

Where there is no vision, the people perish. Proverbs 29.18.

It's amazing how it's all in this holy book, so old, yet so new. The Bible speaks of Jesus being full of grace and truth. That is precisely what today's society, full of coarseness and spin and dishonesty, is crying out for: grace and truth. And here in Prov29.18 we find a brilliant diagnosis of today's ills: 'where there is no vision, the people perish'. It is precisely because we have no vision, no hope of the future, nothing to live for, that our nation is going down the tubes, and so many individuals' lives are falling apart. And we are perishing, as drugs and alcohol get an ever stronger grip on us; as families fall apart, as more and more people are stressed out; as our economy implodes and our politicians are held in universal contempt.

The people are perishing, because there is no vision. That's the old AV translation. The newer translations make it clearer that the 'vision' is a *prophetic* vision. The people perish when there is no word, no vision from God. Isn't that true today? Who cares about listening to God? Even the clergy seem embarrassed by large parts of the Bible. And what about this word 'perish'? Actually the Hebrew literally says 'is let go'. So, it can read: 'where there is no prophetic vision; where God's Word is not revered, the people are let free/they cast off all restraint'. They think they can do whatever they like, because there's no rule book now, no Bible. God is despised and rejected, so there's just a moral free-for-all. Last week I was giving the quite wrong impression that I watch all the trash TV! Well, the other day I furthered my

researches and started watching *day-time* TV, the Jeremy Kyle Show. Here's a girl, sleeping with two men at the same time, and now pregnant. Whose baby is it? It's a huge underclass with no rules. It's just dog-eat-dog, but no-one seems any happier. In fact they're all as miserable as sin, and the taxpayer has to pick up the tab for the mess that's created.

But I think they have been failed. The elite, years and years ago, threw out traditional morality and taboos as something oppressive. They undermined the Church and the Bible to such an extent that even our church leaders have lost the confidence to tell people that they jolly well need the 10 Commandments. They are not oppressive; they *protect* us from ourselves, from our baser, coarser instincts. 'Where there is no prophetic vision, the people cast off restraint', says the NIV. They're free of God now, and free of oppressive morality. But are they any happier? It hasn't worked. They were conned.

We desperately need someone with moral courage, with integrity and clarity of vision to stand up and say this. We are in the gutter, but God made us for heaven. We need a vision. 'Where there is no vision, the people perish', as the AV used to say. Let's pray that God will raise up a prophet soon, someone full of grace and truth, who will say this.

Who now really looks to the future with confidence and hope? Do you? In 1900 Britain had a collective vision. Whether you believe in empire or not, GB *believed* then that it had something to offer the world. It had a vision. It had a *mission civilatrice*, a mission to civilise the world as it spread Christianity, industry, technology, the rule of law.

Now what do we stand for in the world? We're the European capital of single teenage mums, sexually transmitted diseases, broken marriages, drug and alcohol abuse, and the lowest church attendance rate. How have we sunk so low, so fast?

Of course, not every vision is right. In 1789 the French Revolution presented a new vision of *Liberty, Equality, Fraternity*. It was a great vision, but it didn't include kings, aristos or the clergy. Hitler *also* had a great vision, a glorious Reich, but it didn't include Jews, homos, commies, Slavs. Islam has a powerful vision of a restored caliphate, but it doesn't include infidels like us, Jews, homos and other undesirables. These visions lack tolerance and compassion.

One of the very worrying things of modern times is the rise of gangs, especially of gangs of young feral *women*, or 'ladettes', drunk, coarse and violent. They have no vision, no hope of the future. Largely from broken homes, they find their new home in their gang. The gang gives them a sense of belonging they never had, and the chance to prove themselves by vile acts. One of the real pleasures I derive is watching Junior Soldiers arriving from chaotic backgrounds at 16, and leaving at 17 with new hope, new confidence. The Army gives them a vision, something to aim at, something good to belong to. The Army believes in them and tries to make them into something. I was talking recently to a CSM. When he joined up at 16, he had already been in prison. But his life changed once the Army gave him a vision of what he could be. He now tells recruits: 'there was a time when I was in and out of jail. Now people call me "sir". That can be *you* too.'. From

personal experience that CSM gave those lads a vision. Thank goodness for people like that CSM who learned the hard way, because the underclass have been abandoned. Those who join gangs have been abandoned by their selfish and feckless families. They have been abandoned also by the powerful ruling elite which over the years has taken away every taboo and moral restraint which might have protected them from their baser instincts. They have been abandoned even by the Church which in its pathetic attempt to keep in with the smart set went along with all this. They gave no guidance or warning.

So many people today feel that life is empty and pointless. The existentialist writer, Albert Camus, saw modern life in the Greek myth of Sisyphus who spent his life just pushing a heavy rock up a hill, only to find that each time he got to the top, it fell to the bottom to be pushed up again. Life is repetitive and pointless; that's how many see life today. Atheism gives no vision. We've all heard of Christian Aid. Who ever heard of *Atheist Aid*? We need a vision to spur us on, a purpose, something to focus on, hope.

So, as we begin this New Year, let's take our cue from *Hebrews 12.2*: 'let us fix our eyes on *Jesus*'. *He* is the vision. *He* is our focus. Rejecting him has been *disastrous* for our society. We all need a vision which inspires. Let it be *Jesus*, for *he* is the vision of what a human being should be, full of grace and truth. *He alone* will bring in the better times: the 'kingdom of God' is scripture's vision of that glorious future. So let's begin the year by focussing on *Jesus*, and praying, 'Come, Lord, quickly come. Maranatha!'