

# Meeting With Christ

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Practical and Exegetical Studies on the Words of Jesus Christ

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Based on sermons of Pasteur Eric Chang

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## THEIR ANGELS ALWAYS BEHOLD THE FACE OF MY FATHER

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### Matthew 18:10

In our previous lesson, we were studying Matthew 18:5-9 where Jesus said to His disciples that they must take great care not to cause anyone who believes in Him to stumble. We saw that the stumbling is to be understood in the very serious sense of falling away from Christ.

'Because God cares so much for each of His little ones,' Jesus said, 'That the punishment of the person responsible for their stumbling will be terrible. It will be so terrible that nothing a person could do to himself can compare with God's action against that person.'

'It would be better if he ties a great milestone around his neck and jumps in the depth of the sea. Even that is nothing compared to how God will deal with him on the day of judgment.'

### Do not despise a disciple

Today we will look at the following verse, v. 10. Here Jesus expressed His love for His disciples in another way. This is what He said.

*Matthew 18:10. See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.*

Disciples are to see to it that they do not despise another disciple. The word 'despise' points directly at the pious religious leaders who thought little of those below them on the 'spiritual ladder.' In the parable of the Pharisee and tax-collector for example, the Pharisee is described as someone who *despised others* (Luke 18:9). In his prayer, he said, *God, I thank You that I am not like other men-- extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax-collector.* A Christian can have this kind of attitude toward another Christian. There can be a temptation for the zealous believer to look down on people whom he views as nominal Christians and whom he considers as spiritually 'inferior.' In such case, Jesus' admonition not to despise even one of His little ones must be remembered.

Now, listen to this remarkable statement. The reason the little ones should not be despised is because 'in heaven their angels always behold the face of the Father.'

This will give me the opportunity to talk to you about angels. In spiritual warfare, the powers of evil are pressing against us in order to crush us, to make us stumble. But we can thank God for the angels because they are fighting on our side. The holy angels are our allies, and we need to know something about them.

## Angels: imaginary beings?

Do angels really exist? Have you heard of anyone who has seen an angel? Many people deny the existence of angels because from a materialistic viewpoint, a belief in angels seems to be contrary to reason.

But even believers of the word of God can reject the possibility of angels. That was the case with the Sadducees who are said to disbelieve in angels in Acts 23:8.

*Acts 23:8. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit.*

Angels are so extensively mentioned in the books of the OT (over 100 times), that it is hard to understand how those who acknowledged the OT to have divine authority could deny the existence of angelic beings. The explanation is this. The Sadducees did accept all the statements regarding angels in the OT, but they interpreted those passages allegorically. Therefore they regarded angels merely as symbolic expressions of God's actions, and not as real beings.

The view of the Sadducees may be compared today to Christians who do not in any way deny the existence of angels as recorded in the Bible, and yet they do not believe that they play any role among men at the present age. Because the Holy Spirit now dwells in us, they say, there is really not much need for the ministry of the angels.

## Angelic activity today

I think that this notion is mistaken, the notion that once the Holy Spirit comes, the office of the angels is redundant and therefore their action on earth has ceased. The NT mentions angels about 165 times, mostly after Pentecost, after the coming of the Holy Spirit. And they are not referred to in some theoretical context, but often as actively engaging in the life of people. This is particularly true in the book of Acts where they were involved in helping God's servants, opening prison door for the apostles (5:19; 12:5-11), directing Philip and Cornelius in ministry (8:26; 10:1-7), encouraging Paul during the storm on his voyage to Rome (27:23-25), etc.

We also notice that there are about 65 clear references to angels in the book of Revelation, more than in any other book of the Bible. We find angels who have power over fire (14:16), power over waters (16:5), angels who are identified with end time catastrophes (chapter 8, 9, 16), even an angel designated to bind Satan for a thousand years (20:1, 2). If we are to interpret Revelation from the futurist viewpoint (i.e. the book is said to predict events that will happen as the end of the world approaches), we still see angels as being extremely active in the last days. Since angels were active in the early church, and active in the latter days, we have every reason to believe that they are also active now.

Moreover, when the Lord Jesus said in Matthew 18:10 that the angels continually behold the face of God the Father and therefore we must not despise fellow disciples, the implication is that angels are actively doing something at this moment. They are watching over God's little ones.

In fact, their presence and their activity now are assumed in various ways in the NT. They are spoken of:

- As rejoicing over a penitent sinner. Luke 15:10: *Likewise, I say to you, there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.*
- As bearing the souls of the redeemed into heaven. Luke 16:22: *So it was that the beggar died, and was carried by the angels to Abraham's bosom.*

- As ministering spirits engaged in the service of the saints. Hebrews 1:14: *Are not all angels ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation?* Since angels are sent to 'those who will inherit salvation,' i.e. to Christians, we can assume that angels are active today since believers exist today.

There is no doubt in Paul's mind that the ministry of the angels is a very important one. For him, it is certainly not redundant. Let me read to you 1Timothy 5:21 so that you get an idea of how Paul considers their activity. This is what Paul says to Timothy after giving him some instructions on church matters.

*1Timothy 5:21. I charge you before God and the Lord Jesus Christ **and the elect angels** that you observe these things without prejudice, doing nothing with partiality.*

Notice this. I think that most of us would have just said, 'I charge you before God and Jesus,' and that's it. But Paul says more than that. 'I charge you before God, before Christ, and before all the elect angels.' Mentioning angels here is irrelevant unless they are very important for the church. You see, Paul considers them as important witnesses of the affairs of the church. In this verse, he lays the heavy responsibility upon Timothy to do his task as in the presence of God and of Christ, and he calls the holy angels to be witnesses of his actions.

### **All kinds of angels**

When we study the various references to angels in the Bible, we discover that there are all kinds of angels. There are angels called cherubim for example. The cherubim are mentioned some 90x in the OT. They are described in Ezekiel 10 as having four faces and four wings and they resided around or below the throne of God. They seem to be always very close to the throne of God. In passages like 1Samuel 4:4 or 2Samuel 6:2, they appear to have provided with their wings a visible pedestal for God's throne.

Exodus 25:17-22 gives us a description of the mercy seat that is placed on the ark of the covenant. On the mercy seat are to be two cherubim hammered out of pure gold. They are facing each other, covering the mercy seat with their wings. God instructed Moses that He will meet Moses or the high priest above the cherubim on the mercy seat. This representation of cherubim symbolized that the high priest was in the very presence of God. Where God's glory is, so too are the cherubim. The important thing to remember for our understanding of Matthew 18:10 is that the cherubim are associated with the closest presence of God. Not all the angels have this privilege.

There is another kind of angels called seraphim. They are quite similar to the cherubim. When we look at the seraphim's description in Isaiah 6, we discover that they have six wings: two to cover the front of their body, two to cover their hindquarters and two with which to fly with. They act as attendants at the throne of God and they are described as praising God continually.

### **High-ranking angels**

While the Bible does not explicitly say that angels have ranks, it certainly does imply this to be the case. Take Matthew 26:53 for example. We read that Jesus was being arrested in the garden. To reveal some of the power at His disposal, He spoke of the legions of angels he could call upon.

*Matthew 26:53. 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?*

Jesus was speaking in human terms. In His use of the term legion (a legion was a division of the Roman army), He was signifying that the angels have ranks of upper, middle and lower angels available to Him.

One of the chief angels is called an archangel. In Greek, archangel simply means chief or leader of the angels. We know the name of at least one of them, namely Michael. The archangel Michael is mentioned in Jude 9 as disputing over the body of Moses with Satan. We read in Revelation 12:7 that Michael is again fighting against the devil. This passage suggests that Michael is the General over the forces of the holy angelic armies, while Satan is the leader of the demonic hordes.

Gabriel is another angel who appears to be of a high-ranking, though he is not designated as an archangel as Michael is. His function was to bring important messages to specific individuals. He appeared to the priest Zacharias to inform him that his wife will give birth to the one who would prepare the way for the Messiah, John the Baptist. This is what we read in Luke 1:19.

*Luke 1:19. And the angel answered and said to him, "I am Gabriel, **who stands in the presence of God**; and I have been sent to speak to you, and to bring you this good news."*

Notice how he identified himself. 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God.' To stand in the presence of a person means that he could come near to that person. In other words, Gabriel was one of those angels who had direct access to God.

In Jewish tradition, it is believed that this privilege is not accorded to all angels. Only the higher order of angels like the cherubim, the seraphim, Gabriel, or Michael were allowed to stand in the very presence of God.

The idea of 'standing in the presence of God' is found in our passage in Matthew 18:10. We read that there are angels who always behold the face of our heavenly Father. Let's look at this passage again.

*Matthew 18:10. See that you do not despise one of these little ones; for I tell you that in heaven their angels always behold the face of my Father who is in heaven.*

That the angels behold the face of the Father means that they belong to the innermost circle around God's throne. We can certainly say that they stand in the presence of God. Notice the word 'always'. *Their angels **always** behold the face of my Father* They have free access at all time to the presence of God. That is why they can see His face continually. This is a mark of peculiar favor, given only to the highest order of angels. And Jesus says that no one should despise the believers for they are ministered to by the highest and most noble of angels.

The Lord's argument is that if such excellent creatures as these angels in heaven are committed to the care of God's little ones, and since they are so near to the throne of God, it should deter everyone from doing any injury to Christians. They can lodge accusations to God, and when permitted, have power to execute God's judgment upon men. The believers can draw much comfort in knowing that they have as their attendants these honored ministers of the court of heaven.

### **Appointed for the protection of the faithful**

The Lord Jesus lived in this confidence that the angels were always there to protect Him if necessary. Remember His words to Peter in Matthew 26:53. 'Do you not think that I could call My Father and ask Him for twelve legions of angels?'

We, Christians, should have the same confidence. In fact, Psalm 91:11-12 tells us specifically that God commands His angels to care for us wherever we go. Listen to this wonderful promise.

*Psalm 91:11. For He shall give His angels charge over you, to keep you in all your ways.  
12 In their hands they shall bear you up, lest you dash your foot against a stone.*

True, Satan tried to quote it out of context to Jesus in the desert (Luke 4:9-11). But that verse is not less true because Satan misused it. God has appointed angels for the protection of the faithful ones. They are so dear to Him that He assigns angels of the highest order, those who can continually see His face, to watch over all their interests.

The importance of every disciple to God is also stressed by the parable of the lost sheep (Matthew 18:12-14) which immediately follows our passage. There Jesus states that it is not the will of the Father that any of His little ones should perish. The function of this section (vv. 1-14) in the larger context is to provide a foundation for right conduct in the church. That is, because every little one is so important to the Father, the way one acts towards any one of them is extremely important in God's sight. Think about this. If the angels of God are concerned with the little ones, how much more then should also fellow Christians be for one another.