

Sunday January 4th 2009
'Be Thou My Vision'

1). Ho 4:6 ¶ *My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge. Because you have rejected knowledge, I also will reject you from being priest for Me; Because you have forgotten the law of your God, I also will forget your children.*

a). The prophet Hosea here is recording the word of the Lord to His people Israel – and it is a word that is filled with dread.

b). And it is a word that we can see to be self evidently true throughout the history of that people to this present day.

c). The phrase, 'lack of knowledge' is a translation of the Hebrew word 'da'ath' = knowledge:--cunning, (ig-)norantly, know(-ledge), (un-)awares (wittingly).

d). And what we see in it is the idea of being ignorant of, or unaware of that which God has said.

e). But this ignorance and lack of awareness that they have has not come about through the absence of the word, but because of their attitude to it – they have 'rejected knowledge'.

f). Rejected = Hebrew – 'ma'ac' = a primitive root; to spurn; also (intransitively) to disappear:--abhor, cast away (off), contemn, despise, disdain, (become) loathe(some), melt away, refuse, reject, reprobate, X utterly, vile person.

g). In other words then God had given to Israel great and precious promises concerning their position as His adopted firstborn son and the conditions necessary for them to walk in the fullness of that which He had promised – Israel, however, as we know all too well, treated these promises with disdain and cast them off. Exchanging a future hope for a present self-gratification, described in scripture as harlotry – reaching its apex with the crucifixion of their King and Messiah.

h). In consequence, according to our scripture, the people are destroyed, literally cut off, and are rejected from the office of priest before God – Ex 19:6 *'And you shall be to Me a kingdom of priests and a holy nation.'* *These are the words which you shall speak to the children of Israel."*

i). This whole sorry situation is most poignantly presented in a type surrounding God's provision for them during the wilderness journey – Nu 11:4 ¶ *Now the mixed multitude who were among them yielded to intense craving; so the children of Israel also wept again and said: "Who will give us meat to eat? 5 "We remember the fish which we ate freely in Egypt, the cucumbers, the melons, the leeks, the onions, and the garlic; 6 "but now our whole being is dried up; there is nothing at all except this manna before our eyes!"*

j). The manna of course is a type of the word of God, pointing to the Word made flesh, the Bread which came down from heaven. And within our context here we see this with a view to the nation of Israel, but there is also an application here for the people of God within a Christian context with regards to our own attitude towards that which God has said.

k). And it is this to which our attention needs to be drawn at this particular time.

2). As we stand, so to speak, at the edge of a new year we may have a sense of freshness and excitement over the blank page that is set before us. And as we look at this blank page we realize that we cannot know what the year ahead holds for us with regards to the circumstances of our life, and this is perfectly OK – because it is not our circumstances, but the way we relate to them that is the issue -
Php 4:12 I know how to be abased, and I know how to abound. Everywhere and in all things I have learned both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need. 13 I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.

a). And although the day to day circumstances of our life remain uncertain, that which God has set before us does not. Although we have a natural desire to look for newness in a new year, that which God has set for the mission of His Church as we wait for His return does not become new. It is what it has always been. And it is our attitude to this that must be settled in our hearts and minds.

b). The mandate given in - *Lu 19:13 "So he called ten of his servants, delivered to them ten minas, and said to them, 'Do business till I come.'*
Remains intact and unchanged.

c). The command of - *Mt 6:33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness,*

Is the same this year as it was last year and the year before, as it has been since the Lord spoke these words. This is and remains our purpose.

3). From my own past experience there seems to be a need within the church generally for God to be doing something ‘new’ in a new year – there is a need for a new vision, a new direction, a new focus – And on reflection I think this comes about because of the Church in general having a lack of knowledge with regards to their calling, resulting in a need to find a new way to motivate people for the year ahead so as to keep them somehow engaged in something - but what does the scripture say? – *Heb 12:2 looking [from this world] unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God.*

a). Here is the vision for the Church every day in every generation.

b). The risen Christ, the alpha and the omega, is our vision – the suffering that precedes glory is our direction – a future regality is our focus. Not only our vision, our direction and our focus but also our motivation and that which determines our actions in the midst of our uncertain circumstances.

c). And it is keeping this ever before our eyes that would give us the security of knowing that we are less likely cast off that which God has promised in the same fashion as Israel in our Hosea scripture – Heb 6:19 *This hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which enters the Presence behind the veil,*

d). 1Jo 3:3 *And everyone who has this hope in Him purifies himself, just as He is pure.*

e). Heb 2:8 *You have put all things in subjection under his feet." For in that He put all in subjection under him, He left nothing that is not put under him. But now we do not yet see all things put under him. 9 But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels, for the suffering of death crowned with glory and honor, that He, by the grace of God, might taste death for everyone.*

4). So as we come to this new year I want us to be encouraged to continue steadfast in the race of the faith, and not to be looking for some new thing as those without understanding do – Jude 1:3b.....*I found it necessary to write to you exhorting you to contend earnestly for the faith which was once for all delivered to the saints.*

i/ Let us see afresh the enormity of what God has set before us, and the awesomeness of the privilege God has given us here at Cornerstone to be a part of His plans and purposes at this time in preparation for the Kingdom to come.

a). The scripture says - 2Th 3:13 *But as for you, brethren, do not grow weary in doing good.*

b). Weary = Greek – ‘ekkakeo’ = to be (bad or) weak, i.e. (by implication) to fail (in heart):--faint, be weary.

c). We must not allow ourselves to become, to grow weary – to allow ourselves to fail in the heart, with respect to doing that which is good – and it is obviously possible for us to do so as the admonition, ‘do not’, is given.

d). Heb 12:1 ¶ *Therefore we also, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which so easily ensnares us, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us,*

e). The race that is set before us is the same race, with the same rules and with the same prize that was set in place from the foundation of the world – let us guard our hearts and our minds that we don’t become weary in the running of it.

f). We have to run with patient endurance, probably facing the same struggles and dealing with the same sins all over again – which is all part of patiently enduring.

g). This new year then is really just a mile marker showing us the distance we have travelled thus far in our race of faith – it is the same race, and we are heading in the same direction, but we are now closer to the finish than we were this time last year. And in that we can rejoice.

5). The finish line for our race is of course the Judgment Seat of Christ – and we shall all appear there - 2Co 5:10 *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad.*

a). And at the Judgment Seat, if we have been faithful, the goal of our faith will be realized - 1Pe 1:3 ¶ *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, 5 who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 ¶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, 8 whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, 9 receiving the end of your faith--the salvation of your souls.*

b). Because of this reality – because this is the very reason for our creation and the purpose for our salvation – all that we do as individuals and all we do corporately must be seen within this context – the context of the salvation of the soul – which is a continuous, unalterable process.

c). All that we do must be towards that end if it is to be profitable for us.

d). Pr 11:30 ¶ *The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life, And he who wins souls is wise.*

6). Within a personal context, our responsibility towards the salvation of our soul is clearly stated in scripture - Eph 4:13 *till we all come to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ; 14 that we should no longer be children, tossed to and fro and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the trickery of men, in the cunning craftiness of deceitful plotting, 15 but, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head--Christ—*

a). Heb 6:1 ¶ *Therefore, leaving the discussion of the elementary principles of Christ, let us go on to perfection, not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith toward God, 2 of the doctrine of baptisms, of laying*

on of hands, of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment. 3 And this we will do if God permits.

b). And as we know this process of growing up in all things into Him who is the head, and going on to perfection/completion of necessity involves the death of our flesh – Lu 9:23 *Then He said to them all, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me.*

c). It is active and resolute engagement in the spiritual warfare – Eph 6:13 *Therefore take up the whole armor of God, that you may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.*

d). It is the metamorphosis that takes place through proper engagement with the word of God – Ro 12:2 *And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God.*

e). All of which will enable us to overcome the world - 1Jo 5:4 *For whatever is born of God overcomes the world. And this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.*

f). The flesh - Ro 8:13 *For if you live according to the flesh you will die; but if by the Spirit you put to death the deeds of the body, you will live.*

g). And the Devil - 1Pe 5:9 *Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world.*

i/ Resulting in regality - Re 3:21 *"To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.*

h). And this process is not haphazard, but the result of disciplined, structured engagement with the word of God after the fashion in which He has given it to us. 1Co 9:26 *Therefore I run thus: not with uncertainty. Thus I fight: not as one who beats the air. 27 But I discipline my body and bring it into subjection, lest, when I have preached to others, I myself should become disqualified.*

i/ And of course faithful obedience in the doing of it.

i). And our prayer life for ourselves and for our families will be in complete harmony with all of this. And we can see our praying as two facets of the same whole. So firstly let's just look at some prayers in relation to the salvation of the soul.

j). To begin the prayer we are already familiar with - Eph 1:17 *that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him, 18 the eyes of your understanding being enlightened; that you may know what is the hope of His calling, what are the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints, 19 and what is the exceeding greatness of His power toward us who believe, according to the working of His mighty power 20 which He worked in Christ when He raised Him from the dead*

and seated Him at His right hand in the heavenly places, 21 far above all principality and power and might and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this age but also in that which is to come.

k). And also from Ephesians - Eph 3:14 ¶ *For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15 from whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named, 16 that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man, 17 that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, 18 may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height-- 19 to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God. 20 Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, 21 to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen.*

l). Heb 13:20 *Now may the God of peace who brought up our Lord Jesus from the dead, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant, 21 make you complete in every good work to do His will, working in you what is well pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory forever and ever. Amen.*

m). Col 1:9 ¶ *For this reason we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to ask that you may be filled with the knowledge of His will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; 10 that you may walk worthy of the Lord, fully pleasing Him, being fruitful in every good work and increasing in the knowledge of God; 11 strengthened with all might, according to His glorious power, for all patience and longsuffering with joy; 12 ¶ giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light.*

n). 2Th 1:11 ¶ *Therefore we also pray always for you that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfill all the good pleasure of His goodness and the work of faith with power, 12 that the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.*

o). These of course are praying the word of God Himself, something that is invaluable for us, then secondly in addition we can also pray in accordance with the stated will of God. Just remember for a moment what we read concerning seeking first the Kingdom of God and let's put it in its context –
Mt 6:31 *"Therefore do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we drink?' or 'What shall we wear?'" 32 "For after all these things the Gentiles seek. For your heavenly Father knows that you need all these things. 33 "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to*

you. 34 *"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble.*

p). With this in mind let's look at - *Php 4:6 Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; 7 and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.*

q). Here in Philippians is the way to pray with regards to the day to day detail of our lives. Please notice the inclusion of the words 'everything' and 'thanksgiving'

7). Within the same context of the salvation of the soul we also have a continuing individual responsibility towards each other. Now clearly the prayers we have just looked at from Ephesians, Hebrews, Colossians and Thessalonians can all be adapted to be prayed for others with a view to this same end and we can also pray for each other's circumstances in line with what we read in Philippians – and all of this we should do as a continuous practice.

a). Then along with this we also have another scriptural mandate seen in – *Heb 10:24 And let us consider one another in order to stir up love and good works, 25 not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the manner of some, but exhorting one another, and so much the more as you see the Day approaching.*

b). And the reason we are to do this is seen in the verses which follow – *Heb 10:26 For if we sin willfully after we have received the knowledge of the truth, there no longer remains a sacrifice for sins, 27 but a certain fearful expectation of judgment, and fiery indignation which will devour the adversaries.*

c). We have this responsibility to stir up love and good works in each other so as to encourage one another and exhort one another that we may not fall away from the truth. An echo of Hosea.

d). So we see then that the gathering together of ourselves here on Sunday morning, or in our Bible Studies or small groups is inextricably connected with soul winning in its correct Biblical sense, and we must adjust our thinking to see it as such – our thinking must be in line with the truth of scripture, not the tradition or practice of men.

8). And if we apply our Hebrews 10:24 – 25 scripture to the whole of what we do here on a Sunday, which we must, then we will see that this also encompasses our music, which we have discussed in another series, and our children's ministry.

a). Now with regards to the children's ministry we need to see soul winning here as having a dual facet.

b). Firstly, the ministry to the children themselves – Please don't see this as child-minding, or providing entertainment – it is soul winning. Now it may be

preparatory and foundational – as if that is a small thing – but soul winning nonetheless. Those who teach will have this motivation and those who help must view it with the same eyes.

c). Everyone involved in the children's ministry has the privilege to be involved in the salvation of each child's soul. What price would we put on that? And what would we not give to see that become a reality? Could we really say that an hour on a Sunday morning is too great a price to pay?

d). And then of course as the parents of our children are released to focus on the preaching of the word, so our service with the children makes that possible. And if the receiving of the word results in the salvation of their parents' souls, which it certainly can - Jas 1:21 *Therefore lay aside all filthiness and overflow of wickedness, and receive with meekness the implanted word, which is able to save your souls.*

e). Then those who work with the children have a part in the winning of the parents' souls also.

f). Remember what is promised with regards to soul winning - 1Th 2:19 *For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Is it not even you in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at His coming? 20 For you are our glory and joy.*

g). If we would really grab hold of the truth of this we will never be short of workers on a Sunday and a Thursday or whenever.

h). Working with the children, in whatever capacity, is never imposition; it is rather a profitable investment, on which we will see a glorious return.

9). Then, from a corporate standpoint, if we move outside of the walls of this building there is the privilege that the Lord has given us to minister in the lives of Kingdom seekers throughout the USA and around the world – and again this is all within the context of soul winning. For this is His purpose, through us.

a). Everything that God has asked us to do with regards to speaking the word of truth to those with ears to hear is made possible by your faithfulness in being here every week and thereby growing in your understanding of God's plans and purposes, resulting in faithfully giving your tithes and offerings, in sending out with rejoicing those who will preach the gospel – please don't ever think that you don't count for much in the plans of God – no one is insignificant. Our placement here at this time is no small matter – not only can our faithfulness in this result in the salvation of our own soul, but it can also be a significant factor in the saving of the souls of others as well – Ro 10:12 ¶ *For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek, for the same Lord over all is rich to all who call upon Him. 13 For "whoever calls on the name of the LORD shall be saved." 14 How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? And how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? And how shall they hear without a preacher? 15 And*

how shall they preach unless they are sent? As it is written: "How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the gospel of peace, Who bring glad tidings of good things!"

b). A way has been made just recently for this word to be received in India, in Ghana and in the UK – and this year, if the Lord is willing, the good news of the glories of Christ will be taken to the brethren in Jamaica and we shall return to continue the work in Kenya – what would we give to see these folks in the presence of the Lord at His coming?

10). So how would we pray in respect of this and for our extended family wherever they may be, even those we don't even know about? Well we find the answer at the end of Ephesians 6 at the conclusion to the spiritual warfare passage – Eph 6:17 *And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God; 18 praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, being watchful to this end with all perseverance and supplication for all the saints - 19 ¶ and for me, that utterance may be given to me, that I may open my mouth boldly to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20 for which I am an ambassador in chains; that in it I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.*

a). And a companion passage in - Col 4:3 *meanwhile praying also for us, that God would open to us a door for the word, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in chains,*

b). It is a part of the spiritual warfare that we should pray that those who will make known the mystery of the gospel will be given utterance and that they may speak boldly.

c). And we should also pray for the Lord to open to us a door for the word. There is no doubt that He has done so and we should pray that it would continue. And when that door opens we should have the courage to walk through it and the faith to see it for what it is.

11). And while thinking of our extended family it would be remiss not to mention our Conference that is now only a month away.

a). This is a time when we have such a great opportunity to show ourselves to truly be disciples of Christ - Joh 13:35 *"By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another."*

b). Because of what we have on a Sunday and throughout the week it is easy for us to forget that most of our extended family within the US and elsewhere do not have this same opportunity. Many, as a result, feel so alone and in their isolation unloved.

c). Our conference is our chance to turn this around.

d). We need to plan to open our homes to them, to be here every night to encourage and exhort, and be prepared to be involved in any way that is needed to make their visit with us a profound experience.

e). What does the scripture say? Joh 15:13 *"Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends.*

f). We need to determine that for the duration of the conference we will lay down our life – set aside our plans, our agendas our outside commitments – in order that our friends, our brothers and sisters in Christ from our extended family can experience and see demonstrated what sacrificial love looks like. That they may be strengthened and encouraged and emboldened to continue the race.

g). Please realize that our annual conference is one of the avenues that God has given us to encourage the downhearted, to stir up love and good works, to implant His word, to separate the truth from the lie – only at the Judgment Seat might we understand its full importance.

h). Please do not take our conference lightly – this is a work to the salvation of the soul.

i). Let us remember the admonition of scripture – let us take it to heart and apply it to our lives - Ga 6:9 *And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. 10 Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.*

12). So then, as we begin this year 2009 let us see afresh our calling, embrace with renewed enthusiasm our purpose and continue undeterred in the good works prepared beforehand for us to walk in, both individually and corporately as we look to that Day when the Sun of righteousness will arise with healing in His wings and will reward each one according to his works. Let Christ be our vision.