

Systematic Theology: Angels

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Tonight we return to our study of systematic theology and we're going to over the next three weeks I believe, study the whole matter of the spirit world: angels and Satan and demons. And there is a reason why we would turn to this subject next. We have finished our study of creation and our study of Providence, how God sustains his creation now that he has finished his work of creation, and so we have taken a look at the material world, you might say; we've considered how God interacts and oversees the physical world that he has created in which we live and that which we see with our eyes.

Now, what Scripture teaches is that at the same time God created the material world, he also created a spiritual world that is invisible to us, and we can perhaps start our study with this simple premise here this evening. God created two kinds of personal beings, you might say, to populate his universe: he created man, he created the human race, in other words, and he created angels. He created angels.

Now, in our sphere, we don't often think about the spiritual world but we would have a large hole in our biblical understanding if we neglected it, if we overlooked it. One writer gives this statistic biblically, he says that angels are mentioned over 100 times in the Old Testament and more than 160 times in the New Testament. That's a lot of Scripture to have before us and the truth of the matter is that the study of angels is so broad and so diverse that the best we can do is outline a little bit and leave a lot of things unsaid that could be or should be said. But what we're going to try to do for the next three weeks, to know the full counsel of God, is to come to grips with this: we're going to find and see this evening, our study tonight is about good angels or elect angels, as they are called in 1 Timothy 5:21; there are also fallen angels, evil angels called demons who have a leader named Satan, and somehow collectively these invisible beings, invisible to us, these invisible beings have access to our world.

So that's what we want to consider over the next three weeks including tonight. Tonight we have the happy privilege of looking at good angels, and when I say looking at them, I mean considering them and thinking about them. We are not actually going to see them with our physical eyes, but what we want to do is answer three questions about angels here this evening and I'll just outline those questions for you as we begin. First of all, do angels exist? Do angels exist. Secondly, what are angels like? And thirdly, what do

angels do? So that's going to be the structure of our time together here this evening and so we might as well jump in and get right to it.

First question: do angels exist? And the answer to that biblically is clearly yes. Now, before I go any further, I would just say this: I suppose that we are all kind of rightly skeptical when we hear secular people or people on the fringe elements of Christianity talking about angels and, "I saw these angels or I have been touched by an angel," as the old TV show used to speak about, and we develop a healthy skepticism about the claims that people make in our day and age, but it would be a mistake for us to let that healthy skepticism take us to a wrong extreme where we simply rejected any consideration about spiritual beings or we denied their existence altogether in order to overreact to the abuses that we see in the world around us, because to do that would put us in opposition to Scripture itself. So we don't want to do that. We don't want to be there. Instead, what we want to do as we want in all things, is we want to align ourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, right? He is our Lord and he is our Teacher and what he believes, we believe implicitly. We trust his word completely, even for things that we do not see.

Well, Jesus spoke this about his second coming in Matthew 24:36, he said speaking of when he would return, he says,

36 But of that day and hour no one knows, not even the angels of heaven,

Not even the angels of heaven. Jesus assumes the existence of angels as he is speaking about his return and he ties angels into his teaching on his second coming. He assumes the existence of angelic beings in the heavenly realm. So if Jesus assumes it and Jesus teaches it, we believe it also, even if it is something that if secular people got a hold of tonight's message, they might mock us for it. We don't care about that one little whit because we only care about what our Lord says and teaches.

The word "angel" both in the Old and new Testaments, comes from a term that means "messenger," and that's certainly an important aspect of the ministry of angels and what they do. They are God's messengers, you might say, and Scripture teaches us that they are spirits. We'll look at this little bit later. What we mean by spirits is they have no bodily form. They are supernatural celestial beings above us in power. We cannot see them but Christ and the Bible point to them consistently and repeatedly.

Now, what can we say about angels? They are supernatural beings but, beloved, they are like us in this way: they are created beings. They are not eternal. They have not always existed because before the beginning of time, there was only God in his Triune essence, and so angels were part of the creation of God.

With all of that introduction, now let's turn to the book of Job 38 and we can begin there. It would seem that God created the angels before he created the material world. Before he created the material world. Job 38:4, and it's interesting as you consider these things, as you read how a lot of different theologians treat it, some theologians will teach on creation and then in their outworking of theology, they will go immediately to the spirit

world because chronologically it preceded the material world. Others teach creation and then they want to work through with Providence, that's what we've done, to show how God created the material world, sustains it, and then chronologically they go back to the spirit world and that's the way that we are handling it here this evening.

Job 38, let's start at verse 1. You remember the story of Job. He had multiple trials that the Lord allowed Satan to inflict upon him. Job wrestled with this, struggled with it, questioned God, and finally in chapter 38, verse 1, we see this,

1 Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind and said, 2 "Who is this that darkens counsel By words without knowledge? 3 Now gird up your loins like a man, And I will ask you, and you instruct Me!

God is about to humble Job with questions that he cannot answer and in verse 4 he says,

4 Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell Me, if you have understanding,

So what God is doing here is he is taking Job back to the very beginning of creation and he's saying, "Job, tell me what it was like at the beginning of creation." There is obviously no way to answer that question, but he is going to work through what happened at creation and show Job that he has no knowledge compared to the knowledge of God. So in verse 5, he says,

5 Who set its measurements? Since you know [a little bit of irony there]. Or who stretched the line on it? 6 On what were its bases sunk? Or who laid its cornerstone, 7 When the morning stars sang together And all the sons of God shouted for joy?

The "sons of God" there are a reference to the spiritual beings that observed God making the material world when that happened. They were with him at creation and on the basis of this passage, we believe and understand that God made the spirit world; God created the angels before he created the material world. That's the only way that they could be witnesses to the creation of the material world is that they were there first.

So do angels exist? Yes, they do. God created them before he made the material world and the only way that we know this, beloved, the only way that we have to understand this, is on the basis of the infallible authority of Scripture we say that we believe in angels. One writer summarizes this point in this manner when he said, and I quote, "The combined witness of the Old and New Testaments assure us that there is a world of intelligent, powerful, invisible creatures about us and above us that warrants our careful study." So that's what we're going to do. Scripture points us to the existence of angels, we want to know what Scripture says.

Now, it's not like the doctrine of angels is a cardinal tenet of the Christian faith, it's not like this is the most essential doctrine that you could study, but here's the way that we

should think about that, here's the way that we should approach this: it's our desire as much as possible, we want to understand the full counsel of God. We want to know the fullness of the teaching of God. We don't want to be among those who simply focus on a particular Psalm and they just read one particular Psalm, or perhaps someone has a favorite Gospel and that's the only portion of Scripture that they are interested in and they can let all the rest of it go. We don't think that way here at Truth Community Church and no reasonable Christian should. God has given us a full outworking of his revelation and he intends for us to know it all, to consider it all. We believe that every word that God spoke in Scripture is important and we believe that everything that Scripture teaches warrants our consideration at one time or another, and so with that perspective, that's how we are approaching our consideration of the doctrine of angels.

So we've answered our first question: do angels exist? The answer is yes. We have seen Scripture address that. Now, secondly, we want to come to the second question: what are angels like? What are angels like? And as I alluded to earlier, there are elect angels and there are fallen angels, and we will talk more about that over the next two weeks, but here is what we would want to say by way of beginning: Scripture tells us in Genesis 1:31 that everything that God created was good, and so the fact that there are fallen angels, the fact that there are demons, tells us that there was a fall in the angelic realm where some of those angels were lost. Some of them rebelled against God. They fell after creation and now that's what we'll consider later next week.

But what are angels like? We want to say this at the start, kind of start with the most general basic principles and then work out from there. What are angels like? Angels are spiritual beings which are normally invisible to men. They are spiritual beings which are normally invisible to men. And with that said, let's go to the book of Hebrews 1. As we saw a few weeks ago on Sunday mornings, chapter 1 and 2 of Hebrews speaks a good bit about angels and points to the superiority of Jesus Christ over the angelic realm. We saw that one of the arguments of the writer of the book of Hebrews is that Christ is superior, he is more excellent than all, his work was more excellent than every work ever done, he is greater than all in revealed religion, and that includes the realm of angels. He is greater than angels. So he makes this argument starting in verse 4 of chapter 1 where he says that Christ,

4 [has] become as much better than the angels, as He has inherited a more excellent name than they. 5 For to which of the angels did He ever say, "You are My Son, today I have begotten You"?

And then it goes on at the end of chapter 1 in verse 13 and he says,

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said, "Sit at My right hand, until I make Your enemies a footstool for Your feet"?

Then he makes this statement about the essence of angels that is our concern for this evening, he says,

14 Are they not all ministering spirits, sent out to render service for the sake of those who will inherit salvation?

He says that angels are spirits, and with that in mind, look to the end of the Gospel of Luke 24, if you will. Luke 24, and we see what Jesus has to say about spirits after his resurrection. Luke 24:39 and as you're turning there, I'll just say this, that as we study angels, we find that we have to pull a lot of diverse testimony about the Scriptures into one place so we have to bounce around a little bit in the Scriptures to see what the Bible says overall about this topic. The writer of Hebrews said that angels are spirits. Jesus said in Luke 24:39, he says,

39 "See My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself; touch Me and see, for a spirit does not have flesh and bones as you see that I have."

A spirit does not have a body, in other words. It does not have a material existence that you can touch and feel. So when the Bible calls angels "ministering spirits," it's making a statement about their essence, that they are spiritual, that they are invisible to us.

As you continue reading in Scripture, it would seem that angels exist in some form of hierarchy; that there is an order; that there is a command of some sort to them. Michael is called the Archangel. Scripture speaks of different groups called cherubim and seraphim as we sing in the hymn, "Holy, holy, holy." So they are invisible, there are some with greater power than others, there are ranks, but what can we say about them more individually? This is where it gets into be very fascinating. We find that as we read Scripture, we find that angels have personality; that they have a mind; that they have understanding.

And with that little bit said, go back a little further in the book of Luke to Luke 2 and what you find in the book of Luke, especially in these early chapters, is that angels are very active at the coming of our Lord, at the birth of our Lord and in the time preceding his birth. When you look at Luke 2:8, a passage we normally look at at Christmas time, Mary had delivered birth to Jesus in verse 7, and in verse 8, these angelic messengers, these angelic announcements come and in verse 8 it says this,

8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10 But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord."

Now, what does that tell us about angels? Well, it tells us an awful lot. It tells us that angels have mental ability, you might say, that they have knowledge, that they have the ability to communicate, and that they have the ability to make their thoughts known. And they are spirits and yet somehow they are able to manifest themselves to men or to be

made manifest to men, and they worship God. So there is this element of worship, there is this element of mental ability, there is this element of being able to communicate in ways that men can understand.

To add to that, let's turn back to the book of Revelation 5 and we're only giving very selected passages here simply for the sake of time. In Revelation 5, we see angels in the act of worship. Look at verse 8, let's say. Revelation 5:8,

8 When He had taken the book, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell down before the Lamb, each one holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. 9 And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation. 10 You have made them to be a kingdom and priests to our God; and they will reign upon the earth." 11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne and the living creatures and the elders; and the number of them was myriads of myriads, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb that was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing." 13 And every created thing which is in heaven and on the earth and under the earth and on the sea, and all things in them, I heard saying, "To Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, be blessing and honor and glory and dominion forever and ever."

What are these angels doing? They are in the presence of God, the immediate presence of God at the throne worshipping him. They have direct and immediate access to the throne of God, do these good elect angels, and they are worshipping. They are responding to the character of God and ascribing glory and majesty to his name. And notice in the text there that it numbers these angels and says that there are myriads of myriads, too many to count. So when we ask the question, "What are angels like?" we find that they are invisible spirits with mental capacity in the presence of God joining in the most splendid worship of him imaginable. That is what angels are like. That is what they do, in part.

So as we consider angels, we see that they are these unique, magnificent, spiritual beings that God has created for his own glory. That's what they are like. So in that sense, in that sense if you think about it, they share some elements with us: we have mental ability, we are able to communicate, we have minds that we are able to express things, to know and appreciate and understand knowledge. Angels are like that as well, but they are different from us in that Scripture says that man is created in the image of God in a way that it does not ascribe to angels. So that gives us a little taste of what they are like.

Let's move on to our third point where we will spend the rest of our time here this evening looking at even more Scripture on these final points, and the third point is this: what do angels do? What do angels do? I like the simple questions. I like to start with the simple basic things and maybe in the future there is opportunity to build on it, but what

do angels do? If you are a spiritual being in a spiritual realm, what do you do? This is so foreign to our experience. There is nothing by way of human analogy to compare this to, is there? What do angels do? Well, let's look at some scriptures. First of all, angels worship God. Angels worship God. We saw that in Revelation 5, go back also to Isaiah 6 to a familiar passage. Isaiah 6, and in Isaiah 6, the prophet has a vision of the Lord sitting on his throne and if you look at it with me in verse 1, you'll see this, you see that,

1 In the year of King Uzziah's death I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, lofty and exalted, with the train of His robe filling the temple. 2 Seraphim stood above Him, each having six wings: with two he covered his face, and with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew.

These physical descriptions being a part of the manifestation of that spirit being so that Isaiah was able to see and understand what was happening. It was sort of a manifestation from the spirit world to a way that the prophet could see and understand and relate to us. And in verse 3,

3 And one called out to another and said, "Holy, Holy, Holy, is the LORD of hosts, The whole earth is full of His glory."

These angels are around the throne of God and their sole duty, it would seem in this particular passage, is simply to day and night cry out the greatness of the holiness of the glory of God. "Holy, Holy, Holy," perhaps intimating, suggesting, hinting at the Triune nature of God. So when you combine that with the passage from Revelation 5, you see that angels are engaged in worship. Part of what they do is that they are involved in the worship of God. God did not leave the worship and the ascribing of glory to his name simply to the material world, simply to men whom he knew would fall into sin, men who would render imperfect praise at best. Alongside of the material world, he created a spiritual world of beings that delight to have their sole duty is to be that which is nothing other than to worship him and to join in the ascription of glory to God of which he is so richly deserving. Angels worship God, that's part of what they do.

Secondly, and this part gets very interesting, secondly: angels serve God. They worship God and they serve God and to look at this, we are going to, we could consider so many passages in the Old Testament where this is addressed but I just want to take you to a New Testament Gospel in Matthew 4 to see this and to see the careful tending to the needs of God Incarnate that the angels render to him. And in Matthew 4, we read about Satan's temptation of our Lord and let's take a look at it beginning in verse 1. In verse 1 of Matthew 4,

1 Then Jesus was led up by the Spirit into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. 2 And after He had fasted forty days and forty nights, He then became hungry.

An indication, one among many of the reality of his humanity. His Incarnation was real. It was not a fantasy, it was not a mere appearance. Verse 3,

3 And the tempter came and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, command that these stones become bread." 4 But He answered and said, "It is written, 'Man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that proceeds out of the mouth of God.'" 5 Then the devil took Him into the holy city and had Him stand on the pinnacle of the temple, 6 and said to Him, "If You are the Son of God, throw Yourself down; for it is written, 'He will command His angels concerning You'; and 'On their hands they will bear You up so that You will not strike Your foot against a stone.'"

Satan recognized in his temptations that the angels were appointed to serve the Son of man.

7 Jesus said to him, "On the other hand, it is written, 'You shall not put the Lord your God to the test.'" 8 [The third temptation] Again, the devil took Him to a very high mountain and showed Him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory; 9 and he said to Him, "All these things I will give You, if You fall down and worship me." 10 Then Jesus said to him, "Go, Satan! For it is written, 'You shall worship the Lord your God, and serve Him only.'"

Now, before we go to verse 11, let's just pause there for a moment and consider what has happened here. Scripture says that Jesus had been in the desert for 40 days and for 40 nights, he was hungry, and then he gets this satanic assault upon him, tempting him, trying to lead him into sin. A fruitless endeavor if ever there was one because the Son of God was impeccable; he could not sin but that did not mean that he could not feel the weight of temptation. So he goes through this physical battle, he goes through this spiritual battle, and at the end of it, verse 11, look at it,

11 Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him.

They were serving him. They were serving the Son of God in his flesh. It's enough to make you want to know more about what that was like, how do spirit beings serve the Incarnate Son of God. Scripture doesn't open that to us but it tells us enough to see that the mission of the angels at that point in time was to go and to serve him and to meet his needs as they were able to do.

We see this at the beginning of the ministry of the Lord, we see it at the end of the earthly ministry of the Lord, if you would turn to Matthew 26. Jesus is aware of the presence of angels and that they are under his command. Scripture speaks about God being the God of Hosts, the God of angel armies, that the myriads of angels are at his command waiting to do his beckoning, waiting for the word from him to do whatever he would command them to do. Judas has betrayed the Son of man with a kiss in verse 48, and in verse 49,

49 Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, "Hail, Rabbi!" and kissed Him. 50 And Jesus said to him, "Friend, do what you have come for." Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him. 51 And behold, one of those who were with Jesus reached and drew out his sword, and struck the slave of the high priest and cut off his ear.

Peter, looking to help the Lord out in his hour of need, in his hour of extremity, saying, "I'll come to your defense, Lord, and swing my little sword against the Roman army." Verse 52,

52 Then Jesus said to him, "Put your sword back into its place; for all those who take up the sword shall perish by the sword. 53 [Then he says] Or do you think that I cannot appeal to My Father, and He will at once put at My disposal more than twelve legions of angels?

A Legion being by some count 6,000, saying, "72,000 angels could be here immediately to serve me. Peter, I really don't need your help. There is another purpose in this. Put your sword away. If I needed help, thousands of angels are at my beck and call." They are there to serve him. They are there to protect him if only he made the call.

Now in their service to God, angels also did this: they also made announcements at key moments in redemptive history. If you go through the Old Testament, you will find the angels addressing Abraham, addressing other Old Testament patriarchs and other Old Testament servants of God, and so you see angels performing this function in the Old Testament and it carries over into the start of the New Testament as well.

Turn back now to the Gospel of Luke 1, all of this answering the question: what do angels do? They worship God, they serve God, and here I want you to see that they are serving as messengers of God at key moments in redemptive history. In Luke 1 you'll see this, Luke 1, beginning in verse 5.

5 In the days of Herod, king of Judea, there was a priest named Zacharias, of the division of Abijah; and he had a wife from the daughters of Aaron, and her name was Elizabeth.

So Luke has introduced the players in his drama here.

6 They were both righteous in the sight of God, walking blamelessly in all the commandments and requirements of the Lord. 7 But they had no child, because Elizabeth was barren, and they were both advanced in years. 8 Now it happened that while he was performing his priestly service before God in the appointed order of his division, 9 according to the custom of the priestly office, he was chosen by lot to enter the temple of the Lord and burn incense. 10 And the whole multitude of the people were in prayer outside at the hour of the incense offering.

Now look at what happens in verse 11,

11 And an angel of the Lord appeared to him, standing to the right of the altar of incense. 12 Zacharias was troubled when he saw the angel, and fear gripped him. 13 But the angel said to him, "Do not be afraid, Zacharias, for your petition has been heard, and your wife Elizabeth will bear you a son, and you will give him the name John. 14 You will have joy and gladness, and many will rejoice at his birth. 15 For he will be great in the sight of the Lord; and he will drink no wine or liquor, and he will be filled with the Holy Spirit while yet in his mother's womb. 16 And he will turn many of the sons of Israel back to the Lord their God.

Verse 17, the angel is still speaking.

17 "It is he who will go as a forerunner before Him in the spirit and power of Elijah, to turn the hearts of the fathers back to the children, and the disobedient to the attitude of the righteous, so as to make ready a people prepared for the Lord."

That's a very long passage to read, I know, but notice what is happening here and be aware of the significance of what's happening. The angel is announcing to Zacharias the coming of John the Baptist who was going to be the forerunner of the Messiah. This is not any ordinary birth, this is a major advance in the program of redemption. Christ is soon to be on the earth and Christ in his adult ministry would have John the Baptist going forth in order to announce his coming. Before that happens, some 30 years prior to the fact, this angel appears to Zacharias and the presence of the heavenly messenger showed the great spiritual significance of what was about to take place in time and space. So the angel comes, as it were, as an emissary, as a messenger from heaven and declares to Zacharias exactly what's going to happen. There is something new bursting on humanity that required a supernatural announcement and an angel was sent with the task to do that.

Verse 18, Zacharias interacts with the angel.

18 Zacharias said to the angel, "How will I know this for certain? For I am an old man and my wife is advanced in years." 19 The angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, who stands in the presence of God,

Do you see it there? Gabriel, an angel, tells him his name and what does the angel do? He serves in the presence of God and God has sent him from his presence to earth in order to make an announcement, to deliver a message, as it were, to Zacharias, as it is translated in the NASB. And the angel says,

I have been sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news.

He's a messenger. And he tells Zacharias, "Here's how you will know that the message is true, you're going to fall silent and be unable to speak until the day when these things take place,

20 And behold, you shall be silent and unable to speak until the day when these things take place, because you did not believe my words, which will be fulfilled in their proper time."

And so, the angels are serving God by bringing a message about the supernatural coming of Christ that is just about to occur. This is an advance in redemptive history. God sends an angel to deliver the message to men.

Now in like manner, go to verse 26, in verse 26, you will see that Gabriel is in action once more.

26 Now in the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city in Galilee called Nazareth, [this time] 27 to a virgin engaged to a man whose name was Joseph, of the descendants of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. 28 And coming in, he said to her, "Greetings, favored one! The Lord is with you." 29 But she was very perplexed at this statement, and kept pondering what kind of salutation this was. 30 The angel said to her, "Do not be afraid, Mary; for you have found favor with God.

And he delivers this message of God to the virgin. Verse 31,

31 "And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bear a son, and you shall name Him Jesus. 32 He will be great and will be called the Son of the Most High; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David; 33 and He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and His kingdom will have no end."

You could go on with it but you get the idea. What was Gabriel doing here? He was serving God by delivering a message about the advance in redemptive history that was just about to occur to the people in Zacharias and in Mary who would be centrally involved in the advancement of the drama, the drama, simply what I mean by that is simply the narrative, the outworking in history at what God had appointed to occur. So the angels were serving God in that way.

Now, one other aspect of what angels do: they also serve and protect God's people. They serve and protect God's people. We saw in Hebrews 1 that they were ministering spirits sent out to render service to the people of God. Look at Psalm 91, if you will, Psalm 91 to add to that, to supplement that. Psalm 91, a Psalm that addresses the confidence that belongs to those who trust in the Lord. Psalm 91:1,

1 He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High Will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. 2 I will say to the LORD, "My refuge and my fortress, My God, in whom I trust!"

So David is writing or the psalmist, I should say, is writing speaking about the great protection that he enjoys in the hand of God, and this protection is so great that it means that no ultimate evil will fall onto the one who belongs to this God, verse 10,

10 No evil will befall you, Nor will any plague come near your tent. 11 For He will give His angels charge concerning you, To guard you in all your ways. 12 They will bear you up in their hands, That you do not strike your foot against a stone.

This, of course, being the passage that the devil quoted to Christ. Well, going back to the original context, you see that God is promising angelic protection to those that belong to him. And how does that play out? Well, we see it again in the New Testament. Go back to Matthew 2, for example. Matthew 2, after Jesus had been born, and you remember that Herod wanted to kill all of the male babies under the age of two in Bethlehem, and Herod pretends interest in the child, he speaks to the Magi in verse 7,

7 Then Herod secretly called the magi and determined from them the exact time the star appeared. 8 And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the Child; and when you have found Him, report to me, so that I too may come and worship Him." 9 After hearing the king, they went their way; and the star, which they had seen in the east, went on before them until it came and stood over the place where the Child was. 10 When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. 11 After coming into the house they saw the Child with Mary His mother; and they fell to the ground and worshiped Him. Then, opening their treasures, they presented to Him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. 12 And having been warned by God in a dream not to return to Herod, the magi left for their own country by another way.

Now watch what happens here in verse 13.

13 Now when they had gone [meaning when the magi had departed], behold, an angel of the Lord appeared to Joseph in a dream and said, "Get up! Take the Child and His mother and flee to Egypt, and remain there until I tell you; for Herod is going to search for the Child to destroy Him."

The angel came and served the people of God, served the apparent parents of Jesus: Mary his biological mother, Joseph only his apparent father, not his biological father. But he comes and he serves them, the angel comes and serves them and warns them to flee. And this happens again in verse 19, serving the people of God. In verse 19,

19 But when Herod died, behold, an angel of the Lord appeared in a dream to Joseph in Egypt, and said, 20 "Get up, take the Child and His mother, and go into the land of Israel; for those who sought the Child's life are dead." 21 So Joseph got up, took the Child and His mother, and came into the land of Israel.

So let's step back and just do a little bit of review here. Do angels exist? Yes. What are angels like? They are invisible spiritual beings. What do they do? They worship God, they serve God, they serve God's people. So angels have a very distinct essence, they have a very distinct function that they perform in the economy of God. And as you read this, now let's kind of bring this into today and how are we supposed to think about angels today and what does this mean for us today. That's what I want to spend our final time on here. You might think if you were a clumsy, superficial, Bible reader, a student of Scripture, you might say, "Oh, this is cool! I hope an angel speaks to me some day. I'd like to see what that was like." And there are those who think they see angels. They see angels but they're not the good kind, they are only the fallen kind. We'll talk about that more next time. Beloved, there is something very very important about Christ and about the completed Scriptures that you need to understand as we contemplate this. Angels are no longer the vehicle of God's revelation. God does not send angels to speak to men any longer. Why is that? Well, it's because of the exalted place and privilege that we have in this area. God has given us his final word when he sent the Lord Jesus Christ. God has given us his final revelation when the canon of the 66 books of the Bible was closed. God has said his final word. There is not more angelic activity coming until the judgment is invoked as you read in the book of Revelation. We are not going to go there now but, beloved, you must understand that God used angels for a time to communicate to men but now he does not do this. He does not do that because he has given us a different communication. He has given us a fuller, complete, final revelation in the coming of Christ and in the completion of the canon of Scripture.

Herman Bavinck, the Reformed theologian, said this and I quote, he said, "As long as special revelation was not yet completed, heaven approached the earth, but now Christ has appeared and the word of God has been fully revealed to us." Listen to this question that he asked. It is central and it's very insightful. "What could the angels still give us now that God himself gave us his own Son?" God has given us Christ. God has given us the Scriptures and the law of the Lord is perfect. 2 Timothy 3 says that it is adequate, it is sufficient for every good work that the man of God needs to do. What could be added to that? Now that Christ has come, now that Christ has been manifested, shed his blood, buried, raised again and ascended on high, what else is there to say? There is nothing that can be added to that. The best things have been said. The fullness of revelation has been given and therefore that aspect of angelic communication from man, from God to man, I should say, is no longer needed because God has completed his revelation in what he has to say.

Now beloved, this becomes very important and very crucial for your spiritual well-being to understand the implications of that, of what this means: that means that probing into the angelic realm is off limits to you. It is off-limits beyond what is revealed in Scripture.

We should not be seeking to communicate with the spirit world. Mediums and all of that stuff is demonic. It has no place whatsoever in the Christian realm and we should not be trying to communicate with angels because God has established the communication that he wants us to have in his word and in his Son and we must honor that boundary. We must respect the limits that God has established. Follow me here, I'm almost done, so I say. Listen to me carefully: any so-called angelic appearance today should be considered and viewed as a demonic deception, not a messenger from God. This is absolutely clear in Scripture and we must know our boundaries so that we are not sucked into a spiritual realm where we have no business going where you will be in danger.

Let's look at a few Scriptures that point us in this direction. Turn over to 2 Corinthians 11. Paul is addressing the whole problem of false teachers and false apostles and he says in verse 13,

13 For such men are false apostles, deceitful workers, disguising themselves as apostles of Christ.

They are not what they appear to be. Verse 14,

14 No wonder, for even Satan disguises himself as an angel of light. 15 Therefore it is not surprising if his servants also disguise themselves as servants of righteousness, whose end will be according to their deeds.

If an angel of light came and appeared to someone, they would have no basis whatsoever to distinguish a good angel from an evil angel because Satan can take on the appearance of a good angel, an angel of light, and utterly deceive the one who is making the appearance. You cannot, beloved, you do not have the ability to discern a good angel from an evil angel in this age and so you stay away from all of that lest you engage Satan or one of his demons directly.

Look at Galatians 1, the next book over, just a page or two in most of your Bibles. Paul warns us about listening to angels when he says in Galatians 1,

8 But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed!

You could have a supernatural being appear to you and in foolishness, in ignorance, in disobedience, say, "I want to listen to what this spiritual being, what this supernatural appearance has to say." And Paul says, "No! No! No! The priority is the apostolic Gospel which I have given to you. That is what you pay attention to, not a spiritual being."

One more as the New Testament speaks on this a little more often than you might suspect. In chapter 2, verse 18 of Colossians. I'm not sure I said the book. I didn't hear any pages turning. Colossians 2:18,

18 Let no one keep defrauding you of your prize by delighting in self-abasement and the worship of the angels, taking his stand on visions he has seen, inflated without cause by his fleshly mind,

Rather than holding fast to Christ is what he says in essence there in verse 19. The teaching of Scripture is this, beloved, and it is so crucial for you to understand: God has completed his revelation in the 66 books of the English Bible. That's how we have it, the Hebrew and the Greek, of course, being the basis of our English Bible. But he has given us our revelation. We are not to look for supernatural angelic manifestations now. We are not looking for visions, that's not what we stand on. We stand on the more sure foundation of Scripture revealed, written and complete and final that speaks and points us to Christ. This idea of engaging the angelic realm, I realize, I realize, of course, as you do, that it can sell a million books for somebody to say that they've seen an angel and talk about what the angel has shown them and where the angel has taken them. It's all demonic. It has nothing to do with biblical Christianity. It is a supernatural spiritual deception that we are to avoid because God's revelation is complete.

Now, there is a ministry of angels but it is outside of our awareness. You cannot know when it has happened. Look at Hebrews 13. This is the final Scripture text that we are going to turn to. Time ended up getting away from me, how about that? That has never happened. No, I'm kidding, that's not true, it has happened before and it will happen again.

Hebrews 13:1,

1 Let love of the brethren continue. 2 Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for by this some have entertained angels without knowing it.

The point here being, beloved, that to the extent that there is any intersection between the angelic realm and ours now, we don't know it when it happens. We cannot know it and therefore we don't seek it, we don't pry into it. We accept God's revelation and we are content with it lest we be led astray by demonic deception coming in the form of angels of light.

So, today how do we honor God's revelation about angels? We understand it, we study it for a while, but we don't seek to pry further – listen – we don't seek to pry into a realm that God has not given to us. What God has given you in the Lord Jesus Christ, what God has given to you in the 66 books of the Bible, is more than enough, is completely sufficient for everything in your spiritual life. Everything that you need to know, everything for faith, everything for obedience, everything for wisdom is contained in what you hold in your lap and what you have in your heart in the person of the Lord Jesus Christ. You don't even need this other stuff, let alone the fact that it is deceptive when it comes to men. Why would you go there? Be content and honor God by being content with what he has given.

Now very quickly, why does this study of angels matter? Let me just say three things very quickly in less than two minutes. Why does this study of angels matter? First of all, we see something of the manifold wisdom and pleasure of God. God not only populated the visible realm, it pleased him to populate the invisible realm, and the exalted worship that angels give to him calls us to join them, to echo the worship that they are giving in heaven while we are here on earth.

Secondly, we see something of God's care for us in that he appointed a realm of spiritual beings whose responsibilities in part are designed to serve us. I skipped over this. I do not believe that the Scriptures teach or warrant the assertion that every believer has his own personal guardian angel, but somehow there are angels that provide service to God's people and we are the beneficiary of God's care. They are agents of God's care to us in a way that is similar, analogous you might say, to the way that God cares for us within the body of Christ as we serve one another. God ministers sometimes his grace to us directly, sometimes indirectly through his instruments. We benefit from ministry from one another, sometimes without knowing it, we benefit from the ministry of his angels.

One last thing, beloved, we should be humbled by our privilege. As great as angels are, they are greater in power than us, there is a certain mystery about them but, beloved, mark this about the Gospel of Jesus Christ: Jesus Christ did not become an angel in order to redeem fallen angels. The eternal Son of God became a man in order to redeem sinful men, sinful women, like you and me. The atonement, the ministry of Christ, the coming of Christ, was for men like us rather than for angels, so much so that Scripture says the glory of salvation is something that angels long to look into. As great as angels are, as we have seen in our study here this evening, Scripture tells us that we have something and we have a position of privilege that is so great that it is something that they long after but it is denied to them. That's how great salvation is, angels want it and don't have it; we have it and therefore we should give thanks.

Have you come to this Christ who made a blood atonement for sinners?

Let's bow together in prayer.

Our Father, we thank you for your Scriptures, we thank you for the great glory of God to which angels testify and which we see revealed even more fully in the person of Christ. Thank you for each one gathered here today. Thank you for our time. Bless us now as we respond in singing to the teaching of your word. We pray in Christ's name. Amen.

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