

CREATING AN OPENING TO MEET GOD

Mark 2:1-12

January 22, 2023

As we begin this new year, we are focussing on the return of Christ, who is THE BLESSED HOPE – as declared in our key verse from **Titus 2:13**. Let's make that verse personal, ***"I am looking for the blessed hope and glorious appearing of our great God and Saviour Jesus Christ."*** That's my hope for 2023, that we would be anticipating Christ's return, being prepared and ready to meet our Lord and Saviour when He returns for His bride the church. And while we wait, we're not to be idle, but about the Lord's business, keeping in step with the Holy Spirit. We need to be on mission, co-labouring with our Heavenly Father, bringing His kingdom to this earth, shining His light into the darkness around us. God has a dream for us here at SCCC – to partner with Him in fulfilling His purposes for Sombra and the surrounding area. What we need for that to happen is a breakthrough of revival – a movement of the Holy Spirit in our midst in which we are empowered as we partner with Him in what He is doing in this community. We are His hands and feet!

Last Sunday we were challenged to be a light shining in the darkness around us – to our families, to our communities, and to those we come in contact with on a daily basis. As the light of Christ shines upon us and within us, we release that light so that it shines on others, so they would also experience Christ's love, grace, mercy and live in hope in these uncertain times when everything around us is being shaken, and only what can't be shaken will remain!

The Bible teaches us that to reach others with the Gospel message and bring renewed life to ourselves and the church, we need to create an opening to meet God, an opening between heaven and earth. So, what I would like to speak about this morning is creating an opening for the power of the Holy Spirit to bring us a powerful visitation, like He did in the past. We can see from the history of past revivals within the last few centuries that it was a group of committed people who gathered in prayer that created an open heaven and the Lord showed up, and when the Lord showed up His people were awakened, having a renewed love for Jesus Christ and a renewed passion to reach the lost with the Gospel, creating heaven on earth. God's dream for us and every church is for revival to take place within us and among us. Bill Johnson, senior pastor of Bethel church in Redding California, often speaks about creating an open heaven so that God can work through us and among us to bring about His purposes on this earth!

When speaking about open heavens, I'm reminded of an occurrence that takes place to Jacob, one of the sons of Isaac, in **Genesis 28:10-19a**. Jacob is fleeing from his older brother Esau after Jacob stole his brother's blessing and birthright (his legacy and inheritance) by pretending to be Esau when Isaac was old, and his eyes were so weak he could not see. Esau and Jacob were twins, and the birthright of the first born was to receive a double inheritance and a double blessing and it was to go to Esau as the first born son. Jacob was on his way to spend time with his uncle Laban, brother of his mother Rebekah to allow time for Esau to cool off. On his journey, Jacob was given a vision of an open heaven at a place called Bethel. The Lord speaks to him there, confirming that the covenant given to Abraham and Isaac will now be his covenant of promise – God will bless him and his descendants and they will become a great nation, blessed to be a blessing to other nations and people groups. As Jacob experienced God through an open heaven, we also need the gate of heaven to open over our lives, families, churches, community, and nation!

Jesus also experienced an open heaven when He was baptized in the Jordan by John the Baptist – ***“As soon as Jesus was baptized, he went up out of the water. At that moment heaven was opened, and he saw the Spirit of God descend like a dove and alighting on him. And a voice from heaven said, ‘This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased.’”*** (Matthew 3:16-17). The implication here is when heaven was torn open, the Holy Spirit descended on Jesus and never left Him. The dove is a symbol of gentleness, meekness, and purity, and it is said that two gentle animals are pictured here at Jesus' baptism, a dove resting on a lamb as John the Baptist declared Jesus as ***“The Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world”*** (John 1:29)! Here again, at this open heaven God speaks, acknowledging how pleased He was with His Son. When the heavens are opened, God always speaks, and His blessing are released upon those that are under the open heaven!

Dr James Goll, author of *“Revival Breakthrough”* tells us about another open heaven that took place in Mark's Gospel account, when Jesus forgave and healed a paralytic. Mark's Gospel tells the story of four men who tear up a roof and lower their paralyzed friend until he's hanging right in front of Jesus. These four friends dug a skylight in a house so that they could get their friend to Jesus, but this same skylight allowed Jesus to also see the beautiful faith of these four men, who would stop at nothing to get their friend to the divine healer. And this skylight also filled the house with heavenly light as the heavens were opened on that gathering. That

day revival took place as light was brought into that dark place and God spoke through His Son Jesus, and the result was that blessings of forgiveness and healing were released. Now that's the kind of revival I want to see here at SCCC, abundant blessings of forgiveness and healing being released!

This story in Mark's Gospel begins with this statement, ***"A few days later, when Jesus again entered Capernaum, the people heard that he had come home"*** (Mark 2:1). Because of Jesus' growing fame, He could not enter a town without getting mobbed, because of the great need around Him, so He stayed outside in isolated places, but now He's back in His hometown. Have you ever thought that Jesus longed to come home and sleep in his own bed like we long to come home when we are away on a business trip or a vacation. Laurie can tell you that I'm not a good traveller, after about 10 days away, I'm looking forward to coming home and sleeping in my own bed. I could possibly go away for a longer period of time in the winter months, but in the summer, I especially miss my home, my gardens, and my yard. Mark tells us that Jesus had come home, He felt at home in Capernaum, which was the centre of His ministry. We know that Jesus' definitely wasn't at home everywhere He went, especially in His hometown of Nazareth, where they tried to throw Him off a cliff. And then Jesus even cursed some towns in which He ministered and spent time, saying: ***"Woe to you, Chorazin! Woe to you Bethsaida!"*** (Luke 10:13) because they didn't humble themselves, repent and turn from their sins, even after Jesus performed many powerful miracles in those places.

This story tells me that Jesus needs to made to feel at home – and isn't that to be one of the goals for us here at SCCC, that Jesus would feel at home in our church, and also feel at home in our individual homes, and in the homes here in Sombra. Jesus said this in **John 14:23**, ***"Anyone who loves me will obey my teaching. My Father will love them, and he will come to them and make our home with them."*** Too often we treat Jesus like a guest in our homes and even in our churches, rather than the Homeowner who owns everything and allows us to be stewards of what He has blessed us with. Our church sign tells those that drive by that SCCC is a place ***"Where Jesus Reigns."*** Our church is not only a place where Jesus feels at home, but where He reigns and I pray that's a true statement about us, describing us and our ministry here in Sombra, because that's not true of every church, there sign and vision statements don't always describe them. Many believers and churches have made church and ministry all about themselves, and in those places, Jesus doesn't show up very often, because they don't love Him sacrificially or

obey His teaching. Do you like showing up in homes where you're not welcome? Most likely not! So, I pray that Jesus will always feel welcome here at SCCC and in each one of our homes, and I pray that we are willing to create an open heaven over this church and this congregation, so that we would hear God speak into our lives and ministry and receive His blessings and experience His power with powerful visitations!

Reading on **Mark 2:2** tells us that ***"They gathered in such large numbers that there was no room left, not even outside the door, and he preached the word to them."*** When Jesus is at home, people will gather because they want to be close to Him, they don't want to miss out on anything that Jesus may say or do. They have a hunger for God's presence and Word. Episode three of the *"Chosen"* series by Dallas Jenkins, that's currently being released on the internet, is a great example of how people flocked around Jesus whenever He showed up in town, which created a great deal of jealousy among the Pharisees and teachers of the law. Legalism will never draw a crowd, but grace always will – and Jesus embodies grace! At this event in Mark's Gospel, the house is overflowing with desperate and hungry people for God to show up, every seat was taken, every square inch of floor space was occupied, every doorway was overflowing with people trying to get in, every window was crowded with observers, as well the area outside was filled with people straining to hear every word from Jesus' lips. Wouldn't you want to see that happen here at SCCC!

And then this happened – **Mark 2:3**, ***"Some men came, bringing to him a paralyzed man, carried by four of them."*** These four men had a friend or a relative who was suffering. He was paralyzed, and there was no way he could get to Jesus on his own. These friends had heard Jesus was back in town, and they were convinced Jesus could help their friend. They had such an unshakable faith in Jesus that nothing would stop them from bringing their friend to Jesus. These four faith filled men remind me of the kid who was playing a baseball game in a park with his friends. He was playing third base and an onlooker walked up and said, *"What's the score?"* The kid pounded his glove and said, *"Forty-two to zero, their favor."* The man said, *"Wow! You're getting beat pretty badly?"* The kid looked at him, smiled, and said, *"Nope, 'cause we haven't even been up to bat yet!"* Now that's faith! The kind of faith we are to have in Christ!

These four friends believed if they could somehow get their paralyzed friend to Jesus that Jesus would heal him. Their love and compassion led them to sacrifice

their time and effort to give their friend hope – thereby, putting their faith to work. Are we as well willing to sacrifice our time and effort to put our faith to work? We are surrounded by hurting people who need a breakthrough; the question is do we care enough and have enough compassion to go out of our way to bring them to Jesus? Are we committed and desperate enough to see God move in the lives of those around us, having the faith to believe in the extraordinary, being willing to do whatever it takes to lower others into the presence of the same Jesus that these four men lowered their friend in front of? Willing to do whatever it takes to open the heavens for those around us in need, to meet God like we met God in our time of need!

Mark 2:4, “*Since they could not get him to Jesus because of the crowd they made an opening in the roof above Jesus by digging through it and then lowering the mat the man was lying on.*” We don’t know how far these men might have had to carry their friend. When they got to where Jesus was they must have been very disappointed. Seeing the crowd, they could have easily given up in discouragement and headed back home, but they didn’t. They looked for an opportunity, for a solution, because their friend desperately needed Jesus. They were willing to try something new, something no one had ever done before! Can you imagine the disruption that this new idea had created – straw, dirt and pieces of roof falling on everyone down below, and they didn’t just have to make a small hole but a gaping hole, big enough to lower a man on a stretcher. They were really letting the light pour into that home that day, causing quite a commotion. Even though it meant disrupting the whole meeting, the men were determined to bring their friend into the presence of the Messiah. Are we that determined to bring our friends and loved ones into the presence of Jesus, letting nothing stop us? Are we also willing to try new things, even though they may disrupt the worship service, confuse some people worshipping with us, and break with tradition, and possibly even cause an uproar!

Mark 2:5, “*When Jesus saw their faith, he said to the paralyzed man, ‘Son, your sins are forgiven.’*” The gaping hole in the roof was an open heaven and God spoke through His Son Jesus, and the result power was released – freedom from sin and great blessings of healing. Mark says here that Jesus saw their faith, not the faith of the paralyzed man, but the faith of those that brought their friend to Jesus. And we need to notice that this wasn’t a singular faith, but the combined faith of all four of the men. That tells me that as we gather together as His church, our faith is multiplied, that is if we are all in unity and working towards the same goal.

And if one church can be in harmony and unity, working together for a common goal and see God move in miraculous ways. Just think of the possibilities when a group of churches would come together for a common goal. What if there was not just one open heaven, but multiple open heavens throughout a community – just think of the possibilities for a great revival!

Jesus speaks into the situation before Him, to the paralytic, but Jesus didn't say at first, *"Get up, take your mat and walk,"* like the paralytic and his friends expected. Instead, the first thing Jesus told the paralytic was, *"Son, your sins are forgiven."* To which, I believe the four men would have been highly disappointed; thinking, we didn't struggle to get our friend here and tear apart this roof with our bare hands for his sins to be forgiven, but they didn't realize that Jesus was speaking to the man's heart. We all desperately need forgiveness above healing. Jesus understands our deepest need. Jesus spoke to the man's heart and soul, knowing that he can't enter heaven unless his sins are forgiven. Many enter heaven crippled, blind, deaf, suffering with all kinds of diseases and medical conditions, but no one can enter heaven without first receiving forgiveness. And YES, thankfully the paralytic was also healed, he picked up his mat and walked out of that room. However, like every human that was in the room that day, the healed paralytic did eventually die physically, but because he was forgiven he didn't die spiritually, his soul entered eternity, and he continues to live on today. I'm sure we'll get to meet him one day, and he'll tell us about that day he met Jesus when his friends created an opening for him to meet God!

I'm so thankful that SCCC is a praying church because prayer is powerful for breakthrough to take place. That's what happened at the Hebrides Revival in 1949 on a set of islands just off the coast of Scotland. Two housebound elderly sisters in their eighties, Peggy Smith who was blind and her sister Christine Smith who was doubled over with arthritis were desperate for revival, for a visitation of God. As they prayed for revival, they reminded God of His promise to them from **Isaiah 44:3**, *"For I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground; I will pour out my Spirit on your offspring, and my blessing on your descendants."* Day and night they prayed this promise for the residents of their community. Every day they interceded for an open heaven!

And as they prayed, they also claimed another open heaven verse, **Isaiah 64:1**, *"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down, that the mountains would tremble before you!"* And because of their devotion to prayer, sure enough God

made an opening in the heavens and created an opening for them to meet God. Revival came as the Spirit fell on a group of seven young men praying in a barn close to these praying women, and an awesome awareness of God filled the barn. That same morning God also gave one of the sisters, Peggy Smith a vision. She saw the church crowded with people, including many young people, and hundreds being swept into the kingdom. She saw the Lamb in the midst of the throne with the keys to heaven in His hand. As a result, in a few days revival broke out and work in the area was largely set aside as people prayed for themselves, their friends, and neighbours. People prayed and found God in homes, barns, and by the roadside. Revival fire spread to other villages as well, and it is also said that in the Hebrides Revival a spiritual zone was created and when people walked into that zone they would come under the conviction of sin, and many souls were saved. The whole region was saturated with God!

That's revival breakthrough – and it was preceded with intense, sincere, and heartfelt prayer! One of the ingredients for revival is desperation, desperation to see God move in our midst. Of having a burning desire that God would rend the heavens and come down and be present among us in greater measure. We need to also pray for an open heaven so that God will bring forth mighty visitations that will fulfill His purposes in us and through us here in Sombra and the surrounding area; thereby, bringing Him the greatest praise and the greatest glory!

Like those two elderly sisters, Peggy and Christine Smith, let us also remind God of His promise in **Isaiah 44:3**, as well as **Isaiah 64:1**, pleading God to once again rend the heavens and come down!