

10.01.2017

St. Michael and All Angels

Revelation 12:7-12; Matthew 18:1-11

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When I was a kid—I'll be honest—I watched a lot of TV. I was raised on a steady diet of Disney and Nickelodeon, Warner Bros. and Hanna-Barbara. And one thing they all brought me up to believe was that one day, when I pass through those pearly gates, I'll get a halo, a harp, and a pair of wings—all standard issue. After all, whether it was Tom or Jerry, Daffy or Bugs, Mickey or Donald, they all got the full angel treatment when they entered the great beyond. So, when I attended the funeral of my aunt at a Lutheran church in upstate New York, I wasn't at all surprised by what I heard. There, my grieving family eulogized about my aunt, saying stuff like how she'd gotten her wings, how she was looking down on us, how she was now an angel. Now, I don't know about you, but that's the kinda stuff I was told as a kid—in heaven, we all become angels.

Well, fast forward now to my high school years. One Christmas, I received a Barnes and Noble gift card, so browsing the theology section I decided to go with a book on angels. Reading this thing, my head was about to explode—everything I had ever been taught about angels was thrown right out the window. Turns out, what the Bible actually has to say about them couldn't be more different.

Imagine my surprise when I read that angels are entirely other created beings—in other words, we don't *become* angels when we die. No wings, no harps, no halos. And when I saw that, my heart sank, my stomach dropped, my head hung. While for some of you, this might sound like a relief—I mean, sitting on a cloud strummin' a harp for all eternity might strike you as kinda boring—but for me, it was a little disappointing to find out. It's like, when you grow up, you imagine yourself being a police officer, a fireman, a war hero someday—y'know, doing a lot of good, *being somebody*, something important—and then you take the tests, try to pass whatever requirements, and you come to find out you have some kind of weird disease or disability which disqualifies you from your dreams.

I remember thinking, so does this mean I don't get to be special? Does this mean I'm just this regular run-of-the-mill mortal? I won't ever fly; won't ever be shiny, or holy, or glorious? That was a big letdown—and it was confusing too, since everything else and everyone else was telling me otherwise. But hey, it's tough to argue with God's Word.

And what makes matters worse, is how *unshiny*, how *unholy*, how *inglorious* I really feel. I mean, I want to be like the angels—y'know, do God's will, bask in His presence the way they do, be something great like those heavenly hosts. But trouble is, did you hear Jesus' words this morning? He says, "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire." Jesus even says, "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea." Anyone else going, "Gulp!" It's enough to make any of us feel not only less than the angels, but down there with the demons.

But then again, how does any of this get brought up to begin with, d'you remember? The disciples walk up to Jesus and ask, "Who's the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" And y'know what Jesus does? He finds the nearest youngster, pulls him close, sticks him out in front, and says, "Unless you become like one of these, you'll never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is greatest in the kingdom." Well, tell me, how do you feel right now? After everything you've heard today, are you feeling proud, worthy, self-confident, or are you like me, feeling little, least, and last? Well, Jesus says, if you and I are humble then we're actually pretty great.

Did you know that God has His own TV channel? It's some of that educational programming, and it can teach us a lot about angels, and even a thing or two about ourselves. We tuned in to it earlier this morning—the show we watched was the Revelation of St. John. It was a three-part series that gives us a behind-the-scenes look at the lives of angels.

And as that drama unfolded, you and I got a glimpse into the sorta unseen things that are happening all around us every day.

In Part One, war arises in heaven—Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and *his* angels fighting back. All this time, there's this tug of war between angels and demons, a real battle for souls going on right under our noses. Looks like angels aren't such soft, gentle effeminate creatures, after all, like what you see in "Touched By An Angel." Neither are they those cute, chubby cherubs you find in Raphael's paintings. No, angels are more like warriors, sent to do battle against the forces of evil. Instead of a Precious Moments figurine, a G.I. Joe is more like it.

But let me interrupt our regularly scheduled programming for an important public service announcement. Do you still feel little, last, or least? Do you still rate yourself lower than the angels? Then think about this—Do you know why God's angels are locked in this ongoing struggle with Satan and his minions? It's because they care about you, they love you, they stick up for you—you, *you* are the reason for what they do!

Don't you see—angels aren't some bigshot, special, privileged class of beings like we might've at first thought. No, in fact, the reason God ever created angels was to serve *us*. In the Bible, that's all they ever do—help us, deliver messages to us, defend us. Which makes you and me pretty important when you think about it! I mean, just imagine—the whole spirit world's fighting over us!

Okay, let's get on with Part Two then. The devil, we learn, is defeated, and there's no longer any place for him in heaven. The great dragon is thrown down, that ancient serpent—who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he is thrown down to earth, and his angels are thrown down with him. And a loud voice breaks the silence—"Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come," it shouts, "for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God."

[*Ehh-ehh-ehh-beep*] "This is a test of the Emergency Broadcast System. This is only a test." Here's the test—after viewing this segment, who was Jesus' words about millstones and being cast into the hell of fire really about, you? Couldn't be. We just heard how the great dragon, that ancient serpent, was thrown down. Next, tell me, when Jesus was talking about children and little ones, who was He talking about then? Well, who here's God's child, who here feels little, least, and last but is great in our Lord's eyes? Yes, *you*, of course!

Don't you see what's going on here? Woe is Satan for causing any of us to sin—woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! It would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea, because in the end, he's got a millstone with his name on it waiting for him by the Lake of fire.

And remember that loud voice—"Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of His Christ have come!" it shouted. See, Jesus came to set the record straight once and for all. He made a promise to our first parents back in the Garden to get rid of everything wrong with the world and put it all to rights. Well, plunging His cross into Golgotha, the Place of the Skull, our Lord has driven His cross right through Satan's skull, crushing the serpent's head. And do you think He would've done that for some angels? He has yet to do it for any fallen ones. We're the ones who were made in the image and likeness of God, it is our flesh He's assumed, it is for us that Jesus became lower than the angels with all of our unrighteous sin to exalt us as great in the kingdom of heaven. He must think you and I are pretty special!

Now, let's get back to the exciting conclusion of our miniseries. This is the big reveal—we're about to find out what kind of weapons the angels keep in their armory, what they use to defeat the enemy. "They have conquered," it says, "by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." . . . "They have conquered him"—the devil—"by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony." . . . So that's the secret weapon—*blood and Word, blood and Word*—it never fails!

But as the credits start rolling, and we're picking ourselves up off the couch, maybe we can't help but wonder if it isn't all just some show? I mean, all this talk about conquering and victory and triumph just doesn't sound like the real world.

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No, when we watch the news, check our Facebook, go through our daily lives, it sure looks like Christianity's a losing game. Not to mention, who hasn't heard the expression, "You can't believe everything you see on TV"?

Well, first off, that little miniseries on Revelation, that wasn't made-for-TV programming. That was all real life footage caught on camera. After all, everything that airs on God's channel actually happened—you can think of it as the history channel. But God was afraid of this—that we might not take it seriously—and so God doesn't just give us reality TV, but gives us actual reality.

Right here, right now, God breaks into our living rooms. He gives us a share in His very Son's victory as we speak. He drops into our hands and into our ears the secret weapon that can never lose—the blood of the Lamb and the Word of Christ. By Word and Sacrament, we aren't so little so last, so least anymore. We might not be angels, but we're definitely a force to be reckoned with. We are something better, we are great in God's kingdom. We are more than conquerors through Him who loved us. Satan might win a few battles, but thanks to Jesus, you and I have already won the war.