

# The Church in the Park Vision

## **Habakkuk 2:2**

**“Write the vision and make it plain on tablets, that he who reads it may run with it.”**

We have a strong vision for Church in the Park, and as our ministry has grown and developed I have felt the need to share how it was birthed, the vision that God gave me for it, and the direction that God is moving us in as a ministry.

## **Beginnings**

I started Church in the Park in 2002, at a time when I was a member of Calvary Chapel here in Sydney. For some time I had been ministering in prisons in New South Wales, staging outreach concerts and preaching / leading worship in various prisons around New South Wales.

For some time I had a sense that God wanted to use me as an evangelist in the wider community, and I had a strong desire to reach more people.

Out of this desire was birthed the Church in the Park ministry.

We started off at Paul Keating Park in Sydney's Bankstown area in 2002, with the fairly straight-forward approach of taking a worship band and some bar-b-q equipment to the park once a month.

My vision for Church in the Park was simply this – that we would hold outreach events in a park, we would worship, I would preach, and that people would be brought into God's Kingdom.

There was nothing wrong with my vision, except for the word *my*.

After all, God is not interested in MY vision for Church in the Park - God is interested in my becoming conformed to HIS vision for Church in the Park.

We saw many people give their lives to Jesus in the early life of Church in the Park, but in my spirit I knew something was missing, that there was an aspect of our ministry that remained unfulfilled, but I just couldn't put my finger on it.

## **God Releases His Vision**

So, at the beginning of 2003, I sought God through an extended period of prayer and fasting for my ministry, and I began to become aware that there was more to what God wanted for us at Church in the Park than just a traditional church outreach.

So that's the background, and now I'd like to tell you about the vision God has given me for Church in the Park.

God speaks to us in many different ways – sometimes it can be an impression that forms in your mind, it can be through a prophetic word given by another

believer, sometimes it can be God's voice speaking clearly to your heart, and at other times God can speak to us through dreams and visions. At all times, if I feel like I have heard from God about something, I endeavour to wait on Him for confirmation, and of course whatever I feel God is saying to me has to line up with the Word of God – the final authority.

Now *vision* is a word that can be bandied about pretty loosely, but *it's in the way God confirmed the vision* that I knew without a shadow of a doubt what God has called us to. That confirmation has enabled me to persevere with Church in the Park over a long period of time, often in the face of great difficulties.

The vision that the Holy Spirit gave me can be summarised as this – Church in the Park is an evangelistic ministry, but beyond that God has called us to a ministry of reconciliation - people who have lost contact with their faith being reconciled to Him, and brought back into fellowship with other believers – restored into their faith.

It came to me as a series of very strong impressions as I prayed and fasted, and as this began to form in my mind, I really began to question it. After all, how does a simple evangelistic outreach become a ministry of reconciliation? Was this really God speaking to me? I felt completely out of my depth.

And so I sought the Lord further, asking Him for confirmation of what He was showing me.

### **A Reminder from the Past**

As I continued to seek the Lord, he reminded me of something that happened in my life of a very personal nature, and then He showed me by a miraculous confirmation that this vision was real, and not something of my own making or imagination.

To give you some background, I was brought up in a Christian family, and from the age of 8 until 14 or 15 I sang in the choir of a church in one of the major denominations.

There was a close friend of mine who also sang in the choir who I will call Simon. There was also a man involved in this environment, in a position of authority within the church, who was a paedophile, and when I was about 12, this man molested me.

The damage done to me went on to manifest itself in many ways, including my rebellion against God, and eventually in heroin and cocaine addiction.

On the scale of abuse, the extent of that molestation was fairly minor, but others in my circle of friends were not so fortunate.

My friend Simon suffered greatly because of this man, and was so traumatised by what was done to him, that at the age of 15 he attempted suicide by trying to hang himself in the garage of his family's home.

His parents took him out of school, and that was the last anyone I knew heard from him.

By this point, you're probably wondering what this ugly story has got to do with Church in the Park.

I myself was very troubled when the Lord took me back through this sequence of events. These are things that I dealt with over a long period of time after I came back to the Lord, and I praise God that the extent of my healing is such that it does not trouble me to share this with you.

As these memories began to unfold in my mind, I asked the Lord what He was trying to show me, and so the Lord began to show me His vision for Church in the Park, that He wanted Church in the Park to not only reach the lost, but to draw people back into relationship with Jesus, back into fellowship with other believers, being reconciled to God, and restored into the place God designed for them in the body of Christ.

That people who had left the Church, because of offenses, because of being wronged, because of physical, sexual or mental abuse, would be brought back to the Lord through Church in the Park.

This whole concept was completely foreign to any idea I might have had for our ministry.

So finally, I decided that if this was indeed from the Lord, then I needed a confirmation from Him, and I put out a fleece before Him.

I said to the Lord "Lord, if this is you, then I need you to confirm this to me in a way that can only be considered miraculous. That every time I question what we're doing and why, that I will be able to remember the miraculous confirmation you created for me."

### **God Confirms His Vision**

The very next day, between church services on a Sunday, I got a phone call. It was my friend Simon from the choir. Remember, I had not spoken to this man since I was 15 years old.

Just think of this - 28 years since I had heard from this man, and the very next day after I asked God for confirmation of a vision He gave me that included this man, and the sort of abuse that God has called or ministry to bring healing to, and *the man himself calls me*.

He told me that the day before, he was talking to his fiancée, and they were talking about his upbringing and somehow my name came up as being a friend of his from school, and he got to wondering about what might have happened to me, so he searched through the phone directories until he found my name, and decided to call me.

We talked for a while, and it turns out that since leaving the church where we had been part of the choir, he'd never been a member of any church. His faith was completely dead.

We talked for a while, he asked me about what I was doing, whether I was still involved in music, and I shared some of my testimony, and told him about Church in the Park, and then I invited him to the next Church in the Park.

He came along, and he turned up right as I was sharing about what God had done for me in healing me of all the shame of the things that had happened in my past.

The funny thing is he talked to my sister, he talked to our church's senior pastor, it seems he talked to a number of people, all except me.

He left before the end of the event, and despite my attempts since to contact him, I have not been able to talk to him since. He didn't return my calls, and I lost touch with him.

At first this was a great disappointment to me, but then I realized what must have happened – He wasn't ready to confront the things in his past that had caused such trauma - my testimony of healing brought the past back into focus for him, and I believe that God has begun the process that will draw Simon back to Him.

What a confirmation!

Even when we temporarily had to stop Church in the Park and then re-establish it in a different location, waiting for government permissions for the use of the parks where we hold Church in the Park, raising funds for equipment, waiting for people to help, I have held tightly to the extraordinary vision God has given us, and the extraordinary way He confirmed it.

I believe that Church in the Park is a ministry commissioned by God to reach the lost, to bring healing to those who have lost their way and left their relationship with God, and to restore their relationship with Christ and with other believers – God's Church.

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