

The Teaching of CHRIST

By

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PART I

THE TEACHING OF CHRIST CONCERNING PERSONALITIES

CHAPTER FOUR

CONCERNING ANGELS

"The enemy that sowed them is the devil; the harvest is the end of the world; and the reapers are the angels. As therefore the tares are gathered and burned in the fire; so shall it be in the end of this world. The Son of man shall send forth his angels, and they shall gather out of his kingdom all things that offend, and them which do iniquity; And shall cast them into a furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:39-42).

"So shall it be at the end of the world: the angels shall come forth, and sever the wicked from among the just, And shall cast them into the furnace of fire: there shall be wailing and gnashing of teeth" (Matthew 13:49-50).

"For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels; and then he shall reward every man according to his works" (Matthew 16:27).

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven" (Matthew 18:10).

"For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30).

"And he shall send his angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other" (Matthew 24:31).

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

"When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (Matthew 25:31).

"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53).

"Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of me and of my words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he cometh in the glory of his Father with the holy angels" (Mark 8:38).

"For when they shall rise from the dead, they neither marry, nor are given in marriage; but are as the angels which are in heaven" (Mark 12:25).

"And then shall he send his angels, and shall gather together his elect from the four winds, from the uttermost part of the earth to the uttermost part of heaven" (Mark 13:27).

"But of that day and that hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels which are in heaven, neither the Son, but the Father" (Mark 13:32).

"For whosoever shall be ashamed of me and of my words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when he shall come in his own glory, and in his Father's, and of the holy angels" (Luke 9:26).

"Also I say unto you, Whosoever shall confess me before men, him shall the Son of man also confess before the angels of God: But he that denieth me before men shall be denied before the angels of God" (Luke 12:8-9).

"Likewise, I say unto you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner that repenteth" (Luke 15:10).

"And it came to pass, that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom: the rich man also died, and was buried" (Luke 16:22).

"Neither can they die any more: for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection" (Luke 20:36).

"And he saith unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man" (John 1:51).

EACH of the evangelists has some story or stories to tell of angel ministry in connection with the incarnate Lord.

Matthew records the appearing of an angel to Joseph, the reputed father of JESUS, three times; then of how angels ministered to JESUS after the period of temptation in the wilderness; and finally, of the coming of the angel to roll away the stone, not to liberate CHRIST, but to show that He was already risen; and of his declaration to the two Marys that the Lord was risen, and

His charge to them to go and tell His disciples.

Mark significantly only speaks of the ministry of angels after the temptation.

Luke records the visits of Gabriel to Zacharias and to Mary; the appearance of an angel to the shepherds, and of the making of the night full of music with the chorus of the heavenly visitors. He also tells of the coming of an angel into Gethsemane, and of how he ministered to the Man of Sorrows in the hour of His darkness; and finally of how two disciples, walking to Emmaus, reported that certain women claimed to have seen a vision of angels.

John circumstantially describes how Mary, looking into the sepulchre, from which the stone had been rolled away, saw two angels in white, sitting one at the head, and one at the feet, where the body of JESUS had lain.

All these references are simple, natural, straightforward, without apology, and without argument. It is impossible to read these stories, and believe in the truthfulness of the men who wrote them, without at least discovering that they evidently themselves believed in angels; and moreover, that they wrote for those who shared that belief. Their own belief in angels is evidenced by the very naturalness and simplicity with which they told their stories. Their certainty that those for whom they wrote believed in angels is evidenced by the fact that they never argued for the truth of their stories.

When we turn to the words of our Lord for enlightenment on the subject of angels we again find no systematic teaching; but we have such references as set the seal of His authority upon the belief in the existence of angels; and we have such incidental statements as reveal something of their nature, character, and ministry.

In grouping these references chronologically, it is interesting to note that the great majority of them occur in the records of the later part of His ministry. While I am not prepared to set any particular value upon the fact; in all the earlier ministry, He hardly made any reference to angels, as He made hardly any reference to the Spirit.

The earlier ministry would seem to have been almost exclusively confined to the enunciation of an ethic, and the revelation of a power equal to the realization of the ethical ideal presented. That however must not be taken as final interpretation of the fact.

One great word concerning angels was however spoken in the very earliest ministry. It is the only reference to angels from the lips of JESUS recorded by John; and yet John was the mystic, the dreamer, the man who in all probability would have seen visions most easily.

This first word was spoken to Nathanael, whom JESUS described as being "**an Israelite indeed, in whom is no guile.**" The very humor and playfulness of that word of CHRIST will be discovered if we realize that in effect He said, "**An Israelite indeed, in whom is no Jacob.**" "**An Israelite indeed,**" that is, one realizing all that which was the Divine intention for Jacob; and therefore thou shalt see Jacob's dream fulfilled; "**the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of Man**" (John 1:47. 51).

That is the reference to angels upon the portal of John's Gospel; a statement made at the beginning of the ministry of CHRIST; and in itself figurative, symbolic, suggestive, inclusive and final, on the subject of angelic ministry in the new covenant and dispensation which He had come to create.

Then moving chronologically through the ministry of JESUS, the next references are found in the Kingdom parables (Matthew 13:39, 41, 49, 50), wherein He referred to angels as taking part with Him in His final administration of the government of this world, for the establishment of the Kingdom of GOD.

He described their work as that of separating between the tares and the wheat; severing between that which is good and bad when the great drag-net is brought to shore, having all kinds of fishes therein. The angels are to be His ministers, discriminating, dividing, administering, at the end of the age.

Chronologically every other reference to angels was made after Caesarea Philippi, after the hour in which Peter had made his great confession, and in which the Lord had begun to speak of His coming passion and His coming sorrow. Then the references to angels became more numerous.

Let us attempt to gather up the teaching of our Lord under the three heads already mentioned

- The nature of the angels;
- The character of the angels; and principally - for under this head we have more references than under any other
- The ministry of the angels.

As to the nature of angels, let it be at once recognized that the references are very few, and that they can only afford some gleams of light. Yet they afford light sufficient for our present need, and for an understanding of their nature. No reference is of the nature of a definite and systematic declaration; each is but incidental.

The first is that recorded by Matthew, by Mark, and by Luke, when in answer to a Sadducean question as to the resurrection and marriage, our Lord made this statement:

"For in the resurrection they neither marry, nor are given in marriage, but are as the angels of God in heaven" (Matthew 22:30).

In that incidental statement we have perhaps more light than appears at first.

We have our Lord's declaration that angel life is entirely different from human life; in that it is not terrestrial, nor can be; but that it is celestial, and must abide celestial. In other words He thus declared that in angel nature there is neither male nor female, and by that word He denied forever that fantastic and foolish idea that "**the sons of God**" in Genesis were angels; and made it perfectly clear that in angel-life that inter-relationship, which we know in earthly life as marriage, is non-existent and impossible.

The angels are direct creations of GOD; each individual one is immediately created by GOD; and in that sense they are the "**sons of God**." That sweeps out all the ideas that bring angels at all into kinship with humanity. They are of a different order of being, of an entirely different nature, not to be thought of as we think of men and women to-day.

Of course the main point of His teaching in this connection was that, in the life beyond, men and women will have come into the angel realm of life, and share in some sense their nature, but He separated the angels from the earth as to kinship. He showed that the angels are the ministers of GOD, touching the earth, visiting the earth, interested in the earth; but never of the earth. They are an entirely different order and race of beings; and they are never procreated, but are always the direct creation of GOD Himself. There is no light upon their nature beyond that.

The mystery is not explained, because it cannot be explained to men in this life.

There are things of which we in this present limited life can never come to full comprehension, or know the meaning. This gleam of light does however clearly reveal that they are not terrestrial as man is; but celestial, wholly of the spirit world. This does not mean to say that there is no material side to the being of an angel, for there may be a material which is not of the earth; but it divides between the angels and humanity, and shows that the gulf separating is the gulf of an absolute difference in nature.

Then in one gleam of light in the record of Luke we learn a second thing concerning the angels.

As by the three references we have referred to, we have discovered they are not terrestrial; in this statement we learn they are not mortal, but immortal; "**neither can they die**" (Luke 20:36).

In the letter to the Hebrews this teaching of JESUS is carried out by the writer in relation to the Lord Himself, when he declares that:

"Verily For verily he took not on him the nature of angels; but he took on him the seed of Abraham" (Hebrews 2:16).

The reason for this was that by taking human nature He could die. Thus the second fact revealed in the teaching of our Lord about angels is that they cannot die.

In an incidental reference, in the midst of one of the most remarkable things our Lord ever said concerning Himself, we have this final thought concerning their nature; they are not omniscient, they do not know all things, they only know the things revealed to them:

"But of that day and hour knoweth no man, no, not the angels of heaven, but my Father only" (Matthew 24:36).

Here is a distinct declaration that the angels are limited in their knowledge, never to be thought of as infinite, but always finite; created beings, of some heavenly order and type, without dying, and limited in their knowledge, knowing only the things revealed.

The teaching of JESUS as to the character of the angels is revealed in the fact that He only used one adjective concerning them, and that only on two occasions.

He spoke of them as the “**holy angels**” (Mark 8:38). It may be that His use of the word “**holy**” on both these occasions was intended to distinguish between the angels to whom He was referring, and other angels that are unholy; the fallen angels. But even if that be so, it does not detract from the positive value of the adjective that He used. He called them holy, using that word which means quite simply, *awful*; and yet which always stands for the awfulness of sanctity, or separation; and which is always connected with the sanctity or separation of an absolute purity.

It is interesting to go through the words of JESUS and see how often He used that word holy, and in what relationship. He used it of His own high ideals, when in the Sermon on the Mount He said: “**Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine.**” He used it of the Temple by quotation from Daniel, when He described it as “**the holy place.**” He used it perpetually, as we have seen, of the Spirit of GOD. He used it of GOD Himself, “**Holy Father.**” He used it of the angels.

These are only gleams of light, but through them; see an order of being; every individual member of the great order created by GOD; belonging to the things celestial and having no natural contact with the things terrestrial; not mortal but immortal; not knowing all things, but learning, and receiving, and knowing the things revealed; sinless, absolutely pure, awful in their holiness, with the very holiness of GOD.

We turn now to our Lord's teaching concerning the ministry of angels.

The first word, as I have already said, is inclusive and comprehensive. We remember that the language is figurative, and yet let us ponder it. He said to Nathanael: “**Verily, verily, I say unto you, Hereafter ye shall see heaven open, and the angels of God ascending and descending upon the Son of man**” (John 1:51).

By that word He revealed the fact that He thought of angels as engaged in a perpetual ministry of communion between this earth and the heaven that lies beyond. Every word is figurative; “**ascending and descending**” is a figurative term, employed to convey great meanings to the mind of men who are necessarily limited by such thoughts as those of ascent and descent.

Notice the suggestiveness of this. Angels ascending and descending!

The thought of our Lord was in harmony with the thought of the dream of the olden time, and was not that of angels as abiding in their own habitation in the celestial places; but of them as committed to a ministry of service among the sons of men; and then ascending, and bearing up messages to the higher places; not to tell GOD the things they see, for men live and move and have their being in GOD; but to convey the story to other intelligences, and to make known to other worlds the facts happening here; and then descending with answers to petitions they have borne away, to bring the ministry of another and a distant world, and the things of a larger and a more infinite life, to touch and help and renew man in the processes of his probationary career.

This word was the ratification of Jacob's dream, and in the august statement our Lord declared that His mission in the world was that of fulfilling the dream of Jacob, and making this ministry of angels no longer occasional, but perpetual.

Is not that what the writer of the letter to the Hebrews meant when he wrote, "**Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?**" (Hebrews 1:14).

Thus we learn from that first reference that angels are now occupied, under the government of GOD, in the service of humanity.

The next fact we learn is from the next word in order, which declared that the angels are specially committed to the guardianship of children.

If you are inclined to speak of it as poetry, I pray you read the words again. It was, on the part of JESUS, not a figure of speech merely. It was a solemn asseveration. He said distinctly, when speaking of the children, of the little ones, that their angels in heaven do always behold the face of the Father. He was suggesting to those who listened to Him the honour conferred upon the angels, in that they have right of access to the immediate presence of GOD, that their vision of GOD is clear and unclouded, that they do always behold the face of GOD. And these angels guard the children. If such honoured beings are set apart by GOD to watch the children, then how sacred their wards must be:

"Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones;" for their angels have perpetual access to the presence of GOD, they **"That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of my Father which is in heaven"** (Matthew 18:10).

I know the age in which we live; I know the spirit outside the sanctuary, the skepticism, the criticism; and that people will say, Do you really believe angels guard the children? I certainly do; for I do not believe we have seen all the facts of life when we have looked into each other's faces. I believe in the ministry of angels, and that for every bairn there is a guardian angel who always beholds the face of GOD. That is one of my profoundest convictions, because He said so; and; believe it in spite of all that skepticism may say to attempt to shake my conviction.

The next word as to the present ministry of angels we find in that wonderful chapter in which Luke alone has given us the threefold parable of the lost things: the lost piece of silver, the lost sheep, and the lost son.

In the midst of that unveiling of GOD's heart, our Lord declared that there is joy in the presence of the angels of GOD; a profounder and deeper thing than telling us that the angels are filled with joy. **"In the presence of the angels,"** in the observation of the angels, in the place where the angels are there is joy. In all the highest courts of heaven, in the true center of everything, in GOD Himself.

The angels are mentioned because they become the voices of the heavenly joy; and as o'er the

plains of Bethlehem they sang the song of the coming Redeemer, so forevermore they thunder forth in sweetest music the joy of GOD over bruised and broken men and women, weeping their way back to His heart and to His love.

Their ministry, their present ministry is that of the perpetual chorus, the offering of praise in the high places of the universe, whenever men turn home to GOD. Ah, what fools and blind we are! We did not think much of it that some man recently found his way back out of slum or suburb, out of his desolation and misery and sin to GOD; but when he came, with the sigh and the tear of agony and repentance, heaven was filled with joy, and the angels voiced the joy of heaven. That is their perpetual ministry.

We learn next from a word of JESUS recorded by Luke that angels become the guides home of the dying. When a man dies, he finds entrance upon another order of life.

Dying; what is it? Leaving behind the chance of ever dying. It is a dropping of the robe of flesh, which alone can die, and going out into the new order of life. I can imagine the spirit of a man finding himself just across the border, in the presence of the new reality, full of mystery; filled with the consciousness of loneliness, and of perplexity, knowing nothing of how to proceed. JESUS said that such a man was carried by the angels into Abraham's bosom.

"Abraham's bosom" was a Jewish phrase, used to describe the very heart of Heaven, the chief place of joy in the life that lay beyond. And thither, He said, angels bore Lazarus; they met him, conducted him, carried him. I believe they still do it. I believe that when our loved ones have just passed where our voices can no longer reach, our eyes cheer, our hands minister; angels welcome them and bear them to some one of the habitations of the blessed, and lead them out in the first pilgrimages of that great and wondrous life that lies beyond.

The final thing He said about their present ministry is full of fire and force and flaming glory. He was in the garden. Peter had blundered by the use of his sword at the wrong place, and at the wrong time. Men were arresting Him, and He said to Peter:

"Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to my Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?" (Matthew 26:53).

It is a flame of glory, as full of mystery as it is possible to imagine. Twelve legions; twelve, a peculiar Hebrew word, that all His disciples would understand; twelve tribes, twelve apostles, twelve, always twelve; legions, a peculiarly Roman word, six thousand footmen, in addition to cavalry.

Angels, flaming presences of unspotted purity, might have delivered Him, for He

"maketh his angels spirits,
and his ministers a flame of fire";

and for the purposes of GOD they can touch and deal with things terrestrial. The marvel of all marvels is that He simply drew the veil, and gave us to see something of the gleaming myriads of

angels ready to do the behests of the King, and then chose to remain alone. And if you ask me, Why? there is but one answer, "**He loved me, and gave Himself for me.**"

Then our Lord also described the future ministry of angels; and here perhaps we are in graver difficulty; and yet the words of JESUS are perhaps more circumstantial than in any other application. He declared that He will come again, that He will once again be focused for earthly observation.

He Who came will come, and His next coming will be in glory; and the angels will be in attendance in the hour of His vindication. They who have been unseen ministers will be visible attendants upon His glory (Matthew 16:27).

He declared, moreover, that in that hour of judgment, of discriminating justice which the world so sorely needs, He will bring angels to aid Him; from the Kingdom they shall gather out the things that offend, that they may be destroyed, in order that all the things of brightness and glory and beauty may have their full realization.

Thus the teaching of CHRIST directly affirmed the existence of angels, and gave some understanding of their nature, their character, and their ministry.

That teaching was in direct opposition to the Sadducean influence which was powerful in His time. The high priest was a Sadducee. The dominant power was Sadducean; and in Paul's great address, chronicled in the Acts of the Apostles, we find the definition of the Sadducee; he was one who denied resurrection, and angel, and spirit (Acts 23:8).

In the midst of that Sadducean influence and atmosphere our Lord proclaimed, by all these references, His belief in the existence of the angels.

A fuller study of the theme would show the relation of this teaching to the Hebrew past and the apostolic future. That of course does not come within the scope of these meditations. His first word about the angels spoken to Nathanael was linked to the teaching of Jacob's dream; and His last word about the angels, spoken in the garden concerning the twelve legions, was linked to the teaching of that wonderful vision in Kings, when Elisha prayed that the eyes of his servant might be opened; and when they were opened,

"Lo, to faith's enlightened sight,
All the mountains flamed with light."

Thus our Lord accepted the Hebrew view of the angels; and in doing so, He sealed it as true. When we turn from these Gospels to the apostolic writings, the same truths are maintained. Angels are still referred to as the armies of heaven. It is still declared that they minister to the saints. We see them divided into ranks and orders, and yet united in service; and the worship of angels is emphatically condemned, forbidden.

According to the teaching of JESUS, when we take our war from the sanctuary and into the life of every day, we receive ministries other than material, ministries other than the essentially

spiritual; not only fellowship with the Father and with the Son and with the Spirit; but, to aid us in a thousand ways of which we do not dream, the touch of other creations upon our lives, whispers in language we cannot catch so as to repeat it, which has its influence upon us in the hour of danger.

I believe in the ministry of angels because our Lord has taught me so to do.

“They come, GOD's messengers of love,
They come from realms of peace above,
From homes of never-fading light,
From heavenly mansions ever bright.

“They come to watch around us here,
To soothe our sorrow, calm our fear:
They come to speed us on our way;
GOD willeth them with us to stay.

“But chiefly at its journey's end
'Tis theirs the spirit to befriend,
And whisper to the faithful heart,
O Christian soul, in peace depart.' “

~ end of chapter 4 ~

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