

# The House of God and the Gate of Heaven

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[ 0 : 00 ] I'm going to sing to God's praise from Psalm 27, Psalm 27 from verse 4 to the double verse marked 6.

One thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain, that all days of my life I may within God's house remain, that I the beauty of the Lord behold me and admire.

And that I in his holy place me reverently inquire. For he in his pavilion shall me hide in evil days, in secret of his tent me hide, and on a rock me raise.

And now even at this present time mine head shall lifted be, above all those that have my foes and round encompass me. Therefore unto his tabernacle I'll sacrifice his spring.

Of joyfulness I'll sing, yea I to God will praise his sing. These verses 4 to 6 and Psalm 27.

[ 1 : 11 ] One thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain. One thing I of the Lord desired and will seek to obtain.

that all days of my life I may within God's eyes remain, that I the beauty of the Lord be behold me and admire.

And that I in his holy place may rarely inquire.

For he in his pavilion shall be hide in evil days, in secret of all of his tent me hide.

And on our own may raise. And now even at this present time mine head shall lift it be, above all the world.

[ 3 : 28 ] sports that have done my foes, above all the world.

the spring of trifle let us sing yea I to God will praise us sing I'd like us to turn again to Genesis chapter 28 and we can read again at verse 10 Genesis 28 at verse 10 and Jacob went out from Beersheba and went toward Aaron and he lighted upon a certain place and tarried there all night because the sun was set and he took of the stones of that place and put them for his pillows and lay down in that place to sleep and he dreamed and behold a ladder set up on the earth and the top of it reached to heaven and behold the angels of

God ascending and descending on it and behold the Lord stood above it and said I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father and the God of Isaac and the land wherein they liest to thee will I give it unto thy seed and thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth and thou shalt spread abroad to the west and to the east and to the north and to the south and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed and so on we indicated last Thursday evening that it was my intention to look with you at some random selections of scripture where we come face to face with God in his glory and it's a very wide topic a very difficult topic to pin down in many respects because it suggests a great many things to us

I'm sure but what we hopefully encounter in our study of these passages is something that will give us a glimpse of a glorious God in his passion in his work for his people and in his people and the various occasions when he comes face to face with them theologians of course are the right to remind us that the glory of God is not something that we can see in many respects because his glory is such that we are incapable of comprehending it

Professor Foonnessen writes the following no human eye can see or comprehend the full glory of the divine nature we cannot see it because we are creatures confronted by the creator and the creator only reveals what he is pleased to reveal and it is a mercy that he doesn't reveal his glory in all its fullness because our sinful fallen creatures we are incapable of meeting with him in that sense if we think of the person of the Lord Jesus Christ the Apostle

[ 8 : 55 ] John in his gospel reminds us in that gospel that the divine glory was veiled in human flesh and he repeatedly draws attention to that fact that Jesus the Son of God came in own nature but at the same time he says we beheld his glory as the glory of the only begotten of the Father now what exactly he means by that we can determine from what he has written but clearly he doesn't mean us to understand that everything that can be known about the glory of

God was discovered in those who encountered the Lord Jesus in the flesh if we think for example of the occasion in the garden when Jesus was about to be arrested and those who came to arrest him confronted him face to face and asked him the question are you the Christ he asked them whom seek who are you looking for and they informed them that they were looking for the Christ and all he said to them was I am he and in John's gospel we read that they fell back upon these words being uttered now if you read the various comments on that statement there are differences of opinion as to why that was so some are of the conviction that at that moment

John was communicating to us that what took place was a theophany in the sense that at that moment those who confronted Jesus were made aware in some way that this was God before them albeit veiled in human flesh now there's a complication in trying to unravel their thinking on that and perhaps some are saying that it was John's intention in bringing this truth to attention that the God man was indeed there and at that split moment when he said I am he that they glanced the unveiled glory of the son of man I don't think that would be possible when the

Lord as we saw last week spoke to Moses he put him in the cleft of the rock and he told him that he would hide him there until he passed by he saw his back parts whatever that means itself is a mystery but our focus this evening is upon another patriarch last week we spoke just a few thoughts on the person of Abraham and tonight we're looking at this episode in the life of another of the patriarchs Jacob and I'm sure you will be aware and if you have read anything about Jacob he is somebody who divides opinion because of his own nature and we have to guard against some of the opinions that are voiced concerning him that are not fully based upon scripture what we do know is that

Jacob was somebody that God was working in his life from a very early age he was at work in his life and we do know from the way that God worked in his life that Jacob came to know more about God as God worked with him there are elements to his character that are not to be envied or to be emulated in any way we know that he took advantage of the blindness of his father to gain the blessing that was meant for his brother he took advantage of his brother's worthiness in order to gain the birthright that his brother was entitled to whose name means supplanter whose name suggests something of his human nature that it was not as it should be but

[ 14 : 51 ] God gave him another name God met with him and spoke with him and made him a prince in Israel and gave him a name that suggested that he had power with God now at the point that we encounter Jacob here in the scripture he is actually on the run from Esau his brother although his father has told him and his mother has encouraged his father to speak these words to him he has sent him away from home to find a wife that would not be offensive to his father but he is in danger from Esau and the journey that he is on is the journey that takes them to this place where he is to have an encounter with

God and it is that encounter with God that we're wanting to think about very briefly this evening we know the story is quite simple in many respects it's a very easy story to follow but what goes on within this story is harder to take in we read that as Jacob slept that he dreamt and what he saw and what he heard as he dreamt shows us that it wasn't an ordinary dream sometimes our dreams are very vivid sometimes they remain with us in the cold light of day they come and some elements of it are remembered by us most often when the day comes the dreams begin to disappear and our memory often becomes vague but for

Jacob that was not the way it was he had a very powerful recollection of all that he saw and all that he heard and he was able to record it for us and rehearse it so that it would be recorded there are elements to it that make us ask questions about what exactly he was seeing and why he was seeing it he saw a ladder set up on the earth and most commentators suggest that the word ladder there is an inadequate description of what actually was seen by Jacob that it's probably the closest thing to it is a form of stairway that goes from the ground to the heavens but he saw on the stair angels ascending and descending now that itself is something that makes you think that what

Jacob was saying was extraordinary if you were to tell the story and in your story we'll talk about the angels the origin of the angels surely is in heaven and not on earth and yet when Jacob remembers what he saw he saw the angels going up and coming down rather than coming down and going up which would be the natural order of things who but along with that he saw he says he saw the God that was his God and he doesn't tell us how he knew who God was in that sense because he tells us it was the Lord stood above this stair and God doesn't have an image that he could recognize he doesn't have a face that he could say that's the face of God but there was something about the passion of God as he spoke to him that convinced him that it was the Lord that was speaking to him the Lord alone was able to communicate the truth that came to Jacob I am the Lord God of Abraham thy father and the God of Isaac and so on and it wasn't simply because of the vision although the vision is essential to what took place but the vision accompanied with the voice of God and the truth of God that was uttered by God and even if you accept that God was present there are questions to be asked about why he was present in such a way not a lot is made of what Jacob sees but everything is made of what he hears because as God speaks to him as he speaks to him he is reminding him of the covenant promises that had already been delivered to Abraham and that earlier on in this passage that Isaac had reiterated to him in verse 4 verses 3 and for God Almighty bless thee and make thee fruitful and multiply thee that thou mayest be a multitude of people and give thee the blessings of Abraham to thee to thy seed with thee that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger which God gave unto Abraham so what he is what he has heard his father state to him by way of blessing the Lord God speaks to him and reminds him and reminds him of these covenant blessings that he and he alone was able to confer and was able to fulfill but we have further confirmation

of the significance of what Jacob heard even though itself that confirmation itself is mind-boggling in the application that we find given to it because in the New Testament when you read in John's Gospel of the selection of the disciples and the account is given to us of Christ's encounter with Nathaniel which is very detailed reference is made to this encounter of Jacob's with the Lord in the wilderness we can read that passage Nathanael said unto Jesus can there any good thing come out of Nazareth

[ 23 : 38 ] Philip saith unto him this is Philip speaking to Nathanael Philip invites him to come and see and Jesus saw Nathanael coming to him and saith unto him behold an Israelite indeed in whom is no guile these words themselves are significant and Israelite indeed in whom there is no guile I think that there is more than a passing hint there of the origin of Jacob or Israel who was full of guile but this was Jesus' comment on Nathanael Nathanael said unto him whence knowest thou me Jesus answered and said unto him before that Philip called thee when thou wast unto the fig tree I saw thee Nathanael answered and saith unto him

Rabbi thou art the son of God thou art the king of Israel Jesus answered and said unto him because I said unto thee I saw thee under the fig tree believest thou thou shalt see greater things than these and he saith unto him verily verily I say unto you hereafter ye shall see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the son of man now the Lord was clearly there referring to this passage in the book of Genesis and he refers to it exactly as it is written it's not a misprint in the sense that you in the sense that you would expect the angels to descend and ascend Jesus markedly refers to the same thing and he reminds him of the glory of what was seen by Jacob as a glory that will be fulfilled in the experience of Nathanael and a greater glory still than the former glory that was witnessed by the

Old Testament saint now John Calvin in his opinion says that this stair to heaven symbolises the person of the Lord Jesus Christ that he and he alone is the only means of communication that we have with heaven it is through him that we are able to go to heaven he is the way the truth and the life and you could easily believe that what Jesus is wanting Nathanael to understand and what the Bible wishes us to understand as we read of the encounter that Jacob has with God albeit by way of mission that God is teaching a truth concerning the future glory that is yet to be revealed even though there is a glory attached to this encounter with God in the wilderness to quote

Calvin exactly Christ is the medium through which the fullness of all celestial blessings flow to us and through which we in turn ascend to God Christ alone is that now some commentators believe that the vision given to Jacob even though it is a vision given to an Old Testament saint very much at the beginning of the experience of the Old Testament church that he is actually looking towards events that are still to take place that he is looking with an eschatological eye at future glory that is yet to be realised albeit through the person of the Lord Jesus

Christ but crucially for Jacob and for ourselves the words of the Lord which Jacob hears reiterate the promises made to Abraham and the promises are given by God to Abraham in the first instance and Isaac repeats these to his son Professor Kanglish one of the free church commentators writes it would seem that this was the first occasion in which Jacob was recognised directly and personally from heaven as the successor of Abraham and the representative of the chosen seed this midnight transaction is

[ 29 : 28 ] Jacob's former inauguration by God himself into the high and holy position of the child of the promise now Kanglish sees there the experience of Jacob whatever the experiences Jacob had prior to this of God however knowledgeable he was of the nature of God or the role of God in the salvation of sinners the very intelligent he was he was he was not fully aware of who God was or what God's purposes was for the world that's why many people when they look at this passage they speak of this passage in one of two ways they say this is the point at which Jacob experienced conversion this was as

Cantlish says his first encounter that he had with the promises coming to himself from God now it's hard to speak about conversion in the Old Testament particularly at this point because it's not something that is fully addressed at which point a person conversion is not something that is spoken of with the same detail that is spoken of in the New Testament church others would maintain that what we have here is a backslidden Jacob encountering God and God restoring him into the path of obedience to God and I would rather think of it as probably the defining moment in Jacob's experience with regard to an understanding of who

God was it seems that when God spoke to him he was not aware of God's presence, certainly not in the way that he was aware of it following on from what God said. He acknowledged as meant himself.

Jacob awaked out of his sleep and said, surely the Lord is in this place and I knew it not. And he was afraid and said how dreadful is this place. This is none other but the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.

Now what that actually means does it just mean a statement of having gathered more information about the God that he already knew or having come face to face with God in a way that he had never encountered him before.

[ 32 : 45 ] When Jacob awakes his experience is still as vivid. He remembers fully what God said and what he saw.

There is no doubt in his mind as to what he saw. Surely the Lord is in this place he says. It was at night and like I suppose a night like he had never experienced night before and yet from that point on that place was marked in his experience.

You can imagine it tells us you know that he was on this journey and it was not until it was getting dark that he stopped at the place that he stopped.

He lighted it upon a certain place and tarried there all night because the sun was set and he took up the stones of that place and put them for his pillows and lay down in that place to sleep.

You can just think of somebody on a journey and you're determined to continue in your journey but because of the darkness you are hindered from making progress and your awareness of what is around you is limited because of the darkness and yet it is fairly certain that Jacob would remember every facet of his experience including the location which he went on to mark and so as not to remember it.

[ 34 : 34 ] What you can say and what you can understand is this he knew more about God as a result of this than he did before.

What his conclusions are it might not be fully clear what they are or how extensive the sight he had of God was but you can see the deliberate nature of his response to it he consecrates the stone upon which he had slept he used it as a pillow he used he marks it out to commemorate the act of God the words of God and the place of God's activity he pours oil on it to prove that it was a place of significance now whatever else Jacob was he was raised within a home that was a godly home and he knew the significance of worshipping God as God appointed it so any action on his part contrary to that would have been an act of significance on his part that would have not been followed very easily by him so what he does he does in response to the knowledge that he had no gain about God it was an act of worship and he knew better than to worship

God in a way that God did not require of him he had a greater measure of appreciation of who God was at the very least one final thing that we can notice here is you know it's so difficult for you my intention was to mark out occasions in the Bible where the glory of God comes to light and yet so far we've looked at two occasions and it's not something that's highlighted but it is something that is indelibly imprinted in the minds of those who encountered God that God was indeed a God who is glorious because of his activity in their experience because of his words to them that enhanced his glory in their eyes one thing he says in verse 20 what we read is this

Jacob vowed a vow saying if God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go and will give me bread to eat and raiment to put on so that I come again to my father's house in peace then shall the Lord be my God now one thing you can say about that is what Jacob is saying in these words is that he has heard God speak he has listened to what God had to say to him and on the basis of what God has said he is pleading the promises now you would think by reading these words that Jacob is more or less bargaining with God he is he seems to be suggesting that what he does is conditional upon what God does as if he is saying to

God well you've said you are going to do this and if you do this then I will be yourself but I will worship you I will honour you I will do what you say but another possibility is more simple than that that is that that he is saying to God because you have said this it's not if God does this I will do but the the fact that you have said this means that I cannot but do that the American Presbyterian James Murphy says the following it is the thankful acknowledgement of the divine assurance a response of the son to the assurance of the father in other words he is not saying my obedience is conditional upon you doing what you said you would do but because you have said what you are going to do

[ 39 : 41 ] I cannot but be this kind of person that you want me to be so that the promises will be realized just as surely as you have made them I'm sure some of you will have the late Douglas Macmillan's book he's written a book about the life of Jacob wrestling with God and it's well worth rereading it but he remembers in his own experience just to give an example in his own preaching of occasions when he would be early in the morning out on the hill and overwhelmed as it were with the beauty of nature and what he was surveying in it and as he was looking at the beauty that was around him the stillness and the silence would affect him and as he was taken in by the stillness and the silence he would be made to feel in himself all alone and at that point his loneliness would expose him to the presence of

God and as he put it the air around me was made to feel thick with the presence of God it was as if heaven had come down now that is possibly an experience some have had it is probably the experience that Jacob had when God met with him when God spoke with him when God reminded him of promises made to Abraham and to Isaac and through Isaac to himself promises that he probably was not capable of fully comprehending such was the awesome nature of it who can comprehend you know when you think about descendants as many as the stars descendants as many as the sand on the seashore descendants as many as the dust of the ground

God was speaking of a power like no other that could make such a promise and bring such a promise to fruition experience the presence of God even in a meager way can fail to be impressed by what God has revealed to us well may God help us to understand something of this awesomeness that filled the heart of Jacob he was he was afraid how dreadful he said is this place none other but the house of God the gate of heaven well we need experiences like that in our own lives

God bless his word to us let us pray Lord oh God we give thanks that there were these experiences recorded for us in the lives of the saints of the Old Testament and those who came face to face with a God who was indescribable and you are such a God and we give thanks that you have reminded us afresh through your word that you are high and lifted up and that your glory fills eternity forgive our sins and pardon us in Jesus name amen going to conclude singing from psalm 111 we'll sing in gaelic the last two verses of the psalm psalm 111 verses 9 to 10 psalm 111 psalm 111 psalm 111 psalm 111 psalm 111 psalm 111

Thank you.

[ 45 : 57 ] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you. Amen. Thank you.