

## STAIRWAY TO HEAVEN

**Genesis 28:10-22**

**August 8, 2021**

When I was attending the University of Guelph in the early 70's, one of my favorite groups was **Led Zeppelin** and I liked their song that was released in 1971, "*Stairway to Heaven*." This was long before I was saved! The song begins, "*There's a lady who's sure all that glitters is gold, and she's buying a stairway to Heaven. When she gets there, she knows if the stores are all closed with a word, she can get what she came for.*" The song tells a story of a woman who made so much money only to realize, in the end, that her life was meaningless even with all her wealth, and she won't make it to Heaven. The song "*Stairway to Heaven*" is in no way a Christian song, but it brings to our attention the hard truth that true happiness in life derives not from accumulating material possessions but serving a Saviour who came from Heaven to save us from eternal damnation. **Proverbs 14:12** says, "*There is a way that appears right, but in the end it leads to death.*" The point is that we need to be on the right path of life. This message is not about that Stairway to Heaven that the rock group Led Zeppelin sang about, but another Stairway to Heaven found in the Old Testament book of Genesis.

**Genesis 28:10-22**, takes place at Bethel in ancient Israel, involving one of Abraham's grandsons, Jacob. Abraham and Sarah in their old age finally received the miracle son that God had promised to them decades earlier, and they named him Isaac (laughter). Then, this son Isaac marries Rebekah and they have twin sons, Esau and Jacob, and there was a great rivalry between the two of them. The son that was born last Jacob deceived his twin brother Esau twice, the first time he stole his birthright as the firstborn for a meal of lentil stew, and then the second time Jacob deceived his blind father Isaac, at the prompting of his mother Rebekah, to trick his father in to giving him the blessing and rights of the firstborn son. When Esau finds out he lost his blessing, he is out for revenge, so Jacob is sent away to Rebekah's brother Laban to save his life. On his way, Jacob has this dream of a stairway to Heaven revealing angelic activity between Heaven and earth. **Genesis 28:12-14**, "*He had a dream in which he saw a stairway resting on the earth, with its top reaching to Heaven, and the angels of God were ascending and descending on it. There above it stood the Lord, and he said...All peoples on earth will be blessed through you and your offspring.*"

When Jacob awoke, he realized that the Lord was in this place and called this place "*the house of God*," and "*the gate of Heaven*." Names had significant meaning in

Old Testament times, and these two names are very significant to us today as well. Then to remind Jacob of this meeting place with the Lord his God, he took the stone that he had placed under his head as a pillow when he went to sleep that night, and set it up as a memorial pillar, declaring this to God in **verse 22**, ***“and this stone that I have set up as a pillar will be God’s house, and of all you give me I will give you a tenth.”*** This is the first mention of the House of God in Scripture, but you will notice that it wasn’t a building or a temple, but a rock. I believe this is very significant because it reminds me of another occasion when a rock was mentioned by Jesus as *“the house of God.”* Jesus and His disciples traveled to a remote place in northern Israel at the base of Mt Hermon to one of the most ungodly and Satanic places on earth at that time. Here is what Matthews Gospel tell us about that event: **Matthew 16:13-19**, ***“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Messiah, the Son of the living God.’ Jesus replied, ‘Blessed are you, Simon son of Jonah, for this was not revealed to you by flesh and blood, but by my Father in Heaven. And I tell you that you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it. I will give you the keys of the kingdom of Heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven.”***

The rock Jesus refers to here is not Peter, like some may believe, but *“the house of God”* which is built on the Word of God which will prevail for all of eternity. And according to **John 1:1** the Word was present at the time of creation, ***“In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.”*** And then a few verses later, **verse 14**, John declares that Word is Christ, ***“The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us and made his dwelling among us.”*** And then a few verses later in John’s Gospel Jesus is referred to as *“the house of God,”* that came to dwell among us according to **John 1:50-51**. One of Jesus disciples, Philip brings Nathanael to Jesus, and Jesus says that he already knew him because he saw him in the Spirit while he was sitting under a fig tree before Philip called him. To which Nathaniel answers, ***“Rabbi, you are the Son of God; you are the king of Israel.”*** Jesus said, ***“You believe because I told you I saw you under the fig tree. You will see greater things that that...Very truly I tell you, you will see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending***

*on the Son of Man.”* This is the scene that Jacob saw thousands of years earlier which pointed to Jesus as God’s presence on this earth, the House of God that came down and dwelt among us and Who will return one day and tabernacle with us for all of eternity!

Here in John’s Gospel, similar to Genesis 28, this house of God is not a building or a temple, but where two worlds meet, where Heaven and earth meet, and Jesus was the very first prototype of this meeting place when He walked this earth. Jesus was connected to His heavenly Father through this stairway to Heaven and that’s why Jesus could do His Father’s will, which was to usher in the Kingdom of God, heal the sick, raise the dead, and cast out demons. Jacob’s stairway to Heaven that rested on the earth on which God’s ministering angels were ascending and descending, allowed Jesus to be perfectly aligned with His Father’s will. Then, when Jesus ascended back to Heaven, He passed the torch on to us, the church, which was established by Jesus on that Day of Pentecost when the Holy Spirit descended on the 120 disciples. Today *“the house of God”* is the body of Christ, the church where two worlds meet!

Jacob also referred to this house of God as *“the gate of Heaven.”* This tells us that God has gates where the spiritual angelic activity of Heaven and earth collide, and then Satan also has gates where spiritual demonic activity is released upon this earth. I believe that is what Jesus was referring to when He tells Peter in **Matthew 16:18**, *“And on this rock I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it.”* Jesus was telling Peter that Satan’s gates will never stay closed to hinder the church or prevent the church from carrying out God’s divine purposes on this earth. Because Jesus’ destiny is the cross, Jesus was telling His disciples that Satan will have no authority to hinder the ministry and work of the future church once he is defeated. So, the only power that Satan has over a believer is what the believer gives him through fear and disobedience!

We’re all familiar with gates and their importance, they keep things enclosed from getting out, and they also prevent access, keeping things out that don’t belong. People with pets or small children, and farmers with livestock know the importance of gates. God is telling us here that gates are just as important in the spiritual realm as they are in the physical realm. Gates usually have locks on them so that access is restricted to only those who have the key or the ability to open the gate. In the same way God has given us the spiritual keys to open and close gates, as Jesus told Peter in **Matthew 16:19**, *“I will give you the keys of the kingdom of*

***Heaven; whatever you bind on earth will be bound in Heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in Heaven.***” As the church, Jesus has given us the spiritual authority to open and lock gates!

If the church is built on Jesus Christ, who is the Head of the church, the truth of God’s Word, the Rock, then the church is “*the house of God,*” and the church also is “*the gate of Heaven,*” the gateway between two world, Heaven and earth, where God’s will is done on this earth as it is in Heaven with the help of God’s ministering angels who are constantly ascending and descending from Heaven. The church is the stairway to Heaven where God’s grace is poured out on a world that desperately needs a Saviour. And we as believers live in that tension between these two worlds, the kingdom of God and the kingdoms of this earth, assigned the task of making sure what it is taking place in Heaven is also taking place on this earth. Whenever I think of this role and assignment given to the church, I feel humbled, inadequate, and highly challenged. The church has been given the power and the authority, this great responsibility to do what Jesus did and even greater things, but we all tend to struggle like the rest of the world with health issues, financial issues, family issues, unbelief, and feel defeated more than victorious. So, what are we missing here!

As believers, God not only gives us a desire and longing within our hearts for Heaven as a place to live one day for all of eternity, but God has also given every believer a desire and longing for Heaven to be on this earth right now as well to experience the power of God on full display. YES, it is right and good for us to long for Heaven as our future home, but it is also our responsibility to long for Christ’s Kingdom rule right here and right now in this place where He has placed us. YES, God’s job is to get me to Heaven, but it’s my job and your job to bring Heaven down to this earth through my prayers, devotion, worship and obedience for this specific time He has given us. Jacob’s vision in Genesis 28 gives us this wonderful picture of the church: as an open Heaven, hearing the voice of God, seeing angels ascending and descending, and as a ladder on the earth that reaches to Heaven, indicating that we always have direct access and contact with our Heavenly Father, just like Jesus had when He walked this earth. And then, we have also been given a key to the gate that separates these two worlds that we can both open and close. Jesus repeats this promise a second time again in **Matthew 18:18**, “***I tell you the truth, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven.***” Those are the privileges that we have as dual citizens of Heaven and earth!

Jacob's dream in Genesis 28 of an open Heaven tells me that much more exists and is available to the believer, who longs and desires for it, who is never satisfied with the status quo, and who is willing to take risks. That longing for more, never being satisfied with the status quo, is what drove those Old Testament saints to live by faith. We read about them in **Hebrews 11:13-14**, ***"All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance, admitting that they were foreigners and strangers on earth."*** The constant cry of the Old Testament saints was for God to come down and set things straight.

That was the cry of the prophet Isaiah. **Isaiah 64:1**, ***"Oh, that you would rend the heavens and come down."*** And God answered Isaiah's cry when Jesus Christ came down and lived among us. Heaven's answer to the cry of Isaiah's heart came in the form of a sinless God/man named Jesus who released the Kingdom of God and His redemptive plan upon this earth. Jesus began His earthly ministry when He was baptized by His cousin John the Baptist and Heaven took notice. Here is what **Mark 1:10-11** tell us about that divine moment, ***"Just as Jesus was coming out of the water, he saw heaven being torn open and the Spirit descending on him like a dove. And a voice came from heaven: 'You are my Son, whom I love, with you I am well pleased.'"*** That day, God split the Heavens wide open and Heaven invaded earth and descended on Jesus like a dove, and the voice of God was heard. A sound that must have caused Satan and the demonic realm to tremble with fear because God has invaded their territory, this earth!

Then the Heavens were torn open by God once again at Jesus' death. **Matthew 27:51-52** tells us what happened the moment Jesus died on the cross, ***"At that moment the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom. The earth shook, the rocks split and the tombs broke open. The bodies of many holy people who had died were raised to life."*** Heaven and earth both responded violently to the death of Jesus! Because the curtain of the temple was torn in two from top to bottom exposing the Holy of Holies, we can now approach God's throne of grace unhindered and without fear, all because our sins have been dealt with, and because the spiritual forces of darkness have been defeated; thereby, having no authority over us. That day the gates of Hades were closed and locked! Because the Heavens were torn open by Jesus' death, the Old Testament Covenant requirements of the law have all been met and the New Covenant of grace has now been established on this earth. And because the Heavens were torn open and the gates of Hades closed, there is no demonic force that is able to sew them back

together again. What the Old Testament saints had been anticipating by faith, but only saw from a distance, is now the experience of every believer. So, the church is currently living within that dream that Jacob experienced in Genesis 28. Every believer has an open Heaven available to them!

I have been a follower of Bill Johnson, senior pastor of Bethel Church, in Redding, California for about 4 years now, and have listened to many of his sermons and have also read a number of his books. I find that his teaching on this subject of living under an open Heaven is very helpful. He says this in His book, **Hosting the Presence**, *“We cannot let darkness shape our awareness of the heavenly atmosphere that dwells upon us. The size of the open Heaven over us is affected in some measure by our maturity and yieldedness to the Holy Spirit.”* Pastor Bill is telling us that the size of the open Heaven available to us depends upon us, our maturity and how much we are willing to yield ourselves to the leading of the Holy Spirit. So, the open Heaven available to us can be narrow or wide depending on how much yieldedness and control we are willing to relinquish to the Holy Spirit, and how willing we are to use that authority that has been given to us to defeat the works of the devil. Pastor Bill tells us to think of the open Heaven as a big oak tree. The bigger and more stable the tree is, the more people can stand under its shade and protection. Mature believers carry Heaven’s atmosphere and influence in such a profound way that it affects a great deal of people, and the wider the open Heaven above us the more people we can reach and influence for the Gospel!

The role of the church is to live under an open Heaven and influence the atmosphere around them in a positive way, and we do that by growing into the maturity of Jesus, and by bringing as many converts to Christ as possible, and by taking authority over everyone and everything we have been given authority over. That is the ideal that we are to strive for, but I fall far short of that ideal; however, I’m in good company with most believers and even with those early followers of Christ.

Paul tells us in **1 Corinthians 15:6** that after His resurrection Jesus appeared to more than five hundred of the brothers and sisters at the same time. So, where did most of these followers go after Jesus’ ascension back to Heaven? When we get to **Acts 1** we are told that after Jesus’ ascension the remaining disciples gathered together and formed a prayer meeting, meeting together constantly for a period of ten days, and we are told that number was 120. So, what happened to the other 380 followers that experienced the resurrected Christ? And then, we also read in

**Matthew 28:17** that some of those followers who experienced the risen Christ still doubted. It seems that even those that sat under Jesus' teaching and experienced His resurrection didn't have staying power for some reason. I guess that's our flaw as humans with a free will. We can be filled with fear, doubt and unbelief that takes away our power and authority!

However, for those 120 disciples that stuck it out and followed Jesus' instructions, ***“Do not leave Jerusalem, but wait for the gift my Father promised, which you have heard me speak about,”*** (Acts 1:4) there was a reward for their patient endurance. After ten days of patiently waiting and praying, they weren't disappointed, because God showed up as promised, ***“When the day of Pentecost came, they were all together in one place. Suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. They saw what seemed to be tongues of fire that separated and came to rest on each of them. All of them were filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak in other tongues as the Spirit enabled them”*** (Acts 2:1-4). That day a stairway descended from Heaven to earth and the gates of Heaven were opened up, and God's ministering angels of wind and fire showed up, and that noise which emanated from Heaven was heard and experienced not only by those 120 faithful followers, but by all those in the city of Jerusalem. The roar of that open Heaven transformed the atmosphere over that city and summoned the people to drop everything and come running, all because this church of 120 gathering in unity and prayer, which opened the gates of Heaven to allow the Kingdom of Heaven to descend to this earth. That day two worlds collided! That day the stairway to Heaven was experienced by the people in Jerusalem like it was to Jacob in Genesis 28 and they responded!

When the mysterious sound from Heaven was released on that day, thousands of people began to gather, along with the 120 Holy Spirit followers in that house who spilled out onto the street. At nine o'clock that morning there was an atmosphere shift over the city of Jerusalem. The city that rose up fifty days earlier to crucify Jesus their Messiah now was being summoned by God. No handbills or posters were distributed, no announcements were made, only a heavenly sound was released that touched the hearts of the people, compelling them to gather together in one place. Apart from an act of God, it is impossible to cause people to drop everything and gather together for no known reason. This mysterious sound from Heaven not only compelled the people to gather, but also opened their heart to hear the Gospel message. We know this happened because when Peter stood up to

address the crowd, we are told what happened. **Acts 2:37, “When the people heard this, they were cut to the heart and said to Peter and the other apostles, ‘Brothers, what shall we do?’”** The open Heaven that day not only caused an atmosphere shift in that city, but also caused an atmosphere shift within the cold hard hearts of the people, and they responded to Peter’s message with fear and trembling!

Peter calls them to repent and be baptised and receive the gift of the Holy Spirit, and that is exactly what many did. **“Those who accepted his message were baptized, and about three thousand were added to their number that day”** (Acts 2:41). A divine momentum was created under this open Heaven that made it possible for the people to come to the Lord and be added to the original 120 followers that day. The man who was a fearful coward only days earlier when questioned by a servant girl, was now filled with the Holy Spirit, and stood boldly and confidently before thousands to proclaim the good news of the Gospel. And then the other fearful and cowardly disciples who deserted Jesus when He was arrested, once filled with the Holy Spirit, also stepped into their divine destiny, and boldly and confidently operated under an open Heaven from that day forward, willing to suffer and die for their faith. Whenever the atmosphere shifts around us, and we experience an open Heaven, things happen in the spiritual realm, the Kingdom of God is revealed, and God’s power is put on full display!

That day Peter preached under an open Heaven. Peter’s message was brief, but it was filled with power, a power that changed the mindset of this unbelieving mocking crowd, causing them to stop and reflect on the condition of their sinful heart and ask the question, **“What must I do to be saved?”** In this one message 3000 people were saved and the momentum continued. **“And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved”** (Acts 2:47), and this was despite the persecution that was taking place as Satan tried to stop the church in its tracks.

I believe that it’s God desire to shift the atmosphere once again over the Sombra and the surrounding area like He did on the day of Pentecost 2000 years ago. God wants His church to realize that there exists a stairway between Heaven and earth with angels of God descending and ascending, carrying out His divine will for this earth. And this church and every Bible believing church is **“the house of God”** which sits under this open Heaven to display His will and His power upon this earth and destroy the works of the devil. The challenge for us is to step into our divine calling as His witnesses, with the intention that this baptism of the Holy



Spirit, the fire of God, would ignite every heart, and move us with passion to obediently serve Him regardless of the sacrifice and the cost involved!

What is needed to change the atmosphere here over Sombra and the surrounding area is that we first need to be in one accord like the 120 in the upper room on the day of Pentecost. Like an orchestra we all need to be in perfect pitch and harmony, tuned equally to the heart of God, desiring what He desires. And then we have to be willing to say YES to Jesus to whatever He is asking us to do, because something happens in the spiritual realm when we are completely yielded to the Father's will and allow the Holy Spirit to be fully in charge. On that day in Jerusalem, the 120 disciples were just as confused, amazed, and perplexed as the gathering crowd at what God was doing. Jesus' disciples were not prepared for what God was doing! They had no idea what was happening to them and to those around them! They had no idea why all of these people were coming to them! It was all being orchestrated by the Holy Spirit! The Holy Spirit was in control, but those disciples stepped up to the challenge and let the Holy Spirit lead them into unknown territory!

Acts 2 is none other than the unfolding of Genesis 28, showing us what can happen under an open Heaven when the spiritual atmosphere is changed, and the Holy Spirit is allowed to take full control. When the church steps up to the challenge people are compelled to come because they hear a heavenly sound that touches their heart, causing them to ask, *"What must I do to be saved?"*

That is my prayer for St Clair Community Church and for every church that we would come to realize that there is an open Heaven, a stairway to Heaven available to us. That there are ministering angels sent by God, ascending and descending assisting us in carrying out God's divine will on this earth. But it's up to us to step up to that challenge without fear, doubt or unbelief and then watch what the Holy Spirit will accomplish in our midst!