**Angels and Demons 6. Angel Worship - R. C. Sproul**

We ended up our last session in our study of angels in Scripture with a brief look at the passage in Joshua 5 where we see the appearance of the commander or the captain of the Lord of hosts before whom Joshua bowed down in worship, and that raised the question of the propriety of giving worship or veneration to angelic beings. And this issue became a major problem in antiquity with certain eastern religions that openly practiced the worship of angels in their system. And it's an issue that the early Christian community had to deal with because some of the new converts to Christianity brought that baggage over with them from pagan culture.

And so you had a problem of an emergence of Christians being involved in angel worship. Paul's letter to the Colossians, for example, is one of his epistles that deals specifically with that problem, but there's nowhere that we find a more comprehensive view of the superiority of Christ over angels than in the book of Hebrews. Now, again, remember that angels are heavenly beings, and they come from the very presence of God.

But even as heavenly beings, they are still creatures. And to ascribe worship to a creature of any importance or of any rank is to be engaged in the sin of idolatry. Again, we remember Paul's teaching to the Romans in his very first chapter that the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all unrighteousness and ungodliness to men who suppress the truth and hold it in unrighteousness and so on.

And what he gets at there in that first chapter is our propensity towards idolatry. Again, the exchanging of the truth of God for a lie and serving and worshiping the creature rather than the Creator. The first commandment, the second commandment, the third commandment, the fourth commandment all prohibit one way or another any involvement in the worship of a creature.

And so let's turn now to the book of Hebrews, to the very first chapter where we read in verse 1 these words, God who at various times and in various ways spoke in time past to the fathers by the prophets 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. Now, let me just stop there for a second. This is not the only place in sacred Scripture where Christ is revealed as the Creator of the universe.

In John's gospel, the Logos who is manifest in the incarnation of Jesus is the one by whom and through him all things were made. The book of Colossians also stresses what we call the cosmic Christ who is the Creator of the universe. And so he's the consummate revelation of God.

God spoke in various ways and various times in different manners in the past, but now he is spoken in this way by the one who is God's heir and who is the Creator. Christ alone is the appointed heir of the Father. We become joint heirs with him by virtue of our adoption, but only Christ, as it were, has the natural or essential relationship to the Father as the only begotten of the Father, as the rightful heir of God.

So he says, he has been appointed the heir of all things through whom also he made the world. And then the next verse, which is a marvelous verse, who being the brightness of his glory and the express image of his person and upholding all things by the word of his power. This is as high a Christology as you will find anywhere in the Bible.

When we think about the glory of God, the refulgent majesty that blazes from time to time through biblical history where that glory such as in the Shekinah cloud or the glory that surrounded the appearance of the angels around Bethlehem that we've spoken of, the glory cloud that takes Christ up into ascension and so on, that there's this brilliant light that is associated with the glory of God. And what the author of Hebrews says is that the sun is the very brightness. That is, he belongs to the essence of the divine being.

Again, in the biblical period, to ascribe glory was to ascribe deity. Glory was principally a divine attribute. And we see that in one of the most important early hymns of the Christian church, the Gloria Patria, in which we sing what? Glory be to the Father and to the Son and to the Holy Ghost.

That is, all three members of the Godhead are clothed in glory. As it was in the beginning, is now and ever shall be. That is, that this is an eternal concept of divine glory that has no beginning in time and no end in time.

It is something that goes forever. And so here in Hebrews, the glory of Christ as the brightness of the Father's glory is affirmed. The express image of His person.

The expression of His image. Now I think this means more than the incarnate humanity of Jesus, where Jesus does manifest to us the perfection of the image of God like no other human being ever has. In the failure of Adam to be obedient, he failed to manifest and reflect the holiness of God.

And that's every human being's sin. We're still in the image of God in a certain sense, but that image has now been tarnished, it's been marred, because we do not reflect accurately the perfection of God's holiness. But that's what we were created to do.

And of course the only one who ever achieved that perfect reflection or manifestation of divine holiness was Jesus in His humanity. And so we might read in this text here that He is the express image of His person, that we may say that He's the perfect image bearer. And that refers to His humanity.

And that may be what the author means, but I don't think so, because he's talking about that He is the brightness of the divine glory. That's an affirmation of His deity, and He's the express image of the divine person of the Father. And I think that that is an expression as the eternal Word, who is the eternal expression of deity in the Word.

That seems to be the context of what he's saying here in this text. But again, this is all anticipatory for what comes later, where he said, he upholds all things by the Word of His power. When He had by Himself purged our sins, sat down at the right hand of majesty on high, having become so much better than the angels, as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Now the emphasis may be shifting to the ministry of the incarnate Christ, because obviously there is no elevation of the divine nature above the angels as a result of some kind of earthly ministry. The elevation above the angels is the elevation of the incarnate Christ over the angels. Because remember, in creation as the psalmist asked the question, when I consider the sun and the moon and all that thou hast ordained, what is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that thou dost visit him? Yet thou hast created him but what? A little lower than the angels.

So human creatures are a lower order of creation from the angels. Angels are of a higher order. And so the incarnate Jesus, as He clothes Himself in humanity, the human nature at least at this point is lower than the angels.

However, it doesn't end there. And let's look at this. He has become so much better than the angels as He has by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

Now, they don't tell us what the name is here that is the more excellent name that Jesus receives. Now, it may be in light of the immediate context of the passage that the name that is a more excellent name than the angels is simply referring to the title son, which is what the focus of attention here is. On the other hand, elsewhere in the Scriptures we're also told of Jesus gaining a name as a result of the perfection of His obedience.

And that name is not the name son, it is the name Lord. We find that in Paul's letter to the Philippians, you know, when he admonishes us to have that same mind in us that was in Christ Jesus, who even though He was in the form of God, took His equality with God not as something to be grasped or to be jealously guarded, but He empties Himself, not of His deity obviously, but He empties Himself of His prerogatives, of His glory, of His exaltation, and He takes upon Himself the form of a man and becomes obedient as a servant even unto death. And so what Paul is saying there is look at this pattern that has been given to us by Christ who gave up His privileges that He enjoyed in heaven to condescend to our loneliness, to take upon Himself our humanity and to bear humiliation in our stead.

So that's the way we should be behaving towards our brothers and sisters, willing not to guard our own status or stature, but to give it away for the benefit of others. And then at the end of that Paul says, whereas God hath highly exalted Him and given Him the name that is above every name. Now there's where we see this business of the name that is attributed to Christ by God.

And the name that is given to Him says that at the name of Jesus every knee would bow and every tongue confess that He is Lord to the glory of God the Father. So the name that is above every name isn't the name Jesus. The name that is above every name is the name given to Jesus, so that at the name of Jesus everybody responds to this name that is given to Him which is the title reserved for God in the Old Testament, the title Adonai or Kurios in the New Testament.

That's why the very first confession of faith of the early Christian community was simply Jesus ho Kurios, Jesus is Lord, reflecting this action that has been communicated by the Apostle that God Himself has given His title to His Son. Now that's the broader context of the elevated name. The immediate context, however, of Hebrews here speaks of the concept of sonship, and let's look at that.

The author uses the rhetorical question here quite effectively because he says, for to which of the angels did He ever say, you are my son, today I have begotten you? He doesn't call angels son. Angels are servants, not sons. And again, I will be to Him a father, and He shall be to me a son.

But when he again brings the firstborn into the world, he says, now let me just back up again. In church history, these passages from which I'm reading right now in Hebrews and others are what fueled one of the worst heresies the church ever had to deal with, and that was the Arian heresy in the fourth century that ended in and provoked the Council of Nicaea because the church was being threatened by being torn apart between the Arians who were Unitarians and the Orthodox Christians who were Trinitarians. And what Arius, who had his adoptionist view of Christ, which we won't get into here, but just in passing, what he was arguing is that the text of Scripture calls Jesus the begotten of the Father and the firstborn of all creation, as he's called here in Hebrews.

And the whole point that Arius was making is that the firstborn or one that is begotten, the word to beget is genomai or genao, and it means to be, to become, or to happen. And it is the word commonly used to indicate somebody who has a beginning in time. So if one is begotten, that means there was a time when they were not.

And so Arius was saying, since the Bible says that Jesus is the firstborn or the only begotten, if they speak of his being begotten and of his being born, then obviously he's a creature. He may be the highest creature, he may be the first creature that God made before he made everything else, he may be the creator of the universe, and the idea is that maybe God first made this logos, or this creature, and then gave him the power to create the rest of the world, which is the view of Mormons and of Jehovah's Witnesses, for example. Jesus is highly exalted, but he remains a creature.

And this is what Arius was saying. Athanasius and the others at the Council of Nicaea said no, and if you look at your Nicene Creed, some of you use it in your liturgy in your churches, there's that little line in there that's very significant where it says of Christ, he is begotten, not what? Made. That is, he is begotten, not what? Made.

Now, the idea is, people saying that in biblical categories, in New Testament categories, the concept of sonship is not related to biology. It's related to intimacy between the Father and the Son, the one who receives the blessing, the one who is the heir. And that's indicated in several ways.

First of all, by Christ being called the monogamous, the only begotten. That is, there is a begottenness attributed to Jesus by the pages of the New Testament. Which type of begottenness is singular? It is unique.

There are no duplicates of it anywhere in the world. So when the Bible speaks of Christ being begotten, it speaks of it in a specific sense, a guarded sense, see, a special sense that should lead you away from making Greek assumptions of biological generation. So in any case, here in this text it says, but notice this, when he again brings the firstborn into the world, this is God bringing the firstborn into the world, he says, let all the angels of God worship him.

Well again, if the firstborn of all creation is a creature, nothing could be more blasphemous than the author of Hebrews saying, quoting the Psalms, that all the angels should worship him, because God prohibits the worship of creatures. And if God commands the worship of his firstborn, this is God's saying the firstborn is divine and not a creature. And so the angels are subordinate to Christ because the angels are commanded by God to worship him.

And of the angels, he says, who makes his angels spirits and his ministers a flame of fire. But to the Son, he says, your throne, O God, is forever and ever. A scepter of righteousness is the scepter of your kingdom.

You have loved righteousness and hated lawlessness, therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness more than your companions. And you, Lord, in the beginning laid the foundations of the world, and so on. But to which of the angels has he ever said, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool.

And now this is a reference to the session of Christ. And the session of Christ refers to those words in the Apostles' Creed, sitteth on the right hand of God. To be seated on the right hand of God is to be placed in the seat of cosmic authority.

That the risen Christ, the ascended Christ, is given nothing less than cosmic authority as the King of the kings and as the Lord of the lords who sits at the right hand of God. No angel, no angel, no angel is ever elevated to the right hand of God. In fact, no creature can ever be elevated to the right hand of God, nor would God give to any creature all authority in heaven and earth, which authority he bestows upon his Son.

And so we see this text emphasizing as strongly as it can the difference between angels and Jesus, the superiority of Christ over the angels. To which of the angels has he ever said, sit at my right hand till I make your enemies your footstool. Are they not all ministering spirits sent forth to minister for those who will inherit salvation.

So again, we get a little capsule summary of the nature and the function of angels. They don't rule the cosmos, but the good angels are ministering spirits sent forth by God, and they're not sent to minister to everybody. They're sent forth to minister to the heirs of salvation, to believers.

And whether we have one guardian angel or the heavenly host such as surrounded Elisha is a matter of continual debate. But we do have a great help. Just yesterday I read a sermon I'd never read before by Martin Luther on angels that one of the members of our group here gave me, in which Luther, who was so acutely conscious of the angelic world because of the focus of demonic attack he had to endure through his whole life.

For him, Satan was virtually tangible. He went through the unfaktung, this unbridled assault from enemies, and he said if it weren't for the good angels, the angels of light, who uphold the Christian church, the church would be completely destroyed by the heavenly wickedness of Satan and his minions. And so let us remember that God has sent His good angels into the world as ministering spirits, because Luther was right.

Our struggle is against the world, the flesh, and the devil. And angels are there to help us as we struggle with all three of those things, which brings us to the next segment of this study where we will look at fallen angels, and principally at the beginning we will look at the nature and function of Satan as we encounter him in Scripture.