
The Exulting Worship of Ministering Spirits

Hebrews 1:4-14

Somehow, the church and in the world today are fascinated with angels. It had also for those to whom the book of Hebrews was written. There are many ways that we can think wrongly about angels.

We can believe all sorts of myths about angels. Some common myths have continued from time immemorial. But what and who angels are is very clear in the Scripture.

We assign them a greater role than they actually have. Many cults have elevated angels by making Jesus Christ just another angel. Many so-called Christians pray to angels and worship angels, a practice *absolutely forbidden in the Bible* however attractive it may be to us. (Colossians 2:18; Revelation 22:8-9)

We do not care about them at all. This text will speak powerfully as to why we must care a great deal about angels.

Now this text speaks to us very powerfully about all these three possibilities when it comes to angels.

But before we do, let me address for a moment some truths about angels which are not spoken of here but are clearly revealed in other texts in the Scripture. If we are going to think properly about angels, we must begin with a Biblical doctrine of angels.

Angels are created beings. Like all created beings, they have a beginning and also are endowed with eternal spirits. They are ultra-intelligent, powerful and yet are neither omniscient nor omnipresent. Each angel has a locus of existence which can be only be in one place at a time. They are not the spirits of departed humans. (Nehemiah 9:6;)

Angels are spiritual beings which are given human appearance, particularly that of young men. Angels never appear in the Scripture as women nor children, nor do they have wings. Cherubim and seraphim have wings, but they are not angels. Much of the common conception is mythological and not Biblical. (Ps. 104:4, Gen. 19; Judges 2:1; 6:11-22; Mt. 1:20; Lk 1:26; Jn 20:12)

Angels are heavenly worship leaders, messengers and warriors. Throughout Scripture they are seen worshipping before the throne, running errands for the Lord, delivering messages and fighting in the spiritual warfare going on in the cosmos. They have ranks and orders and are overseen by Michael, the archangel. They will appear when Jesus comes and are involved in the awful judgements of that day. (Jude 9; 1 Thess. 4:16; 1 Pet. 3:22; Col.1:16; Rev. 7:1;8:2)

2/3 of all the angels who were created were chosen by God not to fall. The remainder followed Satan in his rebellion and were cast out of heaven. Note that Satan is not an angel – he was the covering cherub who disguises himself to appear as an angel of light. (Ezek.. 28:11-19; Is. 14:12-17; 2 Pet. 2:4; Jude 6; 2 Cor. 1:13-15)

Why would converted Jews in the early church attach a wrong importance to angels? What do they bring to the table that was causing their thinking on angels to go astray?

Angels were involved with giving the Law (Deuteronomy 33:2; Psalm 68:17; Acts 7:53; Galatians 3:19).

Angels were involved with protecting Israel (Psalm 34:7; 2 Kings 6:17)

Angels were involved in the on-going process of revelation (Ezekiel, Daniel).

So it is important that we measure our thinking by that of the Scripture. Its importance is seen in that starting from verse four through to the end of chapter two, the author is dealing with angels. It is an important issue to set straight. But more than that, if you have eyes to see, this text helps us to join with angels who worship Jesus and shows us that angels are sent to serve us, even today.

What about us today? What has pushed this whole idea of angels all out of Biblical proportion?

- Ignorance – often people are badly misinformed.
- Gnosticism – an ancient heresy which has made a reappearance in the church, even in evangelicalism.
- Charismaticism – they have almost an obsession with them.
- Catholicism – they worship angels.
- Christian novels and books – inculcating error about angels using novels as the ve-

Jesus is Superior as the Son

(v.4-6)

It is possible to become so used to, so familiar with a truth that it appears common place. We can be like a person who loves the quick easiness of McDonalds so much that we are uncomfortable and do not appreciate the pleasures of fine food at an excellent restaurant. For your appetite for worshipping and honoring and magnifying Jesus says more about you than anything else. I want to stir you up from familiar truths to see and enjoy how much better Jesus is.

⁴ having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

⁵ For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? ⁶ And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.”

In His Reputation

(v.4)

Here is our opening assertion. *Jesus is as much better than angels as His Name is more excellent.* Now reflect on that for a moment. Having been seated on the throne at the right hand of majesty, He is as superior to angels as His Name, His character, reputation and fame, are. In other words, what we must think about most is how great Jesus is, not how great angels are. So it is very important that we hear this today. However wonderfully mysterious and powerful and beautiful angels are to you, Jesus is to be as much more wonderful and great and precious as He deserves to be. And He deserves to be because He is the final Revelation, Reality, Redeemer and Ruler.

In His Resurrection

Psalm 2:7 (v.5a)

So he goes on to show why this is true. If we are going to think rightly about angels and Jesus we must do so from the Word. What was the more excellent name that Jesus inherited? The superior name is *The Son of God*. While angels may be called *Sons of God* collectively (and they are in Job 1:6) only Jesus can be called this *individually*.

Now what does this quote from Psalm 2:7 tell us about the greatness of Christ? Why quote it now? Because this word *begotten* here is not being used to point to a time when Jesus was made, but to the time when Jesus was resurrected. Listen to Acts 13:32-34.

³² And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, ³³ this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, as also it is written in the second Psalm, “ ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’ ³⁴ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, “ ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’

Here in this text, Paul says that the promises made to the Patriarchs were fulfilled when Jesus was raised up from the dead. Then he quotes this same Psalm as a proof text. Clearly then, the New Testament interprets Psalm 2:7 as a reference to the resurrection. This is not a new idea for Paul says in Romans 1:4 that Jesus “*was declared the Son of God with power by the resurrection from the dead.*”

So Jesus is the Son of God, not only from all eternity, but manifested to be so in a special way when God raised Him from the dead. This is not true of any angel. So worship Jesus.

In His Relation

2 Samuel 7:13-14 (v.5b)

Jesus is to be worshipped as the Son because of the special relationship He has with the Father. This verse is taken out of the covenant God made with David. Listen to the words, “*I will raise up your descendent after you, who will come forth from you and I will establish his kingdom. He shall build a house for My Name, and will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. I will be a father to him and he will be a son to me...*” Now these words are spoken immediately of Solomon. But one greater than Solomon is in view. God affirms His relationship as Father to Jesus His Son because of the Kingdom and the throne and the house of God that will be established, which house we are as living stones. These great words were never spoken to angels or about angels. They were only spoken to and about Jesus Christ. So He is be worshipped because God has affirmed that Jesus is His Son.

In His Return

Psalm 97:7 (v.6)

It is possible to take the word “again” so that the reference here is to Jesus’ incarnation. That Jesus is superior and greater than the angels is evident from the Gospel records. For when Jesus was born, the angels filled the night sky with their brightness and the cold Judean morning with their song and shepherds with fear and wonder. And their song rang out, “Glory to God on the Highest.” So Jesus is greater than angels in His incarnation and humiliation. Just imagine, even was Jesus was a baby, an infant cooing in His mother’s arms, He was still greater than the angels.

But it is also possible that the word “again” modified “brings”. So this ought to read, “And when He again brings the firstborn into the world.” So it is a reference to Jesus in His return. He is greater in the work He did here on earth, in the resurrection and in His ascension into heaven. But He will be magnified even more when He returns. Than everything in heaven (angels) and on the earth (humans) and under the earth (demons and Satan) will exclaim that Jesus is Lord. (Owen, Piper)

Either way, Jesus is greater than angels, whether in the humiliation of His incarnation or in the exaltation of His return.

Jesus is Superior as the Sovereign

(v.7-9)

Now the author begins another tack. In verses four through six, the superiority of Jesus is seen in that the *angels worship Him*. Now His supremacy is seen in that the *angels serve Him*.

⁷ Of the angels he says, "He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire." ⁸ But of the Son he says, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. ⁹ You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions."

In this quote in verse seven from Psalm 104:4 we see that angels are servants. As Warren Wiersbe put it, "Angels minister *before the throne*; they never *sit on the throne*." (*Bible Exposition Commentary* p.281). In this Psalm which evokes in magnificent imagery the creation of the cosmos and angels and the world we live in, angels are seen as being made or created to serve. But not so of Christ. When we are thinking of angels and Jesus together, we must be thinking of those who serve before the throne (angels) and the One who sits on the throne (Jesus).

In His Rule

Divinity (v.8)

This verse has two amazing purposes.

To leave no doubt as to the *DEITY OF CHRIST*. "To the Son, God says, your throne, O God, is forever." Now mark it. This is said to the Son. But He is addressed as God by God. So we cannot make a mistake that says the person was wrong in affirming Jesus as God for it is God who said so. And the word cannot be translated as "Divine throne" as in some cults, for how can a throne be "deity".

To leave no doubt as to the *AUTHORITY OF CHRIST*. To this Divine Son, God says that His throne is forever. It will never end. There will never be a time again when Jesus will give up the free exercise of His deity and authority. His throne will never be overthrown, it will never be threatened, it will never end.

So angels serve Jesus for He is their Divine ruler and ours.

In His Righteousness

Desire (v.8b-9a)

Jesus is superior to angels not only because He is their ruler, but because He is righteous and loves righteousness. Now is this to say that angels do not? No. But the elect angels were preserved from falling, have never known sin, and do not experience temptation. But Jesus has. He has lived among men and experienced what it is like to be tempted. Yet in all of it, He loved righteousness and hated lawlessness.

In our ruling and managing and overseeing, is our headship and leadership done with righteousness as its primary objective? Jesus rules with righteousness. This is what His kingdom is known for. And angels serve Him with glad hearts for His scepter is true and just.

Do we worship and trust and treasure Jesus with a heart that loves righteousness and hates sin? Listen to me. I am fearful for myself. How easy my pride and self and sins overwhelm me. And I am fearful for some of you. You are crowding up close sin and the world. You let its values determine the choices you make. Having is absolutely *nothing*. Being is everything.

In His Rejoicing***Delight (v.9b)***

But that brings us to a most precious sentence. Because Jesus is God, and because He has an eternal throne and because He loves righteousness, Jesus was anointed with “the oil of gladness”. Jesus is supreme as the sovereign in His *divinity*, in His *desire* and now in His *delight*.

This quote in verses 8-9 is drawn from Psalm 45:6-7. We cannot survey the splendor of the imagery of this Psalm. Behind the shadows of David and his queen ascending in great pomp and circumstance to the throne to be admired and applauded shines the bright glory of Jesus and His bride. The scene moves poets, stirs humble hearts and draws homage and delight from pure hearts.

And the emotional atmosphere is filled with heart soaring gladness and joy and happiness. For the author of Hebrews, he sees the angelic hosts in breathless praise. But Jesus has been anointed with gladness even above them. So no matter how high the praise and deep the passion, Jesus’ is greater. And this because His God, Jesus’ God, His Father, has reached into the deep well of joy in his own being and taken that gladness like a rich, sweet perfume and poured on Jesus’ head.

An amazing truth emerges from this text. There is no contradiction between holiness and happiness. The rule of Christ in righteousness, the delight of Christ in righteousness is the ground on which God gives the rejoicing. What a vision the Bible has of God: immeasurably holy and intensely happy.

Jesus is Superior as the Creator**(v.10-12)**

The author takes Psalm 102:25-27 and applies them to Christ. This is to once reinforce what has been said before. Jesus is the creator.

¹⁰ And, “You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; 11 they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, ¹² like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end.”

In His Works**(v.10)**

The heavens and the earth in the Bible comprise all the cosmos. In the beginning all that is not God came into existence by His creating word and power.

In His Essence**(v.11-12)**

The contrast set up here is the eternalness and unchangeableness of Christ over against the constant change and failing feebleness of an aging universe. There will come a day when the clothing of the physical will be removed from the spiritual and new given. So Jesus is the creator and sustainer of what He has made in the beginning and what He will bring about in the end.

Do you worship Jesus Christ as the creator, sustainer and sovereign over all? Do the vast ocean of stars and the bright faces of flowers and the rolling grandeur of mighty rivers and the clapping hands of forested hills and majestic anthems of whale song all turn our hearts to marvel at and worship Jesus?

Jesus is Superior as the Victor**(v.13-14)**

Psalm 110:1 is the author's source for this quote. That Psalm will be drawn from again later. But now, the angels are to worship Jesus because to Him and for Him God is bringing about victory.

¹³ And to which of the angels has he ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? ¹⁴ Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?

Jesus is the Master**(v.13)**

He returns in this verse to what He started in verse 3— Christ sat sown at the right hand of Majesty as the King of the universe and as the Son of God in power and as Heir of all things and as God, verse 8. This seat *beside* God is the seat *of* God. So he comes back (in verse 13) to this triumphant place of the Son. (J. Piper)

This has never been said of any angel and no angel has ever seated at the right hand of God. Now Lucifer, the anointed covering cherub had designs to not only sit on the throne, but to be elevated above the throne. Because of his pride and his self-conceit and self-worship, he became the enemy of God. Jesus, on the cross and through the resurrection has brought the power of Satan to an end. In Satan's foul rebellion, one-third of the heavenly hosts followed them to their own doom.

That is why these two verses are placed side by side.

Angels are His Ministers**(v.14)**

Verse 14 tells us that angels are sent to serve the church. This statement is the summation and conclusion of the argument. Jesus Christ is the King *over* the church; angels do His bidding *for* the church.

But we must lose the connection between these two. *How* do the angels serve us? While we are waiting the day for the triumph of Jesus to be realized, we are surrounded and beset by enemies. And God accomplishes two things through this ministry of angels. (1) He sends them to serve us so that we will persevere in faith and inherit our salvation and (2) in the angel's serving us, the enemies of God are made a footstool for Christ's feet. So Jesus sends His angels to serve us and to bring us safely home.

Now think about a question. If Jesus is greater than angels and all that God accomplishes from beginning to end He does through His Son, why bother with angels at all? Why create them? Is not the worship and service of men and women and children enough to satisfy the glory and greatness and gladness of God?

The answer is quite remarkable. For angels have a role, a God ordained and magnificent role. Toward Christ, the role of angels is to worship Christ (v.6). Toward the people of Christ their role is to serve and help us reach salvation (v.14). In John Piper's familiar language, "God created angels that His son might be glorified and His people might be satisfied."

Reflect and Respond

- The supremacy of Jesus is seen, for the angels:
 - *worship* Him by exalting Him
 - *serve* Him by ministering to us
- We learn that worshipping and serving are two wings on which soaring hearts magnify God. We must never forget this. Jesus is greater because He is worshipped and served by angels. Jesus is magnified when He is worshipped and served by Christians. May this be so among us today.

I want you to go home this morning with this truth ringing in your heart: Jesus Christ is infinitely superior to angels. They were created, not to compete with Christ, but to worship Jesus and to magnify Him for all He is worth. And the chief way they do that on the earth is by serving us so that we hold fast to Christ and trust Him and love Him and treasure Him and finally reach Him in the fullness of our salvation. So angels were created for Christ's everlasting [glory] and our everlasting joy – which as we have learned over and over again, are not contradictory aims.

As one author wrote on this text, "The universe is filled with angelic helpers. By their ministry to you, Christ wants you to be encouraged and hopeful. For these heavenly worshippers are all – all of them – sent to serve you and to bring you safely home to worship Jesus."

