

Day 1 - The most amazing thing about Angels

Here are the basic facts (according to the Scriptures): They exist. They are created beings, made by God. They have the ability to make moral choices (see 2 Pet 2: 24). They can speak and interact with people, so, for example, when Peter was set free from prison by an angel in Acts 5: 19 - 20, he was given specific instructions to continue his work of preaching and teaching.

Next, they are invisible to us until God makes them visible. I love the story 2 Kings 6: 8 – 17. Here we find the king of Israel and his prophet Elisha in the city of Dotham, surrounded by a formidable army with horses and chariots. One servant voiced the fears of many as he asked, 'what will we do?'

'Don't be afraid,' the prophet answered. 'Those who are with us are more than those who are with them', and he proceeded to pray for eyes to be opened. In a moment, the servant saw an even bigger army surrounded by fire. This brings us to our next fact: They have great power. They are the 'mighty ones' in Psalm 103: 20 and those who are 'stronger and more powerful' than humans in 2 Pet 2: 11.

But there is one thing more mind-blowing than all of this, something far more incredible. Simply this – *they serve us!*

Think about it. We are the ones who have disobeyed God, we are the ones who have misused His holy name, and our sins drove the nails into the hands and feet of God's holy Son. Compare that to the angels who dwell in the holy presence of God and who have done nothing wrong. The angels have power and abilities beyond our wildest dreams, yet they work for *our* good and for *our* protection. According to the book of Hebrews, angels are ministering spirits sent to serve those who will inherit salvation – us!

Why on earth would we be so privileged?

The Bible provides us with some answers. The first is found at the beginning in the book of Genesis. At the end of each of the first five days of creation, God steps back, surveys the scene and declares it good, but after creating humans, His approval rating has stepped up to 'very good' (Gen 1: 31). He has made us in His own image and given us dominion over everything else.

The writer of Psalm 8 reflects on this. We were made a little lower than the angels (v 5). That is, we are of the dust of the earth, yet we are crowned with glory and honour. We rule as His kingly representatives.

By the time we get to the New Testament, Christ's death on the cross and resurrection has rendered us (by repentance and faith) new creations 'in Christ' (1 Cor 1: 2), 'raised up' with Him and 'seated with him in the heavenly realms' (Eph 2:5). We are permanently in the place of highest authority.

We have done nothing to deserve this, of course, but next time you are tempted to look down upon yourself or live less than God's best for you, remember who He has made you to be – children of God, made in the image of God and seated with Christ in the heavenly realms.

Even the angels serve you.

Suggested Prayer: "Lord, thank you that I am made in your image, and by faith in you and your death on the cross, I am now a new creation and seated with you in the heavenly realms. I am proud to be one of your children. Please help me to live as a child of God in my thoughts, words and actions. Amen."

Day 2 - The Miracle of Forgiveness

I wonder if you have read the remarkable story in Mark chapter two, where a crowd of people listening to Jesus speaking in a house were surprised by the interruption of a paralyzed man being lowered through the roof to his feet. As the makeshift stretcher slowly descended, all eyes would have been on the man, then on Jesus, then back on the man. What will Jesus do? Every person present would surely have hoped to see a miracle right in front of their eyes.

But Jesus doesn't heal him, at least not straight away. All He does is tell the young man that his sins are forgiven.

The teachers of the law, who have likely travelled from Jerusalem to be there are immediately critical: 'This is blasphemy! Who can forgive sins but God alone?' (2:7). Why would Jesus do this? He seems to be deliberately walking into conflict.

The Gospels, of course, are full of accounts of Jesus' actions and sayings that intentionally point to His true identity – Emmanuel, God with us. So, Jesus, just to make clear to His audience that He does in fact have divine authority to pronounce forgiveness over the man, confirms it by also healing him. No wonder people in the crowd said, "we have never seen anything like this" (2: 12)

But I think there is another reason why Jesus forgave the man's sins. Matthew's version of the story has Jesus saying, "*take heart son, your sins are forgiven*" (Matt 9:2). Somehow Jesus felt He needed to speak to the man with deep compassion - as if He knew the man was weighed down with guilt. Perhaps the young man even believed that he deserved his physical condition because of something he had done. The text doesn't give answers to these speculations, but I suggest that there are hints in Jesus' words that what the man desperately needed was a clean conscience. And only God can give that.

When Jesus heals it is always a miracle, but perhaps His forgiveness is a miracle too. The once-paralyzed man walked away free from his physical suffering but also free from his guilt. I'm surprised we don't see him skipping to a tune on his way out – maybe the dancing happened with his family later!

1 John 1: 9 tells us that if we confess our sins to Him, then He, being just and faithful will forgive us our sins. We all know what it feels like to carry a burden of guilt. We can try and hide it, suppress it, even try to justify the actions that caused it, but we can't set ourselves free from it. Only forgiveness from the one who has authority to forgive will work.

Is Jesus challenging you to repent of something? Have you been carrying a weight that you can't shake off? Perhaps He wants to give you a miracle today – the miracle of forgiveness.

Suggested prayer: "Lord, thank you that you are a God of deep compassion. You don't delight in pointing out our sin, but you love us enough to do so, so that we might receive

your forgiveness and enjoy a new start. Lord, I am sorry for the things I have done wrong. Please forgive me and wash me clean. Amen.”

Day 3 - Nothing is Impossible with God

Have you ever been backed into a corner? Or felt that way. You're in a sticky situation with no way out.

The Israelites must have felt that way when they faced the Red Sea.

When God led the Israelites out of Egypt, they were not an army. They were tribes and families. In fact, the Lord deliberately avoided a route through Philistine country (which would have been shorter) because 'if they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt' (Ex 13: 17).

So, imagine men, untrained for battle, yet nervously holding anything that might pass as a weapon, alongside their wives and children, realizing that a highly trained and cruel Egyptian fighting force are bearing down on them, with desert on either side and a vast body of water in front of them.

They were literally caught between the devil and the deep blue sea.

Most people know the rest of the Bible's most famous story. Under the Lord's command, Moses, standing at the waters edge, stretched out his hand over the sea, which promptly parted. The stunned Israelites walked across a dry seabed, but as the Egyptian army pursued them Moses lifted his hand again, and tons of water crashed back into place crushing every soldier and chariot.

What strikes me about this story is how God *created* an answer to their prayers. His solution was original, to say the least, and completely unexpected.

Of course, many have speculated *how* God might have wrought this miracle, with explanations ranging from Tsunamis to quirks within fluid dynamics to a phenomenon known as 'wind setdown' (the text tells us that 'the Lord drove the sea back with a strong east wind' – 14: 21). There does seem to be a tendency among us humans to want to try and explain supernatural things in natural terms.

The point I want to make though is that, at the exact moment of greatest need, a miracle occurred completely out of left field. No-one saw it coming! At the point where no person could see a way out of their calamitous situation, God re-wrote the rules of nature and triumphantly presented a new solution. He not only provided a way of escape for the Israelites; He also completely destroyed the threat on their backs.

Sometimes I try to imagine how God might answer my prayers, but then I only see limits instead of the infinite possibilities. I try to look at logical solutions to my problems but forget that God's brain is bigger than mine. Even when I try to think outside the box for a way forward, I fail to remember that God is more than able to get rid of the box altogether!

It goes without saying that God often uses the natural for His purposes. We know that! We rightly pray that He will act through the expertise of surgeons when a loved one is facing an

operation and we know that He invented the laws of science. We know that God gave us extraordinary abilities to design and make and build, but how easy it is to only look there.

If our Lord is a creator, then can He not also bring a solution out of nowhere? I think so, because nothing is impossible with God.

Suggested prayer: "Lord, thank you that with you there are always endless possibilities. You are the God of creative miracles. When I don't see solutions, you do. When I can't see a way forward, I can remind myself that nothing is impossible with God. Amen."