

Your Kingdom Come

PART 3: 'THE GATE OF HEAVEN'

Genesis 28:10-13,16

"Now Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Haran. So he came to a certain place and stayed there all night, because the sun had set. And he took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head, and he lay down in that place to sleep.

Then he dreamed, and behold, a ladder was set up on the earth, and its top reached to heaven; and there the angels of God were ascending and descending on it ... (v.16) Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it."

I want to talk about this last statement before we go back and look at Jacob's encounter with God. 'Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it.' I remember several years ago I printed those words and stuck them at the top of the pulpit where I preached every week. I also printed them on small pieces of paper and gave them to all the members of my congregation and asked them to put them in their bibles or on their fridge or at work somewhere obvious. I wanted us all to be constantly reminded how we can miss the Lord when He is at work in our midst.

Throughout my ministry I have seen this happen so many times. I can be preaching and I see the Holy Spirit turning people inside out as the Lord ministers powerfully to them but in the middle of that is a person who is thinking about what they will have for lunch or whether they will get home in time to watch the footy match! How can that happen?

Well of course we know that the Spirit of God works differently in different people and at different times and so it's not uncommon to see some people impacted more than others. But I am not talking about that specific dynamic. I am talking about our general awareness of the Lord at all times. How can we be so disconnected when clearly God is at work among us? I believe God is always at work among us but we don't know it most of the time. Why?

Well after more than 40 years in front-line ministry I think I have the answer. Our awareness of the kingdom of heaven and the work of the Lord in our midst and even in our own lives is proportional to our hunger and our desire for God. It's not rocket science – it's just how we humans work. *Hunger helps perception and the absence of hunger impedes perception.*

You are seldom going to find what you're not hungry for in the kingdom of heaven.

"Surely the Lord is in this place, and I did not know it." Why did I not know it? Because I was not looking for the Lord. I was not focussed on Him and His kingdom. I was not hungry for His presence and His active involvement in what was happening around me. Hunger helps perception.

Why do you think the prostitutes, the tax collectors and the wicked people in Jesus' day all knew who He was? They were aware of their need and had a hunger for change. But the religious leaders were utterly clueless because they were satisfied with the knowledge and religious power they had. They were not aware of their personal need and therefore they were not looking for God. They had no hunger for Him and therefore no perception of His presence – even when He was standing right in front of them! But even the greatest sinners of Jesus' day and today live with a consciousness of their need for something different in their life and that hunger increases their capacity to see.

Brothers and sisters, we can pray *"Your kingdom come"* all we like but unless that prayer is accompanied by a hunger, a deep desire and longing for God's presence and power in our lives, in our families, in our Church and in our nation, we won't see the God's kingdom unleashed around us.

Genesis 28:16 *(Jacob said) "Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it." And he was afraid and said, "How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God, and this is the gate of heaven!" (Then verse 19). And he called the name of that place Bethel ..." (And 'Bethel' means 'house of God.')*

Now this term Jacob uses, *'The House of God'* is mentioned a number of times in the Bible in different contexts. We know that in the New Testament we are the house of God but the first mention of *'The House of God'* in the Bible is right here. It's called a *'house'* but there's no building. Of course we know now that the building is not the house of God - the people are the dwelling place of the Spirit of God - we are the house of God. But in this verse, there's no building or people. There's just one guy sleeping on a rock and when he discovers God is there he says, *"This is awesome . . . this is God's house!"* But the thing that I want you to really grasp here is his description of the house of God. He says, *"This is none other than the house of God, this is the gate of heaven."*

The gate of heaven. Now we all know what a gate is. A gate is a transition place. At our house, we have a gate that takes us from the backyard to the front yard. Perhaps at your house there's a gate that takes you from your front yard - from private property to public property. So a gate is a transition place where you go from one realm to another realm. So the Bible describes the house of God as a gate – but not just any gate – this is *the gate of heaven*.

OK let's jump back for a minute – way back! Before man was created, there was a fall in heaven. Lucifer was booted out of heaven because of his desire to be worshipped and somehow he ended up on planet earth. Planet earth ends up becoming the kingdom over which Satan rules. Now it's important that we understand Satan is the ruler of this world – that is how he is described many times in the Bible. In 1 John 5 we are told that the whole world lies in the power of the devil. You will remember when Satan confronted Jesus in the wilderness at the beginning of the Lord's ministry he offered Jesus all the kingdoms of this world. He could only do that if they were his to give.

So from the very beginning, before mankind was even created, Satan ruled this world. You may remember when Satan challenged God in the book of Job, that conversation begins with God asking Satan, *"Where have you come from?"* Satan answered and said, *"From going to and fro on the earth, and from walking up and down on it."* (Job 1:7). Peter picks on that image when he wrote many years later, *"Be sober minded; be watchful, Your adversary the devil roams the earth like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour."* (1 Peter 5:8). So right in the middle of this kingdom of darkness, right in the middle of Satan's domain, God chose to plant a garden because He wanted to raise up a people made in His image, who were worshipers by choice to overthrow this kingdom of darkness.

Now all of that is the backdrop for this Genesis passage where we have this picture of the house of God as the gate of heaven. Through this gate we have angels ascending and descending. They ascend because they're finished with an assignment; they descend because they have a new assignment in God's quest to overthrow the ruler of this world.

This picture of the house of God is important to us. The various *'houses of God'* in the Bible all had a significant purpose. They illustrated something. For example, the presence of the Lord rested on the Tabernacle of Moses, but the Tabernacle of Moses was not a picture of the Church as some may think.

It was a picture of Jesus Who was coming to die for the world and establish the Church. It had an altar of sacrifice; the washing of the water, the Word of God, the candlestick, the showbread – Jesus is the bread of life and the light of the world - incense, the great intercessor etc. Everything there pointed to Jesus.

The house that spoke about you and me is this one here in Genesis 28 and yet there's no description whatsoever except to say that God was present and wherever God is present, the kingdom of heaven is present. Think about that: wherever God is present, there's an open heaven. Which reminds me of this verse:

John 1:14 *“And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.”*

The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. This truly is amazing. The Word of God became flesh and dwelt among us. The word ‘dwelt’ here is literally translated as ‘tabernacled.’ So the Word of God became flesh and became a tabernacle among us. The tabernacle is the dwelling place of God. Let me unpack this some more. Stay with me here - this is really important.

Now I am sure you already know that the Holy Spirit lived in Jesus when He walked the earth. Yes? Of course He did. When Jesus was baptised, heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descended upon Him and remained on Him. But I wonder if you ever thought about the fact that during those three and half years of Jesus’ earthly ministry, the Holy Spirit did not live in anybody else on the planet. He couldn't, because no one was born again yet. Only Jesus was without sin so the Spirit of God lived in Him and rested upon Him.

So it says that He is the word of God made flesh. And now the Spirit of God in Jesus has tabernacled among men. Jesus would later describe this to the disciples when He said, “... *the Holy Spirit that is with you will be in you.*” (John 14:17). He's referring to the fact that the Spirit of God was abiding *with* them, to help direct them, to empower their ministry, but the Spirit was not yet residing *in* them. That couldn't happen until their sin was atoned for - which couldn't happen until Jesus died. Let me jump towards the end of John 1. At this point in time Jesus is the house of God, the dwelling place of God on the earth, and He has this encounter with a guy named Nathaniel.

John 1:47-48 *“Jesus saw Nathanael coming toward Him, and said of him, “Behold, an Israelite indeed, in whom is no deceit!” Nathanael said to Him, “How do You know me?” Jesus answered and said to him, “Before Philip called you, when you were under the fig tree, I saw you.”*

So Jesus has this vision, this word of knowledge where the Holy Spirit shows him this guy sitting under the tree. And so He tells Nathaniel. Well, as you can imagine, this certainly gets Nathaniel's attention.

John 1:49-51 *“Nathanael answered and said to Him, “Rabbi, You are the Son of God! You are the King of Israel! Jesus answered and said to him, “Because I said to you, ‘I saw you under the fig tree,’ do you believe? You will see greater things than these.” And He said to him, “Most assuredly, I say to you, hereafter you shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man.”*

What did the Genesis ‘House of God’ have? An open Heaven with angels of God ascending and descending and the voice of the Lord came forth. It was the manifest abiding presence of God in that location. What did Jesus have? The same thing, an open Heaven, angels ascending and descending and the voice of the Father.

Why? Because the house of God is the gate of heaven. It is the gate between two worlds, two kingdoms, the gate that allows one kingdom to influence the other. If we choose to live each day with a deep awareness of this reality, then we can partner with the Lord much more intentionally in His mission.

So now we live with this constant conflict or tension between these two kingdoms, these two existing realities: the kingdom of heaven and the kingdom of this world. The key question here is this: where is your primary focus? If your primary focus each day is on the kingdom of this world, then the Kingdom of Heaven will be a blur in the background at best. But if your primary focus is always on the Kingdom of Heaven, then how you live and move and have your being in the kingdom of this world will be radically impacted. In that very first glimpse we have of our purpose on earth, Jacob said, *"This is the house of God –the gate of heaven."* Centuries later, this side of the cross of Christ, we are the House of God – we are the gate of heaven. If you choose to live every day conscious of that truth, it does something to the way you think and the choices you make.

You will always promote and live in the reality of the kingdom of which you are most aware and upon which you are more focussed.

Jesus lived with an awareness of unlimited supply because He was focussed on a world that has no end, no restriction. Drawing from that world is what enabled Him to face every challenge with an answer and a solution. Jesus embodied the picture that God gave Jacob all those years ago – He became the gate of heaven and then He passed the baton to you and me.

The Apostle Paul captures this in Colossians 3 when he says, *"We are seated in heavenly places in Christ."* What Jesus did for you and for me, was to clear the way so that we are now without excuse. We now have access - not through travail, not through much labour - we have free access to the King and His kingdom, every moment of every day, because we live as a gate, to release the reality of His world into this world – to release heaven on earth.

Brothers and sisters, the more you focus on the reality of the kingdom of heaven, the more you will be able to release the dominion of the King on this earth. The more you focus on what Jesus Christ has already secured for you in the kingdom of heaven, the more you will be able to bring that power, that victory and that reality into this world, into this nation, into this community, into this Church, into your family and into your life!

Ok then, here is the knockout punch in all of this. Are you ready? So Jesus comes along as a man, He's the house of God, He is the dwelling place of God on earth, but then He does something outrageous. He turns to you and me and says, *"Tag, you're in. You are now the house of God!"* He says, *"I am the light of the world,"* then He says, *"You are the light of the world."* He does all these amazing things everywhere He goes and then says, *"Even greater things than this will you do!"* He passes the baton to his people and says *"Here, my assignment is now your assignment. As the Father has sent me - I am sending you."*

Now there is a lot to chew on in this sermon and so I really encourage you once again to use the resources we provide and go back and spend some time working through this teaching at your pace, stopping where you need to and letting the Spirit of God answer your questions and give you a clearer vision of who you are in Christ and how you should live as a citizen of two kingdoms and as the gate between those kingdoms.

Let me wrap this up with the Readers Digest version. Here's a dot point summary.

- Genesis 28. Jacob is asleep on a rock and God shows up. Jacob declares, *“This is the house of God, the gate of heaven.”* Without knowing it, he foreshadows what is to come.
- Isaiah 64 – the people of God cry out day after day, *“Oh that you would rend (tear open) the heavens and come down.”*
- Almost a thousand years later Jesus steps out of heaven into the womb of a Jewish teenager and becomes human. When it was time for His Kingdom ministry to begin, God answered that prayer in Isaiah 64. As Jesus rose from the waters of baptism, heaven was torn open and the Spirit of God, the presence of God descended upon Jesus and remained on Him, as a man, throughout His ministry. For the first time in our human history, the Kingdom of heaven was opened to the kingdom of this world and it remained open from that day forward. For the first time in history the presence of God ‘tabernacled’ or dwelt within a human being.
- Jesus then spent the next three and half years releasing the kingdom of heaven on earth. Wherever He went, the reality of heaven broke loose on earth. The sick were healed, the lost were found, the dead were raised, the blind could see, the deaf could hear, the lame could dance. What was true in heaven became true on earth as Jesus opened the gate of heaven wherever He went.
- Then when Jesus completed His mission with His death and resurrection, He stood before humanity and said, *“Tag, you’re in!”* Well, what He actually said was, *“As the Father has sent me, so I am sending you.”* Then He breathed on us and said, *“Receive the Holy Spirit.”*
- Now we have the presence of God and the mission of Christ. Now we are called, commissioned and empowered to be the gate of heaven on earth. Now it is we who get to say, *“How awesome is this place! ... Surely the Lord is in this place and I did not know it.”*

Kingdom of God, come. Will of God, be done! Amen.