

NOTES FOR SPEAKING

Meeting: Freshwaters Christian Fellowship

Date & Time: 13/09/09 10.30am

Title: Our vision renewed

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Introduction

When Jim & Bonnie were last with us in April they challenged us to look again at our vision and strategy as a church. The challenge was to seek the Lord to renew the vision according to where we are now at in our journey as a Fellowship and to restate our vision in a way that is clear and understandable for all.

Since April we have been praying through and discussing this as a leadership team and in deed we are continuing to do so. Vision and strategy is littered with terminology that different people and organisations interpret in different ways. It is not so much about right or wrong as being clear to all those involved what the terms mean.

So when **we** are talking about **Vision – we are talking about revelation from God about who we are and the plans and purposes He has for us**. It could be seen as an umbrella term covering all the things that we I will be sharing this morning, as well as the things we will develop together over the coming months.

Vision is rarely revealed all at once but instead there is a gradual unfolding of God's plans as we are open to Him and continue to walk with Him. **Clarity increases as the Lord takes us through experiences and communicates His heart to us**. Sometimes we recognise things we thought were from the Lord were wrong, while other things may be added which we never saw before.

Our Mission is about what we are called to do, which we would affirm as 'to prepare a people for the Lord.'

Our aims are about what we seek to achieve and I will be explaining these this morning.

Our objectives are about specific measurable things which when completed successfully will bring us closer to achieving our aims – these we are still preparing within the leadership team and I will let you know later how you can contribute to this process.

Finally there are our actions – the things we do – and the things the Lord will do, which will allow us to complete our objectives.

Some important guidelines

Just before I share about our mission and aims as a Fellowship I want us to look at three verses that are really helpful.

[Eph 1:9 -11](#) – The first thing to note is that God has a plan that He is working out – the plan is to bring everything in heaven and on earth under the authority of Christ. This plan God has had from the beginning and He has never wavered from it and He is able to work out all things according to His plan.

Any vision or plan God gives to us and to His people throughout the earth all come within His one overall plan, to bring all things under the authority of Christ. So our plans should contribute to this overall plan.

[2Co 10:13](#) – ‘But we will not boast of authority we do not have. Our goal is to stay within the boundaries of God’s plan for us, and this plan includes our working there with you.’

Part of receiving our vision is receiving an understanding of the boundaries God has given to us. It means focussing on what God has given us to do and recognising that God gives us both the authority and the gifts to operate within the boundaries He sets. Spending time and energy on other things will dilute our effectiveness.

That is why I so wholeheartedly embrace other congregations in Harlow and beyond. Freshwaters, even if it fulfils completely its God given vision – does not have everything that our town needs – nor should we, because God created us to work together with others. Our responsibility is not to fulfil Gateway’s vision – we want to encourage and support them to do that – no we need to fulfil our vision – then alongside Gateway, and Harlow Baptist Church, and St Mary’s etc we will see our town changed.

[Hab 2:3](#) – ‘But these things I plan won’t happen right away. Slowly, steadily, surely, the time approaches when the vision will be fulfilled. If it seems slow, wait patiently, for it will surely take place. It will not be delayed.’

Here is a really important point – the fulfilment of vision takes time and that time is in God’s hands not ours. As with prophecy I believe that often vision is abandoned not because the revelation is false, but because we have applied our timescales rather than trusting in God’s.

Those who have been within the Fellowship since I took over will recall the seven year strategy and many of the things that I understood at that time have not yet been fulfilled – 7 years on. Now some of those things may well have just been plain wrong – but others I am sure were right – but I added a framework of time which was wrong. Part of renewing our vision now is to affirm those things we still believe the Lord is saying to release those things that do not appear to be right – and to add those things which have been revealed as we have continued our journey over the last 7 years.

Foundation verses

[Malachi 4:5,6](#) (NIV) 5 "See, I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. 6 He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse."

[Luke 1:17](#) (NIV) “And he will go on before the Lord in the spirit and the power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers to their children and the disobedient to the wisdom of the righteous-to make ready a people prepared for the Lord”

As a leadership we want to affirm our foundation verses – we believe the Lord gave them to us as a Fellowship under Phil’s leadership and we believe that they continue to be relevant for us.

Mission – to ‘prepare a people for the Lord’

Taken from the end of the passage from Luke 1:17 we want to affirm that our mission – that is what God has called us to do, is to ‘prepare a people for the Lord. You will notice in all of our literature, on our website, on our letterheads that our mission is stated. It has been for some time but we want to highlight it again to you. This mission is both internal and external.

It is internal as we teach, encourage, challenge, provoke and entice one another, with the help of the Holy Spirit to grow in Christ-likeness – that we would be prepared for ever deepening relationship with Christ and would also be prepared for Him to use for His purposes. We are also

prepared for His second coming, whether that is within our lifetime or beyond – that He would find in us faith, that He would greet us with well done good and faithful servant.

It is external as we prepare those around us for the Lord to come to them. Like John the Baptist we can go out into the world around us and declare Jesus is coming to you – He will knock at the door, be prepared, open it up that He can come in and eat with you. We have a great advantage over the John the Baptist in that John proclaimed what God had revealed but he had not yet experienced.

We can proclaim through our words, action and life, He whom we know and love and follow – He who is working in our lives. In fact the more we are prepared for the Lord the more we can help others to prepare for the Lord.

Aims

Now we move on to our Aims, which you will remember are about what we are seeking to achieve. As the Leadership Team has been thinking, discussing and praying this through since Jim & Bonnie's visit in April we have come to just 4 things which we believe are our aims as a Fellowship. I will go through each one and give a brief explanation.

Firstly we believe the Lord has asked us to aim to be:-

A worshipping People

Through the years it has become clearer and clearer that the Lord has given us a particular calling and anointing as a worshipping people. Of course all of God's people are called to worship – but we believe that this is a particular area which we are called as a fellowship to nurture and develop – both amongst ourselves – but also out into the wider Christian community.

We have placed this aim first quite deliberately because we believe that it is about us giving to the Lord and it is about coming into His presence.

Through the years a number of people have specifically mentioned an anointing upon our worship. We are so thankful to God for Jonathan & Helen and all of the worship team, **but we believe that the calling to be a worshipping people is for the whole fellowship.**

Our second aim is to be

A prophetic people

It should not be a surprise to anyone who has been with us even for a short while that we believe prophecy is an important part of who we are as a Fellowship. We were founded by Phil who had a clearly recognised prophetic gifting and it continues to be a part of our DNA.

As our foundation verses state, we are called to operate **'in the spirit and the power of Elijah'** – that is a prophetic spirit. We are called to be those who in drawing close to the Lord in worship are open to hear His message for us and for others He sends us to – or sends to us.

Being a prophetic people is not a thing of pride and arrogance – look at me I have received a message from the Lord. On the contrary it is a thing of humility and service, always recognising that as 1 **Cor 13:9** puts it, in this life we **'know in part and we prophecy in part'** – we do not always get it right – we do not have the complete picture – but still because it is part of who we are, we must continue to seek from the Lord His word for the moment and be ready to share it in the right way to the right people and this leads us into our third aim – to be:-

A proclaiming people

As a worshipping people we minister to the Lord and come into His presence, as a prophetic people we receive from the Lord His word for the moment – but if it just stays within us – if it never flows out from us, then we will cease to receive and we will become a stagnant pond, rather than Freshwaters. We need to be like Jeremiah who declared **'But if I say, "I will not mention him or**

Speak any more in his name," his word is in my heart like a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot. '

Do you feel like that, are you bursting with the good news that Jesus has come to save us, are you in awe of God's mighty power, are you desperate to introduce others to the one who knows and loves you completely – well this is what we are called to be as a proclaiming people.

We believe God is calling us to proclaim by speaking out His word given to us – that may be words of prophecy, words of knowledge, the bible itself – or indeed our words of testimony. Not just within church, but to our friends and neighbours to those around us.

As well as proclaiming with our mouths we can proclaim with our lives – let people know you are a Christian – and show them by your life the difference it makes to you. Let them be attracted by your light shining through your life – then introduce them to Jesus light of the World the life-giver.

I am not going to change our name to stagnant pond – we are Freshwaters and we will flow with the life, the love, the grace and favour of God into our town – and our town will be changed.

A family people.

Our final aim we believe is to be a family people. If our worship is about giving to God – the prophetic and proclaiming about receiving from God and giving to others – this final aim is about becoming.

Again this is not new to us but is part of our DNA as a fellowship. It includes a number of things firstly **it talks about being the family of God**, recognising one another as brothers and sisters in Christ, loving one another, caring for one another, sharing together, encouraging each other. As a family people we show by our love for one another that we are Jesus disciples.

Also as a family people we declare our support for family life. In the words of our foundation verses, turning the hearts of the Fathers to their children and children to their Fathers – **we want to build bridges between generations** – passing on values, wisdom and understanding from one generation to the next – hence our involvement in children's and youth work, in the Contact Centre – but also through things like parenting training.

We also declare our support for men and women to discover and live in the good of their God given identities. **Understanding and celebrating the distinctives of their gender, while recognising the power and strength of men and women working together for God's Kingdom and the good of our communities.**

We also declare our support for marriage, wanting to do all we can to show that marriage isn't a historic relic but is still God's blessing to couples, families and communities, while at the same time loving, caring for and supporting those who are single by choice, timing or circumstance. We need to explore how we can be strongly supportive of families with two parents while being equally supportive of single parents as they bring up children on their own.

How do you fit in?

So what now? Well we want everyone to be able to say when people ask about the Vision of Freshwaters – we are preparing a people for the Lord through aiming to be a worshipping people, a prophetic people, a proclaiming people and a family people. But more than that, we want you to join with us in praying for, receiving revelation about and working towards these aims being fulfilled.

We recognise that not everyone will relate equally to every aim. That's OK, maybe there is just one or two of these aims that particularly talk to your heart. What we really want you to do is to align yourselves to those aims that particularly speak to you and to commit yourselves to pray about that

aim, to listen to what God may be saying to the Fellowship regarding that aim – but also to listen to how God may be calling you to be involved in seeing that aim or those aims fulfilled.

Please feed back to us anything you believe the Lord may be saying – this will help us as we draw together our objectives.

We have decided that we are going to set aside the next 4 Freshwaters Prayer meetings to pray for each aim in turn. Even if you would not normally come to those meetings, please consider coming along at least to those that relate to the aims you are aligning yourself with. We will be praying about the aim of being a worshipping people at Freshwaters prayer next week.

As we pursue this together let's keep in mind what I said earlier, we are part of God's plan which He will work out in His way and at His pace. We need to be open to fresh revelation, to correction, to all the excitement and challenge of walking on an unknown path with a God who nevertheless loves to share His plans with us.