

# Searching for Vision

## Revelation 21

[Video: Martin Luther King Jr speech; 0:00 to 1:24]

Martin Luther King Jr. An American Baptist minister and a leader in the African-American Civil Rights Movement. He delivered the “I Have a Dream” speech on August 28, 1963.

“We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal”.

“I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi, a state sweltering with the heat of injustice, sweltering with the heat of oppression, will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice”.

“I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the colour of their skin but by the content of their character”.

Dreams inspire people. Men like Luther King dream of the way things should be and they inspire others to share the dream.

Now imagine you're in slavery. What would you be dreaming about?

I can tell you what you'd be dreaming about!

You'd be dreaming about your freedom!

And if you're a refugee in a detention centre you'd be dreaming about life in a country of freedom.

Rewind a few thousand years and imagine you're an Israelite in slavery (**slide 1**). The Egyptians made you a slave and they're working you to the bone. History tell us that the Egyptians “worked the Israelites ruthlessly ... with harsh labour in brick and mortar and with all kinds of work in the fields; in all their harsh labour the Egyptians worked them ruthlessly” (Ex 1.13–14).

What would you be dreaming about as the Egyptian slave-driver gives you another beating? I can tell you what you'd be dreaming about! You'd be dreaming about your freedom!

God in his mercy raises up a saviour, Moses, who one day gives his “I have a dream” speech.

“Therefore, say to the Israelites: ‘I am the LORD, and I will bring you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. I will free you from being slaves to them, and I will redeem you with an outstretched arm and with mighty acts of judgement. I will take you as my own people, and I will be your God. Then you will know that I am the LORD your God, who brought you out from under the yoke of the Egyptians. And I will bring you to the land I swore with uplifted hand to give to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob. I will give it to you as a possession. I am the LORD.’ (Ex 6:6–8).

God set before his people a clear vision for the future. And it wasn't that the Israelites didn't like the dream—rather they thought it impossible. “Moses reported this to the Israelites, but they did not listen to him because of their discouragement and cruel bondage” (Ex 6.9).

God castes a vision before his people:

I will deliver you from the yoke of the Egyptians. You will no longer be slaves.

I will take you as my own people (Mt Sinai).

I will take you across the desert into the land I promised to your forefathers (Promised Land).

This is the vision Israel needed and this is the vision God was willing to give them (**slide 2**). Israel's mission was to remain faithful to God in the wilderness so that vision would become reality in the Promised Land.

And it was the role of the leadership to hold the vision before the people.

We read one instance of rebellion in Numbers 14. The people grumble, “If only we have died in Egypt! Or in this wilderness! Why is the Lord bringing us to this land only to let us fall by the sword? Our wives and children will be taken as plunder. Wouldn't it be better for us to go back to Egypt?”

You see what the people are doing? They're changing the God-given vision statement and they're choosing a leader who'll buckle to their sinfulness. It's absolutely outrageous!

Moses and Aaron who the God-appointed leaders respond and this is what they say to the people, “The Lord is with us. Do not be afraid” (Num 14.9). Then God who wants to destroy his rebellious people and Moses intervenes.

Moses the leader knows that a God-given vision will not fail, and after a really interesting exchange in Numbers 14, God forgives his people for the sake of his holy name.

But as a result, the generation whom God rescued from Egypt perish in the wilderness and God leads a new generation into the Promised Land.

From Israel's experience we can draw the following about casting visions:

- They are God-given and always consistent with his Word.
- Visions mean something to people. Israel's vision of the future gave them a reason to get up each morning—even if it was to rebel.
- Visions can be clearly and simply articulated. “We are called to trust God as we head to the Promised Land”.
- A clear vision gives hope for the future. “Even when our enemies surround us, we know that God is faithful to his promises”.
- Visions are a call to action. Visions give life purpose and direction. Visions shape the present situation. There was no point Israel forming a building sub-committee and getting quotes for a Temple while in the wilderness. The time wasn't yet right. Visions help us focus on what needs to be done.

We also should notice that after Israel settled in the land the vision of getting to the land was rather obsolete. With a change in circumstances, a fresh vision was needed relating to life in the land. And so:

- Visions aren't set in concrete. Sometimes they need be changed.

So what visions drive your life? What are you're dreams and aspirations?

I imagine your dreams have changed over the years. What you dream about as a teenager is not what you dream about as a 50 year old, or a 60 year old, or a 70 year old.

In October, 2014, *The Telegraph* in Britain ran an article called, “Top 40 life ambitions for over-65s”.

“Britain’s pensioners are rejecting a quiet life in favour of adventures according to new research. Here are the top-40 life ambitions for over-65s, but add your top bucket list item below in the comments section”.

What do you think was number 1? Fairly predictable really—travel the world. Then in order:  
see my family settled; live to 100; write a best selling novel; win the lottery;  
buy a house; learn a language; be financially secure; become a grandparent;  
and number 10—see their favourite sports team play more than once.

If you're young the dream of owning your own home in Sydney will always be a dream. What drives you? Some people crave for more and more money, “He who dies with the most toys wins”. Their life mission is to accumulate wealth and comfort.

Others dream of being a professional sports person, a commercial pilot or a great musician.

What they all have in common is a picture of the future and a burning passion to turn the dream into a reality. Marilyn Monroe once said,

“I used to think as I looked out on the Hollywood night — there must be thousands of girls sitting alone like me, dreaming of becoming a movie star. But I'm not going to worry about them. I'm dreaming the hardest”.

The fact is that there is no guarantee that dreams become reality because they're underwritten by our frailties and the uncertainty of life.

## **BUT**

When God gives us a vision for the future we can be sure it will happen. But such is our cynicism with promises this can be hard to believe. We live in a world where promises aren't kept. We live in a world where dreams are dashed.

The recent Federal Budget makes promises—politicians make promises—and we treat them like a “grain of salt” because of past experiences.

## **The New Testament**

When God gives us a vision of the future we can be sure it will happen. The New Testament opens with a picture of God's people in exile (**slide 3**).

Once the people of God were held captive by sin and death. Once we were living in a land of slavery. Satan was far worse a slave-master than the Egyptians could ever be.

Once, Paul says in Ephesians, “we followed the ways of this world and the ruler of the kingdom of the air. Once we were slaves to the cravings of our distorted bodies and minds and we were by nature deserving of death” (Eph 2.1–3).

Then God sent his Saviour-King and when we follow him it was a new exodus—Jesus leading us out of the land of sin and death. The lamb of God who spilt his blood so we could be set free. Its Egypt all over again and even more!

Not the blood of lambs but the blood of God's precious Son.

Not freedom for Israelites, but freedom for all people who follow the Son.

Not wandering around in the wilderness, but the people of God living in the wilderness of this world.

Not the promise of a slither of land, but the promise of a new creation with all things made new.

In his first letter, Peter describes God's elect as exiles living in this world. He describes us as people rescued from pit of death and now were marching through the barrenness of this world toward a new land.

Peter describes the vision that God castes before us, “an inheritance that can never perish, spoil of fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you” (1 Pet 1.4).

This is the vision before us.

Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and there was no longer any sea. I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband. And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Now the dwelling of God is with men, and he will live with them. They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God. He will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away.” (Rev 21.1–4)

In 1997 Susie Maroney made her second attempt to swim 112 miles from Cuba to Florida. She swam inside a shark cage attached to a ship with local camera crews above and a medical team around.

Just three miles into the sea, a jellyfish stung her, giving her sustained pain that compelled her to put on a lightweight skin suit.

She was interrupted by 3-4 foot seas, 15 knot winds and strong currents made her sea-sick. For survival she ate baby food and bananas, watched hammerhead sharks cruising by, and replayed Seinfeld episodes in her mind. Swimming 44-46 strokes a minute, she reached the half-way mark and experienced relative calm seas for the next 22 miles before another struggle over the last 30 miles or so.

Susie became the first woman to swim those 112 miles and she did it in 24 1/2 hours, the longest unassisted attempt to that date. Susie's vision was to stand on the beach at Cuba. Her mission was to endure the treacherous seas and deal with extreme physical tiredness.

The New Testament is written to people travelling through the treacherous seas on the way to the new heaven and new earth. With the cross behind us and heaven before us we keep trusting the promises of God.

When we are thirsty—we keep trusting the promises of God.

When we are hungry—we keep trusting the promises of God.

When the fruit of Egypt looks better than the dirt under our shoes—we keep trusting in the promises of God.

It's far better to be in the wilderness with God than back in slavery enjoying the fruit.

So which direction are you heading? Are you still in slavery? Are you held captive by Satan, sin and death?

He's the challenge—here's the call. Drop whatever you're doing and follow Jesus. Follow his lead, follow his calling, follow him through this life into life eternal because heaven is your home. The great vision of the future is worth it. No money can buy heaven. Its free for you because God paid the price for us. The death of Jesus on the cross.

Heaven is our dream. Our vision is an eternity with the Lord in a place where there is no more crying and pain and death. A place where minds and bodies will be renewed. A place of perfect

relationships with God and one another.

Our mission is to persevere until we reach this place. Our mission is to follow Jesus for “he is the way, the truth and the life, and no-one comes to the Father except by him” (John 14.6).

### **Prayer**

Disturb us, Lord, when we are too well pleased with ourselves, when our dreams have come true because we have dreamed too little, when we arrive safely because we have sailed too close to the shore.

Disturb us, Lord, when with the abundance of things we possess, we have lost our thirst for the waters of life; having fallen in love with life, we have ceased to dream of eternity; and in our efforts to build a new earth, we have allowed our vision of the new Heaven to dim.

Disturb us, Lord, to dare more boldly, to venture on wider seas where storms will show your mastery; where losing sight of land, we shall find the stars. We ask you to push back the horizons of our hopes; and to push into the future in strength, courage, hope, and love.

(Sir Frances Drake Quoted in OC Missionary Prayer Letter of Jeanie Curryer, September, 1997)