**Angels and Demons 2. The Heavenly Host - R. C. Sproul**

We're going to continue now with our study of the function of angels in the Scriptures. In our first session we looked at the dimension of the angel's locale in heaven, and we took notice of Isaiah chapter 6 of the seraphim and their makeup as they sing in the immediate presence of God, and we get more information about these angelic beings later on in the New Testament if we come to the fourth chapter of the book of Revelation. In my translation there's a subtitle there that's not part of the original text, but the subtitle that is there is called, The Throne Room of Heaven.

And chapter 4 of Revelation begins like this, After these things I looked, and behold, a door standing open in heaven. And the first voice which I heard was like a trumpet speaking with me, saying, Come up here, and I will show you things which must take place after this. Then John writes, Immediately I was in the Spirit, and behold, a throne set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

He who sat there was like a jasper and a sardius stone in appearance. There was a rainbow around the throne in appearance like an emerald, and around the throne were twenty-four thrones, and on the thrones I saw twenty-four elders sitting clothed in white robes, and they had crowns of gold on their head. And from the throne proceeded lightnings, thunderings, and voices.

Seven lamps of fire were burning before the throne, which are the seven spirits of God. Now notice the rich imagery that John uses to describe this heavenly vision that he's having, and then in the next passage hear what he says. Before the throne there was a sea of glass like crystal, and in the midst of the throne and around the throne were four living creatures full of eyes in front and in back.

The first living creature was like a lion, the second living creature like a calf, the third living creature had a face like a man, and the fourth living creature was like a flying eagle. And the four living creatures, each having six wings, were full of eyes around and within, and they do not rest day or night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, who was and is and is to come. And whenever the living creatures give glory and honor and thanks to Him who sits on the throne, who lives forever and ever, the twenty-four elders fell down before Him who sits on the throne and worship Him who lives forever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, You are worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honor and power, for You created all things, and by Your will they exist and were created.

Notice how much of the imagery of this passage is included in the famous hymn, Holy, holy, holy. Cherubim and seraphim falling down before Him, casting down their golden crowns, and so on. And again, we are privileged here to look into the interior chamber of heaven where we see these angels, and elsewhere we're told of not just one or two or three angels attending the presence of God, but myriads of angels, thousands and tens of thousands of angels, all participating in what we call the heavenly host.

And that word host, by the way, does not refer to somebody who is the emcee at a banquet or who has welcomed you to their home for some sumptuous feast, but here the term host is used as a synonym for the noun army. There's a full army of angels who are sometimes called seraphim, sometimes called cherubim, and if you ask me the difference between a seraph and a cherub, I can't tell you. I don't know, because it seems as though the Scripture uses these terms interchangeably.

Now, if you ask Peter Paul Rubens what a cherub was, if you looked at his classic paintings, he makes the cherubs look like baby angels, but that's more the artist's imagination than it is based on any kind of exegesis of the text of Scripture. But in any case, we see once more that the locale of the seraphim and the cherubim is in the immediate presence of God as they continue to praise and honor Him because He is worthy. And they shout that out day and night.

Now, also we've given more of the physical description here than we got in Isaiah 6. Here these ones have different appearances, like a calf, like a man, like a lion, and so on, and they have eyes all over themselves as they are beholding the presence of God. What the angels here enjoy is that which is the highest hope of the Christian in our future life, and that is what we call the beatific vision. And they are given multitude of eyes to enjoy it.

The beatific vision is so called because it is the vision that results in the highest level of blessedness that any human creature could ever enjoy. It is that hope that is set before the people of God, the promise that is given by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount to one particular group of people when He says, blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God. So that the promise of the vision of God is given to those who are pure.

And we are told that we must become holy, and without holiness no one will see the presence of God. And finally in John's epistle, in the first John, he talks about the astonishing love that God gives to us, behold what manner of love is this that we should be called the children of God, and he goes on to say we are the children of God, and he says we don't know yet what we shall be. People ask me all the time, you know, R.C., what's heaven going to be like? And I say, what do you think, I've been there? I say, am I going to be old when I get there, and am I going to be 85 forever, or how am I, I say I have no idea, but I'm sure that God has that all worked out, and it's going to be so much better than we can imagine from the vantage point of this world.

We know that. Please don't ask me the details of what heaven will be like other than what is revealed to us in the Scripture. But John says we don't know yet what we shall be, but this is one thing we do know.

We'll be like Him, like Christ, because we will see Him as He is. The force of that, as He is, in Latin, in se est, means in His unveiled being. That's our greatest hope, that we're going to have what's called the vision of God, that we're going to see Him.

And again, people say, well, how can we see Him, even in our resurrected bodies, how can we see Him when He is by nature a spirit and He's invisible? Well, Jonathan Edwards gives a good answer to that question. In the first place, the big problem that hides the glory of God from our eyes is not a defect in our optic nerves. The defect is in the heart.

It's sin that is the barrier between us and God, and as long as there is sin in our hearts, as long as we're not pure in heart, we're not going to see Him. That's why after the fall, God made the universal prohibition. No one may see God and live.

But before sin entered into humanity, there was the apprehension of His glory, there was the beatific vision. And Edwards, when he speculates upon that, talks about the media. I asked somebody the other day if they saw a particular football game, and they said, yes, they did.

I said, you mean you were there at the stadium? He said, no. He said, I saw it on television. I said, well, then you didn't see the game.

You saw an electronic image or reproduction of the game. A game mediated to you through the medium of television. You didn't see it live and in person.

But then when we go to the football game, even then, if we're actually in the stadium, when we see what we see with our eyes, we are seeing light bouncing off of physical objects that create certain responses in our eye and in the optic nerve and so on. Even then, what we perceive in the external world is mediated to our minds through our physical senses. And Edwards says, when we see God in glory, we won't need eyes.

We won't need optic nerves. The mind will have an immediate perception of the glory of God. Whoa.

I mean, when I think about it, that just absolutely blows me away. But again, in the imagery here of Scripture, the angels that are present enjoy the beatific vision as they have eyes backward and forward. There's no way that they can turn where they lose sight of the glory of God.

Almost like a pack of turkeys. You ever been in the woods and you see a group of turkeys? I can remember many times sitting in tree stands, excuse the illusion, where I was hunting turkeys in bow season, and I would be watching a group of turkeys making their way through the woods. My heart starts beating and I get more and more excited.

And I'm hoping they won't see me because they can see you bat your eye at a hundred yards. But you watch how they fashion themselves when they're walking in a pack through the woods. At all times, some turkey is looking in the back.

Another one's looking to the right. Another one's looking to the left. Another one's looking forward, and I hope that none of them are looking up.

But they have a panoramic view of their whole environment, so that if one of them sounds the alert, they all scram in an instant. That's why they're so hard to catch. But, again, they rely on teamwork because no turkey can see behind himself.

He needs somebody else looking back there. But the angels that are described here, the seraphim, have eyes all over so that nowhere does God disappear from their line of sight as they enjoy the beatific vision, moment after moment after moment. Now, there's some other texts that I'd like to look at.

If we can, I'd like to look at the first chapter of the book of Ezekiel, which is, again, one of the most difficult chapters to digest in terms of the richness of its imagery and symbolism. And the book of Ezekiel begins with these words, Now, it came to pass in the thirtieth year, in the fourth month, on the fifth day of the month, as I was among the captives by the river Chebar, that the heavens were opened, and I saw visions of God. Just as John was given the privilege of peering into the inner court of heaven in the revelation of the New Testament, so Ezekiel before him is given this heavenly view, and he's writing about it.

He says, in the fifth day of the month, which was the fifth year of King Jehoiachin's captivity, the word of the Lord came expressly to Ezekiel the priest, the son of Buzi, in the land of the Chaldeans by the river Chebar, and the hand of the Lord was upon him there. Now here we have the whirling Merkabahs appearing. Listen to this, and I looked, and behold, a whirlwind was coming out of the north, a great cloud with raging fire engulfing itself, and brightness was all around it, and radiating out of its midst like the color of amber out of the midst of the fire.

And from within it came the likeness of four living creatures, and this was their appearance. They had the likeness of a man. Each one had four faces.

Each one had four wings. Their legs were straight, and the soles of their feet were like the soles of calves' feet. They sparkled like the color of burnished bronze.

The hands of a man were under their wings on their four sides, and each of the four had faces and wings, and their wings touched one another, and the creatures did not turn when they went, but each one went straight forward. I've really seen some bizarre, interesting attempts of people to paint this scene in a way that people can capture it, but what is it that Ezekiel's seeing here? He sees this circle, this wheel within a wheel that's turning, and as it's turning and turning it never really changes the right, you know, it can go everywhere at the same time more or less, and you have these creatures with their wings and so on accompanying them. But notice the elements in which this is introduced.

First of all, whirlwind, great cloud, raging fire, brightness, and radiation in the midst of the fire. Now, in the Scriptures, the primary theophany that we have of God is fire, or some form of fire. The idea of a theophany is a visible manifestation of the invisible God.

Theos means God, and phoneo means to manifest itself, or phoneros is a manifestation. And so a theophany is a visible manifestation of the invisible God, and you normally see it in the pillar of fire, or in smoke, or the burning bush. Author of Hebrews tells us our God is a consuming fire, and you also see it in the shekinah glory, the bright radiant light that we've talked about that accompanies the presence of God.

Well, what Ezekiel is saying is all of these signs of deity, of brightness, of glory, and so on, moving in this wheel within the wheel. What is it? What he's saying here in this whirling thing is the traveling throne, or judgment throne of God, that God's throne is moving across the heavens, indicating His rule has no borders. It has no edge to it that shuts out His reign.

You remember also the grim image of the glory of God departing from Jerusalem, where the same kind of a form comes up out of the gate, up over Jerusalem, and leaves. It's the portable judgment throne of God. Incidentally, it's that sort of thing that was reported in post-biblical times, right, in the center of Jerusalem, during the destruction and attack on Jerusalem.

The historian Josephus prefaces his words when he's giving his account of what happened at the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 A.D. He says that he's hesitant to include this particular testimony, because it would seem so bizarre, but he said that there were multitudes who claimed that they heard a voice in the sky, and they looked up and they saw chariots in the sky leaving Jerusalem, and the voice came saying, we are leaving hence. And he took that as the sign of God's departure from the holy city, and the holy city was then abandoned to the Romans for its utter annihilation and destruction. That's an interesting passage in the writings of Josephus.

You ought to look it up sometime and see it. What is consistent about that extra-biblical testimony is that it fits the description that you find elsewhere of divine judgment, of the departure of divine glory on this portable, mobile judgment throne of God, which is attended as well by the angels. Again that the angels are surrounding the throne of God is not found only in Revelation and in the appearance of the angels here, the appearance of the living creatures like burning coals of fire, and we're told that their wings touched one another.

Where else do you find that description of angelic wings touching each other? In the construction of the tabernacle, when God gives the specific details to the craftsmen that are to fashion the furniture for the tabernacle, and of course the most sacred object is the Ark of the Covenant, which contains the law of Moses, the terms of their contract with God, some manna, and the rod of Aaron. And inside that box is the throne of God that's placed in the Holy of Holies, and the cover is what? The mercy seat, where the offerings are made on the Day of Atonement when the high priest once a year goes in and brings about the, quote, reconciliation by pouring the blood upon the cover of the throne of God. But what adorns the mercy seat are the figures of these cherubim that hover, as it were, over the throne of God, and they are built in such a way that their wingtips touch one another.

And remember that when the throne of God went before the people of Israel into battle, they would be victorious. And that throne, the mercy seat, that is placed in the Holy of Holies in the tabernacle, is an earthly replica of the heavenly throne of God, which also is portable. It's not fixed, but it moves across the skies, always in the attendance of this army of angels, the cherubim and the seraphim.

Finally, that the angels have a heavenly domain and locale is also found in terms of Jesus' statement in Matthew, when the children were coming to Him and the disciples were bothered by them, thought they were pests, and Jesus said of the children, don't you know that their angels do always behold the face of God? Which then raises a question that we may take up later, I'm not sure, depending on our time, of this whole concept of guardian angels. But the idea is that Jesus said, these little ones, their angels are always beholding the face of God. And so this heavenly host is not just, as I said, a small choir of angels, but it is an army of especially created spiritual beings whose task it is to honor and worship and attend the throne of God.