

August 29,2021

**WHEN TRUTH TRUMPS VISION**



Who Could Imagine a King Whitney Houston

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tAFH\\_BAp9c](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7tAFH_BAp9c)

**Matthew 27:37**

**Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is jesus, the king of the Jews.**

## TRAINS

John was in his office, and it had been a tough week. There had been an accident and he had needed to work with investigators and engineers as they struggled to find the cause and render a solution. Fortunately, no one was injured. Although business was good, the financial report lay on top of his desk unfinished. There had been constant meetings with lawyers, management, the board of trustees, the planning committee, accounting, operations, and even a few employees. He always made time to meet with his employees and take their pulse. He sighed and closed his eyes for a minute, just to give himself time to reflect.

John loved trains. For John's 6<sup>th</sup> birthday, his father took him to the local train museum. There, he began a lifelong obsession with trains amidst the restored engines, box cars, cabooses, passenger cars, and mail cars. There was an area in the museum dedicated to model railroading. Standing out among the displays was a large HO scenic track with every possible configuration one could imagine. The local model railroad club always had a contingent of members to run the trains to the delight of children and adults alike. Most of them wore pinstriped overalls and railroad caps. The engines whistled, trains interacted with buildings, the roads had vehicles and HO scale pedestrians everywhere. There was lighting, sounds, and constant movement, which gave the display a reflection of reality. John was bitten by the railroad bug.

He asked his father for a train set for his 7<sup>th</sup> birthday, but it just wasn't within his father's budget. John was so disappointed but didn't lose his fascination with trains.

Times were hard, so Christmas was lean that year. John understood. He was pleased with the new pair of jeans and a couple of t-shirts. There were a few coloring books and a new box of crayons, some used books, new underwear and socks. He knew how hard his dad worked and John felt himself a burden as they tried to make ends meet.

There were two presents behind the tree that he had not unwrapped. Grabbing the first one and carefully removing the paper, he felt his excitement building. They always saved the paper wrapping so someone could use it for another occasion. He folded the paper carefully and laid it aside. The box was actually two cereal boxes taped together. He found a pair of pinstriped overalls in the first one, just like he had seen the model railroaders wearing. He was overjoyed and immediately slipped them on over his pajamas. They were a little bit big, but that meant he had room to grow. In the other cereal box, he found a railroad cap. He put it on and now felt like a true railroad engineer. How special this was.

But there was still the other box behind the tree. It was a little heavy when John pulled it out. Carefully unwrapping it he found a plain cardboard box. Undoing the tape and lifting the flap, he stared in amazement. Inside was a well-used, HO scale freight train set. As gentle as a 7-year-old can, he removed each piece from the box. There was an engine with a coal tender, a boxcar, a flat car,

and a caboose. A rotten rubber band held the track sections together, but it looked like there might be enough to build a small oval. At the bottom of the box was a transformer controller.

He put the track together with his dad's help, attached the controller, and carefully assembled the engine and cars on the rails. Together they did a countdown and watched as the headlight came on and the train slowly moved around the track. It was an inspiring moment. Even with the dirt and grime, flaking paint, and loose connections, this train was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen. In his imagination he added buildings, countryside, roads, cars, and people and visualized what this little train could be.

He reached over and hugged his dad with the fiercest of hugs, tears running down his face. He understood what a sacrifice his dad must have made to give him this moment in time, this precious memory.

A distant whistle pulled John from his reverie. He sighed and opened his eyes, letting them drift to the display cabinet in the far corner of his office. Carefully constructed from old railroad timber, the case had a locking glass top. Inside the display was an old HO railroad set in an oval shape with an engine, boxcar, flat car, and caboose, all seriously needing a paint job. Still, John preferred the patina of dust, grime, and peeling paint. It reminded him of his father. It reminded him of his vision and that moment in time with his dad.

He stood up from his desk and looked out his office window, which overlooked the 220 switching yard. There were twenty-two tracks, splitting and

merging. Trains were coming, going, and resting. Several were being loaded with freight while workers were unloading others. A control tower stood in the distance. He truly wished that his dad had lived to see this scene before him, what his dad had encouraged in him. This was John's switching yard. These were John's trains.

John's vision had started with that train in the display box that had given him so much joy as he began this incredible journey. His vision had expanded into the present when the reality, the truth of the moment, had far exceeded his vision and the imaginary buildings, roads, trains, and people that he had seen that day when he opened the box with that well-worn freight train. John grew as his vision grew, and he had come to realize that often our truth, our reality, trumps our vision.

**The problem that we face as humans is not that our dreams are too big, but that they are often too small. We see the enormity of an issue that appears so very unsolvable, and instead of envisioning an answer that is bigger than the problem, we try to confine it to what we already know. The world needs big thinkers, especially now. We allow ourselves to be intimidated by the size of an issue. We look at a fire and think garden hose. Rather than envision a better answer to the problem, we go with the solution we have on hand. That is not how we achieve progress.**

**Where most of us saw useless swamp, Walt Disney had a vision of Disney World. Where we believed faster production meant more labor, Henry Ford saw an assembly line. Where we saw only an impediment to ship traffic, Theodore Roosevelt envisioned the Panama Canal. Where most people could only see cold worthless tundra, William Seward saw the value of committing to the purchase of Alaska. Big problems need big solutions. Big issues need people with vision.**

**We still have people among us with that kind of vision, people who have bigger imaginations than the problems we face. Mark Zuckerberg, Elon Musk, Oprah Winfrey, Richard Branson, Bill Gates, and so many more, all committed to advancing the human race; all who refuse to think small in relation to the obstacles we face. When we try to confine the human mind to a single solution, we fail to release the power of possibilities.**

**Noah had never built a rowboat, but stepped up his game when God told him to build the Ark. Joshua didn't back down when he was faced the impenetrable walls of Jericho. With God's help, Samson single handedly brought**

down the temple, even after squandering away his strength. David stepped into his battle against Goliath with a only sling and a rock. Nehemiah remained steadfast as he managed the reconstruction of the walls around Jerusalem. Paul looked at the magnitude of the task before him, the task of taking the gospel to the gentiles, and persevered. These people all remained humble realizing their own limitations while understanding that no job was too big for the God that they served. All they needed to do was to step into the relationship that they already had with the Creator of the Universe and allow Him to work through them.

But the greatest example of Truth Triumphant Over Vision is found in our scripture of reference today:

**Above his head they placed the written charge against him: this is jesus, the king of the Jews. Matthew 27:37**

When we nailed Jesus to a cross and hung that sign over His head, it was in mockery. It was an attempt at humiliation. As if being beaten, spat upon, scourged, tormented, crowned with thorns, and forced to carry His own implement of execution through the crowded streets of Jerusalem to the shouts of ridicule and merciless debasement wasn't humiliation enough.

This attempt to bind the son of God to the human condition without understanding that His Kingdom wasn't limited by earth-bound constraints showed a clear lack of vision. Crucifixion, nails, spear puncture, the sheer exhaustion of trying to breath while affixed to the cross, not even the perceived finality of death could change the truth that Jesus Christ was the Son of God.

Nothing could change the fact that He chose this path. He chose to bleed. He chose to be humiliated. He chose to die. He chose to sacrifice His very life for His flock. He allowed His love for his precious sheep to outweigh the cost of their salvation.

How small minded can we be? How puny our thoughts? How could we not see that this was not the “King of the Jews”, but instead the Son of God, ruler of the universe. Our vision of Christ’s purpose on this earth was tiny compared to the truth of his purpose.

**”This is jesus, the king of the Jews.”** Don’t you know that Herod must have felt offended. How dare these people even suggest that Jesus, a carpenter from, can you believe it, Nazareth could be king, even in jest. Nothing good ever came out of Nazareth. And look who he associated with: fishermen, zealots, tax collectors, thieves, prostitutes, murderers, liars, sinners, and all sorts of riff raff.

**”this is jesus, the king of the Jews.”** Now that is good for a laugh. How could He ever have accomplished anything worthwhile doing things the way he did. You don’t get ahead in this world but helping people, by healing people, by teaching people. You don’t get ahead by telling people how much you love them. You get ahead through politics and power. By having the right friends and excluding the wrong kind of people from our lives. By gaining as much authority of the people as you can muster. But Jesus didn’t do things that way. He had no political ambitions at all. And the authority that He sought came from a place of love, not power or position. He’s just a small time rabble rouser, unable to get along with his peers and causing trouble among the people. Even Barabas, a notorious



**criminal who consorted with murderers and thieves, was more fit to be King than Jesus.**

**Truly, how small minded can we be by thinking that Jesus could or ever would be contained by that box, the one labeled “King of the Jews.” But that is our problem. We have trouble opening up our minds to see the bigger picture. Jesus could never be the King of the Jews. He could never be King of the Jews because that vision was too small for the Son of God. God never intended for His Son to be the “King of the Jews.” No, His Son was the sacrificial lamb for the sins of all humankind, the Prince of Peace that laid down His life in service to His Heavenly Father and for the salvation of His Father’s children. You simply can’t have a vision bigger than that.**

**I don’t know if you have ever done this, but it is relative to what we are talking about. When we venture out in the evening beyond the lights of the city limits and find a nice cool place to relax, maybe lie back on the hood of our car, and look up into an unclouded night sky, we can’t help but be drawn in. The effect of having our vision filled with billions of stars, galaxies, nebulae engages with a portion of our brains that help us realize just how little of the universe we can actually see and experience; how small our own presence is in the overall scheme of things. It reminds us of the enormity of God’s creation. Doing this provides a window into our imagination so that we can see beyond the elements that fill the heavens because we know that we see only a fraction of what is there.**

**Now, take that image, wrap it into a ball and envision that it is but a twinkle in God’s eye. Now we may say that we can’t do that. But we are challenged by**

God to try. He gave us the tools to do that, to see beyond what is limited by our senses. Take those very same tools and put the message “King of the Jews” into the tiny box that it deserves, and ponder “King of the heavens” instead. Look into that night sky and ponder these verses:

**John 18:36**

Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jewish leaders. But now my kingdom is from another place.”

**Isaiah 9:6–7**

For to us a child is born,  
to us a son is given,  
and the government will be on his shoulders.  
And he will be called  
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,  
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.  
Of the greatness of his government and peace there will be no end.

**Ephesians 1:19-23**

That power is the same as the mighty strength he exerted when he raised Christ from the dead and seated him at his right hand in the heavenly realms, far above all rule and authority, power and dominion, and every name that is invoked, not only in the present age but also in the one to

come. And God placed all things under his feet and appointed him to be head over everything for the church, which is his body, the fullness of him who fills everything in every way.

### Hebrews 1:3–4

The Son is the radiance of God’s glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven. So he became as much superior to the angels as the name he has inherited is superior to theirs.

Can we see that as we lay on the hood of our car, contemplating the overwhelming universe, how foolish it is to try and cram Jesus into a tiny box with a label “King of the Jews?” To do so is to deny the majesty of the truth because our vision is so short-sighted. It is akin to leaving that place of viewing the expanse of the heavens, going back to the city and expecting to have that same experience in our back yards, where city lights wash out much of what we saw in the country.

The boy John in our story today had a vision that was much bigger than the tired train set his dad had given him. John could have just kept the train until he got tired of playing with it and then boxed it up and put it away in the attic. That’s what most of us do. We get excited about our dreams and think how wonderful it would be if they could come true. But we hit a few obstacles, grow

tired of the upkeep, box them up and put them away thinking someday, someone will find them and make use of them. The realities of life become more important than our dreams. We realize one day that we have lived our life without ever finding the fulfillment that we were so anxious about. That's when the regrets start setting in.

I challenge us all to be more like John, who took his dream and followed it through. Maybe we need to dust off some of the boxes in our attics and what the stuff of dreams is made of. Maybe we need a little reminded of what we had hoped to accomplish before the pressures of this world shut us down.

My dad was 55 years old when he went to college to get his degree. He may have never had the chance to use all that he had learned but he never regretted taking the time to pursue that dream. It brought him peace. I realized the other day that if I stay the course, I will be 70 years old when I finally get my Masters of Divinity degree. But I gave up on that dream so long ago when I had people tell me that it would never happen. I had to climb into the attic, dust off the box and take a chance on that dream. I don't regret it. What I do regret is that I let that box sit in the attic. Out of sight. Out of mind. Unlike John who kept that train from his father in the open in order help keep him focused in his life's journey.

Truth will always trump vision, if we will allow it. But we have to embrace that truth and feed our vision so that we can grow into it. Just like staring into the night sky, our vision is a gift from God reminding us of our purpose.

**AMEN**

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