

“Where There Is No Vision, the People Perish”

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I have chosen to title my remarks “Where there is no vision, the people perish” (Proverbs 29:18). How can a simple verse in the scriptures influence our present, future, and eternal lives and counterbalance the philosophies of the world? What is our vision of the world today and our vision of religion, and how does it influence and determine our responsibilities as individuals and families?

How Do We Gain a Vision?

As we envision the world and religion, we discover rapidly the daily challenges of life: the problems of suffering physically, mentally, spiritually; sorrow and hard work accompanied by questions and doubts; and, finally, death. We also find religions represented by a variety of credos, churches, priesthoods, and a multiplicity of gods to supposedly help us to face, endure, survive, or overcome the difficulties of the world.

How do we usually gain a vision of things? When we were young we became aware of our surroundings in the world and our religion, and we began to see things as our parents saw them—because they taught us according to their perceptions and understanding. We watched, we listened, we learned, and thus we may say that our first vision of the world,

and religion, was predetermined by parents and later by other people, cultures, and locations. We first learned through the vision of someone else.

We then gained some maturity and wanted to know, to discover, and to experiment—with or without this exterior help—to gain our own vision. We wanted to test the world and religion and what they offer as part of our growth and experience. Using this process, however, some—because of laziness or irresponsibility and being afraid of the possible consequences of that free agency—become prisoners of their environment. Others neglect warnings along the way and, like butterflies ignoring the danger of the flame, burn their wings and forfeit the ability to know for themselves. Many follow the stream of the ways of the world and end up wandering the rest of their lives according to various opinions.

Only a few finally press their way forward, holding fast to something true that they have discovered for themselves. Does that story

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sound familiar? Do you identify with it? If not, I refer you to the dream of Lehi (1 Nephi 8), the vision he received of the world, its multitudes and religions, and its influence on his family.

What was the difference between the sons of Lehi: Laman, Lemuel, and Nephi? On one side, referring to Laman and Lemuel, “They did murmur because they *knew* not the dealings of that God who had created them” (1 Nephi 2:12; emphasis added). On the other side, “Blessed art thou, Nephi, because of thy faith, for thou hast sought me diligently” (1 Nephi 2:19). What was the difference? A personal knowledge or testimony through faith.

Alan W. Jones, a theologian, said:

One of our problems is that very few of us have developed any distinctive personal life. Everything about us seems secondhand, even our emotions. In many cases, we have to rely on secondhand information in order to function. I accept the word of a physician, a scientist, a farmer, on trust. I do not like to do this. I have to because they possess vital knowledge of living of which I am ignorant.

Secondhand information concerning the state of my kidneys, the effects of cholesterol, and the raising of chickens, I can live with. But when it comes to questions of meaning, purpose, and death, secondhand information will not do. I cannot survive on a secondhand faith in a secondhand God. There has to be a personal word, a unique confrontation, if I am to come alive. [Journey into Christ (New York: Seabury Press, 1977), pp. 91–92]

So our purpose today is to search diligently and awaken our human and divine faculties, our hearts, and our minds to a true vision of this world, its multitudes, and religions—that we may understand our role by recognizing and accepting true knowledge and not perish.

The Process of Learning from God

Belief or faith exercised in the vision that is given us of a true knowledge of God will bring us salvation; if not exercised, it will bring us

damnation. Joseph Smith taught in *Lectures on Faith* that “three things are necessary in order that any rational and intelligent being may exercise faith in God unto life and salvation.”

1. The idea that he actually exists.
2. A correct idea of his character, perfections, and attributes.
3. An actual knowledge that the course of life which he is pursuing is according to his will.

For without an acquaintance with these three important facts, the faith of every rational being must be imperfect and unproductive; but with this understanding it can become perfect and fruitful, abounding in righteousness, unto the praise and glory of God the Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ. [Lectures on Faith 3:33]

Now is the time to learn for ourselves about true knowledge and true religion, which is a vision of principles, teachings, and ordinances to gain salvation in this world and in the world to come. Watch Moses who went through this process of learning from the source of true knowledge.

And it came to pass that Moses spake unto the Lord, saying: . . . tell me concerning this earth, and the inhabitants thereof, and also the heavens, and then thy servant will be content. [Moses 1:36]

And the Lord answered and declared: “For behold, this is my work and my glory—to bring to pass the immortality and eternal life of man” (Moses 1:39).

The Lord continued, saying, “I reveal unto you concerning this heaven, and this earth” (Moses 2:1) and then gave Moses the history of the creation of heaven, earth, man, and woman. The earth was planted with vegetation and life, the stage was set with actors, and life had been established with order, laws, and commandments. The vision was given, and now the drama unfolds. Satan is tempting Eve

by offering her the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil by using these words: “Ye shall not surely die; . . . and ye shall be as gods, knowing good and evil” (Moses 4:10–11).

As we consider the results of the transgression as it occurred, we also learn about the changes on the stage. From now on

1. there would be pain, suffering, sorrow, and hard work;
2. there would be physical and spiritual death and thus separation from God;
3. there would be a posterity for Adam and Eve;
4. there would be a knowledge of good and evil with all its consequences.

The creation of the heavens, the earth, and the man and woman had taken place. The fall of man and earth had taken place. A third vital element was missing to make the purpose of creation plausible, and that was to provide a way and means whereby man might be saved. The third vital element was the Atonement to ransom man and earth. Man was created to be saved, and salvation comes by having the true vision of the purpose of life in this life, of our Heavenly Father, his son Jesus Christ, and the mission of the Holy Ghost (Articles of Faith 1, 2, 3).

If we see this and believe it and know it to be true, then we serve and we obey. If we turn to a different vision, the belief changes, the Fall does not make sense, and neither does the Creation nor the Savior. As a result, there is neither motivation nor faith, neither repentance nor covenant.

Today we live with the results of these three events: the Creation, the Fall, and the Atonement. Whether or not you have a correct vision, whether or not you understand the consequences, whether or not you accept them will make a big difference in the kind of lives you live.

Will D. Lae was grossly overweight but was fascinated by the idea of becoming a mountain climber.

*Determined to master the skill he was able through hard work and continuous practice to develop his arm muscles so that they would support his obese body. He practiced on local slopes and then decided to try his skill on a mountain worthy of his ambitions. He picked the granite face of El Capitan. Halfway up the sheer rock he looked up and was startled to discover that his rope was fraying and in a second or two would break. He looked down and saw that there was no ledge or bush to break his fall. He made a quick decision—he decided to use a heavier rope. [Laurence J. Peter, *The Peter Prescription* (New York: Wm. F. Morrow & Co., Bantam Books, 1973), pp. 164–65]*

William’s decision was right, but his timing was wrong. He had practiced and provided for the climb but had overlooked his most important need.

This devotional is just one more way to open some eyes, hearts, and minds—an opportunity to change and adjust our vision and not to overlook the most important need. If you don’t care for the word *change*, you may use the word *repent*, for it is the same, and to repent is to learn from God.

Commitment Through Decisions

In essence, having the correct vision of our needs, we must decide. After the vision of Moses, let’s turn to Adam and Eve and receive a vision of their commitment to true knowledge through decisions.

1. They were free to make decisions. “Thou mayest choose for thyself, for it is given unto thee” (Moses 3:17). “Wherefore they are agents unto themselves” (Moses 6:56).

2. They rejoiced about the prospects of their decision. Adam said: “Blessed be the name of God, for because of my transgression my eyes are opened, and in this life I shall have joy, and again in the flesh I shall see God” (Moses 5:10).

Eve said: “Were it not for our transgression we never should have had seed, and never

should have known good and evil, and the joy of our redemption, and the eternal life which God giveth unto all the obedient” (Moses 5:11).

3. They decided to accept the challenges of:
 - a. an unpredictable world to be managed;
 - b. an unsafe world to be survived;
 - c. an unknown world to be discovered;
 - d. an insecure world to be endured.

All these adjectives can be applied to you in this college setting: there are unpredictable teachers in exams, it’s unsafe to break the BYU Code of Honor, the prospects after graduation are unknown, and BYU games are never secure!

4. They made a decision to learn and to be obedient. They “called upon the name of the Lord” (Moses 5:4). “Adam was obedient unto the commandments of the Lord” (Moses 5:5).

5. They decided to turn to the Lord for their education. “Their children were taught to read and write, having a language which was pure and undefiled” (Moses 6:6).

6. They decided to teach their children. “They made all things known unto their sons and their daughters” (Moses 5:12).

7. They decided to covenant with the Lord. “And Adam hearkened unto the voice of God, and called upon his sons to repent” (Moses 6:1).

8. They decided to teach the world true knowledge. “And they were preachers of righteousness, and spake and prophesied, and called upon all men, everywhere, to repent; and faith was taught unto the children of men” (Moses 6:23).

9. They decided to receive the ordinances necessary for their salvation.

- a. Baptism—Adam was baptized (see Moses 6:64).
- b. Receiving the Holy Ghost—Adam was born of the Spirit (see Moses 6:65).
- c. Receiving the Melchizedek Priesthood—“Thou art after the order of him [Jesus Christ]” (Moses 6:67).

What was the result of all these decisions based upon a true vision and knowledge of God’s purpose for man? Were they better prepared to face the challenges of mortal life? It is interesting to see that they literally transformed the unpredictable into the predictable.

Whatever principle of intelligence we attain unto in this life, it will rise with us in the resurrection.

And if a person gains more knowledge and intelligence in this life through his diligence and obedience than another, he will have so much the advantage in the world to come. [D&C 130:18–19]

They transformed the unsafe into the safe.

There is a law, irrevocably decreed in heaven before the foundations of this world, upon which all blessings are predicated —

And when we obtain any blessing from God, it is by obedience to that law upon which it is predicated. [D&C 130:20–21]

They transformed the unknown into a sure knowledge of a correct idea of the character, personality, and qualities of a loving God and how to reach him.

The Father has a body of flesh and bones as tangible as man’s; the Son also; but the Holy Ghost has not a body of flesh and bones, but is a personage of Spirit. Were it not so, the Holy Ghost could not dwell in us. [D&C 130:22]

They transformed the insecure into security because of the Atonement of Jesus Christ.

For God loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. [John 3:16]

Adam and Eve acted this way because they had the correct vision of their future. The plan was predictable, safe, known, secure. They

knew that they would never be alone and never be abandoned. “They heard the voice of the Lord . . . speaking unto them” (Moses 5:4). “An angel of the Lord appeared unto Adam” (Moses 5:6). “The Holy Ghost fell upon Adam” (Moses 5:9). The true knowledge of God and his plan was known by personal experience and by revelation.

And it was the same process—exactly the same—that was used by their followers and by Lehi and by Joseph Smith and by everyone who accepts the Lord’s vision and the challenge to search for himself. Today, in a world of false religions or rampant atheism, where evil is good and good is evil, too many of us become complacent. Too many of us reject or ignore the idea of discipline of mind or any thought attached to that vision of true knowledge because it may take out of life the fantasy or charm or excitement or passion, and life with obedience is dull and gray. Is it taking charm away to scrutinize TV programs or movies or literature? Is it taking excitement out of a football or basketball game to act or appear decently? Is it taking passion out of life to love within the rules rather than choosing what is called “free love?” The examples can be multiplied. Adam shouted with Eve, “In this life I shall have joy” (Moses 5:10). What joy? They knew what they were talking about—the joy of the faithful, having true knowledge and thus knowing why they should be obedient, why they should be disciples of Jesus Christ.

Having a True Knowledge

President Marion G. Romney also spoke about the importance of this true knowledge of God.

This world would be, comparatively, a heaven if men could be brought to understand and know the living and true God. They who are able to receive and who do receive the restored truth concerning God are literally transformed by their knowledge of,

and faith in, him. They are drawn upward from the carnal state of fallen man, as it were, and brought back, to a degree at least, into the presence of God. They develop unshakable faith in him. . . . And he never fails them. In him are their hope and their strength. Envy, greed, hate, lust, and unrighteous ambition flee from them. They grow in virtue, patience, brotherly kindness, charity, and love, and their eyes are single to the glory of God. The principal objective in their lives becomes to keep the commandments of God, thus ridding themselves of sin, for they realize that no unclean thing can enter into his presence; and to return into that presence becomes the supreme faith and hope of their existence.

Into their hearts comes a great concern for the welfare of their fellow men. They set about not to conquer them, not to take advantage of them, not to gain temporal and worldly power at their expense, but to take to them the glorious knowledge of the living and true God which they themselves possess. This they do that their fellows may experience and enjoy the transformation which has come into their lives.

There is nothing other than a knowledge of the living and true God which will give men incentives strong enough to induce them to root out of their lives the wickedness which has brought us to the brink of the cataclysm on which we totter. [CR, October 1964, p. 51]

We have inherited a glorious vision of our responsibilities to enjoy a glorious life and eternal life. The vision is clear. There are no interferences, and the Lord concluded as I conclude: “This is the plan of salvation unto all men, through the blood of mine Only Begotten, who shall come in the meridian of time” (Moses 6:62).

Wherefore teach it unto your children, that all men, everywhere, must repent, or they can in nowise inherit the kingdom of God . . . ; for, in the language of Adam, Man of Holiness is his name, and the name of his Only Begotten is the Son of

Man, even Jesus Christ, a righteous Judge, who shall come in the meridian of time. [Moses 6:57]

The process of spiritual growth and eternal life is conducted by our own free will, based upon true knowledge and service, and works against the natural inclination to take the easy way or to keep things as they are presented. There is something worse than ignorance—it is to *think* that you know. As someone has said, when you are not part of the solution, you are part of the problem. How many see today and will continue to see tomorrow? How many are blind and are unwilling to see? May the testimony of Adam and Eve, the testimonies of prophets and apostles, and my testimony help

you to search diligently for yourselves and to know for yourselves as I know that God lives, that Jesus is the Christ, our Savior and Redeemer, that true religion, The Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, exists upon this earth, and that President Ezra Taft Benson is a modern-day prophet to give us correct vision that we may not perish.

Now is the time to ponder what kind of vision can be ours. What kind of decisions will we make today and tomorrow? May the Lord help us to ponder upon the true history of Adam and Eve and its message. May we receive this vision and not perish. This is my prayer, in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen.