

COMMITTED TO A DREAM: REVELATION 21:1-7

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On everybody's mind this week has been the Democratic Convention in Atlanta. I have watched it with fervor as people cheered and campaigned for their candidate — somewhat like the SBC. However, on Tuesday night as I watched Jesse Jackson make his speech, I was moved with emotion. Emotion not only for Jackson and his people, but emotion for the person before, who had helped Jackson's dream come true. I watched as Rosa Parks stepped into that arena and moved up to the front row. My mind went back to 25 years ago when she had a dream of moving to the front of the bus. My mind also went back to the famous dreamer — Martin Luther King, Jr., who said, "I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed, 'We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal.' I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia, sons of former slaves and the sons of former slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that my four little children will one day live in a nation where they will not be judged by the color of their skin, but by the content of their character. I have a dream today!" Years later that dream is still a reality and more than he ever dreamed, simply because one man was committed to a dream of a better world for the people around him, blacks all over this country have a chance to opportunities that was before out of reach. What a dream!

As I read Revelation, I see some things that I believe to be significant in our day to help us see our dreams and realize our potential.

- I. First I think we see that being committed to a dream means sticking your neck out... doing some unusual things; being unconventional in a conventional world. It means being able to speak up when you see injustice and hatred. It means standing up for what you believe... even though it may not be popular. It means being committed. To fully understand I went to 'ol Webster. Committed means "To bring about...the state of being obligated or pledged." How many of us are obligated to a dream which no one around is supportive? I dare say, most of us would not venture out on a limb for many things.

Before school was out for the summer, I asked some students in my Bible study if there was one issue to which they were really committed. They all gave issues of concern. Then I asked if they were committed to it enough to march or form a group to protest. None would go that far — on any of their issues. They just would not be that forward.

Are our dreams such that they are not good enough to push us to the limits to see them come to fruition? Are we teaching a generation to be committed just enough — but not enough to really see those dreams through?

As I study the Book of Revelation, I continue to see John's life as being one that had a lot of hope — a lot of dreaming of a better life for his people. In the midst of death and discrimination by the Roman Government, John saw his dream, put it on paper and sent it out from a prison cell. Talk about sticking your neck out — he really did. For you see, Christians were being persecuted. They were dying for their cause. John was in prison for the cause. However, in the midst of all that, John continued his dream by sticking his neck out and sending this letter of hope and his dream that Rome and its officials would be destroyed in the end.

Paul, also no doubtedly saw and grasped the vision and dream of John. Paul goes beyond the acceptable stance

envisioning new directions for the law and women and challenging folks. He sticks his neck out. Once he finally sees that vision, he is committed to it, even to the point of death.

Martin Luther King was certainly committed to a dream and he stuck his neck out. I believe we need more of these kinds of folk — they believe in their issue with all the force they have. They take some chances. There is always some reason for a lack of total commitment. It is never easy. Being totally committed demands belief in a dream.

- II. Secondly, committed to a dream means that you believe in the God who made you and that in some strange way that personal God pushes you and is a part of that dream and a part of the carrying out of that dream. The belief that there is someone who is a significant other and a force pushing you forward.

I say this because I believe in every person there is latent a portion of God. Some of us discover that force and some don't. It is the discovering ones who feel the push and the dream is started. Then our drive takes over and either does something with the gift or hides it.

I have a friend who displays this so well. It seems each time I am with her I see God. I don't want to get charismatic here, but it seems that I sense the force behind her. Recently she went through a crisis in her family. It was hard for her because she saw one of her long range dreams destroyed. Her daughter, after a long period of childlessness, was pregnant. The whole family was elated. It had been a dream for such a long time. Then after four months she miscarried. Everyone was devastated. However, after many tears and long hours of grieving, I saw her locate another dream, spend time alone with the Father and come back refreshed with a new hope and a new sense of destiny. I know this is what John had to have to sense the destiny in Revelation.

I believe in this inner strength. I believe to be a dreamer and to be committed to that dream we have to have this almost mystic quality about us. We have to be in the presence of the Almighty, to sense His guidance and support, and to feel His pull into a new world of dreams.

As a mother who works two jobs (and the one at home is many times harder than the one at the office), I find myself missing out on those special times with God. Those reflective, creative, dream times when God works mightily within me. Those are the first things to go when things get hectic. However, without those times I feel drained, not creative and certainly not filled with those spirit-filled dreams.

Paul Tournier in *The Meaning of Persons* says, "Even the greatest saints have their times of drought, when God seems to be far off. But the important thing about these moments of communion with God is not that they happen rarely, like flashes of lightning in the night, but that they do happen, and that they mean more for our whole life and person, than years of automatic existence. These moments are decisive in the determining of our future. They are crossroads where we take new direction. Our life depends on them for spiritual survival."

We have to be driven by that force — the enabler. I see John in this passage driven by that enabler and more so.... The early Christians had to be in touch with God to continue to dream of a better world. God was certainly not far away from this new city. "God will dwell with them and they shall be His people and God Himself will be with them."

As we dream for our self and for our BSU or our home, have we taken time to experience the Lord of our Faith? Have we given His spirit time to work in us? Have we seen His dreams for us? Have we explored the mystic in ourselves?

- III. And thirdly, being committed to a dream means you must set goals and believe that they can be achieved.

I am ever amazed at John's ability to dream and set goals. In every chapter of Revelation, John sees and envisions a new goal coming to be an accomplishment. In Chapter 7, John sees the great multitude, from every nation and tribe and tongue standing before the lamb in white robes. What a vivid dream to be accomplished. They even had measurable goals — 144,000.

In Chapter 14, John tells about the fall of Babylon, Rome. To John this was a dream — a goal, because it was the fall of this destructive power that would free the Christians and bring Christ back to the throne. Then in Chapter 21 John brings the new Jerusalem into being, bringing to a close his goals for a better life — a new city, God is on the throne, no tears, new things and a new heritage.

I wonder if we have dreams that are readily active in individual goals. Each of us, I am sure, have grandiose dreams we think we will never reach. Every management professor or book on the subject clearly tells us to break down each major objective or dream into manageable goals. Reach one small goal at a time, reward yourself and move on to the next goal.

In the case of my friend, she told me that after the miscarriage, the family had to take one day at a time, deal with that problem and hurt, then take the next. She had mastered the art of separating goals so they could be met.

I am enamored with fairy tales. It might be because being a mother of two preschoolers, I read a lot of them. The story of Snow White is particularly significant here. With a tremendous number of obstacles to face, she dreamed big — she dreamed of a handsome prince. However, while waiting for her prince, instead of moping around, feeling sorry for herself, she made friends with the dwarfs and had a wonderful life. (Leo Buscaglia — *Bus 9 to Paradise*)

So many times I find myself dreaming big dreams, hoping this great thing will happen, seeing myself doing these big programs; however, I forget that part of the

dream is the quality of our everyday life. Everyday life goes a long way to make up that “big dream”.

Leo Buscaglia in his book *Bus 9 to Paradise*, says that so many times we have this wonderful idea or dream of what paradise is, yet we fail to understand that paradise has to come each day of our lives before it can come in some grandiose way. There is not a bus that you simply get on to reach that dream. It takes winding roads, rain, broken vehicles and long days of persistence to reach that dream.

One of the longest bus rides for me was my dream to get out of the country. As some of you know I was born on a farm in Alabama. I know I don't look the role now but I really was a farm girl. I am also an only child — the second child in our family. I had an older brother who died at birth. My dad needed a boy on the farm so I tried to fit the bill. I was always lonely and as an only child spent a lot of time alone. I can remember the long summers of being out there with no one to talk to. I shelled lots of peas and beans, hauled lots of peaches and hay to the barn. I remember thinking as a teenager, “If I ever get old enough I will get a job in the city with people around and phones and things to do.”

Then after high school wanting to go to college and everybody saying, “You will never make it.” I was determined to make it. I didn't have any money or any real support for this effort; however, I knew somehow I would get there. Maybe there was a part of me saying, “I will show them.” I set small goals for myself (although I did not know what goals were then) always keeping that dream alive. I made it. I always believed I could do it.

Since that time I see the value in those long days by myself, dreaming, scheming about how I was going to do what I needed to do. I had the big dream in place and had plenty of time to figure out little steps. Now in my busy life I long for those quiet times to put together my life — to make goals that can be reality. Because I know without those daily goals that make up dreams, the dreams will never be a reality.

Many of the students you and I work with are sharp students. I see in some of them great potential, because they dare to dream and even more, they put those dreams into action within each day. I can probably separate the successful from the unsuccessful in this area. I believe the successful to be the ones who have dreams, goals, and values. They are the strong who survive because no matter what happens, they always find a new dream and work toward that dream with new goals. The successful ones do not have the phrase "I just can't do it" in their vocabulary. They do not mope around, feeling sorry for themselves. They use each day as a step to accomplish something.

Kierkegaard once said, "Depression and boredom result in a lack of initiative about everything and feeling sorry for yourself."

In our story today, certainly nobody should have had more reason to feel sorry for himself than John. However, he composed one of the amazing literary fêtes of the Bible — a book of hope and a dream of a better world, of a new life.

I wonder, have we lost our vision? Have our dreams perished in the tons of paperwork on our desk or the screaming kids wanting what seems to be insignificant? Where is our focus? Shall we dare to dream? Shall we dare to stick our neck out? Can we afford not to experience the I-Thou relationship?

I urge you in this hurried world to (as Jesse Jackson said) "keep on dreaming, don't surrender your dreams. Tragedy in life lies in having no dream, no goal, on ideal."

Dream! Dream! Dream!