

Heaven Opened

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[0 : 0 0] Now for a short time this morning let's turn to John chapter 1 and we're going to look at the last verse of this chapter. It's part of the meeting of Jesus with Nathanael but we're focusing mostly on what he has to say in the final verse as he spoke to Nathanael there.

And Jesus said to him, truly, truly I say to you, and that you is actually plural rather than singular so you can see that it's being addressed not just to Nathanael but in John's recollection of it as he wrote this, certainly it was you plural.

In other words to the whole of God's people, to his disciples, to those who were followers of Christ. Truly, truly I say to you, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Now this obviously takes us back to Genesis. It takes us back to a dream that Jacob had. In Genesis 28 you have that recorded. Jacob on his journey as he slept he had this dream of a ladder which really would have been steps rather than what we would associate as a ladder nowadays.

But it would have been steps leading up to heaven. The Lord standing above it. And on these steps, on this ladder that joined heaven and earth, the angels of God were ascending and descending upon it.

[1 : 3 3] And then the Lord followed that with a promise to Jacob that he would be his God, that he would look after him, that he would establish his covenant with him.

And Jacob then made a promise to God as well. And in this passage in John, it's very interesting that Nathanael is first of all spoken about by Jesus as an Israelite indeed, in whom there is no deceit or guile.

Jacob was named Israel by God. Remember that was after he wrestled with the angel that God gave him this name.

You shall no longer be called Jacob but Israel, a prince with God. And that is something that you have to take account of when you have here Nathanael, if you like, is the ideal disciple.

The whole idea of being an Israelite, being the kind of person Jacob was not, because Jacob was a schemer.

[2 : 3 7] Jacob was deceitful in some ways, although he was a man of God. But to bring us into the ideal discipleship, Jesus is saying of Nathanael, this is an Israelite indeed, who is without deceit, without guile.

He's open, he's transparent, but especially he comes to make a confession of Jesus as the Son of God and the King of Israel.

That's the ideal disciple. That's what discipleship is about. That's what fulfills the name Israel. Somebody who has come to confess openly Jesus being God, the Son of God, and being the King of Israel.

And then Jesus went on to speak to him and say, where you will see greater things than these. I say to you, truly, truly, you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

Now you go back to Jacob and the incident there. And in chapter 28, Jacob, of course, then said, in regard to that incident, surely the Lord is in this place.

[3 : 49] 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. And that, I think, especially is what links that incident with what Jesus is saying here to Nathanael.

And Jacob was naming that place the house of God, the gate of heaven. What is the house of God? The house of God is his temple. The house of God is the Bible's word for where God is met with his, where God meets with his people, where they meet with him.

And where he is worshipped, the house of God. That's what Jacob was really saying. This has become the temple of God. This spot on earth is sacred because here God and I have met.

This is where the link between heaven and earth is established. This is the house of God. This is the gate of heaven. And Jesus is saying to Nathanael, you will see heaven open and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man.

In other words, in Jesus, something wonderful is happening. In Jesus, connection with heaven, if you like, is being reestablished.

[5 : 06] Heaven is being reopened through the work of Christ. So that what sin had brought about is reversed. And as we'll see, the closure of heaven has come to be overcome by the work of Christ as the Son of Man.

We'll see something of the meaning of that, that it includes this idea, this matter of Jesus as he there is, as the servant of God. And as someone who is going to be here is something of Christ as the Lord as the Son of Man.

And as someone who is going to give his life by his death on the cross for his people.

he's the one who has come to establish this great connection between or re-establish it between God in heaven and his people on earth and it's in the person of Jesus who is himself the ladder the steps the way the access to God that's what Nathaniel is being told by Christ so let's look first of all at heaven opened then we'll look at heavenly traffic as he mentions the angels ascending and descending on the son of man heaven opened now in order to understand that you have to go back to heaven closed heaven here stands pretty much the same thing as what God said to Jacob or what Jacob said about about the place this is the house of God this is the gate of heaven the temple of God because the heaven opened here really is our access to God where God is where

God resides in his glorious presence where where angels and glorified souls worship him all of that as you associated with especially God himself and our access to him is what's meant and that of course came to be closed to us when Adam sinned against God we all know the connection between Adam and ourselves that Adam is a covenant head who represented all of mankind as descendants apart from Jesus and in that when Adam fell mankind fell with him that's abundantly obvious throughout the Bible you go to especially to Paul's writings where he discusses and talks about the Jesus as the last Adam and where you find that he has the covenant head of his people has actually overcome and reversed what the first covenant head did by bringing ruin upon mankind so you and I were in Adam and you and I would not have done any different any better than Adam it's so vital for us that we understand that these opening chapters of Genesis are not fairy tales they're not things which you can just regard as mythology they are actually God telling us this is how things came about so that things are as they are with human lives with human beings with human actions with human responsibility with human relationships to God this is how it came about man rebelled man actually kicked aside God's rules and God's laws and just as God had said brought in death now you remember how Genesis 3 describes in verse 24 Adam and Eve being ejected from the garden and it doesn't use mild language it says that God drove out the man he drove out mankind from the garden and he placed there at the east cherubim and a flaming sword cherubim are kind of mysterious beings they're described in different parts of the Bible but we'll see they very much fit into what you have here with regard to Christ being the person who's overcome for his people this ejection this closure of heaven come back to the cherubim and the flaming sword if you think of the cherubim and they're not exactly the same as angels but cherubim in the Bible we can kind of simplify it in a bit if we say that they appear always associated with the holiness of God they're the ones in Isaiah's vision in chapter 6 who exclaim holy holy holy holy holy is the Lord the Lord of hosts so you could say that cherubim in the Bible are something like if you can use the word guardians of the holy place and because the holy place then was Eden and because now man is driven out of that due to the sin and the rebellion and the death that's come upon him he doesn't belong in the holy place anymore he doesn't belong in this heaven on earth where he was placed to begin with he's been driven out by God and the guardians of the holy place come into view they guard re-entrance along with a flaming sword which is really representative of

[10 : 59] God's law enforcement God's law enforcement means basically the penalty of the law is death if you actually try to come and keep the law yourself you're going to die the death penalty is what the law pronounces man has broken that law all of that is built into that description of man being driven from the garden of Eden the holy place is closed heaven's gates are shut man has been driven out the guardians along with the flaming sword are placed there just as a visible representation of what is now the case that holy place is closed off it cannot be re-occupied as things are by the man that God has driven out something else needs to happen something major something drastic something that deals with what's happened in a way that comes to restore the favor of God instead of his displeasure and his condemnation and that's really what Nathaniel is being told that what happened in Adam has been reversed in Christ you shall see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man before we see heaven opened we have to actually just in a word look at this title for Jesus the son of man because it's important in this context what we understand by that title because only Jesus used it apart from the testimony of Stephen just as he was about to die in the book of Acts he said

I see heaven opened and the son of man standing at the right hand of God it was always Christ who used this title about himself and if you look at all the instances in the gospels where Jesus referred to himself I know he doesn't explicitly say I am the son of man but it's obvious the way he uses it that he's talking about himself that he's describing himself and the way he uses it it's always associated with him being the servant with him being in a state of lowliness and with him in fact being a sufferer unto death in other words the son of man is a title you cannot detach from Christ as as in his obedience providing an atonement for sin and if you look at the son of man it's not just some people think you see that the son of man is a description for Jesus in his humanness whereas the son of God is a description for Jesus in his Godhood or in his deity but it's not as simple as that it's not just that kind of distinction it's more than just his humanness that's described in this phrase the son of man when you look at all the instances of it and it's always interesting to get a concordance out look at the number of verses where this phrase is used and just look at each of them in each context and you'll see that as you combine all that together the meaning of the son of man is three things basically that the son of God has become human yes his humanness is included in it it's involved in it but so too is the fact that he's acting as the last Adam or the second Adam and so too is that he's doing so in the way of a servant in the way of suffering heaven is so reopened the heaven that through Adam was closed it's reopened through the son of man as the last Adam and through him taking our nature to the son of God becoming the son of man and in that as a servant laying down his life making an atonement dealing with our sin so that God may reopen heaven to us isn't it interesting that heaven was closed through the first Adam's proud arrogant disobedience in other words the first Adam you could say in that sin was characterized in his proud rebellion by looking upwards above his station listening to the words of the serpent in whom Satan was obviously present where he said you shall be like God to know good and evil if you eat this what God has actually forbidden you and that's what

Adam did he listened to that and sought that elevation of himself upwards above what was proper to him indeed upwards above God himself but the last Adam the second Adam this Jesus the son of man he reopened heaven by the opposite direction by putting himself in the place of a humble servant by coming to give obedience to the will of the father by a downwards process not an upwards one but a downwards one which led to his death so the son of man that's very brief it's a big subject in biblical terms but the son of man describes for us as a title all of these things about Jesus these three features especially his becoming human that's the son of God becoming human his being the last Adam the representative of his people the head of that covenant people and his suffering unto death his abasement his humiliation as an atoning sacrifice so there's heaven's closure and there's the son of man who has come to reopen it for us and that's where heaven is opened for us now it's interesting when you go back and look at the description of the tabernacle which God gave to

Moses and then you read in 2nd Chronicles and other passages the building of the temple which replaced the tabernacle I've given you these references there Exodus 25 22 and then well Exodus 28 should actually that should be Exodus 26 31 to 33 you may want to correct that in your notes it's Exodus 26 31 to 33 and then 2nd Chronicles 3 14 is a description of the temple and what that tells us is particularly about the holy or the most holy place you remember that the tabernacle and then the temple were according to a certain pattern that was set by God you had the outward court then inside that you had the holy place where the priests ministered and then inside that again you had the most holy place where only the high priest was allowed to enter once a year on the day of atonement with the blood of atonement and in that most holy place you remember was what's called the mercy seat with the ark of the covenant and the cherubim above the mercy seat remember they're the guardians of the holy place and that's where God as he said to Moses there is where I will meet with you this is where I will reveal myself to you this is the very heart of God's relationship with his people

God's presence with them it's above the law it's above the mercy seat it's in the place of atonement it's where blood is sprinkled to deal with sin and that's where God is saying I will meet with you and that's why the tabernacle the most holy place and the temple were patterned as God had said now the interesting thing too is there was a heavy curtain separating the most holy place from what was outside and not only did you have cherubim and we don't know exactly what they looked like but they had wings pointing in a certain direction but the cherubim were not just made out of gold and above the mercy seat they were also to be embroidered on the curtain that separated the most holy place from everything around it so cherubim the guardians of the holy place and the most holy place they were features of the curtains features of what was within the most holy place as well and when you come to the gospels and their description of what happened at the death of

[20 : 26] Christ at the moment of his death on the cross what happened many things but one of the most prominent things was this the veil or the curtain of the temple was rent was torn apart in two from the top to the bottom it's almost as if you can say God reached down and took a hold of that curtain and tore it apart and said the guardians need guarded no longer because now there's access into it through the son of man my people can come to me and can come to me directly through him the ministry of salvation in Jesus Christ through his death is actually established and actually accomplished to establish this reopening this re-access to God for sinful human beings like you and I now to go if you take all that with you to the letter to Hebrews

I know we're kind of skipping around a lot of texts and that's always difficult just to follow it and I hope you can do that from the notes afterwards that you can just go over and just follow out these passages in more detail than we can do just now but there's the Exodus and the Chronicles passages the tabernacle the temple the cherubim the curtain the holy place there's Mark chapter 15 for example his version of the death of Christ and the reference to the veil of the temple the curtain being rent being torn apart in two from top to bottom and you take that to Hebrews 9 verses 23 and 24 what does that describe well it describes Jesus entering the holy place the most holy place and by that of course he means heaven itself the presence of God what the tabernacle and the temple were but pictures of or representations of here's the real thing and in that passage you read he didn't just enter with the blood of calves or of bulls such as the high priest in the old testament would he went in with his own blood it's his own death that actually makes atonement it's his own death that deals with the problem of heaven being closed it's his own death that deals with this most holy place that represents

God and his presence and his relationship to us and it's this Jesus himself this son of man in his death particularly that goes in to reopen this for us and that helps us to understand I think more of what John is saying in what John recorded there in John 14 I think I've also given you that reference there in your notes but let not your hearts be troubled believe in God believe also in me is Jesus saying in my father's house are many rooms if it were not so would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you and if I go and prepare a place for you I will come again and will take you to myself that where I am you also may be I'm going to prepare a place for you that's really the same thing as he said to

Nathaniel you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the son of man you will see heaven reopened you will see a place being prepared you will see in my ministry something that God is bringing about to reverse what the first Adam did you will see this reestablishment of heaven and earth connected in Christ himself it's as if you might say let's just think of these cherubim as representing the guardianship of the holy place not that God of course strictly speaking needs anyone to guard anything for him he can do it very well for himself but it's a representation for us to just get something that helps us to understand how important this is to God how important it is that his holy place and his presence can only be entered in a way that meets with his approval and can only be entered by human beings again on the basis of an atonement that's been made to deal with their sin think of how you need a pass nowadays to get entrance to buildings if you're going to a conference or into places of work you need a pass and if you don't belong to the place in an everyday way like for example if you're going to the BBC studios in

Glasgow everybody there has to wear a pass of course just to verify who they are and if you go as a visitor you're given a visitor's pass so that you hang that round your neck on a card and it establishes that you have a right to be there what this is really saying is that for us to re-enter heaven we need a pass the guardians if you like have to examine our pass and God has given us that Christ Christ is our pass because when you come to show it to the cherubim if you like or the guardians of the holy place it's not your face they see on it it's not your credentials it's those of Christ Christ and you are in him and you are accepted because he's accepted and your acceptance is complete because his acceptance is complete and God gives you his full favor because he has his full favor how vital is Jesus how absolutely crucial to your own life personally and mine because without him heaven still flows to us and in him and with him having his credentials while heaven is reopened the traffic of heaven is reestablished and people who are now heirs of glory have access to God through the

[27 : 41] Son of Man heaven was closed we caused that we were responsible for that the Son of Man came as the second Adam to reopen it for us to reestablish relations with God where we would have his favor and his acceptance where sin would be forgiven and we would be cleansed and made holy where heaven is now reopened the cherubim the guardians of the holy place if you like they no longer stand as guardians because the way is now opened in Jesus and you have access in him heavenly traffic then secondly briefly you will see heaven opened and the angels of God ascending and descending on the Son of Man we haven't said much about the angels why does he say angels of God ascending and descending what is this to do with our redemption with our salvation with our relationship with God well this is the same description exactly that's given in Genesis 28 the dream that Jacob had his vision he had in a dream where he saw the angels of God ascending and descending on the

Son of Man we don't know much about the angels but we know as Hebrews again tells us Hebrews 1 verse 14 that they are ministering spirits they are intelligent beings who actually minister as God's servant to what Hebrews 1 14 calls the heirs of salvation those who are heirs of salvation those who are God's people those who are redeemed those who are in Christ those who are Christians those who are saved those who are born again whatever you use words you use from the Bible to describe it this is who is meant they are heirs of salvation and these angels minister to them we're given glimpses in the Bible as to how these intelligent beings how they do minister to us we understand they protect God's people they are an army for their protection you don't see them but they're there God describes them for us in their function and in their ministry in a brief way but there are incidents in the Bible where as in the case of

Elijah for example where his eyes were opened and the eyes of the young man with him to see these thousands and thousands of these beings as God's army and the title that God gives to himself as the Lord of hosts includes the hosts of the angels being his accompanying retinue or sometimes his army that actually are sent out to protect to look after his people angels are involved in the warfare with Satan and the angels who followed him in their fall with the devils the evil angels there's that warfare that we cannot see in the spiritual realm that the Bible again makes reference to angels we also read in the Bible carry the souls of believers into heaven that appears to be one of their functions and all of that reminds us and we should really be amazed at it reminds us of how precious

God's people are to him of course the most obvious evidence of that is that he sent his son to die for them but he also has all of these servants these angels to minister to them to protect to guard to carry their souls to heaven don't ever say as a Christian there's nothing special about me I know you will probably mean that the way we usually mean it there's nothing special about me myself there's nothing special in me I'm just a sinner and I'm a sinner saved by grace of course you are but you are special to God on that very basis that he has in his grace sent a son to die for you given a son to become the son of man for you and looks after you with a myriad of angels who knows how many angels right now in an unseen way are hovering over this assembly this gathering this worship service in this church today because all of you of

God's people have ministering angels ministering to you as heirs of salvation and the traffic that's mentioned here and specifies angels is really I think just the way that it describes this interaction between God's people on earth and God in heaven and how that communication and that interaction and that relationship there's obviously here a picture of constant activity just as it was in Jacob's dream this is a very busy motorway because God and his people are constantly in touch God and his people are constantly engaged in communion with each other it's a two way relationship and the angels fit into that ministry along with the spirit of God of course and God the father and

[33 : 34] God the son they are ascending and descending on the son of man he is the link he is himself the one and whom we have this traffic taking place and you remember that in John 14 the passage we mentioned as just a minute ago with regard to the place that Christ went to prepare for us this heaven to be reestablished again for us remember how that passage goes on Philip says to him how Lord we don't know where you are going how can we know the way Jesus said I am the way and the truth and the life no one comes to the father except through me I am the way I am the ladder I am the steps I am the one the son of man in whom this communication this traffic this interaction this communion this life giving relationship is established ascending and descending on the son of man and it begins with ascending that too might be significant it doesn't say that they are descending and ascending you might expect that because the bible lays so much emphasis on

God taking the initiative that you might think well surely they descended first to earth and then back to heaven to rep to in the ministry that they have for these human beings back to God and so on but it's ascending and descending and remember this is this is talking particularly about this reestablished relationship we have with God and Christ and the emphasis here is what's coming from our side to God through him it is ascending and descending your prayers your worship as it comes from you as it comes from your side that's what's being emphasized for us or to put it again in the words of the writer to the Hebrews because we have this great high priest because we have this reestablishment of the link with heaven and the communication with heaven in a saving way since we then have a great high priest who has passed through the heavens

Jesus the son of God let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace let's come he says right into the most holy place we have access we have the right we have the privilege in him or in the same letter and in the tenth chapter you have another reference very similar to that where you find in chapter 8 and 9 having spoken about the atonement that Christ has made as our high priest now he comes again to draw conclusions from that and here is what he says in chapter 10 verse 19 therefore brothers since we have confidence to enter the holy place by the blood of Jesus by the new and living way that he opened for us through the curtain that is through his flesh how incredibly relevant that is to what he said to

Nathaniel and since we have this great high priest let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith and he draws a few more conclusions from that as well let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith what does that mean it means that you are fully satisfied satisfied with the son of man that you are fully satisfied with what he has done that you are absolutely convinced for your salvation you don't need anything or anyone else than what he is and has done as the son of man for you and that's for our encouragement for our comfort for our assurance because for our assurance we so often go to things like our own faith our exercise of faith our love for the

Lord our obedience our commitment all of these things that's not where our assurance lies our assurance lies in himself that we are absolutely convinced he and he alone is all we need the son of man who opened heaven for his people let's pray Lord we bless you today for that re-establishment of a saving relationship with you through the son of man we thank you that he is real to us today we thank you that you are the one who continues to be the means by which and the root by which that interaction we have with God in heaven has been established and continues we thank you for the ministry that you give to your people we thank you for the ministry of angels as well as your spirit and your word of truth we pray that these may be constant a source of wonder and a source of constant admiration for us of the

[39 : 37] God who has saved us with an everlasting salvation hear us we pray in Jesus name Amen a place God God God God Keep God God God God God And God ■■■■ God■