

# 1/8/17 The Heavens Are Opened

## Intro

- Beginning our new series 'The Great Invite'
  - Great Snow Storm of Jan 2017!?
- Starting of a new year
  - New Years Resolution
- Last week Covenantal renewal
- Today= 'The Heavens Are Opened'

## Matthew 3:13-17 ESV

13 Then Jesus came from Galilee to the Jordan to John, to be baptized by him. 14 John would have prevented him, saying, "I need to be baptized by you, and do you come to me?" 15 But Jesus answered him, "Let it be so now, for thus it is fitting for us to fulfill all righteousness." Then he consented. 16 And when Jesus was baptized, immediately he went up from the water, and behold, the heavens were opened to him, and he saw the Spirit of God descending like a dove and coming to rest on him; 17 and behold, a voice from heaven said, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

## Baptism

- Last week
  - Larry
  - It was awesome
  - Able to use baptismal for first time
- Journey toward discipleship begins with Baptism
  - Jesus started his ministry with Baptism
- 'Heavens were opened'
  - Mark 1:10 ESV And when he came up out of the water, immediately he saw the heavens being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove.
    - Greek verb= Schizomenous (skhid'-zo-meanous), means split/torn- more dramatic
  - Heavens opened
  - Voice of the Lord
    - Important
    - Powerful
    - Psalm 29 ESV
      - 1 Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. 2 Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of holiness. 3 The voice of the Lord is over the waters; the God of glory thunders, the Lord, over many waters. 4 The voice of the Lord is powerful; the voice of the Lord is full of majesty. 5 The voice of the Lord breaks the cedars;

the Lord breaks the cedars of Lebanon. 6 He makes Lebanon to skip like a calf, and Sirion like a young wild ox. 7 The voice of the Lord flashes forth flames of fire. 8 The voice of the Lord shakes the wilderness; the Lord shakes the wilderness of Kadesh. 9 The voice of the Lord makes the deer give birth and strips the forests bare, and in his temple all cry, "Glory!" 10 The Lord sits enthroned over the flood; the Lord sits enthroned as king forever. 11 May the Lord give strength to his people! May the Lord bless his people with peace!

- Water
  - Water and fire important in Bible
    - Take note every time mentioned in the Bible
    - Purification
    - Eleazar the priest, When Israelites coming out of Egypt, went to battle under Moses: Numbers 31:23 everything that can stand the fire, you shall pass through the fire, and it shall be clean. Nevertheless, it shall also be purified with the water for impurity. And whatever cannot stand the fire, you shall pass through the water.
  - Great Flood
    - Noah in Genesis 6-10
    - Genesis 7:11 ESV In the six hundredth year of Noah's life, in the second month, on the seventeenth day of the month, on that day all the fountains of the great deep burst forth, and the windows of the heavens were opened.
    - Heavens were opened like in Matthew 3
    - In Genesis 7 it was to destroy the earth and pronounce judgment
      - In the end a covenant was established
      - Never again happen
      - Rainbow
    - Matthew 3 Heavens were opened to pronounce a blessing not to destroy or pronounce judgment
    - Water was at the center
    - Peter puts it this way in 1 Peter 3:20-22 ESV because they formerly did not obey, when God's patience waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was being prepared, in which a few, that is, eight persons, were brought safely through water. Baptism, which corresponds to this, now saves you, not as a removal of dirt from the body but as an appeal to God for a good conscience, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ,
- Salvation (Baptism is a mark of)
  - Involves 3 things
    - Repentance
    - Faith

- Holiness
- 1 Peter 1:3-9 ESV 3 Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ! According to his great mercy, he has caused us to be born again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, 4 to an inheritance that is imperishable, undefiled, and unfading, kept in heaven for you, 5 who by God's power are being guarded through faith for a salvation ready to be revealed in the last time. 6 In this you rejoice, though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been grieved by various trials, 7 so that the tested genuineness of your faith—more precious than gold that perishes though it is tested by fire—may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ. 8 Though you have not seen him, you love him. Though you do not now see him, you believe in him and rejoice with joy that is inexpressible and filled with glory, 9 obtaining the outcome of your faith, the salvation of your souls.
- House= repentance is porch, door is faith, house itself is relationship with God is holiness or holy living (Belton Joyner 2008)
- All three are a part, not just Repentance
- Key is holy living (for UM's)
  - One time decision important, but not the goal
  - Goal is to live a faithful life
  - 1 Peter 1:14-16 ESV 14 As obedient children, do not be conformed to the passions of your former ignorance, 15 but as he who called you is holy, you also be holy in all your conduct, 16 since it is written, "You shall be holy, for I am holy."
- Means of grace (2)
  - Works of piety
    - Public worship
      - Going to church
      - Hebrews ESV 10:25 not neglecting to meet together, as is the habit of some, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day drawing near.
    - Word (read or expounded)
      - Colossians 3:16 ESV Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, teaching and admonishing one another in all wisdom, singing psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, with thankfulness in your hearts to God.
    - Holy Communion
      - Important Celebration
      - 1 Corinthians 11:27-32 ESV 27 Whoever, therefore, eats the bread or drinks the cup of the Lord in an unworthy manner will be guilty concerning the body and blood of the Lord. 28 Let a person examine himself, then, and so eat of

the bread and drink of the cup. 29 For anyone who eats and drinks without discerning the body eats and drinks judgment on himself. 30 That is why many of you are weak and ill, and some have died. 31 But if we judged ourselves truly, we would not be judged. 32 But when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world.

- Private Prayer
  - Matthew 6:6 ESV But when you pray, go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
- Studying scriptures
  - 2 Timothy 3:16-17 ESV 16 All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
- Fasting/abstinence
  - Jesus in Matthew 6:16-18 ESV 16 "And when you fast, do not look gloomy like the hypocrites, for they disfigure their faces that their fasting may be seen by others. Truly, I say to you, they have received their reward. 17 But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, 18 that your fasting may not be seen by others but by your Father who is in secret. And your Father who sees in secret will reward you.
    - Expectation, Not 'if' but 'when'
  - Corporate Fasting part of Community of Believers
    - Nehemiah 9:1-3 ESV 1 Now on the twenty-fourth day of this month the people of Israel were assembled with fasting and in sackcloth, and with earth on their heads. 2 And the Israelites separated themselves from all foreigners and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their fathers. 3 And they stood up in their place and read from the Book of the Law of the Lord their God for a quarter of the day; for another quarter of it they made confession and worshiped the Lord their God.
- Works of mercy
  - Things done as we practice holy living
  - Loving words and actions
    - Matthew 25:34-36 ESV 34 Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father,

inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world. 35 For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me, 36 I was naked and you clothed me, I was sick and you visited me, I was in prison and you came to me.'

- Offer Christ and invite others into relationship with him
- Jesus= heals, teaches, forgives, restores, just, redeems
  - Isaiah 42:1-9 ESV 1 Behold my servant, whom I uphold, my chosen, in whom my soul delights; I have put my Spirit upon him; he will bring forth justice to the nations. 2 He will not cry aloud or lift up his voice, or make it heard in the street; 3 a bruised reed he will not break, and a faintly burning wick he will not quench; he will faithfully bring forth justice. 4 He will not grow faint or be discouraged till he has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for his law. 5 Thus says God, the Lord, who created the heavens and stretched them out, who spread out the earth and what comes from it, who gives breath to the people on it and spirit to those who walk in it: 6 "I am the Lord; I have called you in righteousness; I will take you by the hand and keep you; I will give you as a covenant for the people, a light for the nations, 7 to open the eyes that are blind, to bring out the prisoners from the dungeon, from the prison those who sit in darkness. 8 I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols. 9 Behold, the former things have come to pass, and new things I now declare; before they spring forth I tell you of them."
- Entire Sanctification= full love of God and full love of neighbor
  - Christian perfection
- Salvation more than personal relationship
  - Something we do
  - Something we practice
    - Get better at
    - Training/Discipline
    - Live into more fully as we mature as Christians
  - Not us
    - Nothing we've done
    - Not saying the right words
  - God
    - He saves us
    - He reaches out to us first
      - Love
      - Prevenient Grace
    - Sent Jesus to show us how to live
    - Offers us eternal life

- Available to all
    - Acts 10:34-35 ESV 34 So Peter opened his mouth and said: "Truly I understand that God shows no partiality, 35 but in every nation anyone who fears him and does what is right is acceptable to him.
- Unexpected Ways
  - God spoke through
  - Birth of baby
  - Courage of someone else
    - Kid and cancer
    - Struggling father/mother
- Happened more than once
  - Throughout our lives
  - Steps along the path of life
  - Important for us to ritually remember our baptisms and celebrate as a congregation
    - Last week
    - We will be having more
    - If not I will bring it out and remind us of it
- Assurance
  - Trusting Christ alone
  - Relief our sins are forgiven
  - Response to what God has already done
  - John Wesley
    - After a Methodist society meeting in a Moravian chapel
    - Journal May 24, 1738
    - "In the evening I went very unwillingly to a society in Aldersgate Street, where one was reading Luther's preface to the Epistle to the Romans. About a quarter before nine, while he was describing the change which God works in the heart through faith in Christ, I felt my heart strangely warmed. I felt I did trust in Christ, Christ alone, for salvation; and an assurance was given me that he had taken away my sins, even mine, and saved me from the law of sin and death."
    - Not a champion of Wesley, a good man creator of Methodism (church formed after his death)
    - This story has always been awesome to me
      - Someone (doesn't say who it is) reading preface to Romans by Martin Luther
      - Change which God works in heart through faith in Christ
      - When it happened
      - Not a sermon, a revival service, outreach event, sidewalk preacher

## Closing

- Different
  - Each person
  - God speaks in way that we most easily hear
  - Lowest point
    - Different for each
    - Changed my view a little
    - Most open/confused/looking for something/searching
  - Prevenient Grace
    - Grace that goes before us
    - Grace marked in Baptism
    - Grace that lifts us up when we struggle
    - Fills us with joy
    - Helps us to be more loving
    - This is available to all
  - Sharing our Story/Testimony
    - Made easy b/c of Prevenient Grace
    - God has already done the work
    - Recognize the moment
    - Share the good news of Jesus
    - Share what we know
      - Not what any other preacher
        - Billy Graham
        - John Wesley
        - Brent Gilstrap
      - Personally
      - Our testimony
    - Questions
      - When were the heavens opened to you?
      - When was your 'heart strangely warmed'?
        - When did you have that Assurance?
        - Acceptance?
        - Relief that sins were forgiven?
      - How long has it been?
        - Not a one time deal
        - Rededication
        - Have you got that feeling recently?

## Challenges

1. This Season, through worship, study, and personal devotion take time to consider deeply why you have chosen to be a disciple of Jesus Christ
2. **Invite someone to come to church!**

Belton Joyner, F. 2008. *Being United Methodist in the Bible Belt: A Theological Survival Guide for Youth, Parents, and Other Confused United Methodists*. Westminster John Knox Press.