seminar, I was also a janitor,

cleaning up everything after events and activities—one of those "and all other duties as assigned" things.

However, it was not my vision of one of the things I would be doing when I entered seminary. I mean, who goes to seminary with a vision that they will be a janitor? What kept me being a janitor for those three years was not my "vision." It was the **cause** in my life. That cause was, then, and still is, now, Christ. As Jesus would say, "...for His sake"... This is what I meant when I said earlier there is a vast difference between a vision and a cause.

Helen Keller once said, "The only thing worse than being blind is having sight but no vision." It is even more true, I believe, that the only thing greater than having a vision is having a cause! Christ "knew this." It took me a while to discover it for myself. A vision can generate excitement, but a cause generates power. A vision can be essential, but a cause is foundational. A vision can sometimes be ignored or stalled...and many are. But you cannot ignore a genuine **cause**.

Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke about equality for African-Americans. Nelson Mandela pursued an end to apartheid in South Africa. They were both driven by a cause. Parts of the world tried to ignore their each one's vision. Yet because of their cause, their visions remain alive even today. Whether we realize it or not, a vision always offers a way out. A cause, on the other hand, leaves no options but to press on... somehow... someway!

Brian Houston is the pastor of Hillsong Church in Sidney, Australia; writer, speaker, and co-founder of the world famous Hillsong Music house...a very successful world-wide publishing house for worship music. He talks about an example of how a **cause** never gives you a way out! At one point he was invited to a Sunday afternoon beach barbecue with his best friends. At the last minute, a church commitment popped up. He was not happy being the odd-one-out as his friends and family headed for the beach. Yet that day turned out to be pivotal. On that day he fully realized God's **cause** in his heart meant "time" would rarely be his own. As he wrote, "...the cause of the King meant he had to die to all other options." (*Brian Houston, "For This I was Born" p. 38. See also p. 31.*)

You see, a vision is something you possess; a cause is something that possesses you. Said another way, a vision is something you have. A cause is something that has you.

St. Paul knew this difference when he wrote to the Christians in Galatia, "...it is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me." (*Gal. 2:20*) THAT is a cause. And again Jesus says, "Truly I tell you, there is no one who has left house or brothers or sisters or mother or father or children, or fields for My sake and for the sake of the good news who will not receive a hundredfold..." (Bear in mind, in that day some of the greatest treasures a family had were family itself, good friends, and fields to nurture.)

I am convinced it was Christ's cause that allowed Him to say to God late on the night He was betrayed, "Though I want you to please remove this trial, and pain, and suffering, nonetheless I know it is Your will, Father, that I must follow." (*from Mt. 26. Adpt.*) At His trial, when Jesus stood before Pilate, he said it again, "For this I was born, and for this I came into the world, to testify to the truth." (*From Jn 18:37. See also John 12:27.*) An interesting note—the King James Version translates the early Greek like this... "...for this cause I came into the world..." **Cause!**

Companies, businesses, organizations, churches, and even some families and individuals craft what is called a "vision statement." Here is an unexpected thought—instead of "vision statements" maybe we should be crafting "cause statements"!

If you are a New England Patriot fan, or a USC Trojan's fan (Go Trojans!) or on the off chance maybe even a Dallas Cowboy fan, you probably have a vision or a dream that "your team" will win a Super Bowl. However, your "cause" is to support them through thick and thin, win or loose. The "cause" drives your support.

Put even more simply, you can hold a vision in your hand. But a cause? *That* you hold in your heart.

Jesus told His disciples that if they gave their time, energies, prayers, and efforts for His sake... to His cause... then heaven and eternity

would be theirs; that when their vision begins to fade, if they think of His sake... His cause they will then pick themselves up and press on.

A question: Five seagulls are sitting on a dock. One of them decides to fly away. How many seagulls are left? The answer: Five (not four!). You see, *deciding* to fly away and *actually* flying away are two very different things. It matters not what you "intend," but what you "do." The one seagull probably intended to fly away. It certainly "decided" to fly away, and it probably mentioned it to the other four (you know...."bird talk"!) But until it flaps its wings and takes to the air, it is still on the dock with the other four seagulls. There is then no difference between that one seagull and the other four. They are all five still sitting on the dock.

It is the same as me telling you I decided to make the cause of Christ "the" cause in my life, but I never actually do it and it is never evident. I just keep telling you I have decided to do it. (See *Tim. 1:9; 2 Thess 2:13-14; Eccl 3:11; John 15-16.*) A **cause** gives rise to a vision. Not the other way around! Or so at least "I" believe. If Christ... if "for His sake"... is not our **cause**, then rest assured something else is. If Christ *is* our **cause**, then nothing else is.

Each of us has to decide which way it is for us, and to what degree it then is.