

Vision for 2013

In the early morning hours just before daybreak, I drove our Youth Pastor, Caleb and his wife, Ruthy to the airport to fly out of town to spend Christmas with Ruthy's parents. We had a bit more time than usual since they were flying out of Hobby Airport. For a few days we had been trying to get together to talk about the future of our church. Caleb asked me, "Pastor what is your vision for Christchurch for 2013?" I expressed three areas of burden to him a few days ago, including an area of burden that voiced itself unexpectedly from our conversation together. Allow me to share this vision with you this morning.

1. We need to move from apathy to empathy.

The root word that both of these words share is "pathos." This is a word that expresses feeling, grief or suffering. Apathy is indifference, dispassion, or lack of interest. It comes from the Latin meaning without feeling, without suffering. Empathy reveals its meaning by the prefix "em" meaning "in." So empathy is being into suffering or into feeling. It is one who has the ability to understand and share the hurt, the happiness, the angst or ecstasy of others. A verse that comes to mind is Romans 12:15, which says, "*Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.*" Everyone involved in Operation Christmas Hope entered into the hurts of those who hurt and made a difference for time and, in most cases, eternity. For a period of about two weeks Christchurch members aggressively sought out people who are poor and in need of the Savior and were used by God to meet both the spiritual and physical needs. It may not be much reward on earth but, there will be a great measure of eternal reward for those who entered into the sufferings of others. James said, "*If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, And one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit?*" (James 2:15,16).

A young boy and his father were walking along the beach at low tide when the son was overwhelmed with the number of starfish that had washed ashore and were now stranded. The boy said, "Dad, what is going to happen if these starfish don't get back into the water?" "Well, son, they are going to die," was the father's reply. As the father walked along the beach he noticed his son was no longer walking by his side. The boy had stopped and was throwing the starfish back into the waves one at a time. The father cried out, "Son, there is no way you are going to be able to throw all those fish back into the water! Come on, let it go, this happens all the time; it doesn't matter!" The father was touched as his precious son took one more starfish in hand and threw it back to the ocean saying with a loud voice, "It matters to this one, Dad! It matters to this one!" This is where we need to be as church. I know we are not able to help all of Houston

see Jesus and experience His love and compassion in a tangible way, but oh, that we might realize for the ones whose lives we do touch, it matters!

2. We need to move from worldly to holy.

How are we different from the world? We tell people that Jesus makes a difference. Well, my question to our membership is, if there is a difference, what's the difference? If we talk like the world, dress like the world, indulge in activity that does not glorify God, how are we showing that being saved makes a difference? John was pretty dogmatic when he said, "*Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him*" (1 John 2:15). We are to love the people of the world, those for whom Christ died, "*For God so loved the world...*" (John 3:16a). What the apostle is referring to in 1 John 2:15 is the world system, the workings of the world, the evil that is in the world. We are not only to have no part in it, we are not to admire or love it.

Many years ago, a conscientious Christian young lady was burdened for one of the most popular boys in High School. She longed for an opportunity to witness to him for Christ. Then one day this boy asked the young lady to go with him to a school dance. She agreed with the explicit purpose of witnessing to him during the course of the night. As they were on the dance floor, the girl asked the young man, "Are you a Christian?" He answered, "No, I'm not, are you?" She quickly returned, "Yes, I am!" Then he asked, "Well, what are you doing here?" It has always amazed me that many people, even lost people caught up entirely in this world system have higher standards for Christians than they have for themselves.

I am concerned that many of our people are acclimating to a worldly lifestyle. The Bible says, "*Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful*" (Psalm 1:1). The progression is walking, standing and finally sitting. You don't become worldly overnight; you begin to walk near it. Then like the rabbit hypnotized by the snake and stand and gaze at it. Then last of all you have been "bitten" by the old Serpent and this world system and you become part of it. The anecdote for this is found in Hebrews 12: 1, 2, "... *let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us, Looking 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 is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.*" A.W. Tozer said it like this: "Faith is the gaze of a soul upon a saving God. Like the eye which sees everything in front of it and never sees itself, faith is occupied on the Object upon which it rests and pays no attention to itself at all. While we are looking at God we do not see ourselves — blessed riddance. The man who has struggled to purify himself and has had nothing but repeated failures will experience real relief when he stops tinkering with his soul and looks away to the perfect One. While

he looks at Christ, the very things he has so long been trying to do will be getting done within him. It will be God working in him to will and to do."

Many years ago, a young man named John Walton who was attending Harvard University was in attendance every night of a revival meeting I was preaching in Dover, Delaware. He missed the last day of the meeting because he had to return to Harvard for classes. During that week, God moved strongly in his heart. When I walked out of my motel room the morning John left, I noticed a huge box of what many would call a collectors dream. It was a box of vintage rock-n-roll. John came to the conclusion that this obsession with this genre was taking his gaze off God. I'll never forget his note he wrote to me and left on top of his former idol (the box now before me). He said, "Some will not understand what I have done, by leaving this here. I want no pity for this. It is not what I am delivered from, but what I am guided to that I do this." To put it another way, John was saying I am no losing anything; I am gaining everything by looking unto Jesus. It is Who we are guided to, that will give us overcoming power.

3. We need to find our niche.

Every church has its personality. Every church has an emphasis. I want our church to have a totally Christ-centered approach to ministry. Steve Boose was reared in a very formal protestant church while growing up. He became a successful young businessman here in Houston and was living the American dream with his wife and two children. But something was missing or, we should say, Someone was missing. After a few services, I had the privilege of sharing Christ with him and he received the Lord in salvation. On that visit, he shared with me, "I have been to many churches in my life. We sang about God, we talked about God, we heard about God, but when I came into this building for the first time, I sensed God Himself was here...and I wanted Him!" Thank God he found Him and now Steve lives in Austin and is in full time financial consulting services with an emphasis on biblical stewardship. I believe our niche is found somewhere in Christ-centeredness and an outreach that is as much like Jesus as one church corporately can be in this world. I believe our best days are yet to come.

4. We need to realize the value of teamwork.

As Caleb and I were about to leave each other's presence, I asked the young man, "Well, Caleb, what is your vision for Christchurch in 2013?" Without a moment's hesitation, he answered, "My vision is your vision." He doesn't realize how close to breaking down and crying I came. How this touched my heart, not because he thinks so much of the senior pastor of Christchurch, but what I heard in his reply was, "Pastor, I am a team player." This is the only way we are going to get ahead and do more for our Lord in the coming year. I like the acrostic that the former Continental Airlines used to employ: "**T** (together) **E** (everyone) **A** (accomplishes) **M** (more).

Paul said, *“Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?”* (I Corinthians 1:12, 13). Getting ahead is getting on the same team. Let these words resonate in your heart: *“Is Christ divided?”* Let us serve the same Lord and see the same vision!

-Pastor Pope-

© 2012 [Christchurch Baptist Fellowship](http://www.christchurchbaptist.org/), Houston, Texas, Johnny Pope Pastor
<http://www.christchurchbaptist.org/>