

THE MINISTRY OF ANGELS

A SERMON

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By Mister JAMES WELLS

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“Are they not all ministering; spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation?” Hebrews 1:14

THERE is a strong analogy, and there is also entire concord, between the character and the service of angels and of saints. The angels are called “elect angels;” they are called “holy angels.” The Lord laid hold of them by eternal election, and therefore prevented their becoming unholy. Here, then, election and holiness go together in the standing of the angels. And so, it is with the people of God; no election, no holiness; election and holiness are inseparable in the state and destiny of the people of God. What was election? but taking them out from the first Adam, and from sin, and from the law, and from death, and from the curse, and giving them to Christ Jesus, and constituting them free from sin by his blood, and grace by his righteousness holding them there? and what was the Savior's death but the carrying out of this choice; sanctifying the people with his own blood; laying down his life for those who were chosen? Here, then, election and sanctification stand inseparably connected. Just so it is in the work of the blessed Spirit; when the Lord Jesus Christ by his Spirit lays hold of the conscience and heart of a sinner, and makes that sinner see and feel what and where he is as a sinner, he hereby severs that sinner from the world, unites him to himself, and he becomes a holy man, a lover of holiness. Therefore, says the Savior, “I have chosen you and ordained you, that you should go and bring forth fruit.” So that wherever in the Bible you find election, you will always find holiness. Just so sure as a people are a chosen generation, just so sure shall they become a royal priesthood, just so sure shall they become a holy nation, just so sure shall they show forth the praises of him who has called them out of darkness into his marvelous light. Angels then owe their standing to eternal election; and the saints of God well know that their heirship originated in that great, that wondrous, that eternal transaction. So that election and holiness, then, went together originally; and they go together in mediation, they go together in manifestation, and they will go together in ultimate destiny; there is no separating the one from the other. Do not let us listen to what men say about election let us listen to the word of God; let us read for ourselves, let us pray for ourselves, and for others too as far as we can; and the Lord give us to live from time to time in the consecrating power of this discriminating grace, this eternal election. There is then this analogy, this concord, between angels and the saints of God. But again, the angels also are free from death; they are not only chosen and holy, but they are also free from death. Hence, said, the Savior, running a kind of analogy here again between angels and saints, “They who are counted worthy to obtain that world neither marry nor are given in marriage; neither

can they die anymore; for they are equal unto the angels; and are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection.” Therefore, an angel would trace his freedom from that death to which fallen angels are subjected, that is, the fallen angels are subjected not to a death of annihilation, but they are subjected to a death to everything they once had; they are dead to God as regards any enjoyment of him, and dead to all happiness; that is the worst kind of death, that living death, that death that never dies; an angel would trace his freedom from this death to God’s election; God was pleased to choose them. And so, the saints of God in this matter also are equal to the angels; that as the angels were prevented by the good pleasure of the blessed God from falling, so we are saved from death by the Lord having chosen us in Christ. Christ comes in, and death must go out, and sin must go out, and Satan must go out, and wrath must go out, and hell must go out; Christ comes in, and life comes with him, light comes with him, peace comes with him, joy comes with him, God comes with him, heaven comes with him, salvation comes with him, sanctification comes with him, justification comes with him, eternal glory comes with him. So that here again the saints, are equal to the angels; “Neither can they die anymore; but are the children of God, being the children of the resurrection;” and “they are counted worthy to obtain that world.” And how are they worthy? They are worthy by that worthiness they have in Christ Jesus; they are worthy by relationship to Christ; “that worthy name by which you are called;” as though James, without intending to reproach us, yet at the same time would convey an idea which every man convinced of what he is as a sinner would naturally feel; for he says, you are named after that worthy name; as though he would say, your own name is unworthy; I need not remind you that your own name is an unworthy name; and implies all that pertains to your character as a fallen sinner; as a poor sinful worm of the earth; but then, there is a new name, “that worthy name by which you are called and being named after him, and being made one with him, it is in this way they are counted worthy to obtain that world. It is not said that they are worthy, but they are accounted worthy. So, then they must be accounted righteous, they must be accounted holy; and bless the Lord, he has revealed the way in which that great truth is established; “they are accounted worthy to obtain that world,” that world of immortality in which angels’ dwell. And is there one of us here that knows anything of the Lord Jesus Christ that can have one moment’s doubt as to the worthiness of Christ? Do you doubt for a moment that he is worthy? I am sure you will say, Oh, I can see that as clearly as I can see anything; that Jesus Christ is worthy of that eternal world, that he is worthy of that eternal bliss, that he is worthy of that eternal joy. Well, then, if we are one with him, the blessed God has constituted us worthy even as he is worthy. Angels then are interested in this great matter, for it is said that “unto the angels,” who in the Ephesians are called “principalities and powers;” “that unto the principalities might be known through the church the manifold wisdom of God.” So that angels learn through the church the manifold wisdom of God. How wondrous then, friends, is that mercy that has brought us up into such a oneness with the dear Savior; breaking our covenant with death, breaking our league with hell, and bringing us into a covenant of life, bringing us into a league with heaven, bringing us into oneness with the blessed Redeemer, and even bringing not only the Lord to take care of us, but the Lord condescending to employ angelic hosts to watch over his people, minister for them, and take care of them.

Our subject then this morning will be *the ministry of angels*; secondly, *the persons for whom they minister*; “them that shall be heirs of salvation.” And if the angels are to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation, then certainly their ministry must pertain to salvation matters, must pertain to a saved people. But we shall not reach that part of the text this morning, I shall not touch the part that will call upon me to describe this salvation, or to describe wherein the heirship of this

salvation lies. Therefore, this one idea will occupy all our time this morning, *the ministry of angels*. “Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them that shall be heirs of salvation?” Now the Bible is very clear upon this matter, and I shall want to know as we go along what we personally know in our own souls of the ministry of angels. Do not suppose for a moment that I am going to occupy the precious time that we are together in mere speculative matters. No. The ministry of angels is a matter clearly revealed in the word of God, and a matter of personal experience; it has been a matter of personal experience, and I trust the Lord will make it unto us more or less so this morning.

The ministry of angels is of course the ministry of the gospel; they will minister nothing else but the gospel. And let us see then as we go along if this mystery shall not cease with us to be any more a mystery. In the first place then angels minister instrumentally, pardoning mercy and they then, secondly show the gospel to be a gospel of power; third, that it is an everlasting gospel; and fourth, that it is an unrivalled gospel. Under these four heads, then, I notice this morning the ministry of angels; after just saying that the revelation that most exalts angels is the revelation of God by Jesus Christ; they see more of God there, they enjoy more of God there than anywhere else. Ah, that is the great meeting place of saints and angels; and all these saints stand nearer to God, more vitally related to him, than angels are; for “Christ passed by the nature of angels, and took upon him the seed of Abraham.”

First, then, here is a poor sinner, and God appears to him, and appears in his majesty and in the splendor of his holiness; and it is a spirit into which none but the Holy Ghost can bring any one. The holiness of God flashes upon the conscience, the justice of God flashes upon the conscience, the certainty of his eternal wrath flashes upon the conscience; and the soul can hear in the distance, and perhaps near, the song of angels, “Thrice holy is the Lord God of hosts.” What said Isaiah when he was brought under this conviction; when he was brought into this feeling? He said, “Woe is me, for I am undone, I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell among a people of unclean lips.” There he stood as a poor sinner, saw in the contrast what he was as a sinner; saw no way of escape; “woe is me, I am undone.” What a mercy to be undone in that sense of the word; for our false holiness, our supposed righteousness, our supposed comeliness, our supposed strength, all to be taken away. Now in comes the ministry of angels. “Then flew one of the seraphim’s,” which we supposed to be an order of angels; “then flew one of the seraphim’s,” feeling no doubt honored, highly honored, to be favored so to minister; for they behold the face of God our Father, each waiting for the message he is to take; “Then flew one of the seraphim’s, and took a live coal from off the altar.” Ah, where the sacrifice was; there is the living promise, there is the living mercy, there is pardoning grace; “and touched my lips, and said, your iniquity is taken away, and your sin purged.” The ministry of angels; here this seraph instrumentally ministered pardoning mercy. We cannot, we do not wish to enter into anything beyond that which concerns us. I felt disposed this morning to make this matter clear, because people have thought that the ministry of angels is some mysterious, unaccountable, out of the way thing, that we can make nothing of. No, friends, there it is in the gospel. So, it shows that angels rejoice to see God the Father pardoning us; and that they rejoice to see the efficacy of the Savior’s sacrifice, taking away sin; and they rejoice in seeing the Holy Spirit revealing to us and enabling us to realize this pardon. So that I cannot but think those great men have made a great mistake that tell us that the elder brother in the parable of the prodigal will mean the angels. The elder brother grudged the prodigal the pardon he had found, and grudged the prodigal the best robe, and grudged the prodigal the fatted calf, and the music, and the dancing,

and the kind reception he met with. I do not think the elder brother is the angels; no, they glory in the grace of God, they rejoice in seeing the display of this grace. "Are they not all ministering spirits?" Have we then been brought, in the same manner where Isaiah was, under a sight and sense of God's infinite purity and majesty, the certainty of his threatening, and to feel ourselves unclean? that "undone," is the only word that can describe our character. The only remedy is a live coal from off the altar, the sweet living promise of the blessed God brought home with power. See how sweetly Isaiah was at liberty after this; when the Lord said, "Who will go for us?" O Lord, I can go now! Oh! how I can tell to sinners now.

"What a dear Savior I have found."

How I can tell of your pardoning mercy now! How I can tell of that great sacrifice now! How can I tell of the exceeding great and precious promises of your Holy Word now! With what assurance I can speak now! Here am I, send me! Oh! the soul rises as on eagle's wings, it mounts aloft, and glories in the sweet liberty of the everlasting gospel!

Again, in the ninth chapter of Daniel we have the same subject. Daniel says, "And while I was speaking, and praying;" you see how the Lord prepared Isaiah for that manifestation of his mercy; so the Lord prepares Daniel, gives him a spirit of prayer, "While I was praying, and confessing my sin, and the sin of my people, (not confessing the sin of my people, and then my sin, he confessed his own first; we can always help others better when we get clear ourselves first,) confessing my sin and the sin of my people Israel, and presenting my supplication before the Lord my God, for the holy mountain of my God; yes, while I was speaking in prayer," I was brought to know what the ministry of angels was; for "about the time of the evening sacrifice;" that's it, that's the time; "at the time of the evening sacrifice Gabriel (the archangel,) being caused to fly swiftly, touched me. And he informed me, and talked with me, and said, O Daniel, I am now come forth to give you skill and understanding." That declaration has had my admiration for many years. What was the skill he came to give him? what was the understanding he came to give him? "For (says he,) you are greatly beloved," but not greater than the rest of the Lord's people. Wherein did the skill and the understanding lie? "After seventy weeks the Messiah shall come ah, that's it, there is the skill and the understanding: The Messiah shall come "To finish the transgression, and to make an end of sins, and to make reconciliation for iniquity, and to bring in everlasting righteousness; and he shall be cut off, but not for himself." "He shall finish transgression." Ah, that makes a skillful man, that is a man of good understanding, that is brought experimentally to know that transgression is finished; the very transgressions that are in my heart are already finished in the sight of God; they are ended, "He shall make an end of sin;" make an end of it: he won't leave anything for you to do; he will come and not go back again till he has finished transgression; he will come, and not go back again till he has made an end of sin; he will come and not go back again, till he has made reconciliation, reparation for iniquity; that whatever mischief iniquity has done, he will make reparation for, he will restore to God that which he took not away, and having made every reparation, he will bring in everlasting righteousness. That is the skill. Oh, that man is skillful who understands this; but he that does not understand it, is unskillful, is a babe, and needs to be taught the first oracles of God. So the apostle in the Hebrews, reasoning upon this same subject, by that most glorious type of the eternal priesthood of Christ, Melchizedek, says, "Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing you are dull of hearing." "I am come to give you

skill and understanding.” Here is the skill then. The ministry of angels then, is not so very mysterious, you see, after all; it is clear enough here.

But there is another point I wish to take notice of as I go along, and that is, the kind of gospel they minister. It is clear, in the remarks I have made, beyond all dispute, that pardoning mercy, and justifying grace, are two of the features, or characteristics of that gospel which the angels minister; and if we are not one with Christ, we are not one with God, we are not one with the blessed Spirit. An angel never spoke a lie, and never can. Again, it is a gospel not only of pardoning mercy, and justifying righteousness, but a gospel of effectual power. Let us see whether that is the gospel that we love, and by which we serve the Lord. Gabriel said concerning John the Baptist, that many of the children of Israel should he turn to the Lord their God; and that John the Baptist should go before the Lord, the presence of the Lord, in the spirit and power of Elias, and should turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just, to make ready a people prepared for the Lord. Let us examine this sermon preached by this angel, that angel, a representative of the rest of the angels. Let us examine the sermon there preached, let us review it. The first thing is relationship. “Many of the children of Israel (their names were in the book of eternal life,) shall he turn to the Lord their God.” Notice, he was the Lord their God before they were turned to him; the angels knew this, the angels knew that he was the Lord their God by eternal election from eternity. I will not say the angels were Calvinists. I have nothing to do with Calvin; I will say the angels were free-grace angels. I will say they were gospel angels, I will say they were heavenly angels. There was not a particle of anything earthy in any part of their ministrations. And this was the effectual power: “He shall turn the hearts of the fathers unto the children.” Who are these fathers? That was a term used in that day for teachers, teachers were called fathers, and they keep that up now in the Roman Catholic church; they call certain men fathers. John the Baptist then should turn the hearts of these teachers away from what they had hitherto taught, and turn them towards the children. What children? The children of God; just the very persons against whom their hearts had before stood; even some of these sturdy old Nicodemus-es, some of these sturdy old teachers, their eyes should be opened, they should be tumbled out of their life-long righteousness and holiness, and their hearts should be turned towards God’s truth. The angels knew that there was not anything too hard for the Lord; that he could manage a Saul of Tarsus as easily as he could any other poor sinner, let him be who, or what, or where he may. “And the disobedient to the wisdom of the just.” Disobedient there means unbelieving. Wherein lies the wisdom of the just? Why, in knowing how he is justified, in knowing how that great question is answered, “How shall man be just with God?” In comes the answer, “Be it known unto you, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins; and that by him all that believe are justified from all things from which they could not be justified by the law of Moses.” Now, mark the angel’s closing definition of the ministry of John, “to make ready a people prepared for the Lord,” There is a people prepared; that is, provided; but the people are not ready yet, the Lord has them in hand, had given them all to his dear Son, there they are, he had provided them; but if the Lord come to one, and say, Are you ready now, are you ready now to leave father and mother, and sisters and brethren, and houses and lands, and your own life also, for the gospel’s sake? No, Lord, I am not, I am not going to leave my father and my mother, my sisters and my brethren my houses and my lands; and as to my life, I mean to live as long as I can. You are not ready, then? No, Lord. But he shall make them ready. As I have said in times past, in that discourse of the angel to Zacharias, there are nine *shall’s*, but not one *if*. “He shall make ready a people prepared for the Lord.” Then you are not ready yet, Saul. Ready? I am going to Damascus to put to death what few

there are left of these dangerous characters. Very well, Saul, I will meet you there. He went to Damascus. Well, friend Saul, how are you this morning? Quite happy. What were you doing yesterday? Preaching Jesus Christ. Preaching Jesus Christ! Why, how came that about? He met me by the way, and he was too many for me; he brought me down; and he sent Ananias to me, and told me I was his chosen vessel; that I should hear his voice, that I should know his will, and see that Just One; and he has fulfilled his promise; and now I am ready not only to be bound, but to die for the Lord, Jesus; I am ready now to part with sisters, and brethren, houses, lands, liberty, life itself, for the name of the Lord Jesus. "To make ready a people prepared for the Lord." So, then this ministry of the angels, what kind of gospel is it? It is not a free-will gospel; it is not a duty-faith gospel. Did the seraphim offer any condition as the ground upon which he was to apply the living coal to Isaiah? Did Gabriel offer any condition as the ground upon which he was to reveal these things to Daniel? and did the angel purpose any condition as the ground upon which John in his ministry was so to succeed? No. Thus, then, the gospel of God is a pardoning gospel; pardoning iniquity, transgression, and sin; the gospel of God is a gospel of mediatorial perfection, as having put an end to transgression, sin and iniquity; the gospel of God is a gospel of effectual power; turning our hearts to the children of God; turning the disobedient to the wisdom of the just; bringing them to receive Christ's righteousness, renouncing all their own, and receiving Christ's righteousness; and bringing them to know that this is the work of God, that makes them willing in the day of his power. The ministry of the angels is not a mystery; it is a revealed mystery. How far they help a minister to preach a sermon I cannot say; how far they help you to pray I cannot tell; there are no doubt mysteries we cannot understand but we do know that their ministry is a gospel ministry; it is the gospel.

I must just tell you, the gospel which the angels minister is an everlasting gospel, Take these five points as another sample of the ministry of angels. First, said the angel concerning Christ, "He *shall* be great!" No uncertainty about it; "He shall be great;" greater than sin, greater than the curse, greater than Satan, greater than death, greater than hell, greater than all opposition. Then notice something else, I think eternity is implied here; that Christ retains his greatness. Now in this world you find some men become great for a little time, and by some means or other they lose their greatness. Adam lost his greatness: and even, Solomon lost his greatness by sin; and thousands of others have lost the greatness they acquired. But Christ never lost his. No, if ever he were great, he is great forever; for the word of God declares that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever. Then also he is the Son of the Highest. If ever Jesus Christ, was the Son of God he is the Son of God now. "Unto the Son he said your throne is forever." And the Lord God shall give unto him the throne of his father David;" not the earthly throne; the priesthood was promised to Christ, but it did not mean the literal priesthood. And so, the throne of David, people tell us, pretty little stories, and write pretty little books that do very nicely for those who want something to amuse them, lest the solemn and vital truths of the gospel should intrude, upon them; and they say we are to have an earthly millennium by and bye; that Jesus Christ is to come to Jerusalem, and reign on a literal throne, and have a literal kingdom, and I don't know what all. There is not a single syllable in the word of God to authorize such notions as these. His throne is, like his priesthood, spiritual and eternal. His throne is in accordance with his kingdom; his kingdom is not of this world, but it is an everlasting kingdom, that shall not pass away. "And he shall reign over the house of Jacob forever; and of his kingdom there shall be no end;" Thus then we have a gospel of mercy, of righteousness, of power, of eternity, of certainty.

Again, the, ministry of angels is also a joyful, ministry. An angel came to the shepherds, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and prepared them for the tidings, the joyful tidings, the angel had for them. "They were sore afraid." It is, a mercy, it was so, friends. Ah, if any threatening of God's word strike your mind, make you sore afraid, if you read the character of Judas, and tremble and fear lest perhaps you are that character; if you read the character of king Saul, and tremble and fear you are like him, it will do you good; and if you read of the people being given up to a reprobate mind, and you feel a sort of shudder come over you, and say, Lord, with such a heart as mine perhaps I shall someday be that hardened reprobate; it will do you good, And if you have sometimes gone to the Bible, and to the house of God with that feeling, and if the minister has gone into the things that I have spoken of this morning, oh, how sweet it has been. Ah, I am not Judas after all; I do not think I am Saul after all; I shall not be left to a reprobate mind after all; for I do feel I have a heart to receive these things; I love them; they rejoice my soul. Therefore, when they were sore afraid, the angel said, "Fear not, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord." A Savior! Ah, you were so afraid, you thought I as an angel was commissioned to come and cut you off, as an angel cut off the army of Sennacherib; you thought I was come to cut you down; no, no; I am come to tell you that unto you, is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is the anointed Lord, he is the Anointed, and he is the Lord, he is Lord of all; and these good tidings shall be "tidings of great joy to all people." And when this angel had thus announced this birth of the Savior, according to prediction, and what that Savior was, and what the result should be, "Great joy to all people," down rushing came innumerable myriads of angelic hosts, "praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men." This gospel then is an unrivalled gospel. Isaiah thus pronounces upon it, "The moon shall be confounded, and the sun ashamed, when the Lord shall reign in mount Zion in Jerusalem, and before his ancients gloriously." What does it mean? Why, it means that this glorious gospel is so unrivalled that it will leave the sun behind, the moon behind, the stars behind, creation behind it will leave everything behind; nothing can rival the glory of God, it is unrivalled. Christ without a rival reigns; Christ is the highest of all God's works; Christ is the highest of all God's delight; Christ is the highest of God's glory; and his people shall be exalted with him, rejoice with him, reign with him, triumph with him forever. Nowhere did the counsels, perfections, and doings of the great God shine forth to his honor and to the good of mankind as they do in eternal salvation; angels understood this when they sang, "Glory to God in the highest." That is the first part of the sermon. The next part is, "On earth peace." Ah to whom is there peace on earth? Not to the enemy; not to the wicked; there is peace only to the believer. "Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, through our Lord Jesus Christ" "And good will." When we look at the several wills that God has made, and see how they have all failed, we rejoice that there is a will that cannot fail. He made a will for Adam, but he added a condition to it; and Adam violated the condition, and lost the will. He made a will for the Jews; but they violated the covenants of that will, and lost it. He made a will for the literal offspring of David. "If they will keep my statutes and my judgments, then shall they reign on the throne of their father David." But they violated the conditions, and lost the throne. But ah, there was David's greater Son, upon whom all the conditions of God's good will rested; he came and did not fail. Therefore, the "good will" there will mean God's new covenant, in contrast to the other covenants or wills. The other wills were righteous, but not good in the sense in which the new covenant is good.

Thus, then, the ministry of angels is simply this, that they are the servants of God, and especially of Christ; that they worship God by Christ Jesus; yes, that they worship Christ; that they are interested above all things in the glorious revelation which the blessed God has made of himself in the gospel: and therefore, if through the feeble remarks I have made this morning we can come to this one conclusion, that our souls are in harmony with this order of things the ministry of angels, then our souls certainly are in harmony with God the Father, whose counsel this gospel is; in harmony with the Savior, whose blood has confirmed this gospel; and in harmony with the blessed Spirit, who has indited this gospel; and being in harmony with the blessed God, “If God be for us, who can be against us?”