

"Days Yet To Come"

Daniel 10:10-14; 12:1-3

September 29, 2013

St. Michael and All Angels

While angels are immensely popular these days, the image of angels is really quite a "wimpish" one. Angels convey the feelings of cuteness and gentleness. This probably started from the feminine portrayal of angels in medieval art and Sunday School materials. The image is perpetuated when angels are portrayed almost exclusively by little girls in children's Christmas services. Cute jewelry, Precious Moments figurines, and shows like *Touched By An Angel* all give the impression that angels are child-like or feminine creatures who are all sweetness and light.

Nothing could be further from the Biblical truth. Angels are no wimps, but mighty and powerful servants of God who do His bidding, no matter what it may be. Only two are mentioned by name in the Bible. There is Gabriel who is God's messenger (which is what the word *angel* means) and delivered crucial messages to Zacharias about the birth of John the Baptist and to the Virgin Mary about the birth of Jesus. Nothing wimpish there! And then there is Michael, the warrior angel, the only one designated as an "archangel", the leader of God's army of angels. We commemorate Michael and all the angels today, not only for how they serve and protect us as God's people now, but how they serve us in the ultimate confrontation which will occur in "days yet to come."

Our Old Testament text for today prophesies of that coming time. It involves Daniel, a young man taken from his home in Judah when it fell to King Nebuchadnezzar and into captivity in Babylon. He rose to prominence under King Nebuchadnezzar by interpreting his dreams. He appointed his friends Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego as administrators over the province of Babylon before they got thrown into a fiery furnace for refusing to bow down before the gold statue of Nebuchadnezzar. Daniel was also the one who was thrown into a lion's den for refusing to pray to the king. An angel from God had protected him by shutting the mouths of the lions.

In the text for today, Daniel is visited by another heavenly being, only it is not an angel. The identity of this being is in the verses prior to our text where Daniel writes, "I looked up and there

before me was a man dressed in linen, with a belt of the finest gold around his waist. His body was like chrysolite, his face like lightning, his eyes like flaming torches, his arms and legs like the gleam of burnished bronze, and his voice like the sound of a multitude." (Dan. 10:5-6) This is the Son of God appearing in a preincarnate state. This description is nearly the same as the one of Jesus given in Revelation where John reports seeing Jesus who looks "'like a son of man,' dressed in a robe reaching down to his feet and with a golden sash around his chest. His head and hair were white like wool, as white as snow, and his eyes were like blazing fire. His feet were like bronze glowing in a furnace, and his voice was like the sound of rushing waters." (Rev. 1:13-15)

The Son of God tells Daniel that Michael, one of the chief princes (as He calls him) has come to help him with "days yet to come". The time He speaks of is not only the immediate future for Israel, but the end of the world itself. This is a topic that interests people, but also fills people with fear. Although the "days yet to come" are filled with fearful things, it will also be a time of return, resurrection, and rejoicing for all who trust in Christ.

The "days yet to come" when Christ returns is approaching. It is a future time, but it may not be a far-off time. The text describes it as "a time of trouble, such as never has been since there was a nation till that time." This distress is the sign of Christ's approach. Jesus predicted further signs of His return which are now in place: the false messiahs who claim to represent God; wars and rumors of wars; nations and kingdoms rising up against each other; famines and earthquakes happening with regularity; the persecution of the church; people deserting the faith; betrayal, hatred, and deception are common place. Society is as wicked as ever, despite our hope and effort to improve it. Love for God grows cold. Given this description, Christ's return seems as if it could be at any time.

Yet when exactly this "days yet to come" will arrive is unknown. No one knows or can know when Christ will return. That day will come "like a thief in the night", Scripture says, and a thief does not make appointments or give warnings. Jesus said we "do not know the day or the hour" (Mt. 25:13). But it is not necessary or important for us to know this. In fact, concentrating compulsively on

the Last Day can rob us of much purposeful living. The important thing to know is that He will return for a cataclysmic judgment and we need to be prepared.

In 1969, Hurricane Camille was about to hit the Gulf Coast. Several weather warnings preceded this which many people chose to ignore. A group of party goers in Mississippi ignored the warnings and held a "hurricane party" on the top floor of a condominium. When the hurricane did hit, 23 of them died unnecessarily because they failed to heed the warning.

"The days yet to come" is a warning, a warning of judgment. Many are ignoring this warning. They are partying on at their own peril. Jesus will come with all His angels to judge the living and the dead, to award some the kingdom prepared for them since the creation of the world and to consign some to the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels.

All will stand before Jesus at the "days yet to come". Everyone will account for his or her life before the judgment seat of Christ and be judged for their sins. It will be too late to change then. The story is told about the Western frontier in which a young man risked his life to save a little boy caught in a run away wagon, pulled by a horse which had bolted. Years passed and the young boy had grown into a lawless man standing before a judge to be sentenced for a capital crime. The prisoner recognized the judge as the one who had saved his life many years ago. So he hopefully asked for mercy. The judge could only say, "Young man, back then I was your savior; now I am your judge. I sentence you to be hanged." Jesus came the first time only to be a Savior. His second coming is only to be a Judge. Those who saw Him as "sweet and kind Jesus" during their lives, but rejected Him as Savior will see Him only as Judge and will receive the condemnation due them.

Yet, all is not lost for humanity. There *is* hope according to the text from Daniel because the devil and hell have been overcome. Michael and the angels play an important part in this, as well. Jesus went to the cross to do battle with Satan, to overcome sin, and defeat death. When he shouted, "It is finished!", the sin of humanity had been overcome by the perfect sacrifice of His life. When He rose from the dead, death itself was defeated. This combined to beat Satan who's only two weapons to bring us down are the accusations of sin and the threat of death.

Up until that time, Satan apparently still had access to the courts of heaven to accuse people before God. Jesus' work changed all that. According to Revelation 12, when Jesus rose from the dead and ascended into heaven,

“war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world—he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, ‘Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come.’”

Satan was defeated. He was utterly cast out of God's presence. Yet, although Satan could no longer win, he was determined to take down as many people with him as he could.

Does that cause us concern? It would if we view Satan and his power as we see it portrayed in movies about the occult. However, another movie gives us a better way to view the situation. Steven Spielberg's popular film, *Schindler's List* told the story of Oskar Schindler, who, during World War II, organized a factory using slave laborers from concentration camps. His "list" was a list of names of Jewish prisoners ordered to work in Schindler's factories. Those on the list were exempt from regular concentration camp life and death in the crematoriums. To have one's name on Schindler's list was to escape from death to life.

In your baptism, you were joined to Christ's victory over sin, Satan, and death. Your name was placed on a list -- written in a book -- the book of life. In the "days yet to come" when distress, peril, and judgment are taking place, you don't have to worry. You have escaped from death to life. As the text says, "at that time your people shall be delivered, everyone whose name shall be found written in the book."

As the words of Daniel go on to say, "And many of those who sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt." The resurrection of all dead will take place in this "days yet to come". The Bible promises it and we confess it in our creeds, "I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life of the world to come." While many will awake to "everlasting contempt", the dead in Christ will awake to everlasting life. These are the wise, not in the wisdom of the world, but in the fear of the Lord. They will shine like "the brightness of the sky above...like the stars forever and ever."

Therefore, the "days yet to come" need not be a time of fear and panic for you and me. Rather, it is a time of anticipation, celebration, and rejoicing.

We anticipate, rather than dread, the coming of Christ to judge for we know that our sin has already been judged and condemned in Christ on the cross. We celebrate, rather than fear, the resurrection of all the dead from all the graves and cemeteries of this world for we know that our awakening to everlasting life and the glory of heaven has already been gained for us by Christ's resurrection from the tomb. We rejoice, rather than despair, as we see the signs of "the days yet to come" approaching and becoming more intense for we know that, by God's grace for the sake of Jesus, our names have been written in the Book of Life. There will be no surprises on that day for you and all who trust in Jesus Christ. The book will be opened and your name will be read. The "not guilty" sentence given at your baptism will be declared publicly for all of heaven and earth to hear. And you will hear Jesus say, "'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world."

It is helpful to celebrate the ministry of angels this day. Until the "days yet to come", we live under the care and protection of all the angels for God, as the Psalmist writes, "will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways; they will lift you up in their hands, so that you will not strike your foot against a stone." (Ps. 91:11-12) We look forward to the day when the angels will lift us up and bring us into the presence of Christ, either at our death or His coming. And we eagerly await sharing in the victory over Satan, the evil we see around us, and death itself which was

won for us by Christ and fought for us by Michael and all the angels of heaven whom we honor and thank God for this day. Amen.