

“Angels”

PART 5: FUTURE JUDGMENT

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As most of you know, over the past few weeks we have been studying what the Bible teaches on the subject of angels. We have done an overview, we looked at Satan and his angels, we looked at angels in the life of Christ, and last week we looked at the role that angels play in the world today. For those of you who have not been here, all four of those lessons have been posted on the church website. As you can see on the wall up here, I would like for us to conclude the series this morning by looking together at the role that angels will play in the final judgment. And once again, I would like to thank all of you who have turned in some excellent artwork for this series. This morning, I will be using some of what was turned in last Sunday morning. And again, for those of you who have not been here over the past month, much of the artwork has been posted on the church's Facebook page. And again, if you are not on Facebook, that right there is enough reason to sign up! We have some very creative people here, and a lot of those drawings are now online.

And while we are talking about artwork, I should also thank those of you who have kept your eyes open for angels in other ways as well. Sometime last week, Harold and Ruth went out to Denny's, and they spotted an angel! If you have good eyesight, then you might be able to see that their server's name was "Angel." So, I guess we can accurately say that there are indeed "angels among us." By the way, I believe this might have been Ruth's very first time to send a picture via a text message, so I am especially thankful for that effort!

As we conclude our series by looking at the role that angels will play in the final judgment, we actually find a number of passages spread throughout the four gospel accounts, and we will get to most of those in just a moment. But as we begin, I would direct your attention to Acts 1 (p. 1699). At the end of the gospel accounts, the Lord has been raised from the dead, he has given the Great Commission (instructing his followers to preach the gospel in all the earth), and then, when we transition over to Acts 1, the Lord is getting ready to leave this earth and to go back into heaven. With his last words, he emphasizes the fact that his people are to take the gospel even to the remotest parts of the earth, and that is where we pick up with Acts 1:9-11,

And after He had said these things, He was lifted up while they were looking on, and a cloud received Him out of their sight. And as they were gazing intently into the sky while He was going, behold, two men in white clothing stood beside them. They also said, "Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched Him go into heaven."

And so we have a prediction made by these two men in white clothing – we assume they are angels (this is how Luke identifies the angels at the resurrection) – and these angels inform the Lord’s disciples that he will return in the same way he left: In the clouds and accompanied by angels. As I said, there are a number of passages that give us more details about the Lord’s second coming, but I would like for us to go back to our custom of looking in depth at one passage, and I’d like to do that by looking at 2 Thessalonians 1 (p. 1851).

We know that Paul established the church in the Macedonian city of Thessalonica on Paul’s Second Missionary Journey (somewhere around the year 50 AD). The account of what happened during Paul’s first visit to Thessalonica is found in the opening verses of Acts 17. Basically, Paul went in and started preaching the gospel, the Jews got incredibly upset at that, they rustled up a mob, they started dragging some of the new Christians up in front of the city authorities, they hit the church up for money as a kind of **“pledge”** that they would keep the peace in the future, and Paul pretty much headed out the back way and moved along to the next town to continue preaching the gospel. As you can imagine, Paul was concerned about this new group. Here was a brand new congregation, and they were already getting harassed by the authorities. So, as Paul continued traveling, he kept on making his way south along the eastern coast of Greece, briefly stopping in Athens, and then establishing the church in Corinth (where he settled for the next 18 months). Almost immediately, Paul sent a letter back to the new congregation in Thessalonica, what we know now as the book of 1 Thessalonians. Well, even after receiving that letter, they were still having some issues, they still needed some encouragement, so almost immediately Paul sends another letter, the little 3-chapter book we now know as 2 Thessalonians. Notice how he starts,

Paul and Silvanus and Timothy, to the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: Grace to you and peace from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

We ought always to give thanks to God for you, brethren, as is only fitting, because your faith is greatly enlarged, and the love of each one of you toward one another grows ever greater; therefore, we ourselves speak proudly of you among the churches of God for your perseverance and faith in the midst of all your persecutions and afflictions which you endure.

So we find that Paul is trying to build them up. He thanks God for the fact that their faith is **“greatly enlarged.”** Literally, their faith is **“super-growing.”** The prefix is **“hyper/hyper.”** Their faith, then, was hyper-growing. Their faith was growing above and beyond what Paul expected. Not only that, but notice at the end of verse 3 that their love was growing as well. Literally, their love was **“super-abounding.”** Referring to their love, Paul used a word that was used in the ancient world to refer to a river that was overflowing its banks during a great flood. And the love we are talking about here is not a mushy feeling, this isn’t a romantic kind of love, but this is AGAPE, making a decision to do what is best for another person regardless of the cost to ourselves, a self-sacrificing kind of love. This love was overflowing like a river overflowing its banks. And with that in mind, notice what Paul says in verse 5. Because of their super-abounding faith and overflowing love, Paul was speaking **“proudly”** of them to the other congregations. In other words, he was using the church in Thessalonica as an example. Paul would preach on faith and love, and he would tell people: You need to be like those Christians up in Thessalonica!

However, even though they were strong in faith and love, we find in the rest of 2 Thessalonians 1 that these people needed some HOPE. In other words, they needed some encouragement. They were getting beaten down for their faith, and they needed some encouragement to hang in there just a little bit longer. All of this brings us to one of the most powerful references to angels at the Second Coming of Christ – 2 Thessalonians

1:5-12. If you will, please look with me at the second half of 2 Thessalonians 1, starting with verse 5, the words of the apostle Paul to the church in Thessalonica,

This is a plain indication of God’s righteous judgment so that you will be considered worthy of the kingdom of God, for which indeed you are suffering. For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you, and to give relief to you who are afflicted and to us as well when the Lord Jesus will be revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire, dealing out retribution to those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel of our Lord Jesus. These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord and from the glory of His power, when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day, and to be marveled at among all who have believed—for our testimony to you was believed. To this end also we pray for you always, that our God will count you worthy of your calling, and fulfill every desire for goodness and the work of faith with power, so that the name of our Lord Jesus will be glorified in you, and you in Him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

And so we find in this passage that in an effort to encourage these people to hang on, the apostle Paul appeals to the Judgment Day. He appeals to the Second Coming of Jesus Christ. And for the Christians in Thessalonica, this was an uplifting message that they desperately needed to hear. Paul, then, is very direct. In no uncertain terms, Jesus is coming again, and when he comes, several things are going to happen. With this in mind, the apostle Paul gives several encouraging words.

- I. **And I would point out, first of all, that when the Lord returns in the clouds, according to verse 7, he will be bringing RELIEF to those who are afflicted.**

And I love the drawing up here! In the middle, notice that God is depicted as a star, and the note says, “Cuz I don’t know what he looks like.” On the right, we have an angel with several bad people in chains. On the bottom, we have an angel keeping people in line as they wait for judgment. And on the left, we have an angel with those who are good, and did you notice what that angel is saying? The angel is asking those who are good, “Can I get you anything?” That is so awesome! According to the apostle Paul and according to this drawing, when the Lord returns in judgment, he (along with his angels) will be bringing relief to those who are being afflicted.

That word “**relief**” refers to a “**loosening**” or a “**relaxation**” of something. It refers to the removal of pressure. In the ancient world, the word was used to refer to the unstringing of a bow. Most of us here this morning have used a bow and arrow. I remember those old bows we used to use in middle school and high school. I remember almost shooting my counselor at summer camp in 6th grade. But I also remember how those old bows had to be unstrung. It wasn’t good to leave them under pressure, and so we had to learn how to unstring each bow at the end of each day. In the same way, Paul could see that these new Christians were under pressure, and so he reminded them in this opening passage that the day was coming when Christ would return and bring “**relief**.” In this life, God’s people are often pressured, but there is a time coming when that pressure will be lifted. The pressure will be relieved. All of those struggles that made life nearly unbearable will come to an end. We will be rescued and taken away.

We think of the Lord’s promise in John 14:1-3, “**Do not let your heart be troubled; believe in God, believe also in Me. In My Father’s house are many dwelling places; if it were not so, I would have told you; for I go to prepare a place for you. If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you to Myself, that**

where I am, there you may be also. When the Lord comes back in the clouds, it will be to take us to that place. So, first of all, when the Lord returns with his angels, he will bring ***“relief”*** to those who are afflicted.

II. There is another comforting thought concerning something that will happen on Judgment Day, and that is: The Lord will bring JUSTICE.

In verse 5, we read about ***“God’s righteous judgment.”*** And in this context, we read about the Lord being ***“revealed from heaven with His mighty angels in flaming fire.”*** And really, the idea of angels bringing justice is not a new concept. We think of the angels in Genesis 19:13 who were responsible for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah. We remember it was an angel who struck Israel with disease as the result of King David’s sin in 2 Samuel 24. We remember that it was an angel who struck King Herod with worms so that he died in Acts 12. All through the Bible, angels have been used by God to deliver justice.

But I would emphasize here that God’s final judgment will be comprehensive. There will be no escape. If you remember the Parable of the Wheat and the Tares in Matthew 13, the enemy came in and sowed weeds among the farmer’s wheat. As the crop started to come up, the servants could see what had happened, and so they asked the farmer what to do: Should they go out in the middle of the growing season and try to take the weeds out? The farmer said, ***“No,”*** because that might damage the crop. So, the farmer told the servants to wait until the final harvest to sort things out. Later in the chapter, the Lord explains that the parable is a picture of what is going on in the world. For now, the righteous and the wicked are mixed in together, but in the Judgment, the angels will serve as the reapers and will separate the wheat from the weeds. The weeds will be burned in the fire, and the wheat will then be gathered into the barn. In the parable, there is no middle ground. We are on one side or the other, and the angels will assist with the sorting and gathering. As the Lord explained in Matthew 13:41-43, ***“The Son of Man will send forth His angels, and they will gather out of His kingdom all stumbling blocks, and those who commit lawlessness, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth. Then the righteous will shine forth as the sun in the kingdom of their Father. He who has ears, let him hear.”*** The same picture comes through a few verses later in that chapter with the parable of the fishing net. The fisherman throws out the net and catches all kinds of fish, but he sorts it out at the end of the day. With that picture in mind, Jesus said, ***“So it will be at the end of the age; the angels will come forth and take out the wicked from among the righteous, and will throw them into the furnace of fire; in that place there will be weeping and gnashing of teeth”*** (Matthew 13:49-50).

We also find the angels involved in the judgment in Luke 12:8-9, where the Lord said, ***“And I say to you, everyone who confesses Me before men, the Son of Man will confess him also before the angels of God; but he who denies Me before men will be denied before the angels of God.”*** That is a reference to the Judgment Day. Notice, again, the role that angels will play. The angels will be there. The angels will be witnesses to what happens. They will also assist. And that is the picture we have here in 2 Thessalonians 1. On the Day of Judgment, the angels will appear in ***“flaming fire.”***

The picture we have is of an irresistible army. And the army is coming not because they are angry or spiteful, but because the cause is just. The purpose is to bring the justice that was promised long ago. We think of what the Lord said concerning those who did not feed and clothe the poor in Matthew 25:45-46, ***“Then He will answer them, ‘Truly I say to you, to the extent that you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.’ These will go away into eternal punishment, but the righteous into eternal life.”*** Many only want to see God as a God of love and grace and mercy and tolerance. And he is, but he is also a God of justice. Going back to the sin leading up to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Abraham approached God and

said, ***“Shall not the Judge of all the earth deal justly?”*** You see, God is merciful, but he is also a judge. We think of what Solomon said more than 900 years before the time of Christ, in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, ***“The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”*** And that is how that book ends. In the New Testament, we think of what Paul wrote in Romans 2:16. He referred to a day when, according to the gospel, ***“...God will judge the secrets of men through Christ Jesus.”*** We think of what Paul said later in that book as he quoted from Deuteronomy in Romans 12:19, ***“Never take your own revenge, beloved, but leave room for the wrath of God, for it is written, ‘Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,’ says the Lord.”*** The Christians in Thessalonica, then, could take comfort in the fact that although they were being harassed and persecuted at the time, the day was coming when God would make things right.

Notice the emphasis in verse 6, ***“For after all it is only just for God to repay with affliction those who afflict you.”*** The idea is: People will eventually reap in accordance with what they have sown – God’s law of sowing and reaping. Pharaoh tried to drown all of the male Israelite babies in the Nile River; Pharaoh’s own army was drowned in the Red Sea. Haman planned on hanging Mordecai and wiping out the entire Jewish nation; Haman and his entire family was hanged on the gallows he had made. The advisors of King Darius planned on feeding Daniel to the lions; those same advisors were eaten by those same lions before their bodies hit the bottom of the pit. God has a perfect sense of justice.

In verse 9, we find that ***“These will pay the penalty of eternal destruction, away from the presence of the Lord...”*** We might want to think that the punishment will be quick, that the punishment will be temporary. But notice here: The punishment will actually be ***“eternal,” “eternal destruction,”*** eternal separation from God, loneliness, emptiness. Jude describes those in hell as ***“wandering stars, for whom the black darkness has been reserved forever.”*** C.S. Lewis has suggested that, “In hell, everybody will be at an infinite distance from everybody else.” Hell, then, is pictured as a place of pain and loneliness. And all of this goes back to the idea of justice. Turning away from Jesus is basically treason against the King of the Universe, and the punishment will be eternal.

So, this is meant to comfort the Christians in Thessalonica. At the time, it might have looked like evil people were getting away with something, but Paul reminded them in this passage that there was a time coming when the Lord would return with his angels and would deliver justice.

III. There is a third encouragement that Paul brings out in view of the Judgment Day, and that is: On that day, all of God’s people will be able to WORSHIP God face-to-face.

Notice, please, in verse 10, that ***“when He comes to be glorified in His saints on that day”*** he will be ***“marveled at among all who have believed.”*** The picture I have is of us seeing the Lord for the very first time, and we ***“marvel,”*** Paul says. We stare in wide-eyed amazement. Our jaws hit the floor. The word ***“marveled”*** refers to being ***“astonished,” “amazed”*** or ***“surprised.”***

We think of the praise heaped upon heroes returning from war. Earlier this year, our family made a point of attending one of the welcome home celebrations for one of the Badger Honor Flights. We went with another family from this congregation, and it was an amazing experience. As you might know, WWII veterans leave Madison early on a Saturday morning to go to Washington DC to see the memorials, to visit Arlington National Cemetery, and to see the WWII memorial that was built in their honor. And these are men in their 80’s and 90’s, many of them in wheelchairs, but when they get off the plane late on Saturday night, they are welcomed home by a crowd of thousands, all of whom are there to thank them for their service so many years earlier. As

I stood in that huge crowd several months ago, I thought to myself: This is what heaven is going to be like! There is a time coming when we will be welcomed home. There is a time coming when we will finally get to see the Lord face-to-face and to fall down at his feet in worship. There is a time coming when all of us who have believed will be able to worship God in person.

And that is why I love the drawing up here. I love that the artist very proudly took credit, but I also love the group up there singing under the “Welcome to Heaven” banner! There is a day coming when we will be able to worship God face-to-face.

Conclusion:

As we close our thoughts on this passage, I would like to wrap it up by asking the “So what?” question as we often do. What does this passage really mean for us today? And to wrap it up, I would point out how Paul wraps it up. Notice, please, verse 11, as Paul starts out by saying, **“To this end...”** In other words, Paul is summarizing. Paul is bringing this section to an end. This is what this means in practical terms. And what it means comes in Paul’s prayer. If I could summarize: In verses 11-12, Paul is telling these people to hang in there and to continue glorifying the name of Jesus in everything they do. And that, as I see it, is our mission in life: To glorify God. And so the message is: It may seem as if evil people are winning, but hang in there! You may wonder whether the sacrifice is worth it, but hang in there! Keep on glorifying God! In verse 11, Paul’s prayer was that they would fulfill God’s plan for their lives, that they would be considered worthy of their calling – not that they would be worthy of salvation (we can never be truly “worthy” of our salvation), but his prayer was that they would fulfill God’s plan for their lives, that they would be worthy of their calling, that they would do what God had called them to do. And that is why I love the drawing up here. Did you notice that the judgment scene here is focused on the Bible? In case you can’t read it from where you are, there is an open book on that table down there in the middle, and the book determines where each person will spend eternity.

And that is the encouragement here: When we are struggling, we stay focused on the mission – we glorify God. We point people to Jesus. We reflect God’s plan in the way we live. As you can see at the bottom of the handout, I have included a place to think about ways we can glorify God in our own lives this week. And this might be different for each of us here this morning. Maybe it comes in how we handle a stressful situation at work. Maybe it comes in how we deal with a difficult assignment at school. Maybe it comes in how we react to something that happens to us at home. Maybe you can think of a situation in your life right now where God needs to be brought into it in some way. How can we honor God over the next several days? Maybe our daily schedule needs to change. Maybe we need to adjust how we spend our salary. Maybe we need to go out and buy some “cream of” soups for Shults-Lewis Child and Family Services. Maybe there is somebody who might appreciate a home-cooked meal or a brief visit in a nursing home. Maybe we need to get up the courage to speak out against some kind of inappropriate discussion among friends. There are so many ways we can honor God, but that seems to be the point here: We are not to get discouraged, but we are to dig in and bring glory to God in everything we do. Again, I am very thankful for your help with the artwork over the past month or so, and I am very thankful for the good questions that led to this series of lessons.

As we close, I would bring your attention back to an interesting little phrase in verse 8. The punishment brought on by those mighty angels in flaming fire will come upon **“those who do not know God and to those who do not obey the gospel.”** The word **“obey”** comes from two words meaning, **“to listen under.”** In the ancient world, the word was often used to refer to someone who heard a knock at the door and responded to it. And that is the picture here. Those who respond to the good news with obedience will be rewarded, but

those who do not respond will be turned away for eternity. For now, God is knocking at the door, but there is a day coming when that door will be closed forever.

How do we **“obey the gospel”**? The gospel is the good news that Jesus came to this earth and died, he was buried, but on the third day he came back from the dead. We obey that good news by reenacting it in our own lives. We die to sin. That is, we turn away from sin. We come to the realization that our sin put Jesus on the cross, and we turn away from it. We then allow ourselves to be buried with Christ in baptism so that our sins will be forgiven. We then come up out of the water as new people, having been born into God’s family. At that point, the Christian life begins. If you have any questions, let us know. If you would like to talk about it, let us know. You do not need to be baptized during a service like this. But if you are ready to obey the gospel right now, 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

JUDGMENT DAY

#1: RELIEF



ANGELS

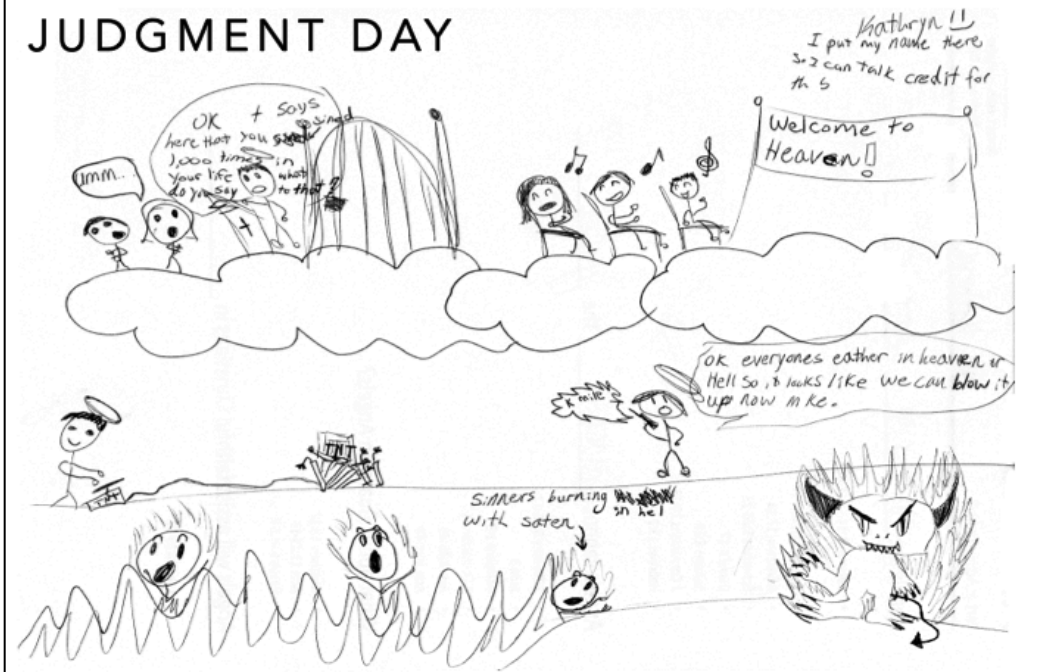
JUDGMENT DAY

#2: JUSTICE



ANGELS #3: WORSHIP

JUDGMENT DAY



ANGELS

JUDGMENT DAY

GLORIFY JESUS!

