

Momentum For Life 5

Vision

Daniel 2

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Until I recently read *Windows of the Soul* I was not aware that Vincent Vang Gogh believed in God, and at one time passionately served him. Brought back to mind Don McLean's Vincent or Starry Starry nights, which Duane and Billy Owens Sang for us. Did you catch the first verse; *Now I understand what you tried to say to me . And how you suffered for your sanity. And how you tried to set them free. They would not listen, They did not know hom. Perhaps they'll isten now.*

Was I one of the ones the singer was referring to, one of the cones who wouldn't listen, who didn't how? What did the songwriter understand that I didn't? What was the vision Vincent painted I could not see? And what did it mean to me?

Vincent started out in life, wanting to sow the words of the Bible to poor and working-class people. In preparation for this he would sit

at his desk night after night and copy page after page of the bible, translating them into english, german and french. I read it daily he wrote but I should like to know it by heart and to view life in the light of it's words.

While in London, he went to the remotest parts of the city and preached to the poorest of the poor. He felt destined to follow in his fathers vocational footsteps as a pastor, so he sought out a theological education. But Vincents temperment, zeal and eccentricities distanced him from the religious establiment. "He didn't know the meaning of submission on of his fellow students remarked.

And maybe that's why the school he attended asigned him more as a concession than a comission, to be a "lay evangelist" in an impoverished coal-mining town.

The conditions in which the miners worked were abysmal. Laboring in the dark and gaseous bowels of the earth, they faced dangers of poisoned air, explosions, underground flooding, and the collapse of the mine itself. The long hours of back breaking labor took their toll too. Most of the miners vincent wrote are thin and pale from fever; they look tired and emaciated, weather beaten and aged

before their time."

Vincent lived among them, sharing their poverty. He went down into the mines with them, breathing into his lungs the same black dust they breathed into theirs. He visited the sick among them, bandaging their wounds, praying with them. And he preached to them on Sundays, trying the best he could infuse a little light, a little hope, a little encouragement into their coal-dark lives.

He wrote to his brother; "I should be very happy if I could draw them, so that those unknown or little known types would be brought before the eyes of the people" Before long that is exactly what he did. The poet Rilke writes of this as the start of being an artist. He goes on to say. . ."And so he becomes what he calls an evangelist, and he goes to a mining district and tells the people the story of the gospel. And while he talks, he draws. And finally he doesn't even notice that he has stopped talking and is still drawing.

Because of Vincent's extreme self-denial, his fanatical zeal and his unwillingness to follow the guidelines set before him, the governing body his ministry terminated his ministry. Angered and embittered Vincent left, and at twenty-seven years of age, embarked on a journey to become an artist. This painful exit was also his struggle with insanity

and depression. He would never recover from the rejection of his vision to minister to the coal miners. What he failed to see was his calling to all mankind as an artist, that painted to down and out in a way that revealed his compassionate heart. That should have given humanity a vision of greater compassion for all mankind

Another, visionary painted with words a harsh world where the powerful ruled and seemed to thumb their nose at God with no consequences. But he was so clear, wise and accurate few got at the time of composition and experience rejection just like Vincent. But he understood it was part of the story, so he never lost his way. His name is Daniel and let's read about . . .

Daniels Vision 2:36-45

Head of Gold (36-38)

This was the dream, and now we will interpret it to the king. 37 You, O king, are the king of kings. The God of heaven has given you dominion and power and might and glory; 38 in your hands he has placed mankind and the beasts of the field and the birds of the air. Wherever they live, he has made you ruler over them all. You are that head of gold.

As the vision was recounted to Nebuchadnezzar, he would be thinking

of the glories of his empire, but what would happen after this? He knew that his life was limited in time and he wondered if all he had accomplished would crumble into dust? This sort of crisis brings us back to reality; it shows us how helpless we are, that is, unless we are in a right relationship with God.

The king was rendered speechless, but Daniel knew it was the right dream. He knew God does not make mistakes. But what could it mean? Daniel was brutally frank in explaining its meaning to Nebuchadnezzar. His empire, although represented by the gold head, would soon pass away. Kings may rule and dictators may govern and make proud statements like Hitler, who said the Third Reich would last a thousand years, forgetting that above and beyond them all is the Almighty Sovereign whom Daniel referred to as "The God of the heavens". It is God who entrusts power to those in authority and they are accountable to him.

Daniel went on to explain that just as the head of gold gave way to the arms and chest of silver, so Nebuchadnezzar's mighty Babylonian empire was to be succeeded by a kingdom inferior to its predecessor, and similarly down the body.

Gold is made thru a refining process where it is heated up and impurities are scraped off. Gold was a very fitting symbol of Babylon they were the gold smiths of the ancient world. Many of their statues were made of pure Gold. It is also a hint to Daniel and all believers as to what God was up too. Part of the reason they were exiled to Babylon was their refusal to repent of their sin of Idolatry. Babylon was the fire that heated Israel up to the point that idolatry was scraped off and never dealt with again.

Chest of Silver(32...39)

The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver. . . After you, another kingdom will rise, inferior to yours.

Persia was known for its treasures of silver. Just as silver is inferior to gold in value, the next kingdom, Medo-Persia, was inferior to Babylon in wealth.

It was the Silver from the Medes that God used to rebuild and reestablish the Kingdom of Israel to prepare for the coming of the Messiah. It was Persian who ended Israel's exile and sent them home. Confirming God had a plan to bless and not harm even in Babylon.

Bronze Trunk(32. . .39)

The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, The third kingdom, shown in the image by the bronze trunk and thighs. . . Next, a third kingdom, one of bronze, will rule over the whole earth.

This applies to the kingdom of Greece founded by Alexander the Great, whose conquests were so extensive that he commanded that he should be called "king of all the earth" and wept that there were no more worlds to conquer.

Part of Alexander's secret to his conquest was the battle tactic of the Phalanx. The hoplite phalanx was a formation in which the hoplites would line up in ranks in close order. The hoplites would lock their shields together, and the first few ranks of soldiers would project their spears out over the first rank of shields. Understand why Bronze was a symbol of Greece: Their Helmets, shields and spears were made from Bronze.

Greece's world conquest brought a new language to almost all of the ancient world: Konia Greek. It was accurate and the language of traders. When Jesus came it allowed for his message to be accurately shared with a larger audience than ever before.

Feet of Iron and Clay(32,33. .40-43)

The head of the statue was made of pure gold, its chest and arms of silver, its belly and thighs of bronze, 33 its legs of iron, its feet partly of iron and partly of baked clay. . . Finally, there will be a fourth kingdom, strong as iron—for iron breaks and smashes everything—and as iron breaks things to pieces, so it will crush and break all the others. 41 Just as you saw that the feet and toes were partly of baked clay and partly of iron, so this will be a divided kingdom; yet it will have some of the strength of iron in it, even as you saw iron mixed with clay. 42 As the toes were partly iron and partly clay, so this kingdom will be partly strong and partly brittle. 43 And just as you saw the iron mixed with baked clay, so the people will be a mixture and will not remain united, any more than iron mixes with clay.

The iron in the image sat on feet of iron mixed with clay. The Battle of Pydna, June 22, 168 B.C. marks the time when Greece fell before the Romans. From this point on, Rome ruled the Mediterranean world and beyond to Britain in the north. For more than 500 years, Rome was unconquerable.

Daniel emphasized the feet and toes of iron and clay, not another separate kingdom. This mixture is symbolic of Rome's weakness their

fast empire put together of many peoples, cultures and countries in the end they broke apart and destroyed itself.

Does any one know what the national symbol of Rome's empire was?

The Iron Eagle! Iron was part of Rome's military might-They were the first to utilize standard Iron weapons that smashed brass and allowed them to conquer the world. So Iron and clay was an accurate vision.

This warring Iron Kingdom made something possible: Roads and Peace. Pax Romana - A Latin phrase meaning the "Peace of Rome". Usually refers to the process by which peace was maintained by Roman force in territories once they had been fully occupied by Rome.

It relates to the internal peace of the empire not to its external conflicts. This made possible roads bridges, law and order and easy travel. This is part of the secret to History's mystery of how is it possible for the church to spread so quickly-Pax Romana. The Peace of Rome made it possible for Christians to take the good news of Jesus into all the World in one generation.

Notice how Daniel foretold a thousand years of world history with unerring accuracy. The rise and fall of these four world empires--Babylon, Medo-Persia, Greece, and Rome-are clearly foretold in the Bible and proved by the history books. These four

empires were in many ways evil and corrupt yet God used them to bless the world with Goodness. Daniels envisionsthe coming of the last kingdom.

The Rock Kingdom(34, 35)

While you were watching, a rock was cut out, but not by human hands. It struck the statue on its feet of iron and clay and smashed them. 35 Then the iron, the clay, the bronze, the silver and the gold were broken to pieces at the same time and became like chaff on a threshing floor in the summer. The wind swept them away without leaving a trace. But the rock that struck the statue became a huge mountain and filled the whole earth.

Daniel envisions a rock Kingdom from a stone cut...without hands

This "without hands" suggests it is not your ordinary kingdom. Also, it would start small and then grow larger-(Kind of like a Mustard seed?)

What Did Jesus teach about the nature of His kingdom. His kingdom is not of this world. It would start small, and grow to encompass the

earth. But most important is what Jesus said; ***Jesus said to them,***

"Have you never read in the Scriptures: 'The stone the builders rejected has become the capstone^[a]; the Lord has done

this and it is marvelous in our eyes^[b]? "Therefore I tell you that the kingdom of God will be taken away from you and given to a people who will produce its fruit. Matthew 21:42, 43

So the Rock Kingdom are those who allow Jesus to be the Lord of their life.

How to Practice Daily God's Vision

1. Start with the Obvious

Let's Read Verse 21: *He changes times and seasons; he sets up kings and deposes them. He gives wisdom to the wise and knowledge to the discerning.*

Visionaries have a way of seeing the obvious in a new way. In fact Dreamers do not have their head stuck in a cloud they start with plain old reality. Then they seek out how God is using that to shape out a new reality. For Daniel the obvious was the fact that God rules; inspite the reality of being conquered and enslaved by Babylon. So Daniels life vision quest became What is God up to amidst this reality.

Vincent Van Gogh wrote of his life; "There may be a great fire in our soul, yet no one every comes to warm himself at it, and the passers-by see only a wisp of smoke coming through the chimney,

and go along their way. Vincent's tragedy is that he stopped at the reality of rejection that eventually drove him mad. Instead of persevering unto the reality that God rules and rewards each according to his good deeds-whether there is applause or not.

God's Kingdom will never be destroyed. If you are upset by threats of job loss and the prosperity of fat Cats through government bailouts, remember that God, not world leaders, decides the outcome of history. Under God's protection, God's Kingdom is indestructible. Those who trust in God are members of his Kingdom and are secure in him. If we start with the obvious truth that God Rules, it will free us to envision God's coming Blessing. That daily vision will free us from fear and release us to live life with faith.

2. Spend Time With the Dream Giver

Then Daniel returned to his house and explained the matter to his friends Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah. 18 He urged them to plead for mercy from the God of heaven concerning this mystery, so that he and his friends might not be executed with the rest of the wise men of Babylon. 17,18

If you study Daniels life filled you will see the fuel for his vision was the huge amount of time he spent with the giver of those dreams in

devotion. Daniel had a disciplined prayer life. Our prayers are usually interrupted, not by threats, but simply by the pressure of our schedules. Don't let threats or pressures cut into your prayer time. Pray regularly, no matter what, for prayer is your lifeline to God's vision. The key to daily grasping God's vision, is to spend time in His presence.

I am not an expert on Vincent Van Gogh, but the little I have learned. He seems to be the type of person who wanted more to do for God, than to be with God. He was more intent on being a missionary than knowing God as his mission. He sought the spotlight more-than basking in the light of His Presence.

We must slow down life, so we spend more time in God's presence seeking His vision, Before we attempt to work out that vision. It is important that as ECC we spend more time with God than doing work for God-this is what ensures we as a church and you as individuals find the God given direction of His Holy Spirit.

3. Search For God in Pain.

This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon. So the decree was issued to put the wise men to death, and men were sent to look for **Daniel** and his

friends to put them to death. Daniel 2:12,13

Daniel suffered enough in his life to write an encyclopedia on hurt. As a teen more than likely he saw his parents executed. Saw his country conquered and destroyed. Exiled to a foreign land. Given to the whims of fanatical kings often calling for his head. Co-workers who were always plotting his death. Thrown into the lion's den as an old man. And yet this man seems to have always kept his Joy and optimism. Why? I believe he came to realize: Suffering is part of God's story and we can either suffer with or without God. He chose to suffer with God, and was given a vision that the threads of his pain were weaving a pathway of the coming of God's kingdom.

Vincent's last words were: The sadness will never go away. The great God given Vision for the beauty of God's world-he never understood-that his sadness was also part of the shadowing that made our life a masterpiece.

We have all gotten excited when we have felt like God has given us a vision on how things could be better. Then we start building that dream and we are shocked to find it does not come easy. When you or the blues brothers are on a mission of God there will be pain involved. This is the story, but some how we are shocked when it happens to us.

Pain is the amplifier God uses to speak, lead and redeem us. Often, without painful consequences we would never know right of wrong. Without the shame of sickness, we would never know the blessing of health. Without devastating rejection we would never know the prodigals welcome home. Suffering is part of the story-to have an accurate vision of God's future we have to ask what is God saying amidst the pain of life. Remember suffering is a fact of life-the choice is to suffer is with God or without God! Vincent chose without-Daniel chose with-what will you choose this day?

Praise band come up front.

Conclusion:

Vincent said of Jesus Christ is more of an artist, he works in a living spirit and the living flesh; he makes men and not statues. Like Vincent, Jesus drew our attention to a sower in the field, birds of the air, flowers of the field, and faces of the poor. Like Vincent he has to borrow Don McLeans word's; "Eyes that know the darkness in my soul," and hands, like an artist's that soothed weathered faces lined in pain. Like Vincent, he put frames around ragged men in ragged clothes. And like Vincent, he tried to set them free. And another Dreamer bDaniel Foresaw this thousands of year before the fact.

But unlike Vincent, who died from a self-inflicted wound, Jesus died from wounds inflicted by others. Unlike Vincent, whose last days were filled with despair, on the night he was betrayed. He encouraged His disciples not to let their hearts be troubled for he was going to prepare a place for them in His father's house. Even in the pain of his own cross, he encouraged a thief on the cross next to Him with the hope of heaven. And even in his forsakenness, Jesus entrusted His Spirit to His Father's hands.

Jesus did this because he is a visionary. He dreams of you spending an eternity with him. *Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame, and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. Consider him who endured such opposition from sinful men, so that you will not grow weary and lose heart.*

Hebrews 12:2,3.

Will you disappoint God's desire for a relationship with you? Or will you come forward as we stand to sing to embrace God's vision of a future with you for all eternity?