

The Church Opened Up

I thought we were finished with this series of messages on the church but as often happens, I felt the Lord speaking another word to my heart. We've talked about the church grown up, prayed up, linked up, fired up, caught up. This morning we are going to talk about the church opened up. If we are going to be the church God is calling us to be, we are going to have to open up. What do I mean? We're going to have to open up our eyes, our hearts, our doors and our arms. To whom? That's what we are going to talk about.

At the close of the message two weeks ago on the church caught up, I said the promise of the Lord's return, the fact the church is going to be caught up to be with the Lord someday is a motivating factor in us reaching the world with the gospel. I read then from Luke 14 and Jesus' parable of the Great Banquet. I want you to turn there this morning. I want to show you something in this story and then I want to turn to another parable found in Luke 10.

Jesus is eating Sabbath dinner at the house of a prominent Pharisee. He noticed people trying to sit close to the host, to get the best seats and Jesus used this as an opportunity to speak about humility. Then he tells his host, **“When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or relatives or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous.” Luke 14:12-14**

Hmm... we are starting to get an idea of whom we are to open our hearts and arms. Then one of the guests at the table said to Jesus, “Blessed is the man who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God.” This was kind of a “blessed is the guy who gets the invitation to sit at the head table in the kingdom of God” perhaps implying that he qualified, and Jesus uses this as an opportunity to teach them about the kingdom of God.

Jesus then tells this parable. (Luke 14:16-24) When the invited guests made excuses and declined his invitation, the master told his servants **“Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.”** ‘Sir,’ the servant said, ‘what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.’ Then the master told his servant, **‘Go out to the roads and country lanes and make them come in, so that my house will be full.’ Luke 14:21-23**

I made this point in the message two Sundays ago, that this parable tells us we are to go quickly, to go everywhere and to go to everyone with the message of the gospel. I was going to just simply make that point again and as I read the parable in preparation for this message, I felt the Holy Spirit stop me and refocused my attention for a moment on this parable. In two weeks we are going to meet in the new sanctuary. I think it's beautiful and exciting and there is going to be a lot of good things happening there. But I heard in my spirit the Lord asking, "who did you build this for? Did you build it for the invited guests? Did you build it for the comfortable saints so they could be more comfortable?" I think we had good reasons. We built it because it was time to upgrade, to improve, to increase our influence. The best reason was because we felt it was obedience to God to build. But here is the question I think the Lord was asking from the parable. Did you just build it for yourselves, for Carbondale folks, or did you build it for those who haven't heard yet? Who haven't been invited yet? Did you build it for others, for the poor, the crippled, the lame and the blind? Did you build it to reach the lost, the broken, the hurting, the alien, the outcast? My answer is "Yes!"

Like the man in the parable, we've built something, we've prepared something, the banquet is ready, now we have a responsibility to go quickly, to everyone, everywhere and invite them to come meet Jesus!

I've watched the men working on the building for the past year. Thinking about those guys. A lot of them didn't speak English as their primary language. Some of those good old American boys with the pony tails and tattoos looked a little rough. There were some guys doing manual labor that Charlie hired to help them start a better life. These guys were building the church and I thought, "Are we building this for them? Would they feel welcome here?" You see, if we are going to be the church that God is calling us to be, we have to open up. We have to open up our arms and our doors to everyone, from everywhere, to welcome them home to Jesus!

The tendency of the church in America is to want to hunker down, like spiritual end-time preppers, we'll have enough food, water and ammo to defend ourselves against the sinners outside and we will hold on until Jesus and his angel commandos in a heavenly Blackhawk come to rescue us out of this world! That may be what some are preaching, but I don't think that's what Jesus taught. I don't think that was the church he was talking about when he said he would build his church and the gates of hell wouldn't prevail against it.

I get it, that we want to protect the young and keep evil influence and compromise out of the church. Absolutely. Yes, we are going to preach the gospel, preach the truth. We are going to lift up the standard of holiness. Part of what the proclamation of the gospel is all about, what the gospel is designed to do is to bring transformation. When Jesus is preached and lifted up, all men and women will be drawn to Him. They will be lifted up as well. He has come to set people free. He has come so that if we are in Christ we will be new creations. We aren't going to compromise the gospel, but we are to open our hearts and our arms and our doors. We are moving into new digs down the hall and we need to open up!

We are a church of healing, hope, laughter and peace. That means sick and broken and hurting people are welcome here because we believe they will be healed. That means hopeless people, trapped in sin and shame and addiction and despair are welcome here because they will find hope in Jesus. That means people that haven't had joy or peace, that have only known sadness and despair can come and be welcomed because we believe God will fill us with joy and laughter and peace. He will set our souls to dancing by his grace and in his presence. For the church to accomplish our mission and be the church he calls us to be, we are going to have to open up. (If Reggie Dabbs was here he would tell you to touch somebody and tell them "you'll have to open up.")

To be the church that opens up, we will have to guard ourselves from closing our eyes and our hearts to the needs of the world around us. Turn to **Luke 10:25**, the story of the Good Samaritan and let me read the story and then make a few observations. (Read the parable.)

Notice this is all about loving our neighbors and of course, Jesus answers the defining question, "And who is my neighbor?" That's still a question for the church to ask and answer and we need to make sure we are answering it the way Jesus intended. It's those neighbors we are opening our doors to, the neighbors we are inviting to the banquet.

V30 tells us the condition of the man in the ditch. Naked, beaten, bloodied, half dead. He was as broken and desperate as anyone could be.

V31 tells of the priest, followed by the Levite who both saw the man but then passed by on the other side of the road. The first thing we have to do is open our eyes. **To be the church God calls us to be, we have to have open eyes!** Where are you looking? What do you see and what is your response? The priest and the Levite both saw the condition of the man in the ditch but they chose to cross over to the other side. They thought if they kept walking, if they picked

up their pace a bit, maybe they wouldn't hear the man's cries for help, they wouldn't hear him moaning in pain. Maybe they could walk fast enough and outrun the conviction in their heart that someone was in need and they should respond.

Bill Wilson started the great inner city ministry in New York City. He used to say, "**The need is the call!**" I asked him once about when he felt called to the inner city, to work with children in poverty there. He said something like, "There was never a call. I just saw the need. How can you see the need and not respond? The need is the call."

If we are going to be the church God is calling us to be, God help us, we will have to decide the need we see is the call! We'll have to open our eyes. There are needs all around us. Injustice, poverty, homelessness, lives broken by addiction, marriages and families broken and hurting, rich folks and poor folks, struggling to hold it together, in need of healing and hope. What do you see? Who do you see? The need is everywhere. We have to open our eyes because there is someone you know in a ditch, hurting, dying. The need is the call.

But, it's not enough to see. **To be the church God calls us to be we have to have an open heart.** There was a heart difference. The Priest saw and passed by on the other side. The Levite saw and passed by on the other side. The Good Samaritan saw the man and notice verse 33, "**When he saw him, he took pity on him.**"

It's not just open eyes, it's an open heart. How do we open our heart? **Start by remembering we've all been in the ditch!** I don't care if you were born with a silver spoon or a golden pacifier in your mouth or you came up on the poor side of town on the other side of the tracks. We all came out of the ditch. All have sinned and missed the mark. All of us were left half dead by sin and its consequences. You may say, "I never sinned like that." No you were just eaten up with pride and self-righteousness. We've all been in the ditch. We all needed a Savior, someone to rescue us and lift us out of there.

Who found you? A Sunday School teacher? A Youth pastor? A friend? A co-worker? A chaplain? A neighbor that brought you to church? Someone that invited your parents to a service? Someone opened their eyes and saw you and opened their heart to you because they had been in the ditch before and they wanted to help get you out! Remember? Someone found you and told you about Jesus and how he could and would rescue you. Open your eyes and let Jesus open up your heart today to others who need rescued out of the ditch. Jesus said, "**Preach this message: The kingdom of heaven is near. Heal the sick, raise the dead, cleanse those**

who have leprosy, drive out demons. Freely you have received, freely give.” Matthew 10:7-8 He has sent us to tell someone, “I was in the ditch just like you but Jesus rescued me, healed me, raised me from the dead, cleansed me, cast the devil out of me. He gave life to me and I’m here to help you out of the ditch.” That’s how we open our hearts. Remember we’ve all been in the ditch. Freely you’ve received, freely give!

All three had open eyes, but only the Good Samaritan had an open heart. But that wasn’t enough. When he saw him and took pity on him, he then went to him and bandaged his wounds and poured in oil and wine. Then he put the man on his own donkey and took him to an inn and took care of him and the next day he paid the innkeeper. “Look after him and when I return, I will reimburse you for any extra expense you may have.”

It wasn’t enough to feel sorry for the man, to have an open heart. **To be the church God is calling us to be, we have to have open arms!** God calls us to action. The Good Samaritan sacrificed his own comfort, sacrificed his own earnings, his own resources, giving the innkeeper two silver coins to cover expenses. He made arrangements for his care and assured the innkeeper he would come back to check on him and settle the account.

The call of God and the needs of this world demand action from His church. Open eyes, open hearts, open arms. He didn’t call us to hide, to stick our heads in the sand, or to poke our heads up into the clouds ignoring the sorrow and brokenness around us, he called us to go into all the world and preach the gospel and make disciples and heal the sick and raise the dead and set captives free. That’s the church he calls us to be. That’s the church we must be.

Throughout the story I’ve seen casting us as the Good Samaritan, that’s the role of the church to respond to those in the ditch. But I think we could agree that Jesus is the Good Samaritan that found us bleeding and dying in the ditch and did what no one else could do: He healed our wounds and then he brought us to a place where he knew we would be loved and cared for. He brought us to the church, the inn.

The word translated as inn in this parable means “a place where all are received.” What a powerful image for the church – a place where all are received. Jesus the Good Samaritan finds people that are broken and dying, pours in the healing oil and wine of his grace and Spirit and then brings them to the church, to the inn where all are received and then he says, “Take care of them until I come back.”

Now these are some pretty beaten up and bloody folks the Good Samaritan finds. We're tempted to say "Jesus, we just got new carpet and we fixed up the sanctuary...we have to be careful about who we let in...We can't have people bleeding all over the carpet." But that's who we are. The church. The place where all are welcome. The place of healing for the bleeding and broken.

I wrote the book *Without Spot or Wrinkle* in 1999, almost twenty years ago. Let me wrap this up by reading just a couple of pages from *Without Spot or Wrinkle*.

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God is calling us to be a church that is opened up, a church with open eyes, open hearts and open arms. Are you ready? **Open Up!**