

98-05-01a

Let's begin our study this evening with a word of prayer. Father, as always, we come before you grateful for the privilege of assembling with fellow believers and sharing time and fellowship in your word. We thank you for the understanding that you grant to us through the Holy Spirit.

We thank you for the purpose that you have assigned to us in your plan, for the standing that we have in our Savior Jesus Christ. We pray tonight as we study the passages that we will see that God the Holy Spirit will illuminate the word and make these things understandable to us, not only to grasp the concepts, but also to see the application and the meaning that these things have for us as we live from day to day. We pray that in all things our Savior will be glorified, and we ask these things in his name.

Amen. In our Sunday studies in Genesis, we have come to Genesis chapter 6, and the last time we met on Friday night, we took up one of the topics that has come before us in Genesis 6, which is the subject of angels and the place that they have in human history and in our lives. We tend to think that angelic activity was mostly historical, Gabriel appearing to Mary and Joseph, and great appearances in the pages of the Old and New Testament.

But we know that there is an accurate understanding of angels that we need to have, and I hesitate to even go into this area just because it's so popular. And as we noted last time, there is such a fad and popular misconception about angels, all the books and the movies and the fantasies about angels. One of the themes that we will see tonight running through the Scriptures that deal with God's creation throughout the universe, including the heavenly creation, the earthly creation, is that everything revolves around God.

God exists. God is real. He is substantial, and everything in the universe has been created by Him and has a purpose assigned by Him.

When you look at the popular conception of human life in general and the perception of angels in particular, it seems as though everything revolves around us. Angels come to watch over us, to minister to us, to help our lives be better. They used to have a series where, let's see, it was called Quantum Leap, where a guy was sort of like an angel, and he had kind of an angel going along beside him.

It was a scientifically thinly veiled angel story where this guy would pop in and fix things that went awry in history, and he would travel back and forth and come into broken situations and by his presence help to fix them. And people like to think, we have been encouraged to think, that there will be some sort of supernatural intervention to make our lives better and make our circumstances work out. There is some truth in that, but the perspective behind that kind of thinking is something we really need to watch out

for.

Life does not revolve around us. The universe does not circle us. Although, at times past, some of my friends and even myself, we have occasionally thought that we were at the very center of the universe and that everything revolved around us, but it really does not.

It revolves around God, and it is amazing and it is a saddening thing if you spend time with fellow believers and in conversation and in just viewpoint of life and perspective and talking about priorities and hopes and dreams and goals to see the lack of interest in what God's plan is or what God's purpose is. And because we don't have an interest in those things, because we don't think in those terms, what is God up to? What does God have at stake in this situation? We think, what am I up to? What do I have at stake? What's in it for me? What's going to come out of this? What's going to happen to me in this circumstance or in this relationship? Because of that, there is a lot in the universe that we can't understand because the only way to understand it is to see its relationship to God's purpose and God's plan. That sounds all kind of vague and general, but I think when we look at some of these passages tonight, what I'm trying to say will become more clear.

We can only understand the role of angels in creation and in human history when we understand the centrality of God and God's plan. Angels are not here to serve us. Angels are not our servants.

They serve God. They accomplish God's purposes. We think, well, I believe I have a guardian angel, and certainly that creature's sole purpose in life is to guard me and watch out for me and smooth my way and keep me safe and so forth.

Why would this particular angel want to do that? Has he just developed a particular liking for us and heartfelt desire for our life to turn out better? Why would an angel guard and watch out for an inferior creature? Well, the unfallen angels, the angels that serve God, do so because they love God. They appreciate Him. They understand Him and His plan, and they see their place in His plan.

They have been asked by God to look out for some of the most misguided, distracted, confused, dazed creatures in the universe, which is us. And the poor angels have to follow us around, trying to keep us from bumping into things and to preserve us so that we can continue to function in God's plan. But it isn't because we are so important.

They do that as a service to God. Why does God preserve us? Why does God bless us? Why does God have an interest in our lives? He loves us. He's our Heavenly Father.

But at the very heart and center of God's plan is God's glory and God's purpose. And we tend to reverse the whole thing. We subconsciously often think of God as a genie or God

as a power that we have on our side so that we can have things turn out the way we want them to.

This will betray itself in conversation. You find yourself looking at your circumstances. Maybe you're single, and you make it through your 20s, and you make it through your 30s, and some people get all the way up into their 40s, and they're still not married.

I was talking with somebody this past week in my environment out in the work world who is a believer and is a lady who has never been married but would like to be and for whatever reason has gotten to this point in life, and that has not taken place yet. And it is a sad thing that when you are in conversation with a believer and you can address all the different subjects in the world, spend hours and hours and hours talking about one thing and another, but God never comes up until your singleness comes up. And then, well, I've committed that to God.

I'm just waiting for God to bring the right person along or I've just committed that into the hands of God. And you stop and think about that and realize that in that sentence you could substitute the word fate or kismet or chance or luck, and it would come across the same way, that God isn't a real person with a real purpose and that maybe there is a reason why you have been spared the rigors of marriage up to this point or that you have more time than others who have to split their time between family and work and so forth. And that our thought does not progress beyond what this circumstance means to me, how it affects me and how it makes me feel, but what could this mean in God's plan? If God has chosen for me to reach this point in life without being married, why would He do that? Is there an opportunity that I have overlooked? Is there time that I can invest in study of the Word or in developing my spiritual gift or whatever it may be? Because God has a purpose.

We just don't stop and think in terms of God's purpose. Well, tonight, as we look at and conclude basically our digression on angels, one of the things we want to watch for is not that angels are interesting and mysterious and otherworldly and won't it be fun to learn something about them, but to see that the whole reason God reveals things to us about the angels is to make this point. God has a big universe with lots of creatures besides us in it.

But all of them, whether they are heavenly or earthly, past, present or future, all of them serve God. All of them are presented in their relationship to God. Why do we talk about the fallen angels? Because they fell from grace.

They fell from relationship with God. We identify them with reference to God. What have been called the elect angels or the unfallen angels are defined by their relationship to God, which is different than the disobedient angels or the fallen angels that join Satan in rebellion.

But everything relates to God. And it's an important lesson for us to remember. Everything in our lives, every circumstance, every relationship, every test, every challenge, every blessing, every piece of prosperity, every opportunity, every resource, everything is a factor only as it relates to God and God's plan, God's plan for us and our place in God's plan.

And if we're thinking in any other way, we are wasting hours and we're wasting days. The clock of our life is ticking. And the time is going by never to be retrieved, never to be relived.

There are no second chances to go back and relive the days and years of our lives. God has allocated this resource of time to us. And if we don't value it and invest it in the things of God, it slips through our fingers like sand.

So with that in mind, let's return tonight to looking at what the Scripture has to say about the angelic or heavenly creation and their relationship to us. We have seen that in Genesis chapter 6 they are referred to as the sons of God. These are at that time unfallen angels who were detailed to come down and administer the human race in its early days.

The Bible has quite a bit to say about angels. We will not make an exhaustive study, but I think we'll see enough tonight to make the point. The angels are involved in human history.

They have an interest in human history. Look at Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 10. There are a surprising number of references to angels in Ephesians.

Pretty much all of which we will look at tonight. But let's begin in Ephesians chapter 3 and verse 10. Paul is talking about, in chapter 3 of Ephesians, the fact that the church and the truth about the church, the body of Christ formed of believers, God has allocated a portion of the believers of human history to Jesus Christ.

He has wrapped them up and presented them to Christ as a gift. It began at Pentecost and extends until the rapture of the church. It is a fraction of the total number of believers in human history, but in this particular time when someone comes to faith in God through Christ, we are made a gift to Christ and we belong to Him.

Old Testament saints are not in the same category. They don't share the same identity and relationship. So Paul is talking about these things.

He says in Ephesians 3, By revelation He made known to me the mystery, as I have briefly written already, by which, when you read, you may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ, which in other ages was not made known to the sons of men, as it has now been revealed by the Spirit to His holy apostles and prophets, that the Gentiles should be fellow heirs of the same body and partakers of His promise in Christ through

the gospel, of which I became a minister according to the gift of the grace of God given to me by the effective working of His power. To me, who am less than the least of all saints, this grace was given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ, and to make all see the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the ages has been hidden in God, who created all things through Jesus Christ. This was in the plan of God before the world was created.

God knew that at a certain point in human history, He would call out a certain category of believers and assign them the role of being the body of Christ, the bride of Christ, to be co-heirs with Him, to share His sonship, His priesthood, His election, His destiny, His ruling authority, and so forth. And so Paul says, I, who am the least of the apostles, have been given the privilege of preaching this truth, this formerly unrevealed truth, among the Gentiles. But look at verse 10.

To the intent that now the manifold wisdom of God might be made known by the church, or through the church, to whom? To the principalities and powers in the heavenlies. God's purpose in His plan for the church, His purpose in calling us out, in assigning us to Jesus Christ, in gifting us and assigning the ministry of the Holy Spirit to us, and all of the other things that God does in this age specifically, everything that's a part of the mystery doctrine of the church, is designed to do what? To reveal the manifold wisdom of God to the principalities and powers in the heavenlies. The principalities and powers in the heavenlies are angels.

God is using human history. He's using specifically the church age as an object lesson, an illustration, an experiment, if you will, to demonstrate. It's not an experiment where no one knows the outcome.

God knows what the outcome will be. But it's a demonstration, an illustration for the angels of His manifold wisdom. So many of the things that occur in human history are object lessons that teach truth to the angels.

And we infer from that that there are parallels in our history to their history. That the same types of sins that are committed in our existence, in human history, have been committed in angelic history. And that God's judgment, God's dealing with us, whether in grace or in discipline, reveals something to the angels that they were not able to see in their own experience.

It is not unlike the experience we have as believers of studying the Old Testament. We learn by looking at God's dealings with a different category of human beings, the Old Testament saints. God had a different covenant, different promises, different paradigm, if you want to use one of these modern buzzwords.

It was a different dispensation, different economy, different way of dealing. But we see principles that are timeless, principles that transcend the dispensations about God and

His justice, His righteousness, His expectations for man, and so forth. So we study the Old Testament.

God says all these things were written for our instruction. Well, human history, in one sense, is written for the angels' instruction. And they learn by watching us what? They learn what great people we are.

They learn to respect and admire human beings, and to give us the honor that we are due. Not at all. By studying us, they're watching God's dealings with us, and they're learning about God.

They learn the manifold, the many-faceted wisdom of God. Which, by the way, should be our purpose when we study the Scriptures, to come to an understanding of God. A lot of times we go to the Scriptures looking for answers to our problems, or perspective on our circumstances.

Well, I wonder if there was anybody in the Bible that had this experience, to see what they did, instead of going to the Word of God, looking for an enhancement of our understanding of God Himself. Angels study us intently. They are paying close attention.

Look at 1 Peter 1. 1 Peter 1. Peter, here, is talking about the inheritance of the saints. In 1 Peter 1.4, he says, Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. In verse 3, Who, according to His abundant mercy, has begotten us again to a living hope, through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled, and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation or deliverance, ready to be revealed in the last time.

In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials. We have that absolute certain future expectation of the things that God has prepared for us in heaven, but in the meantime, until we receive possession of those things, we encounter trials. Why? We'll look at verse 7. So that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, even though it is tested by fire, may be found to do what? To the praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.

Why do we have an interim period between the promise and the fulfillment of the promise? We first addressed this when we studied the life of David. Samuel came out, poured the anointing oil on his head, said, you're the next king of Israel, and then decades went by before he ever sat on the throne, and that period between the assurance and the anointing and the giving of the promise and the fulfillment of that promise, what did that do for David? It developed his relationship with God. He learned the things that he put into the Psalms and that he taught Solomon.

And that's where we learn, and that's where the angels learn, as they watch us after salvation and before the deliverance of our incorruptible bodies and our future rewards and blessings. What is the valuable thing in this interim period? What is more important than any possession, any gold or silver? It's our faith. It's our confidence in God, trusting in God even though we can't see all of the factors and all of the purposes.

That's what Peter emphasizes. It's the genuineness of our faith that is more precious than gold. And to prove the genuineness of our faith, it is tested by fire.

It's stressed. It's put into a harsh environment. And ultimately, in verse 9, we receive the end of our faith, the deliverance of our souls.

Of this deliverance, the prophets have inquired and searched carefully who prophesied of the grace that would come to you. These are the Old Testament prophets searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow. We have the same pattern in the life of Christ.

He had sufferings followed by glory. And that's the pattern of our lives. So, you know, this changes our perspective.

What I was talking about earlier, when we look at our life, we think, well, why am I having to wait for this? Or why has this not come? Or why do I have this unresolved issue? Or this paralyzing circumstance? Or this terrible difficulty? Or this particular thorn in the flesh? Why doesn't it get resolved? Instead of asking ourselves a different question. Is this what God requires to fulfill His plan? If God were to come into the room, if Jesus Christ were to walk into this room and say, Sam, to fulfill God's plan, God the Father's plan, to reflect His glory for all eternity, I'd like to ask you if you'd be willing to go through life with the loss of your sight. You're going to be blinded in a car accident.

Would that be okay? You'll endure this for 30 or 40 years of your life on earth, and then you'll come to glory and have all of your resurrection blessings. But to serve the purposes of God, this is one of the things God needs to do. Are you willing? Well, it's a question to ponder.

What's more valuable? Something in this life? Something to possess? A relationship? Or an opportunity? Or a goal to be achieved? Or to know that God is pleased, that God is accomplishing His purpose and God's glory is being reflected in whatever the circumstance is in our life. When we look at it in a fresh light, when we look at it in a fresh perspective, and we say, well, maybe you just have scars. Maybe you've come through a lot in the past and you're beat up.

And God says, would you live the rest of your life in this age with those scars, with those marks, and with those experiences in your past and trust and let the glory of God be

reflected in your faith, your faith that's tested by this fire. That fire may be burning from the past. It may be burning in the present.

It may get tested in the future. Wherever the testing comes from, if God in the person of Jesus Christ came in and said, would you do this for me? We probably would not hesitate. And we might be like Peter and give an over-optimistic answer.

But we would like to think that if the Lord Jesus came and said, would you live with this affliction? Would you endure this adversity for me? Because it will glorify the Father. We'd like to believe that we would say, yes, certainly. It's a small thing to ask in exchange for eternity with Christ and eternity with God.

What a small thing to ask. It seems insignificant. Like Paul says, a momentary light affliction in comparison with an eternal weight of glory.

Well, this is what we're encouraged to remember by Peter in this book when he says there is a great deliverance, there's a great hope, there's joy on the way, even though we may endure some trials in the meantime. And this opportunity, this is something that the prophets were trying to get a handle on. They were trying to search it out and understand it through the ministry of the Spirit in times past.

This deliverance. Deliverance is more valuable when the threat is great. We've had this movie, Titanic, that came out this past year.

I haven't seen the movie, but I understand that in some part of it they had this old lady that was a survivor. And she thinks back to the past as sort of a flashback kind of a thing. And her story is interesting because of the magnitude of the catastrophe.

The number of lives that were lost and the ship that nobody thought would sink, sank. And sank quickly and took many people with it. And the greater the catastrophe, the greater the deliverance.

Jesus said, those who have been forgiven little, love little. And those who have been forgiven much, love much. When we come to appreciate the magnitude of our salvation, we come to appreciate the magnitude of God's grace.

And this salvation in prospect, looking ahead to it from the Old Testament days, they couldn't get a good grip on it. They couldn't fathom how great it was. They wanted to.

They longed to understand it. But it was dim. It was in the future.

It was shadowy and was compressed in their perspective. So Peter says, Of this salvation, the prophets have inquired and searched carefully. They prophesied of the grace that would come to you, searching what or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ who was in them was indicating when He testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ

and the glories that would follow.

It was tough to figure out what role do these sufferings have? Why is there a suffering servant and a conquering king in Isaiah and in Ezekiel? What does that mean? That many of them thought there were two messiahs? Had to be two different people. How could they be one and the same? Look at verse 12. To them it was revealed that not to themselves, but to us, they were ministering.

When they wrote down these prophecies... And this, by the way, touches on something we've discussed in the past about the nature of Scripture. There's a very popular idea today in scholarly circles that you can't see anything in the Scriptures that the original author would not have understood. That if he didn't comprehend it, it's not fair to read it in.

You're reading it back in the Old Testament from the New. It's really not fair to see Christ in the tabernacle, and it's not fair to see Christ in Cain and Abel and so forth. You're reading your New Testament back into the Old.

The Old Testament people that read the Old Testament Scriptures wouldn't have understood that. Moses wouldn't have understood that when he wrote the Pentateuch. So that can't be a legitimate understanding.

Well, this implies that God couldn't have any foresight. Be like an author in a novel. A really good novel, a good writer will put clues and there will be threads and there will be foreshadowing in the story of things that are going to happen later.

There will be a crow up on the doorpost cawing away early in the story, and then when the big tragedy happens, here's the crow. And you think, oh, you know, that was an omen. That was foreshadowing earlier in the story.

But scholars who say this about the Scriptures think, well, God can't do that. God can't foreshadow. God can't... I mean, it's a terrible flattening of the Scriptures and prevents us from taking advantage of the wonderful perspective we have that all of these things were written for our instruction.

And Peter says right here, these authors realized that they were ministering something to future people, not to themselves. He said, you know, somebody later on is going to understand this. The angel says to Daniel, seal up the prophecy until the time of the end.

Everybody in between is not going to get it. You've written it down, but it's for people in the future. Well, somehow we've managed to lose sight of that.

It was revealed to them that not to themselves, but to us they were ministering the things which now have been reported to you through those who have preached the Gospel to you by the Holy Spirit. The Gospel reveals the mystery of the church. That's

the living truth.

It goes beyond salvation and beyond Christ dying on the cross. Redemption, reconciliation, propitiation. It's the living faith that we live with each and every day.

It's the Gospel. It's the Gospel of our salvation. It's the salvation that we work out with fear and trembling.

It's the salvation that we experience, the deliverance out of this present evil age day after day after day. That's the Gospel. It is the power of the Gospel that Paul talks about in Romans 1. I am not ashamed of the Gospel of Christ.

It is the power of God for deliverance to those who are trusting. It's an ongoing process. And that's why we're here.

We get so distracted. We get so caught up in circumstances and in people and in things and in situations, and we become so terribly short-sighted. And when we do think of God, we think of Him as an outside force that can have some effect and some bearing on this particular stack of poker chips that's sitting in front of us, this particular chess board that faces us today.

And we think, well, you know, God might be able to... You know, I can't jump this piece and kill this thing that's attacking me, but maybe God can reach down from heaven and move that little pawn out of the way so that I can go over here and resolve this problem I'm having. And we don't stop and think that we are on the board. It is God's game.

It's God's plan that is at issue. And maybe this is exactly what He wants. Maybe this is a demonstration in that eternal Bible that will be studied for all eternity of the value of faith and the value of confidence in God's Word, the vindication of God's righteousness and justice in our lives.

We are writing the story of a biblical figure as we live our lives. In some future time, there might be a book with our name on it. You know, 1 and 2 Samuel and some 3rd Testament there.

And my failures and my successes, just like David's or Moses' or Daniel's or Jonah's or any of the other figures of the Old Testament or of the New are written for edification, to reveal the glory of God. It's worth persevering through failures like Peter did and like David did and like so many others in the Scripture did if ultimately it serves the glory of God. Can you imagine what it must be like to be David or to be Peter and to have your worst failures in front of the entire human race now and for the entire future eternity? How could you think, well, wouldn't it be a mercy if God could somehow rub out the betrayal and rub out the adultery and rub out the murder and rub out the shameful things? How does David or Peter or anyone else cope with that knowledge? It's orientation to the glory of God.

It's not my glory. It's not my reputation. It's not my life or my circumstances, my achievements or the fulfillment of my goals that counts.

If I really love God, if I really care about God, it's His goals, His plan, His purposes that count. And if He can turn cursing to blessing and work my failures out to His glory, there's Moses standing in front of the entire nation of Israel striking the rock when God said, speak to it. We think, well, that's not so shameful.

I'd take that as a failure any day. That was a failure that kept Moses out of the land of Israel, the promised land that he had been waiting for for 120 years. It was a big deal to Moses.

Can you imagine standing in front of the children of Israel and, well, you know, God designated me your leader. I brought you out of bondage. I stretched out the rod, parted the sea, all of these other great things, but I have been disqualified.

You will go in ahead of me. But that failure has been a teaching point throughout the centuries. All of us have been blessed and benefited by studying the life of Moses or the life of David or the life of Peter and all of the other figures in the Bible.

The angels are watching our lives and like it or not, the bad and the good is all out there to be seen. What's the point? The point is I can rejoice in my sufferings. I can rejoice in my weakness.

I can rejoice in the grace of God because in repairing and in replenishing and in restoring and in cleansing me, God demonstrates His manifold wisdom. God demonstrates His grace and His love and His long-suffering and His patience. He demonstrates His respect for the work of Jesus Christ which transcends any human failure.

And it is a great illustration. It's a great object lesson for every human being and every angel about God. And so it's worth it.

It's worth it to keep on living life. It's worth it to see our lives with that perspective. And it begins to dawn on us that it's not so important whether an issue is resolved or not.

Remember Paul with his thorn in the flesh? A messenger of Satan was sent to buffet me and three times I asked that it be removed. And what's God's answer? My grace is sufficient for you. And the issue there is not Paul's suffering.

It's God's grace. Paul had the opportunity in that area of weakness for God's grace to be demonstrated. It's a privilege.

It's an honor to be the object of God's grace. Whatever the occasion, if God is active and if God's glory is being reflected, it's worth it. It's a perspective we need to focus on.

It's a perspective we need to retain. It is too easy to get caught up in a short-term

worldly view and lose the privilege and lose the honor of being a place where God is at work. We're going to pause here and take our break and when we come back we're going to see that the attention that the angels pay to our lives is significant.

It makes a difference what we think and what we choose and how we live and even the smallest details of our lives. We'll see that when we come back from our break.