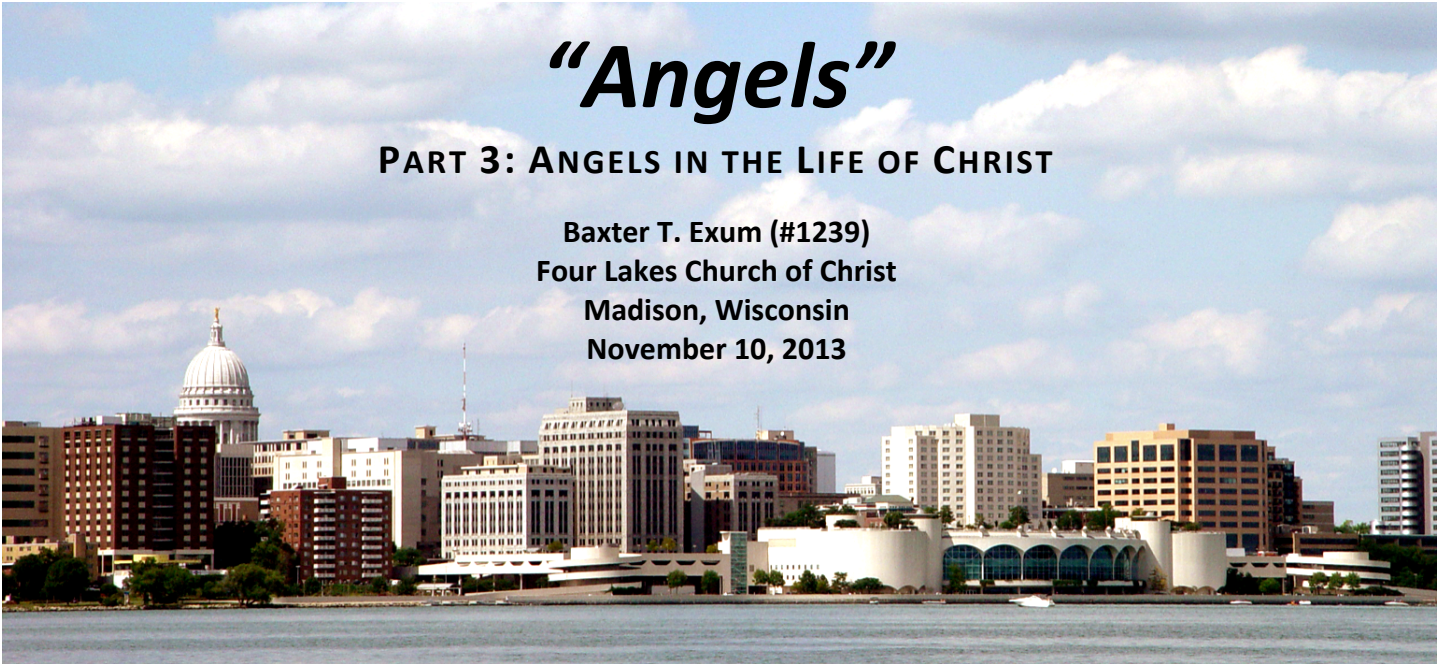


“Angels”

PART 3: ANGELS IN THE LIFE OF CHRIST

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If you have been with us over the past several weeks, then you know that (based on several questions from some of our members and recent visitors) we started a series of lessons looking at ANGELS in the Bible. Two weeks ago, we started by learning that much of what people think they know about the appearance of angels is probably wrong. When most people think of an angel, of course, they picture a beautiful woman with huge wings or they think of a chubby little baby. We learned, though, that angels in the Bible are always pictured as men. As to why, we have no idea. And so two weeks ago, I invited all of you to turn in some kind of artwork depicting a Biblically accurate image of an angel. Some of you have turned in some great ideas over the past few weeks. I have put some up here, some of those were in the announcements this morning, and some of those are on the church's Facebook page. I would encourage all of you with Internet access to stop by for a visit. And, as you can see from the handouts coming around this morning, I would continue to ask for your help on this. We have two more weeks in this series, so we do have time if you would like to share some more of your amazing artwork. In Bible times, of course, angels often appeared as normal human beings, but when they appeared in their natural state, they appeared in a form where the natural human reaction was to fall down in fear and worship (although the worship of angels was always condemned).

Beyond this, we also learned two weeks ago that the word “angel” literally means “messenger.” So, the primary responsibility of angels in the Bible was to deliver messages on God's behalf. And then we moved along and did just a brief overview of some characteristics of angels in the Bible.

Last week, we moved ahead and looked at some of what the Bible has to say concerning Satan and his angels. We learned that angels have the ability to sin, we learned that Satan and his angels are against us, and then we looked at several passages related to the idea that although Satan is somewhat restrained, he is still quite dangerous. He has the ability to deceive, he has the power to keep us away from the word of God, he has the ability to tempt us to sin, and it also appears that Satan may also have the ability to affect our physical health. The bottom line for us, though, is that our job is to do everything in our power to resist the devil. He is real, he can do damage, but we have a promise from God that if we stand firm and resist, Satan will flee from us.

As we progress in this series, I would like for us to take a few moments this morning to think about the role that angels played in the life of Jesus Christ. And as we think about angels in the life of Christ, we start to realize that angels were involved in the Lord's earthly life from the beginning all the way to the end.

We think back to Matthew's gospel account where an angel of the Lord appears to Joseph in a dream and tells Joseph not to be afraid, because Mary has conceived a child by the Holy Spirit. She is to give birth to a son, and the son's name was to be Jesus, because he would save his people from their sins (Matthew 1:18-24).

In Luke's account, we find that an angel named Gabriel was sent to Mary in Nazareth and delivered a similar message. In Luke's account, we find that the child would be given the throne of his father David and would reign over the house of Jacob forever in a kingdom that would never end (Luke 1:26-38).

On the night the Lord was born, we find that an angel announced his birth to the shepherds who were watching their flocks out in the fields around Bethlehem. The angel brought the greatest message ever heard up to that point in human history. The Bible tells us that when they saw the angel, the men were terrified, ***"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; for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.' And suddenly there appeared with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, 'Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.'"*** (Luke 2:10-14).

A short time later, an angel would appear to Joseph, warning him to flee to Egypt to avoid the persecution that King Herod was about to begin. Some time later, an angel appeared to Joseph again, telling him that it was safe for the family to return to Nazareth (Matthew 2:13-23).

Years later, when the Lord was getting ready to begin his earthly ministry, right after his baptism, the Spirit led him out into the wilderness where he fasted for forty days. At the end of those forty days, the Lord was tempted by Satan. Last week, we noticed that Satan twisted the Scriptures in an attempt to get the Lord to fall into temptation. The Lord, though, came back with the word of God and resisted the devil, just as he teaches us to do. The Lord God blazed a trail for us there. But at the end of that time of temptation, we have an interesting reference in Matthew 4:11, ***"Then the devil left Him; and behold, angels came and began to minister to Him."*** Exactly what did those angels do? I don't know. But we do know that they came and served the Lord in the wilderness.

There is so much that we could learn from all of these accounts, but this morning, instead of focusing on what angels did in the life of Christ, I would like for us to focus instead on what angels did NOT do. And so that we can understand why this is so important, I would like for us to look at two passages referring to angels on the night before the Lord was brutally murdered. The references come in two different gospel accounts, so to put the events in time sequence, I would like for us to put these two accounts in chronological order, starting with Luke and then going back to Matthew. But first, let us please notice Luke's account in Luke 22:39-46.

And He came out and proceeded as was His custom to the Mount of Olives; and the disciples also followed Him. When He arrived at the place, He said to them, "Pray that you may not enter into temptation." And He withdrew from them about a stone's throw, and He knelt down and began to pray, saying, "Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done." Now an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him. And being in agony He was praying very fervently; and His sweat became like drops of blood, falling down upon the ground. When He rose from prayer, He came to the disciples and found them sleeping from sorrow, and said to them, "Why are you sleeping? Get up and pray that you may not enter into temptation."

So, we find that as the Lord is praying in the Garden of Gethsemane, his closest friends kept falling asleep. But in the middle of it (in verse 43), we find that ***“an angel from heaven appeared to Him, strengthening Him,”*** a very interesting little reference. I would just point out very briefly here that this angel did not step in and do anything miraculous. He did not pull Jesus out of that situation, the angel did not physically protect the Lord in any way, but the angel appears to merely provide some kind of encouragement so that the Lord is able to face what is about to happen.

With that, we move back in to Matthew’s account to notice what happens immediately after this. Notice, please, Matthew 26:47-56,

While He was still speaking, behold, Judas, one of the twelve, came up accompanied by a large crowd with swords and clubs, who came from the chief priests and elders of the people. Now he who was betraying Him gave them a sign, saying, “Whomever I kiss, He is the one; seize Him.” Immediately Judas went to Jesus and said, “Hail, Rabbi!” and kissed Him. And Jesus said to him, “Friend, do what you have come for.” Then they came and laid hands on Jesus and seized Him.

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. 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. 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? How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?”

At that time Jesus said to the crowds, “Have you come out with swords and clubs to arrest Me as you would against a robber? Every day I used to sit in the temple teaching and you did not seize Me. But all this has taken place to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets.” Then all the disciples left Him and fled.

Again, I know there are so many lessons we could learn from these two passages, but in this series on angels, I would like for us to focus this morning on what these angels did NOT do. The angels did not prevent the Lord’s suffering and death. And here at the beginning, just to emphasize the power that the Lord had at his disposal, I should point out that Roman military historians tell us that a “legion” was a military term that designated the largest unit in the Roman army. According to Tacitus (the Roman historian), the Roman army at this time had a grand total of 25 legions spread all across its empire. Each legion contained approximately 6,000 soldiers (5,300 on foot and 700 on horseback). Each legion was then broken down into 10 cohorts (each cohort being composed of 600 troops), and each cohort was then subdivided into six “centuries,” each made up of 100 troops and commanded by a centurion. So again, a single legion was made up of 6,000 Roman soldiers. My understanding is that we are looking at one legion of Roman soldiers up here on the wall.

You guys know I am not good with numbers, but I think most of us can probably figure out what kind of numbers the Lord is talking about in Matthew 27:53. When the Lord says that he had 12 legions of angels at his disposal, you take 12 and multiply it by 6,000, and you come up with a figure of 72,000! Sometimes we sing, “He could have called 10,000 angels.” That is not really accurate. I guess it flows a little better than the alternative, I guess we can give the author of that song a little poetic license (after all, 10,000 is less than 72,000, so the Lord could have only called 10,000 angels), but truly, the Lord could have called 72,000 angels! But even that is not accurate. Notice: The Lord could have called “more than” 12 legions of angels. So, we are

talking here about a minimum. The figure only starts at 72,000 angels (12 times the number of troops on the wall up here)!

With that in mind, let's just think for a moment: How much damage could be done by 72,000 angels? I don't know, but as we noted two weeks ago, we do know how much damage can be done by ONE angel. You might remember from 2 Kings 19:35-36 that the city of Jerusalem was surrounded by the Assyrian army, King Hezekiah begged God to intervene, and overnight one angel came in and singlehandedly wiped out 185,000 Assyrian soldiers.

If one angel can destroy 185,000 soldiers, then how many soldiers can 72,000 angels destroy? Earlier this week, my daughter told me about some of the word problems she was doing in math, so yesterday I gave her that little word problem, and she came up with a figure of 13.2 billion soldiers! And that is a minimum! That is just what we know! 72,000 angels could have done a lot of damage! If Jesus had just given the word, his angels could have swooped in and destroyed the entire population of the earth at that time, many times over.

And I point out these numbers just to emphasize, just so that we can imagine what must have been going on in heaven that night. Imagine with me: Thousands of angels gathered around this scene, watching as their King and Master is betrayed, and abused, and spit upon, and tortured, and ultimately murdered the next day. Thousands of angels with their swords drawn just waiting for the word, just waiting for the slightest hint that their services were needed. More than 12 legions of angels stood ready. We can imagine thousands upon thousands of rows of flaming chariots with horses pawing the air, pulling at their restraints, just waiting for the word. But that word never came. For the rest of our time together this morning, I would ask: Why? Why did the Lord never call in those angels to bring down heaven's wrath on the most unjust scene in human history? Why were those 72,000 angels never called? I would suggest four reasons.

I. **First of all, the angels were never called SO THAT THE SCRIPTURES WOULD BE FULFILLED.**

We look at Matthew's account, and we find that this reason is given two times in that little paragraph. In verse 54, the Lord says, "***How then will the Scriptures be fulfilled, which say that it must happen this way?***" And then, in verse 56, the Lord goes on to say, "***But all this has taken place, to fulfill the Scriptures of the prophets.***" In other words, the Lord is making it very clear to his disciples that these things are not happening by accident. The betrayal and sham of a trial and crucifixion were not random events. This was not taking the Lord by surprise. Instead, the Lord's death had been planned from the beginning, even before the beginning. We find in 1 Peter 1:20, for example, that the shedding of the Lord's blood for our forgiveness "***...was foreknown before the foundation of the world.***" And being foreknown, the Lord's suffering and sacrifice was also made known through the prophets. We think of the Passover Lamb pictured in Exodus 12, the perfect lamb that had to be sacrificed without breaking a single bone, and we think of how that prophecy was so amazingly fulfilled in John 19:36, "***For these things came to pass to fulfill the Scripture, 'NOT A BONE OF HIM SHALL BE BROKEN.'***" King David wrote about the coming crucifixion in Psalm 22. Isaiah described the Lord's suffering and death in Isaiah 53.

But we don't even need to go to the Old Testament for prophecies about the Lord's betrayal and death. The Lord himself spoke scripture during his lifetime, predicting in Matthew 17:22-23, "***The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men; and they will kill Him, and He will be raised on the third day.***" Or, as the Lord said in Matthew 20:18-19, "***Behold, we are going up to Jerusalem; and the Son of Man will be delivered to the chief priests and scribes, and they will condemn Him to death, and will hand Him over to the Gentiles to mock and scourge and crucify Him, and on the third day He will be raised up.***" And so we find in Garden of

Gethsemane as the Lord prayed and as the Lord was betrayed, he did not call on his angels so that the Scriptures would be fulfilled. He needed his disciples to understand: What is happening tonight is not happening by accident, but it is happening for a reason. The Lord, then, did not call those angels, so that the scriptures would be fulfilled.

II. **There is a second reason why the Lord refused to call the angels, and that is: HE KNEW THAT HE HAD TO BE OBEDIENT TO HIS FATHER IN HEAVEN.**

We think about the Lord's prayer as we read earlier, back in Luke 22:42, ***"Father, if You are willing, remove this cup from Me; yet not My will, but Yours be done."*** We know from the other accounts that the Lord prayed this prayer over and over again, all night long. We can see the struggle there. As a human being like all of us, the Lord did not want to die, and yet he knew that it was very important that he do his Father's will.

We think back to what the Lord said to his disciples in John 10:17-18, ***"For this reason the Father loves Me, because I lay down My life so that I may take it again. No one has taken it away from Me, but I lay it down on My own initiative. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This commandment I received from My Father."*** And so we find there: The Father commanded that Jesus lay down his life, but ultimately, that decision was up to the Lord. He was not forced into it, but he decided to obey his Father's commandment.

We think of Hebrews 5:7-8, ***"In the days of His flesh, He offered up both prayers and supplications with loud crying and tears to the One able to save Him from death, and He was heard because of His piety. Although He was a Son, He learned obedience from the things which He suffered."*** The Lord, then, experienced what it means to obey, and he became our perfect example in that regard. Just as Jesus obeyed, so also we must obey God as well. The Lord, then, did not call upon the angels at his disposal, but he chose to obey his Father instead.

III. **There is a third reason why the Lord did not call upon those 72,000 angels, and that is: Jesus knew that PHYSICAL FORCE WOULD NOT SOLVE A SPIRITUAL PROBLEM.**

After all, that is why the Lord spent the entire night in prayer. He didn't spend the night arming his disciples, but he spent the night in prayer. The enemy, though, was very physical. All four gospel accounts tell us that the mob was armed with ***"swords and clubs."*** John's account goes even further and tells us that Judas was accompanied by a Roman ***"cohort."*** You might remember from earlier that a cohort was 1/10 of a legion. Again, a legion was 6,000, so a cohort was 600 soldiers. We know from history that one cohort was permanently stationed at Antonia, the Roman fortress adjoining the northwest corner of the temple. During a feast like Passover, though, the Romans brought in even more soldiers to try to keep the peace with the hundreds of thousands of extra visitors coming into the city – we might think about a situation like Freakfest or the Mifflin Street Block Party here in Madison. Everybody is on duty, and some are even brought in from outside agencies to help keep the peace. Well, the same thing happened in Jerusalem, and this huge mob shows up to take Jesus into custody.

In Matthew's account, Peter sees what is happening, takes out his sword, and chops off the ear of the slave of the high priest. Of course, as we have discussed before, Peter is not a swordsman, he is a fisherman! We assume he was probably going for the man's head or neck, but the man ducks to the side, and Peter chops off his ear instead. Now, the Lord's reaction to this is interesting. He tells Peter to put the sword back in its place. With that statement, the Lord was not condemning the use of any sword under any circumstances – there are

valid reasons for using a sword outlined in other passages in the Bible (self-defense, defending a nation, punishing evildoers, and so on). However, the point here seems to be that physical violence is not the solution for a spiritual problem. In other words, the Christian faith is not to be defended or promoted or enforced with a literal sword. Unlike some other world religions, Christianity is not to be a violent religion. As Paul would go on to say in 2 Corinthians 10:3-5, ***“For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war according to the flesh, for the weapons of our warfare are not of the flesh, but divinely powerful for the destruction of fortresses. We are destroying speculations and every lofty thing raised up against the knowledge of God, and we are taking every thought captive to the obedience of Christ.”*** As we discussed last week, the only weapon at our disposal as Christians is the ***“sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God”*** (Ephesians 6:17).

Peter, though, at this point, was not really thinking in spiritual terms. In Peter’s mind, these people wanted to hurt Jesus, Peter didn’t want that to happen, so Peter took matters into his own hands and just whacked the first person he could reach. Peter, then, had to be reminded: This is not how we defend the Christian faith.

I would also point out that Peter was fighting the wrong enemy. We find in John’s account that the slave’s name was Malchus. Have you ever wondered why we have the slave’s name here? Some commentators have suggested that when we have a seemingly insignificant name like this, it is possible that this person was known to those who were reading the account for the first time. In other words, it is possible that Malchus later obeyed the gospel. So, the people would be reading John and would be able to say, “Oh yeah – Malchus! We know him!” That is at least a possibility, but the point here is: Malchus was not the enemy. Malchus was just a slave doing his job. Like Peter, sometimes we also forget that we are not really fighting other people. Going back to what Paul said in Ephesians 6:12, ***“...our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.”*** Thankfully, it seems that Peter finally got the point. Fifty days later, on the Day of Pentecost, Peter stood up and wielded a much more powerful sword, the sword of the Spirit, the word of God, which is ***“living and active and sharper than any two-edged sword, and piercing as far as the division of soul and spirit, of both joints and marrow, and able to judge the thoughts and intentions of the heart.”*** In Acts 2, Peter used the word of God, and those who heard were ***“stabbed in their heart”*** (as the Bible says in Acts 2:37). They cried out asking what they needed to do, and Peter said to them, ***“Change your hearts, and let each one of you be immersed in the name of Jesus Christ, so that your sins might be forgiven,”*** and on that day, 3,000 were baptized into Christ.

The Lord, then, did not call on those angels, because he knew that physical violence was not the answer to a spiritual problem.

IV. **There is at least one other reason as to why the Lord did not call on those angels, and that is: THE LORD KNEW THAT WHAT HE WAS ABOUT TO DO WAS THE ONLY WAY THAT OUR SINS COULD BE FORGIVEN.**

In other words, the Lord Jesus refused to call for help, because he loved us so much. If the angels had intervened, our salvation would not have been possible. The only angel associated with the Lord’s death, then, came not with a sword, but came with encouragement – giving Jesus the strength to do what he needed to do, for us. One author has pointed out that the greatest expression of love isn’t just in what Jesus did on the cross, but what he did not do in the garden. He did not call for the angels. Instead, he kept his army restrained, and faced the cross alone. This morning, then, we have basically studied the miracle that never happened. And with that, we have a reminder that the Lord’s life was not taken away from him, but instead, he willingly laid down his life for us. As Paul said in Romans 5:8, ***“...God demonstrates His own love toward us, in that while***

we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. And, as the Lord himself said in John 15:13, ***“Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends.”*** On the cross, Jesus refused to call for help, and instead, he willingly laid down his life for us.

Conclusion:

As we close, we realize that there is really only one thing for us to do about this, and that is: Willing, humble, submission to Christ motivated by extreme thankfulness for what he did for us. For those who have never obeyed the gospel, the Bible teaches that you must put your faith in Jesus as God’s Son, you have to repent – that means that you must have a change of heart concerning sin. Let Jesus be in charge of your life. Live for him instead of living for yourself. Once you have made that decision, the Bible teaches that we must allow ourselves to be buried in water, just as Jesus was buried in the tomb, and then we are raised up out of the water (as the Lord was) to live a brand new life. At the point of baptism, our sins are forgiven.

Or maybe you did all of this in the past, but you slipped and fell along the way, and maybe now, due to some influence in your life, it is clear that you need to come back to God and work things out. We would love to help with that. The Bible teaches that when we fall we need to ask God for forgiveness. We confess our sins, making the confession just as public as the sin. If we have sinned privately, we confess our sin to God. If we have sinned against another person, we confess it to one we have sinned against. If we have sinned publicly, we confess publicly.

Whatever we need to do, we do it because we are thankful for what he did for us. We are thankful that Jesus obeyed and that he followed through with the Father’s plan. We are thankful that he did not call those 72,000 angels. This morning, the Lord himself is inviting you to obey the good news. If you are ready to become a Christian, you can let us know as we sing this next song. Let’s stand and sing...

To comment on this lesson: fourlakeschurch@gmail.com

ANGELS

