

The CITYGATES C H U R C H

Hebrews 1:4-14 Jesus is Better Than the Angels

Summary: What are angels really like and why is it so important that Jesus is better?

We have been slowly working our way into the book of Hebrews where we have said the overarching theme is: Jesus is better. This morning we see how that applies to angels, we discuss what angels are really like, and we discover why it is so important for Jesus to be better than them.

Let's begin with a quick review:

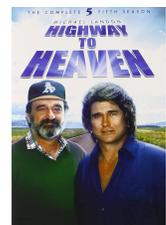
Hebrews 1:1 God, who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets, 2 has in these last days spoken to us by *His* Son, whom He has appointed heir of all things, through whom also He made the worlds; 3 who being the brightness of *His* glory and the express image of His person, and upholding all things by the word of His power, when He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, 4 having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Now I asked us to review that because it's important – it's all building up to this fact: that God is speaking to us, through Jesus, and Jesus is better than the angels.

That's important to know because people today, just like people way back then, have all kinds of strange ideas about angels that we pick up from all sorts of places, including television. If you were alive during the 70's, 80's, and 90's you didn't have YouTube or Netflix or Hulu, you had ABC, NBC, and CBS and you had to watch whatever was on, which oddly enough, often included something about angels.



I grew up watching Michael Landon star as Pa in Little House on the Prairie each Monday night. But when that series ended he starred in a new show called Highway to Heaven on Wednesday night where he played an angel on parole trying to help people on earth. The funny thing is, it was a new show, on a new night, with a new role, but he was still doing mostly the same things - trying to help people out, give good advice people, and be kind – it didn't seem to matter if he was a farmer, a father, or an angel, in these sentimental dramas, the job was still the same.



A few years later we had Touched by Angel where Monica, an angel from the search and rescue division, under the guidance of her angelic supervisor Tess also tried to help people solve their problems here on earth.



Somewhere in that whole time period of television there were also three good looking women who knew martial arts and worked as Charlie's Angels. And they had nothing to do with the local baseball team that played in Anaheim, California, also the Angels. It was all very confusing.

But long before TV artists were shaping our ideas about these heavenly creatures.



Raphael, painting over 500 years ago during the Renaissance, famously depicted angels as little chubby-cheeked children. This eventually led to the Victorian era of art which produced all kinds of delicate looking angels. Obviously, it's not hard to imagine Jesus being better than any of these interpretations, but our modern depictions bear little semblance to what we find in Scripture. As CS Lewis notes in his preface to the Screwtape Letters:



In Scripture the visitation of an angel is always alarming; it has to begin by saying "Fear not." The Victorian angel looks as if it were going to say, "There, there."¹

So let's go back to Scripture and see what we can learn about real angels because it turns out they're everywhere, from Genesis in the very beginning, to Revelation at the very end. They never look like a chubby-cheeked child, but if you're taking notes, they do have at least four major functions.

First, *they continuously worship, praise, and serve God*. Some of the most detailed descriptions of angels are those that appear in Isaiah, Ezekiel, and Revelation where we read of spectacular creatures that sing worship around the throne of God. Isaiah, for example, says:

Isaiah 6:1 In the year that King Uzziah died, I saw the Lord sitting on a throne, high and lifted up, and the train of His *robe* filled the temple. 2 Above it stood seraphim; each one had six wings: with two he covered his face, with two he covered his feet, and with two he flew. 3 And one cried to another and said:

"Holy, holy, holy is the LORD of hosts;
The whole earth is full of His glory!"

Second, *the angels communicate God's message to men*. They assisted in bringing the Law to Moses back in the days of the Exodus (Acts 7:38, 53). Angels bring several messages to Daniel, and Michael the archangel even tells him about the opposition Michael faced on the way to bring an answer to prayer. The apostle John speaks of his interaction with an angel in the book of Revelation. And each Christmas we remember the fact that the angel Gabriel brought important news to the future parents of Jesus and John the Baptist. Again, from the first pages of Scripture to the last, angels are found bringing people messages from God.

¹ CS Lewis, The Screwtape Letters, preface.

Third, *angels form the army of the Lord and serve as His agents of judgment*. Angels were responsible for the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah (Gen 18-19) and later the army of Assyria which laid siege to Jerusalem. In the story of the rich man and the beggar Lazarus Jesus says the angels carry us away to our final judgment after death. And Jesus said one day the angels will separate the wheat from the chaff, meaning the righteous from the unrighteous (Matt 13:39-42).



In the book of Revelation we find them blowing trumpets, pouring out bowls, opening seals, and executing judgment on Satan and his servants at the direction of God. Not really a job for chubby-cheeked children or Pa from Little House.

And yet while all of this is true for those who resist and rebel against God, our fourth point is that, *angels minister to, or help and watch over, believers*. Angels really are watching over us, even when we don't see them, and they love to see us change. Jesus said

Luke 15:10... there is joy in the presence of the angels of God over one sinner who repents.

Psalms 91 has long been a source of comfort to those enduring hard times. It says, in part:

Ps 91:11 For He shall give His angels charge over you,
To keep you in all your ways.

And, Jesus said at some point in the future He'll send His angels to gather His people. Describing the End Times, He told the disciples:

Matt 24:29 "Immediately after the tribulation of those days the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light; the stars will fall from heaven, and the powers of the heavens will be shaken. 30 Then the sign of the Son of Man will appear in heaven, and then all the tribes of the earth will mourn, and they will see the Son of Man coming on the clouds of heaven with power and great glory. 31 And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.

So, angels are very real, and very active throughout Scripture which means they are very real and very active in our world today as well. And yet, the whole reason we're talking about them is because *Jesus is better*, (Heb 1:4) *so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they*.

So let's look at why and how.

Hebrews 1:5 For to which of the angels did He ever say:

"You are My Son,
Today I have begotten You"?

And again:

“I will be to Him a Father,
And He shall be to Me a Son”?

Jesus is better than the angels because He is the only begotten son of God. OK, but what does that mean? If God has begotten Him “today,” then does that imply Jesus has a beginning, a birthday, like any of us? The answer is no, this is figurative language.

In the Upper Room on the night before He was crucified, Jesus prayed:

John 17:4 I have glorified You on the earth. I have finished the work which You have given Me to do. 5 And now, O Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was.

Remember, we already read in Hebrews 1:2 that Jesus made the world. How could He be present at Creation if this is the day that He was begotten? Again, the answer is, it’s figurative language.

God is speaking of the day, the actual date in time after His death, burial, and resurrection that Jesus ascended back to heaven having completed the work of our salvation. Although Jesus has always existed, this was the moment, that to our human understanding, inaugurated His role as victorious savior.

On earth, Jesus voluntarily emptied Himself or restrained Himself from certain aspects of His divinity (Phil 2:5-6). He was, for a season, a bit lower than the angels. But now He resumes all of His prior position and standing as the Son of God who is coequal with God and is also fully God and fully man.

You have to know that – you don’t have to fully understand it, but you have to know it. This is very important theological stuff. So I need you to circle back and pay attention here for a minute if your mind has wandered. There are certain cults, groups, and religions that teach that Jesus was created, that He was very special, perhaps superhuman even – like a super prophet, many Muslims believe that Jesus, or Issa as they would call Him, was a very holy prophet, a good man. But they don’t believe He was God.

Others believe he was more than a man, but still less than God – they believe he was an angel. Some teach that He was actually the brother of Michael the archangel. Mormons believe Jesus and Lucifer were brothers with competing ideas on how to save mankind.

There are two significant problems with these views. First, if Jesus was just a very special man or a super powerful angel, then He has peers to compete with and you can get into spiritual power struggles. It becomes the Eastern idea of the yin and yang, two opposite but equal forces struggling for control. It’s the Jedi and the Sith, the light side and the dark side, they struggle against each other all the time and the best you can hope for is balance. But

Scripture doesn't teach that at all, it clearly declares Satan will be bound and judged and banished, that Jesus rules forever.

The second problem is related to the first, but even more important in many ways and it's this: if Jesus was just a superpowered human or angel used by God, it completely devalues the gift of grace that we received on the cross.

Think about this. If God simply made someone or something that He was going to send to the cross, then He just manufactured His own solution. He created a sort of spiritual whipping boy to play the part of Savior. I hate to say it this way, but He's got no skin in the game – He's just moving and directing the pieces of the game and adding new parts whenever He needs them to keep things going.

But if Jesus really is God, fully God and fully man, then He's saying – I'll do for you what no one and nothing else can. I will, at great cost to Myself, with personal action and involvement, rescue you. I will actually step into your suffering and rebellion personally. I won't just recruit, train, equip, and send someone else to do it, I'll do it for you Myself. Friends, that changes everything!

Last week we spoke of the Apostle's Creed, an ancient statement of the core beliefs of the Christian faith. But we find an even older statement of faith in the book of 1 Timothy, a letter written to a young pastor in the early church. It says

1 Timothy 3:16 And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness:
God was manifested in the flesh,
Justified in the Spirit,
Seen by angels,
Preached among the Gentiles,
Believed on in the world,
Received up in glory.

Jesus was not an angel, He was seen by angels. He was God, manifested in the flesh.

So let me hit this another time to drive it home – here's why you should care that Jesus is better than the angels: it means that God did not hire someone to help you, He did it Himself. God wants an up-close, in-depth, unmediated, personal relationship with you and He has personally done what is necessary for it to happen. This is God's attitude toward you. When it mattered most, He did for you what no one else could.

Which is why, the angels worship Him and serve Him.

Heb 1:6 But when He again brings the firstborn into the world, He says:

“Let all the angels of God worship Him.”

And that is exactly what we see happen in Heaven in Revelation chapter 5. The angels and the elders and others are gathered before the throne of God and they worship Jesus:

Revelation 5:11 Then I looked, and I heard the voice of many angels around the throne, the living creatures, and the elders; and the number of them was ten thousand times ten thousand, and thousands of thousands, 12 saying with a loud voice:

“Worthy is the Lamb who was slain
To receive power and riches and wisdom,
And strength and honor and glory and blessing!”

Again, Jesus is better than the angels, and they know it, they rejoice in it, they worship Him for it. They actually exist to serve Him which is the next point we see developed back in Hebrews.

Heb 1:7 And of the angels He says:

“Who makes His angels spirits
And His ministers a flame of fire.”

In other words, God has made the angels to serve. He created them, He directs them, He tasks them, everything they do, they do at His command to build His kingdom. But while the angels exist to *serve*, Jesus is to *be served*.

8 But to the Son He says:

“Your throne, O God, is forever and ever;
A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of Your kingdom.

9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”

The angels minister and worship before the throne, but Jesus sits on it. He rules and reigns forever in His kingdom. Which, by the way, is a kingdom of righteousness.

Jesus loves righteousness and hates lawlessness. You need to know that. You need to know it because this is the kingdom Jesus is calling you into. This is what He is like, this is what His kingdom is like, and this is what He is teaching His people to be like – to love righteousness and hate lawlessness – and notice what this brings: gladness.

9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You
With the oil of gladness more than Your companions.”

Christian, I hope you can see this direct connection between holiness and happiness. There is a specific link between loving what is good, hating what is bad, and experiencing joy.

9 You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness;
Therefore God, Your God, has anointed You

The kingdom of Christ is a kingdom whose foundation is justice, where everything is made right and that leads to the experience of gladness, happiness, joy, and peace. Christian, this is your eternal destiny this is what God has in store for you and this is what God is calling you into today – to love righteousness and hate lawlessness – let Him speak to you about how that needs to work out in your life.

And, notice the change won't just be for a little while, Christ's kingdom endures forever.

10 And:

“You, LORD, in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth,
And the heavens are the work of Your hands.

11 They will perish, but You remain;
And they will all grow old like a garment;

12 Like a cloak You will fold them up,
And they will be changed.

But You are the same,
And Your years will not fail.”

There's a lot of concern right now about the future of our nation. A lot of uncertainty. A lot of competing visions. A lot of struggle between political parties, blue states and red states, blue counties and red counties, coastal elites and flyover states. There's concern about near-peer competitors and the growing influence of China and Russia. And listen, some of you in this room need to be concerned about those things. That's your job. You get paid to make sure the rest of us are safe, directed and protected, and provided for. You have a very important mission.

But never forget the greater importance of the kingdom of God which has stood and will stand forever, which has no such thing as a near-peer competitor, and which has absolutely no concern whatsoever about preserving it's institutions for the next generations.

A few years ago I had the chance to go teach a class at a Bible College in Europe and I was able to take the family with me. For two weeks we stayed in Budapest, the capital of Hungary. I would teach for several hours every morning and then after lunch we would go out exploring – we had some friends who were locals and they loved to tell us – do you see that building? It's older than your country.

It was a good reminder that for as much as we may love America, this whole grand experiment in democracy hasn't even been around for 250 years yet. We live right in the

middle of it and so we just assume it will probably go on forever, but we saw things in Budapest that give you a new perspective, including, Roman ruins.

2000 years ago a Roman legion was stationed there, on the banks of the Danube river. You can visit their military base and walk among the ruins of their empire, an empire that ruled the known world. An empire that persecuted Christians. An empire that said it's own ruler, Caesar, was Lord. An empire that thought it would last forever and here were my kids jumping from brick to brick playing in the ruins of their once mighty army.

We could travel the world and repeat the story over and over with empires, rulers, and civilizations that once seemed mighty and strong and are now only the subject of specialized scholars and selfie-snapping tourists.

Meanwhile, "Your throne, O God, is forever and ever."

the heavens are the work of Your hands.
11 They will perish, but You remain;
... they will be changed.
But You are the same,
And Your years will not fail."

Christian, be encouraged by the eternal nature of Christ's coming kingdom, it has been planned since before the foundation of the world and it will not fail.

13 But to which of the angels has He ever said:

"Sit at My right hand,
Till I make Your enemies Your footstool"?

14 Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation?

We end here with an amazing twist. Jesus is better than the angels – strong angels, powerful angels, protective angels that do the bidding of God. And Jesus has sent those angels to minister to you – to those who will inherit salvation.

Christian, you need to know what angels are. You need to know who Jesus is, and why it is so important that He is better than the angels, so that *you can fully appreciate the fact that this Jesus loves you and sends these angels to watch over you*, to minister to you, to guide you and one day to escort you to His everlasting kingdom.

This is your hope. This is your God. This is the good news, that Jesus is better.

Let's pray.



Sermon Application and Discussion Questions

Hebrews 1:4-14 Jesus is Better Than the Angels

Summary: What are angels really like and why is it so important that Jesus is better?

- What comes to mind when you think of angels? Where and how have you seen them depicted?
- Have you ever had an encounter with an angel?
- Some people think angels are just intermediaries between us and God and that Jesus is simply the best and highest-ranking of them all.
 - Why is this idea attractive?
 - Why is this a problem?
- Read Colossians 2:18 and Revelation 19:1-10. Should angels be worshipped?
- Look up the following verses and note what angels do:
 - Matthew 18:10
 - Revelation 14:6-12
 - Acts 12:1-23
 - Revelation 20:1-3
- Verse 13 asks to which of the angels has God ever said “Sit at My right hand, Till I make Your enemies Your footstool”? This is from Psalm 110:1 and is quoted in the New Testament more than any other OT passage (14 x’s) including by Jesus at His trial in Mark 12:36. Why do you think this message is so important?
- Why is it important to know that Jesus’ kingdom is a kingdom of righteousness? In what ways have you seen loving righteousness and hating lawlessness produce joy, or the anointing of gladness?
 - Read Revelation 16:7 – what is said about God’s judgements and kingdom?
- God’s kingdom will last forever. Why is that a source of comfort? How can you use this knowledge to make a change in the way you look at and react to things in your life today?
 - Later in Hebrews 13:8 we learn that “Jesus Christ is the same, yesterday, today, and forever.” What hope does this give you?
- Why is it comforting to you to know that Jesus is better than the angels?