

Jacob at Bethel!

Overview

He took one of the stones of that place and put it at his head. 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 descending, ascending and descending on it. And behold, the Lord stood above it and said, I am the Lord God of Abraham, your father, and the God of Isaac.

The land on which you lie I will give to your descendants. Also your descendants shall be as the dust of the earth. You shall spread abroad to the west, to the east, the north, and the south.

And in you and in your seed, all the families of the earth will be blessed. Behold I am with you, I will keep you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land, for I will not leave you until I have done what I've spoken to you. Then Jacob awoke from his sleep and said, Surely the Lord is in this place, and I didn't even 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. He arose early in the morning, took another stone, and put it up, and set it up as a pillar, and poured oil on it, and he called the name of the place Bethel. The word Bethel means house of God.

I was raised in a church in Hamilton, Ontario. It's still known as Bethel, house of God. I have an adopted sister.

She came from a house in Toronto. Her mother in the Maritimes was with child, she was not married, and so she chose to let that child go, and there was a spiritual Christian outfit in the city of Toronto called Bethel, home for girls. So I ended up with a sister because of a place called Bethel.

There are churches all over the world called Bethel. It means the house of God. Now, when I was raised as a youngster, I was told that I had to act a certain way when we went to church because we're meeting in the house of God.

We were not allowed to run in the house of God. We were not allowed to play in the house of God. We were not allowed to act out our childish whims and aspirations.

We couldn't do anything. That was the house of God. That was a good way to teach us children, I suppose, to respect the place where we were meeting.

But I had to come to a fork in the road by necessity and determine for my own mind this building that we're in is not the house of God, and there aren't people who have a nervous breakdown if somebody eats a cookie in the house of the Lord. It's not the house of the Lord. I oversaw the construction of a brand new church some years ago in the city of London, and on the day of dedication, I had us dedicate this sheepshed unto the Lord because I said that's what it is.

It's a place for sheep to gather. And I went to great lengths to teach those people, you are the house of the Lord. There's a scripture that says, don't you know that you are the temple of the Holy Spirit? You are the dwelling place of God.

So interesting that on this occasion in Genesis 28, Jacob saw things and he heard things. And when you look at it casually, if you just kind of race through like so many of us do at times reading the scripture, you know, we read our chapter for the day or whatever our habit is, if you don't slow down and look and dig and meditate on such things, I think you can miss some beautiful little gold mines that are here and there. The things that he saw, he would not have of necessity been able to link and correspond what he saw with what he heard.

He saw angels ascending and descending. He saw the Lord. I did some digging and some research and found out that where it says, and the Lord stood at the top of it or at the apex of it, there are translators who will point out that it's more likely that the Lord stood beside Jacob, that even the Lord came down that ladder and visited with him.

We won't make a big deal about that today. But these are the things that he saw. He saw angels ascending and descending.

But then he heard some things. He heard that all the nations will be blessed in Abraham and in his seed. He heard, as the Lord spoke to him, that Abraham and his seed would possess the land forever.

United Nations needs to read their Bible. He heard that Abraham is to be the father of an innumerable seed. And they, the Jewish people, would interpret that, that the innumerable seed would be Jewish by birth, Jewish by geographical location.

But in fact, the Lord was saying the seed of Abraham will go far beyond the Jewish tribes of Israel. He also heard a confirmation that Abraham is to be the father of a singular seed who will conquer all enemies. And he also learned Abraham's name is to be great.

So I'm Jacob, and I heard God say things. And I see angels ascending and descending, and I think, why am I seeing this? I'm happy to see it. It's wonderful.

It's enthralling. And in fact, when Jacob woke up in the morning, he wasn't necessarily speaking of that which the Lord had spoken to him of. It appears to me that what he saw is what caused him to speak out with such excitement.

This is an awesome place. This is where God lives. This is where God dwells.

I must have slept right at the gate that leads to where God lives. That to me would have been his conclusion from what he saw. But how do you correlate what he saw with the message that came? And I hope this morning to draw those two elements together for you.

So he was reassured of a promise. And we've just gone over those promises, that he possess the land, the father will be, Abraham's name will be known all over the world, and it certainly is to this very day. And you heard then these additional words that God was speaking to Jacob specifically.

I am always going to be with you. I'm with you now. You see, he ran from his father.

He ran from his brother. He ran in fear. He ran in fear for his life because he had acted out a betrayal.

But the Lord is telling him, I'm with you. He was promised a land, Abraham was promised a land, and they had been living in that land. But now Jacob was in effect running from that land.

He's heading toward Haran. But the Lord is saying, I'm going to be with you. You don't have to run away.

I'm going to be with you. Secondly, the Lord said, I'm going to watch over you. In other words, I'm going to protect you.

I'm going to be your defender. Next he said, and I will bring you back. I will bring you back here again.

So when he said, I will watch over you, what's implied there to me is, you're going to be during your lifetime and all the generations. It won't always be wonderful for you. And there will be times when you're scattered, which in fact has happened in so many ways.

But even though you'll be scattered, I met people in the city of Montreal in 1967. During that 67 war, I was invited to a home. I don't remember how come I was invited there, but I met a beautiful young gal who was 21 years of age and she was catching an airplane the following morning to fly to Israel.

But Israel was in the midst of a crazy war with all of the Arabs. I said, why are you going back there? Why are you going? I have to go. Have you ever been there? No.

Her parents had of course migrated from Israel to Canada. I said, what is it that draws you? She said, I don't know. It's my land.

It's my country. She'd never been there. She was a Canadian citizen.

The only thing that she knew about Israel was what she'd been taught by her parents and what she learned in the synagogue through the teachings. But those things had had such a prominent effect upon her, I never heard of her again. She caught a plane and flew over there.

So the Lord was watching over people and still is in this country and all over the world. We in Canada actually have one of, if not the largest congregation of Jewish people outside of Israel. Did you know that? It's in Montreal.

That's one of the largest. I think the boast is it's the largest congregation, not church now, but the largest grouping of Jews in the entire world is right in our own city of Montreal, Canada. The Lord is watching over.

He said, I'll watch over and I will bring you back. And we all have heard the stories. I remember some years ago, I think it was in the late eighties, early nineties, that there were certain ministries that were helping Russian Jews to get out of Russia and move toward Israel.

Why were they doing that? Well, life was very difficult in Russia. And why wouldn't they come to the, to the favorite place of the whole world, Canada or the U.S. Canada and U.S. was the destination. Right now, Canada is not the destination.

They say, whole companies, everybody's leaving. If Alberta leaves or if Alberta leaves Canada, I'm going with Alberta. That's political.

So the Jews are being followed by the Lord. He's watching over them and he's bringing them back. And he said, I will never leave you until I have fulfilled all of the things that I've promised to do for you.

These are all exciting, wonderful things. It never occurred to Jacob, I'm sure to ask all of these things you're going to do for us. You're going to make my grandfather's name, Abraham great.

And you're going to make his seed innumerable. And here I am out in the desert without even a wife and I'm supposed to be the new Klansman. I'm going to be the new patriarch of this family, this family that really doesn't exist.

I'm the lone ranger here. My brother opted out. How are you going to do that? How are you going to accomplish this? How are you going to do it? And this is where what he saw to me comes to play.

He saw heaven open and he saw the angels ascending and descending. And all he could make out of that was, surely I have discovered where God lives and I'm at the very gate. So that gate, that gate that was invisible was the passing line.

It was the line between Jacob's reality was based on what he could touch, what he could see, what he could smell, what he could feel. He had never smelled, tasted, seen in any way, shape, or form that which was on the other side of the gate. And suddenly he's taken up with what he sees.

We don't know what he heard, but he may have heard angelic voices. He may have heard singing. He may have heard all kinds of things.

He was experiencing in some measure what we have always called heaven. And yet he was laying on a sandy desert. But when he awoke in the morning, he was saying, I know there's nothing visible here, but this is the place.

This is where I experience God. The angels ascending and descending, that is how the Lord is and will continue to manifest the promise that the Lord made. All of the promises, everything that we read in the book of Revelation, everything that comes to us in the Gospels was actually in pictorial form right in front of Jacob's eyes.

The idea of heaven open. Heaven had been closed to Jacob. Heaven had been closed to Abraham. Yes, I said the same thing last week. I'm still stuck on this. Abraham had not seen.

Now Abraham had had visitations from the Lord who came to him. When he was in Ur of the Chaldees, which is somewhere in Iraq or Iran, the Lord visited him and said some profound things to him. It wasn't just a dream.

It was a reality in some way, shape or form. The Lord visited him. Abraham had experienced that.

But Jacob knew when he saw what he saw and heard the voice of the Lord where he was, he realized this is something that my grandfather Abraham never experienced. This is something that my father Isaac, he never experiences. I have landed on, I've come to something.

But what he did not get was that what he was seeing, yes the promises that were given to Abraham were now reassured, but he got more than Abraham did. When he saw the angels ascending and descending, and when he saw the heavens open before him, heaven was an open place. It was like, you can come here.

This is going to be you. This is going to be your future. This is it.

When he saw that, it was a divine revelation of what we call the gospel of Jesus Christ. He was seeing with his eye. He wasn't capturing it.

He wasn't getting it totally, but he was seeing how God was going to bring all the promises that he'd made, how it's going to bring them to fruition. I find it tremendously exciting, and my mind just runs wild. Jesus meets a man by the name of Nathanael, and he impresses Nathanael with what he knows about Nathanael the moment they meet, and yet they've never encountered each other before.

Nathanael is mind boggled by what Jesus said. He was revealing things about the person Nathanael, and so Nathanael was so taken with this. He declared his belief that Jesus was the Messiah.

Jesus does not address that in particular, but he goes on to say, so you are enthralled with me because of what you perceive I know about you. But there's greater things yet to be seen. The day is coming when angels will ascend and descend.

Now here's the thing, I never saw this before. In Genesis 25, angels were ascending and descending on the interpreters when they put this together for us from the original, they put ladder. A ladder is a very difficult thing.

I've fallen off of ladders. It's not a good place to kind of dance around and have a great old time. I literally fell off a ladder and pretty near broke myself, and when I landed on the ground I felt so stupid, I thought, you deserve this, you knucklehead, and the first thing I did is I looked out onto the street.

This was in our house in Florida, and we had a long driveway and these beautiful homes. All of these people who were, you know, dusted off, I mean, they were the creme of the creme. I don't know what we were doing there, and you know what I looked for? I looked, did anybody see this? I felt so stupid, and I didn't know if bones were not yet broken.

So that was all about a ladder. I had no business being on a ladder, and by the way, the leadership of the church have forbidden me to ever climb a ladder again. I've been up cleaning the roof, and they've said, no, no, no, you're, no, that's way above your pay scale.

You stay on the ground. So I don't mess with ladders anymore. I have a ladder if anybody wants to sell, wants to buy, I have a ladder for sale.

This was not a ladder. It was some kind of a staircase, and Genesis records for us that the angels were ascending and descending on that staircase, but when Jesus talks to Nathanael, he says, the day will come when you will see angels ascending and descending on the Son of Man. Jesus is the staircase.

Jacob was seeing the whole pictorial of evangelism, of salvation, of the hour and the day, the saga of the church. He was seeing it in a beautiful graphic form, and he could never have put that together with what he's seeing. He could never put that together with the foretelling of what was to come about through Jesus coming and becoming a stairway.

He couldn't put that together with the promises that God had made to Abraham, but you see what God had promised to Abraham is also embedded in the staircase. Abraham's name will be famous. His name is more famous per capita in Canada than his name is famous in Israel.

Christians in Canada remember Abraham. When I was over in Israel so many years ago, I had forgotten something at the Church of the Nativity. I think that was the name of it.

I hired a taxi, and I said, take me back to that church. I left something there. It's important to me, and as we're driving, he wanted to know how come you've come to Israel.

What brings you people to Israel? And I said, well, I read in the Bible that I'm of the seed of Abraham, and he took a double take. He knew I wasn't Jewish, and so we got into this chatter about how Christians consider themselves because of Holy Scripture. We are the seed of Abraham.

Abraham, Book of Romans, Paul says, he's the father of us all. He's the father of our faith. He has shown us how to believe in God against the impossibility.

That is all embedded in the staircase. It's all embedded in the promise that God made to Abraham, and it's being enunciated and affirmed again in the ears of Jacob. Jacob, don't be afraid.

I'm with you. I'm going to make your name great. I'm going to look out.

How are you going to do it? And the Lord shows him angels running up and down a staircase, and Jacob must have said, okay, I hope the motor doesn't die on this escalator going up and down. The picture of the angels ascending and descending is the gospel in pictorial form. Jesus is the staircase.

He's our access. So let's talk about access to where? Access to heaven. He said, this is Bethel.

This is, now, he couldn't put this together. The sand is getting between his toes as he's standing on that burning hot desert. He knows that where he's standing, this is not, this sand, this isn't heavenly.

But there was this spiritual dynamic that he connected with and said, this place that I chose to lay down and sleep, this is a magnificent place, and he even named it Bethel, and to this day, that's the name of the town. It's called Bethel, the house of God. So he learned some things.

He had some revelation, but it was limited. And this is the beautiful thing about doctrine, about divine truth. It was never given all of it to Adam.

It was never given to all of the patriarchs. Abraham got a little bit, Isaac got a little bit, Jacob got, David got a little bit, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, they all got a little bit, a little bit. Isaiah was the one who started identifying the lamb that had been slain on the evening of the exodus of the Jews.

He got it that the lamb is a man. As Isaiah 53 goes on to describe the death of the lamb, it's Isaiah that realizes that the lamb is a man, and it's when John the Baptist looks at Jesus and says, look, there's a lamb, the lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world. It was John who made that revelation, you see.

So revelation is an unfolding thing. It's an unfolding corridor. And so Jacob was getting a piece of it, but he couldn't get all of it.

Beloved, you are blessed this morning because you're getting all of it. But of course, you're still in the midst of a mystery. Somebody said to me just a few hours ago, I believe that Jesus is coming soon.

And then they said, he better, he better come soon. This is, this is not a happy rock and roll time that the world is going through. Europe, the whole thing is just, everything's coming unraveled.

It's just an incredible thing. But let not your heart be troubled. The Lord said, these are the things that will come to pass.

Look up, your redemption draweth nigh. But we are a blessed people because we can read the scriptures and we can see things that Jacob experienced, but we can interpret. We can see the value.

We see the rest of the story. Remember that guy that would come on the television and say, and now the rest of the story. He was a fine Christian fellow.

You have experienced a greater measure of the story than Jacob could have ever hoped for. We're a blessed people. So you'll see angels ascending and descending.

Now, did Nathanael in his lifetime ever see a vision like Jacob did? Angels ascending and descending. No, Jesus said the hour is coming when you'll see angels ascending and descending. He never saw literally angels ascending and descending.

But you and I and he, he experienced the resurrection. He was there to see that Jesus arose from the dead. He surely was among the 120.

They experienced the baptism of the Holy Spirit, the birthing of the church. That was the angelic flow, the angelic flow. And the angelic flow continues.

And I made a point last week that I believe that the angels are with us. That they're with us in this room even just right now. That the angels are ascending and descending.

Jesus said, wherever two or three are gathered together in my name, I'm there. And wherever he is, the angels are. I'm there in your midst.

And I believe this when we say, wherever two or three are gathered together, there am I in the midst. It's not that Jesus comes down to us in that situation. Where two or three are gathered together, there am I. When we gather together in his name, it doesn't bring him down, it takes us up.

This morning as you were singing and there was this beautiful little flowing of people singing their own little melody, their own little singing, their own little verse coming out of their mouth. I sense that we were being lifted up. We were being, this is what worship does among us.

It doesn't bring him down, it takes us up. When two or three are gathered together in my name, the staircase becomes more obvious. Jesus is our transporter.

He's our way. He ever liveth to intercede for us. So then, what I see, I can't put in words well enough and yet that's my task.

The congregation, the congregation is the house of the Lord. We're called members of his body, members, members of his body. He's the head, we're the members of his body.

So we're described as a physical being, a body, a spiritual being. But we're also described as a temple. But we're also described as, he says, I am the vine and you are the branches.

And we're described as an army. We're described as a family. We're called brothers and sisters.

We're described in so many ways. But here I bring to your attention that we're called a temple, a temple that's being assembled by the Lord, a habitation for the Lord. It's interesting, can I play with this just for the few minutes I have left? God says to Moses, I want to be among you and I need you to create a place for me to be with you.

And you can read it where the Lord gives a grocery list. Tell the people to bring offerings to me. And he said, I'm not demanding this.

This has to be their heart. This has to be their desire. Some will bring goat skins.

Some will bring badger skins. Some will bring special stones for the priest's garments. Bring all of these things.

And once the things were all assembled, then the Lord gave to Moses the architectural plans for constructing what came to be known as the tabernacle. The tabernacle. The tabernacle, okay, I won't try and quote the Greek word.

It's tabernacle with a few extra letters tacked on. And it means a mobile dwelling place, a temporary dwelling or a tent. And that's what the tabernacle was.

It was a tent. And to look at it from the outside, there'd be nothing that would really capture your attention. But when you got inside, folks, that was a sight to be seen.

The list of furnishings that were in there is just totally inspiring. Things made out of pure gold, et cetera, et cetera. Tabernacle.

The tabernacle was to be the place where God would visit his people. Now the tabernacle was later replaced. It was not an elongated usage.

There came a time when David made some plans, and God instructed that Solomon would be the one to build the house. Mind you, it was not God that asked for a permanent dwelling place. He would have been happy with a tabernacle forever.

The tabernacle, the tent. Because you see, this is not our final home. But it was in David's desire, and God gave him the desires of his heart, tabernacle.

A temporary dwelling. John's Gospel, Chapter 1. In the beginning was the Word. The Word was God.

The Word's with God. Everything that was made was made by him. And then about three verses down, you know the words.

And that Word, John 1, in the beginning was the Word. That's Jesus. And a few verses down it says, And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us.

I looked up the terminology. Not the flesh. I know what that means.

The Word, Jesus, became flesh. But I got excited about the Word and dwelt among us. That's what God did in the wilderness.

In their journey, God was with them. The tabernacle was a way to give them a sense of security and a sense of his presence. And the tabernacle put fear in their enemies because they knew that the God of the Israelites, he literally resided in that tent.

Don't mess with him. Do you know the Jews still celebrate the tabernacle? In the month of September or October or thereabout, they have a feast that was established by the Lord from that earliest time when the tabernacle was made. He said you will have a time at the end of the harvest when you will celebrate the fact that I dwelt among you in that tabernacle and that during that time you lived in tabernacles, you lived in little tents, and you're going to celebrate the fact that I sent the quail.

You're going to celebrate the fact that Moses struck the rock and the water gushed out. You're going to celebrate what I did. Every Jew is required, if they're going to be a good Jew, that when the feast of tabernacles come, they put tents.

If you're in Toronto, Montreal, in the Jewish sector, at that time of the year, you will see that they've got little dwellings out on the decks of their apartment buildings. Or if it's a home, if you went into the backyard, you'd find a little tent there. It's a tabernacle.

And the concept is that for a week they live in that tabernacle, they live in that tent. I guess the really religious Jew would tent out for that evening. I don't know how that goes, but it's a celebration.

It's a memorial to remember God dwelt among us. In the beginning was the Word, the Word was God. And the Word became flesh, and that Word dwelt.

He became tabernacled among us. That's what that Word literally is translated from. Jesus took upon himself a robe of flesh, and just like the Lord stayed with them in the desert, the wilderness for 40 years, living in that mobile tent.

So the Lord Jesus came, and he tabernacled with us in our wilderness. Then he said, it's important, and it's to your advantage if I go away. But don't worry, another will be tabernacled with you.

For Jesus said, the Spirit of truth who's now with you will be in you. He will be tabernacled within you. And so the thing that I just want to explode right now, I don't know how to say this.

This building has value. It has historical value. Wonderful things have taken place.

But the glorious thing that I see is that you are, you are now his tabernacle. You by your person, where two or three gather together, he says, I'm there in the midst. And so when somebody comes through that door, they are encountering the house of the Lord.

And this is what is so incredibly glorious about even the assembling of ourselves together. This is why the apostle says, do not be like those people who have forsaken the assembling of themselves together. What's the assembly? Where two or three are gathered.

You can't remain home and believe it's all going to work out. You come together. Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them.

And again, it's not like it brings him down, but Bonnie, it lifts us up. It lifts us up into the heavenly realms and the book of Ephesians. The apostle says we get to sit with him in heavenly places.

Not just always, but when you focus, when you focus in the prayer closet and you're with him, you're lifted up. But when two or three are gathered together, there's something more glorious about that. You know, if one angel had been on the stairway, that would have been nice.

But there had to be thousands of angels coming up and going down. And that was, the sight of it was glorious. More than an angel, more than a... Hey, Jacob, do you think it can count them? No, isn't it exciting? It was better than the 4th of July in the United States where they had the fireworks go off.

It's better than your favorite football team punting that goal and getting that. And the people start throwing their popcorn and showering in the beer. This and this great.

Beloved, this is something more glorious. The angels ascending and descending. It's a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ and our salvation.

And the man woke up in the morning and said, my father, this is the house of God. He was right. He was right.

The angels were ascending and descending to where he was. Where you are is where the house is. As I thought about it, I like to finish off.

Sometimes I start with, and sometimes I conclude with a little story, an illustration to kind of bring it home. And I saw two moments in my personal history that in a very feeble way maybe brings this truth. I was invited to preach at a church in Dearborn, Michigan.

I don't even know how they got my name. I believe I was still a Bible college student. How did they ever get my name? It doesn't matter.

And so the pastor's name, oh, this is something I can't remember my own name. I can't remember your name. I call you all kinds.

I call him Alec. My wife says, no, no, it's Nick. It's Nick.

He was here in the nick of time. Nick, Nick. But I can remember the, it was the Mazaris, brother and sister Mazaris.

And they were something else. They were so neat. A retiring couple pastoring a church, a large church, Dearborn, Michigan.

So we went to the church on Sunday morning and I had a message all prepared. I had worked that over. I'm a Bible college student.

I've got to impress people, you know. And so I had my message all set up and Pastor Mazaris said, now I got to go out and do some things around the auditorium and greet people. You just stay here and I'll come back.

Make yourself at home. Well, he had a book on his desk and it was a pictorial book. And so I picked it up, flopped it on my lap and started opening it up.

And I came to a picture. This isn't going to astound you, but I came to a picture of some, an artist's idea of Pilate and he's got Jesus standing there and his hands are tied. And I read the words that are in the scripture that Pilate said, behold the man.

And when I read those words, I started to cry. I can't explain it. And I felt the Lord say, that's your message today.

I don't have time to prepare. This is a new sermon. What's the opening sentence? What's the closing? What's the main element? Like, what am I going to pray? All of a sudden, Mazaris goes, okay, we're ready to go.

I go, hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, hop, hop. I got in the pulpit when it came my turn and I said, and I felt like a man from another world. I preached, behold the man, behold the man.

I don't know what else I said. And I gave an altar call. I got to go back.

They told me that they'd had a very difficult week because somebody had broken into their church and messed the place up, managed to get into the church office, found the petty cash box and took some money, took some other things that they thought that maybe they could hawk, you know, at a pawn shop or whatever. And it just upset this elderly couple. The older we get, we don't do well with things like this, right? So they were kind of messed up.

And so I give this altar call and one person comes to the altar. It's a man. So he came to the altar, Mazaris goes down, ministers to him, other people.

And all of a sudden I'm told, okay, we're going to go home for lunch, David. We get home for lunch. And as we're having lunch, the phone in the pastor's house rings and he gets off the phone and he says, I can hardly believe this.

I said, what? He said, that message you preached. Yes, sir. He said, that touched the heart of a man.

And he turned to Sister Mazaris. He said, well, half of our problems are over. The man that came to the altar has confessed.

He broke into our church. He's the bad guy. And we're going to get all the things that we lost.

We're going to get them back. We were gathered together in his name. And when we gather together in his name, there's an anointing.

If you know that word, there's an anointing. There's a presence. There's a presence.

It wasn't my sermon. It wasn't my delivery. It was the presence.

And one more story. It doesn't matter what year, I was a pastor of a fairly large church. And the service had been going for about less than 10 minutes.

Place was jammed. And a man, I remember him standing up. Boy, he was huge.

He was a tall fellow, broad shoulders. He had quite a head of hair. Anybody that's got hair, I have respect for them immediately.

This big man, as he's coming down the aisle, he's coming toward it. And I got a little shaky for him. I go, where's this guy going? And I'm not leading the service.

I allowed my musicians to lead it. There was nobody talking. Piano and an organ, they just played.

And the congregation sang whatever they played. There was nobody leading. We just went from song to song.

And so I was just sitting there. But as I saw this man coming toward us, I got a little nervous. And then as I focused in, I can see tears are running down this big fellow's face.

When he got to the front. Had he ever been in a church? Did he ever know? Did he, I don't know. I don't know his history.

I never really actually got to know him. I can tell you that he always came to the church as long as I was there. He came to the church for years.

I can't tell you his name. I don't know if I ever heard his name. He hit that altar, the stairs, and you could hear his crying all over that auditorium.

He was a man desperately hooked on drugs and had been selling drugs in order to maintain his habits. He hadn't heard a sermon. I didn't get to show him my wonderful expertise.

I didn't get a chance to flop around my limited locks. This guy got saved at that altar. And the only thing that had really taken place was two, three hundreds had gathered together in his name and we were lifted up into his presence.

His presence, the word says in his presence is fullness of joy. That should be added on to just in his presence is power. And in his presence is a release, an authority that breaks the chains and breaks the bondage that sets the captive free.

It's a power. One more story. I didn't intend this one.

In that same place, we had heard about this drama called, how did it go? Hell spells. No, no. How did it go? Oh, heaven's gates and hell's flames.

And so we called and they said, yeah, we'd love to come. So these two people sitting right over here were part of a very small team that showed up in our church and they covered the whole front of the place with tinfoil. My congregation of a lot of seniors were not impressed.

You know, we're people who are used to the power and the glory and the presence and so on. And this guy comes in and coats the place with tinfoil. Hello.

And then we're supposed to realize, well, the tinfoil, that's heaven. Oh, good. And so then that then the people that we had so pulled together, this is a new church.

There were so many. Everybody that was young in that church was was new. And every one of them had just got saved.

They didn't know which end was from where. And I said, well, here here's the young people. And so this this couple and the other couple gathered together with them and they trained them for a few hours.

And it's now Sunday afternoon. And we're going to be putting on a performance of heaven's gates, hell's flames. And my head usher, his name was Bob Birtwell.

He was in his 70s. He shouldn't have had that responsibility because he just would come on glued at anything that wasn't just perfect. Everything had to be perfect.

He was a wonderful man of God. He came running to me and said, Pastor, he literally did. Pastor, we have a problem.

We have a price. It was that all those people downstairs, you know, all those young. I said, yes.

He said, you better come. And he said, forget about all this foil stuff. He said, we don't need some silly drama.

He said, you better come downstairs and see what's going on. Pastor, I thought he was going to pass up, ran downstairs with him. And here's all these young people.

There was Carolyn who just got saved out of prostitution in the streets. Here was what was Martin and he had been a drug addict and his freezer was full of drug. This was the motley crew.

This was a mess. But here they are all over the floor, some of them laying on the floor, all of them at least down on their knees. They're all weeping and wailing and they're speaking in a prayer language that only the Holy Spirit.

These people had no idea about what we call pain. They had not. They they knew nothing.

They were from the streets. God bless them and filled them with the Holy Spirit in that time. And here's Bob saying, we can't we can't stop this.

Yeah. You know, you you you go up there and tell the people go home. There's no drama.

I said, Bob, this is the prepared time. Come on, let it go. And so the drama went on and an altar call was given.

And people that responded to the altar filled the front, filled the aisles. We got them all downstairs and people were doing some counseling, talking with people. And I have to tell you this one.

Somebody came to me after after the place was calming down and people are going home and they said, Pastor Dave, I was counseling somebody and they they motioned somebody else to come over because it took two people to kind of confirm this story. This one says, I'm talking to a man who just came forward to surrender his life to Christ. And as I'm talking to him, he's looking at me.

But now he's not looking in my eyes. I'm talking to him. He's nodding his head saying, OK, OK.

But he's looking past me. He's looking somewhere else. And he says, as I'm standing and looking at this man, he says his eyes go all glassy.

His eyes are his eyes are tearing up. The other person who's there, a lady says, and I was all way over on the other side of the room and I'm talking to a lady and I'm experiencing the same thing. All of a sudden I see her face light up and she's not listening to me.

She's looking past me. And now the tears are running down her cheeks. And the story goes on.

The counselors were abandoned. The lady starts walking this way. The man starts walking that way. They had just been in the divorce court. They just got divorced last week and it had been a horrible, ugly thing. But as they met there and then they embraced, they got gloriously saved and started attending.

I follow. They started attending in Woodstock, Ontario, a Baptist church and became wonderful stalwart supporters of that church. Was it the drama? No, it was the presence.

You see, when those young people pray, there was an anointing on them. There was an anointing on our people. And when people gathered in that room that night, if you didn't know Jesus, you were going to have a hard time getting past that threshold.

You were going to be trampling on the word of God that night. There was a power that was present. It was because of the presence.

When people walked in that night, they were walking into the house of the Lord. Listen to this. I'm going to finish.

I really am. I'm going to finish. The fact that we gather, the gathering in is the gate.

That's what I felt in my heart last night. The gate is the gathering and the worship time brings us into the house. We are the house and we're filled with his glory and with his presence.

I better stop. I'm going to have a heart attack right now. Jacob didn't get it all, but neither did his grandpa, but neither did Ezekiel.

He never knew what the wheel in the middle of the wheel was. It's okay, Ezekiel. I still don't understand that one.

Revelation is unfolding. Divine truth is unfolding like one page after another in a book, and that book is the Bible. Heavenly Father, I sense your presence in this house now.

I've been sensing your presence for quite a while in this room, and it's not because we're here, it's because you're here, and we know you're here because there's a promise. Whether we feel your presence, whether we even discern your presence or not, there's a promise. Two or three gathered in my name, I'm there.

Holy Spirit, thank you for being with us today and help this tattered preacher. You helped me today to unfold truth that is just mesmerizing my own heart, my own spirit. Thank you for teaching me your truth, and I trust, Lord God, that what I shared today would be a very small portion of what the people actually heard.

I trust, Lord, that the things that people heard today will be an expanding experience, that as we leave this place, we'll not just leave it behind, but what we heard today, the word, will become like seed within us. It will sprout, and it will grow, and our lives will be transformed by it. I ask it in your name.

Amen.