

VISION OF THINGS TO COME

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You've seen what God has done—in your own life, in the lives of others, in the pages of Scripture. Now see what He's going to do next!

The hunger to know the future before it arrives has plagued humankind since the dawn of time. Fortunetellers, Tarot cards, Ouija boards, horoscopes, tea leaves, palm readers, and the like abound everywhere. Still people are not satisfied; they keep asking, searching for assurance of a preferred future.

Yet, Jesus has said:

John 16:13 *When the Spirit of truth comes, He will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on His own but will tell you what He has heard. He will tell you about the future.*

An Alternate Future

The Gospel of Jesus Christ offers humankind an alternate future, in which righteousness, love, and peace prevail. Let the Holy Spirit paint for you a vision of that future. Your future. Our future.

Colossians 1:3 *We always pray for you, and we give thanks to God, the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. ⁴ For we have heard of your faith in Christ Jesus and your love for all of God's people, ⁵ which come from your confident hope of what God has reserved for you in heaven. You have had this expectation ever since you first heard the truth of the Good News.*

The Gospel is a sure hope for the future. It is not a pipedream. It is a glimpse of a future that is already in place, and assured to us by the promise of Almighty God.

Now, before I proceed, I offer you a warning: part of my message may feel unsettling and unwelcome. I ask for your patience; I will not leave you there. But if it's truth and reality that we want, some shaking of our preconceptions will be necessary. You can get that in a sermon, or you can take it (full force) in the circumstances of your life. Your choice.

Which future does the Gospel present? The future in this life, before you die? Or, the future in the next life, after you die? While some people create artificial theological limits, actually, it's both: a better future here, and the best future then, just as Jesus demonstrated.

Promises From God

2 Peter 1:4 And because of his glory and excellence, he has given us great and precious promises. These are the promises that enable you to share his divine nature and escape the world's corruption caused by human desires.

Great and precious promises! Those promises indicate God's ultimate will, and our present possibilities. But do they guarantee? Are they just waiting on us to claim them, like uncashed checks? The contemporary practice of "claiming the promises of God" suggests that it's all up to you—your timing and your faith (though so-called faith is frequently indistinguishable from aggressive presumption or entitlement).

Usually, the person who makes a promise is the one responsible for bringing it to pass, not the one to whom it was made. Isn't that correct?

There may be times when I must meet certain conditions, such as faith and obedience. Then, again, there may be other conditions that are completely beyond my power to satisfy. Still, the power to fulfill the promise lies in the hands of the one who promised.

So, how can things in this life be "sure," or "secure," or "guaranteed"? What about Hebrews 11:39? This verse comes at the end of a lengthy summation of the power of faith in God.

Hebrews 11:32 How much more do I need to say? It would take too long to recount the stories of the faith of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and all the prophets. ³³ By faith these people overthrew kingdoms, ruled with justice, and received what God had promised them. They shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the flames of fire, and escaped death by the edge of the sword. Their weakness was turned to strength. They became strong in battle and put whole armies to flight. ³⁵ Women received their loved ones back again from death. (So far, so good.) But others were tortured, refusing to turn from God in order to be set free. They placed their hope in a better life after the resurrection. ³⁶ Some were jeered at, and their backs were cut open with whips. Others were chained in prisons. ³⁷ Some died by stoning, some were sawed in half, and others were killed with the sword. Some went about wearing skins of sheep and goats, destitute and oppressed and mistreated. ³⁸ They were too good for this world, wandering over deserts and mountains, hiding in caves and holes in the ground.

³⁹ All these people earned a good reputation because of their faith, yet none of them received all that God had promised. ⁴⁰ For God had something better in mind for us, so that they would not reach perfection (completeness) without us.

Some received what God had promised; some did not, even though they also trusted in Him. ALL of them earned a place of honor in God's sight. Yet, NONE of them received everything that God had promised. God (the Promiser) held some things in reserve for later.

No amount of “claiming the promise” or “pleading the blood” or “binding the devil” was going to change that. God holds sovereign power over His promises.

I believe that faith—real faith—is deeper than will power, or insistence, or demand. Real faith is not about your interaction with a promise, but your interaction with the Promiser (just like real gratitude is not about your enjoyment of a gift, but your enjoyment of the Giver). Real faith is about leaning, in restful trust, on the Promiser, and leaving the promise’s fulfillment in His hands. *“He has made everything beautiful in its time”* (Ecclesiastes 3:11).

Seeing the Invisible

Perhaps a promise has more to do with generating vision, than simply granting possession. Perhaps it is vision that fits and prepares us to receive what God has promised. Can we receive what we do not see?

Colossians 1:15 Christ is the visible image of the invisible God.

He existed before anything was created and is supreme over all creation,

¹⁶ for through him God created everything

in the heavenly realms and on earth.

He made the things we can see

and the things we can’t see—

such as thrones, kingdoms, rulers, and authorities in the unseen world.

Everything was created through him and for him.

¹⁷ He existed before anything else,

and he holds all creation together.

The Gospel gives us vision of things we could not see before, and do not yet see with our natural eyes. The Gospel ADDS vision of the life to come (what we now “cannot see.”).

To receive a promise from God, I must first see it. And see it not just as a promise from God, available yet separate from my life, but as a purpose of God for me, integrally connected to my life. That vision is not the result of my will, but of my receptivity.

God’s Kingdom is always breaking in (or seeping in) to this life, but its process is subtle (not overt or obvious). God-inspired vision is necessary to perceive it.

Our temporal view of life (and even of God’s Kingdom) is governed by *what we see*. When circumstances look good, we say that God was in it. And when circumstances are not good, we worry and fret, and invoke God’s presence, hoping for a change. Our temporal view of life is governed by *what we see*.

The Source of Real Faith

Real faith, however, is NOT governed by what we see, but by what God says (as He reaches into what we cannot see). This comes to us through what God has said in the past in the Bible, as the Holy Spirit highlights those words and applies them to our present. This is what we generally call “hearing the voice of God” or “God speaking to us.”

We can only make ourselves available to His voice; we cannot force Him to speak. We make ourselves available by prayerfully and thoughtfully and regularly reading the Scriptures. When God does speak in this way, His words illuminate our circumstances, casting a new vision of what is to be.

The result is that we see things differently! We see an alternate future to the “normal course of events.” THEN it is time to take hold and not let go of the vision. THEN it is time to proclaim what you have seen in faith. THEN it is time to give thanks and rejoice in the God of promise.

There will still be disappointments in life—many times because of the failures of others, sometimes because of your own failures, and sometimes because of God’s good and wise choice. But can we just agree that griping and complaining are not expressions of faith?

Disappointment feels bitter, but salting the wound with complaint will not help. Sometimes scratching an itch only makes it itch more. Instead, put it in the hand of God. Declare your faith in His unfailing love and wisdom. Regard the apparent setback as a precursor of better things to come.

The Book of Hebrews explained the essential difference between the old and fading First Covenant with the new and brighter Covenant of Christ:

Hebrews 10:1 The old system under the law of Moses was only a shadow, a dim preview of the good things to come, not the good things themselves.

The Good Things Themselves

The Gospel of Jesus Christ predicts and releases “the good things themselves” (though not 100% of them now, and not according to your will alone).

The Gospel paints an alternate future for your sinful heart, involving forgiveness, recovery, and healing. Can you see it? Then embrace it, not half-heartedly, but with all your heart! And begin to thank God for it.

The Gospel paints an alternate future for your troubled mind, including peace, soundness, and inspiration. Can you see it? Then embrace it, not half-heartedly, but with all your heart! And begin to thank God for it.

The Gospel paints an alternate future for your broken body, including recovery, healing, and strength. Can you see it? Then embrace it, not half-heartedly, but with all your heart! And begin to thank God for it.

The Gospel paints an alternate future for your finances, including becoming debt-free, meeting your needs, and having extra to share. Can you see it? Then embrace it, not half-heartedly, but with all your heart! And begin to thank God for it.

The Gospel paints an alternate future for your faltering relationships, including a sense of belonging, trustworthy friends, and encouraging support. Can you see it? Then embrace it, not half-heartedly, but with all your heart! And begin to thank God for it.

The Gospel paints an alternate future for your fruitfulness in life, including gifts you haven't yet discovered, opportunities you couldn't imagine, and courage you have not tasted before. Can you see it? Then embrace it, not half-heartedly, but with all your heart! And begin to thank God for it.

God, Tell Me Secrets

Jeremiah 33:2 "This is what the Lord says—the Lord who made the earth, who formed and established it, whose name is the Lord: ³ Ask me and I will tell you remarkable secrets you do not know about things to come.

Some of all that God has promised in Christ Jesus is for this life, and all of it will be yours in the life that is to come. The more you see it, the more of it will be yours in the here and now. Ask God to show you what's ahead. Let Him reveal it to you so that you may hope for it and pray about it and prepare yourself for it.

We've seen what God has done—in our own lives, in the lives of others, and in the pages of Scripture. Who wants to see what He's going to do next?

No wonder Paul exclaimed, *"I am not ashamed of this Good News about Christ. It is the power of God at work, saving everyone who believes"* (Romans 1:16). Paul lived for the Good News; he was willing also to die for it. How about you?

"The Kingdom of God is near! Repent of your sins and believe the Good News!" (Mark 1:15).