

March 28, 2010

Wrestling in Prayer

Daniel 9:1-3, 20-23

Ephesians 6:10 – 12

This week we are going to turn our attention to a week of fasting and prayer, wrestling as it were, for the salvation of souls, through five nights of prayer, Monday through Friday, five to ten pm here in the sanctuary. So before we begin I want to alert you to some cosmic realities that exist in regard to prayer. First of all, **this is probably the most dangerous thing you can do.** The Devil hates it when we pray – because in prayer we are not trying to do anything ourselves but to enlist the aid of God to launch the battalions of heaven against the strongholds of the enemy. The Devil knows that our prayers bring his doom. And because of this, **The Devil will stop at nothing to keep you from prayer.** He will use all his tactics to stop you from praying. He will send messengers of apathy and hopelessness, he will bring busyness and weariness as excuses, things you never thought to do before this will suddenly make their way into your minds – good things, legitimate things, that will keep you from praying.

But take heart, **the Devil and all his angels cannot prevail in this battle.** The will of God is supreme, the Devil has been defeated, the battles we fight are the last gasp of an angry foe. It is written in the book – the Devil and all the hosts of wickedness get dropped in the lake of fire. But we should never take for granted this wonderful fact. We just read where Daniel read in the book the number of years the Lord had ordained that Israel would be captive in a foreign land, and Daniel's response was to turn to God in prayer, with fasting and sackcloth and ashes. We who long for Christ's return should take Matthew 24:14: *And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all nations, and then the end will come* and kneel over it like Daniel in prayer, pleading for God to fulfill His promises. And that is what we are taking this week to do, with prayer and fasting. Of course, sackcloth and ashes are optional.

Finally, you need to know that **there is more firepower on our side than the Devil's.** **The Holy Spirit is more powerful than the Devil:** *Little children, you are from God and have overcome them, for He who is in you is greater than he who is in the world.* 1 John 4:4 And you need to understand that **the armies of God outnumber the armies of the Devil:** In 2 Kings we read where the Old Testament prophet Elisha had so angered the king of Syria that he sent a great army with horses and chariots to kill him. Elisha's servant got up one morning and looked out of his window and saw that the city was surrounded by the enemy, and he came back in to Elisha and said 'What are we going to do? We're surrounded!' Elisha said *"Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."* Then Elisha prayed and said, *"O LORD, please open his eyes that he may see."* So the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw, and behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha. 2 Kings 6:16-17

When Satan rebelled against God, the Bible says 1/3 of the angels followed him in his rebellion. Now that may sound like a lot of bad angels. But that is looking at the glass half-empty. The greater truth is that 2/3's stayed on God's side. That's a 2 to 1 advantage for heaven and us. So you ask, 'Why is that important?' I'm glad you asked the question. Because prayer is so instrumental in this warfare, we need to understand a bit how it works. And part of how it works has to do with angels. Billy Graham, in his book called **Angels**, says that **"The empire of angels is as vast as God's creation. If you believe the Bible, you will believe in their ministry. They criss-cross the Old and New Testaments, being mentioned directly or indirectly nearly 300 times."** Angels are referred to in 34 of the 66 books of the Bible and are mentioned 108 times in the Old Testament and 165 times in the New. Of their part they play in God's plan, John Calvin wrote, **"Angels are the dispensers and administrators of the divine beneficence toward us. They regard our safety, undertake our defense and direct our ways."** Angels are God's messengers, His heavenly emissaries, and as Stu Weber puts it, "our allies in this spiritual warfare."

In Genesis 28, God gives us a little glimpse into the workings of the spiritual realm when He gives Jacob a dream of a ladder, or stairway set up reaching from earth to heaven. And on it were angels, the Bible says, **going up and down on it, and God stood at the top of the stairway proclaiming His promises to Jacob.** When Jacob woke up his immediate statement was *'How awesome is this place! This is none other than the house of God and this is the gate of heaven.'* Genesis 28:17 And God calls His House the House of Prayer, and **prayer is the gateway to the heavenly realms**, and it is the weapon that engages the hosts of heaven who are for us, to battle the forces of Satan who are against us. As we pray, the angels ascend with our prayers, and then descend with the answer. There ought to be a lot of heavenly traffic on this stairway – angels ascending with our requests and descending with the answers.

Angels are servants of God who carry out much of His work on earth

Angels are created beings with rank, power and authority

For by Him all things were created, in heaven and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities--all things were created through Him and for Him. Colossians 1:16 God created them. Once there were no angels. God made them. Angels are spirit beings, created before the creation of the world. And they have great power. See the words thrones, [some translate as 'dominions'] powers, [or 'lordships'], rulers or authorities refer to ranks of angels... they are an organized group of beings. They have ranks and power and authority. And there are lots of them. John saw wrote about them in Revelation: *Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"* Rev. 5:11-12

Angels also have the job of gathering the elect at the end of the age.

And He will send out His angels with a loud trumpet call, and they will gather His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other. Matthew 24:31

Angels are God's spokesmen – they announce what He is going to do.

In the gospel of Luke, Gabriel appears to John the Baptist's dad in the temple. *And the angel answered him, "I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God, and I was sent to speak to you and to bring you this good news."* Luke 1:19

Here we see that angels have names

However from the Bible we only know of two – Gabriel here and Michael the archangel. From the way the Bible pictures at least these two, we know that they have different functions – Gabriel seems to always be announcing stuff, and Michael is a man of few words off fighting demonic princes.

Angels are powerful and awesome beings

They are nearly always described as awesome and mighty, guys you wouldn't want to mess with. I don't know where we got the idea that angels were fat little cherubs or that they look like women. *Then I saw another mighty angel coming down from heaven, wrapped in a cloud, with a rainbow over his head, and his face was like the sun, and his legs like pillars of fire. 2 He had a little scroll open in his hand. And he set his right foot on the sea, and his left foot on the land, 3 and called out with a loud voice, like a lion roaring. When he called out, the seven thunders sounded.* Rev. 10:1-3

Angels are also involved in arranging marriages

When Abraham was looking for a wife for Isaac, he sent his servant to find one from the land where his relatives were. *Abraham said to him, "See to it that you do not take my son back there. The LORD, the God of heaven, who took me from my father's house and from the land of my kindred, and who spoke to me and swore to me, 'To your offspring I will give this land,' He will send his angel before you, and you shall take a wife for my son from there."* Genesis 24:6-7

Angels are also involved in escorting us to heaven when we die.

The poor man died and was carried by the angels to Abraham's side. The rich man also died and was buried, Luke 16:22 I don't see where the wicked are given any kind of escort at all. Perhaps they are simply thrown.

Every believer has at least one angel assigned to serve him or her. [Some need more]

The writer of Hebrews says this: *And to which of the angels has He ever said, "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet"? Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?* Hebrews 1:14 Again, angels don't seem to have any functions associated with the unbelievers. My personal view is that angels are assigned to us... I have angels assigned to me, you ... Daniel had guardian angels ... they protected him from the lions. I believe each believer has at least one angel assigned to him or her. There isn't a verse that teaches this dogmatically ... but it's a logical conclusion of several passages... *"See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that in heaven their angels always see the face of my Father who is in heaven."* Matthew 18:10 *For he will command his angels concerning you to guard you in all your ways.* Psalm 91:11

We haven't even scratched the surface on the role of angels in the universe, but let me summarize here: **Angels are God's ministering spirits... they worship God, they serve God, they do His bidding, and they help accomplish God's work in the world.**

There is a cosmic struggle between the demons of Satan and the angels of God

Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. And the great dragon was thrown down, that ancient serpent, who is called the devil and Satan, the deceiver of the whole world--he was thrown down to the earth, and his angels were thrown down with him. Revelation 12:7-9 Satan or the devil is the Prince or the General of fallen angels. And the host of angels who followed him are called demons. So demons are fallen angels... Holy angels who followed Satan when he rebelled against God. And since they were cast out of heaven, the battlefield is now confined to the earthly realms.

Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince." Daniel 10:20-21

Satan and his demons have a great deal of influence and power in the world

Again, the devil took him to a very high mountain and showed him all the kingdoms of the world and their glory. 9 And he said to him, "All these I will give you, if you will fall down and worship me." Matthew 4:8-9 Jesus did not debate the fact that Satan had the authority to offer this. But his authority is only as long as God's leash. In the world today, Satan has a great deal of influence over government, and economics and over movements and over non-Christian religions of the world. He has an evil influence ... he creates an incredible amount of sin in our world today.

Satan holds unbelievers captive to his will

And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but kind to everyone, able to teach, patiently enduring evil, correcting his opponents with gentleness. God may perhaps grant them repentance leading to a knowledge of the truth, and they may come to their senses and escape from the snare of the devil, after being captured by him to do his will. 2 Timothy 2:24-26 **Listen:** The individual who has not committed his or her life to Jesus Christ is under the control of the devil. They are held captive by him to do his will. Paul tells us in 2 Corinthians: *In their case the god of this world has blinded the minds of the unbelievers, to keep them from seeing the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God.* 2 Corinthians 4:4 That's why the gospel doesn't make sense to people... Satan has blinded their eyes and their hearts.

That is why we pray "Father unveil their darkened minds and release them from control of the god of this age who has blinded their minds." That is why we pray John 16:8 - *'Holy Spirit, give them a growing fear of death, and final judgment; and a realization that they are not living right and they need a Savior.'* That is why we pray Jeremiah 29:13 and Ezekiel 11:19: *'Lord, give them an earnest desire to seek You out, and take out the heart of stone and replace it with a heart of flesh.'* And Romans 2:4: *'Heavenly Father, in Your kindness lead them to repentance. Let them see how kind, tolerant and patient You have been with them in giving them time to turn from their sin.'* This is why we are coming together this week to fast and pray.

When we pray, God sends angel to accomplish His will

I believe that today most of the work of angels is done only in response to the prayers of His church. *while I was speaking in prayer, the man Gabriel, whom I had seen in the vision at the first, came to me in swift flight at the time of the evening sacrifice. He made me understand, speaking with me and saying, "O Daniel, I have now come out to give you insight and understanding. At the beginning of your pleas for mercy a word went out, and I have come to tell it to you, for you are greatly loved."* Daniel 9:21-23

So Peter was kept in prison, but earnest prayer for him was made to God by the church. Now when Herod was about to bring him out, on that very night, Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains, and sentries before the door were guarding the prison. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood next to him, and a light shone in the cell. He struck Peter on the side and woke him, saying, "Get up quickly." And the chains fell off his hands. And the angel said to him, "Dress yourself and put on your sandals." And he did so. And he said to him, "Wrap your cloak around you and follow me." Acts 12:5-8 The church was exercising authority in prayer and God responded by sending an angel. Our praying causes God to commission, and send His angels.

When we pray, angels are empowered to bind and destroy the power of the devil

Then he said to me, "Fear not, Daniel, for from the first day that you set your heart to understand and humbled yourself before your God, your words have been heard, and I have come because of your words. The prince of the kingdom of Persia withstood me twenty-one days, but Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, for I was left there with the kings of Persia... Then he said, "Do you know why I have come to you? But now I will return to fight against the prince of Persia; and when I go out, behold, the prince of Greece will come. But I will tell you what is inscribed in the book of truth: there is none who contends by my side against these except Michael, your prince. Daniel 10:13-14, 20-21

Do you know what would change our prayer life? **If God were to grant us the privilege of being able to see in the spiritual realm. If for just 5 minutes we could see the demons and the angels...** and watch the impact of our prayers upon the unseen spirit world. That would revolutionize our prayer life. We'd see that our prayers have power. They do something incredible. And perhaps God will do that for you, I don't know. But I do know that prayer is incredibly important, that angelic beings are duking it out in the heavenlies, and my prayers are crucial to the outcome. I also know that we are to walk by faith and not by sight.

A missionary on furlough told this true story while visiting his home church in Michigan, "While serving at a small field hospital in Africa, every two weeks I traveled by bicycle through the jungle to a nearby city for supplies. It was a journey of two days and required camping overnight at the halfway point. On one of these journeys, I arrived in the city where I planned to collect money from a bank, purchase medicine and supplies, and begin my two-day journey back to the hospital. Upon arriving at the city, two men were fighting, and one was seriously injured. I treated his injuries and told him about Jesus Christ. I then traveled two days, camped overnight, and arrived back home without incident. Two weeks later I repeated my journey. When I arrived back at the city, I was approached by the young man I had treated. He told me he knew I carried money and medicines. He said "Some friends and I followed you into the jungle, knowing you would camp overnight. We planned to kill you and take your money and drugs. But just as we were about to jump your camp, we saw that you were surrounded by 26 armed guards!"

At this I laughed and said that I certainly was all alone out in that jungle campsite. But the young man pressed the point, saying, "No Sir, I was not the only person to see the guards. My five friends also saw them, and we all counted them. It was because of those 26 armed guards that we were afraid and left you alone." At this point in his message, a man in the audience jumped to his feet and interrupted the missionary and asked the exact day that incident happened. The missionary told him - and the man excitedly told THIS story - "On the night of your incident in Africa, it was morning here, and I was preparing to play golf. I was about to tee off when I felt the urge to pray for you. In fact, the urging of the Holy Spirit was SO STRONG, I called men to meet me here to pray for you. "If you were here with me that day to pray please stand up?" The men who met together to pray stood up. The missionary wasn't really concerned with who they were - but he wept as 26 men stood up around the room.

When the church prays and exercises its authority ... the demons are bound and made powerless, they are pushed back and the word of God runs and is received, God's people are revived, and the lost are saved! Pray is not a religious duty... it's exercising the authority granted by God to be part of accomplishing His will and His purposes in the world. And until God's people understand who we are and what our role is, we will never get going on God's work! Let us pray, knowing that as we pray, God is commissioning and energizing and sending angels to accomplish His will on earth. There's a war being waged; the devil and his demons are fighting a war with the holy angels against the purpose of God in the universe, and I want to be part of that, but I can't do it by myself; neither can you. But together, all of us together, if we will pray, His power will be unleashed and the devil's back will be broken, his captives released, his kingdom demolished, strongholds destroyed, and the kingdom of God spread throughout the earth.

Our great God and gracious Father,

Grant us to see something of the battle that rages unseen around us so that we would be all the more energized and encouraged to pray. May we be those whose hearts and passions are fully engaged in the place of prayer. Help us to know that Your Throne of grace is where we are strengthened for the conflict, equipped for the upward call, empowered to conquer every foe. That is where we sharpen the sword of the Spirit, anoint the shield of faith, put on the helmet of salvation and the shoes of the gospel and are armored for the battle. Let us see as Jacob did, that great and awesome gateway of heaven and set ourselves to pray, 'Thy kingdom come, Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven'. May our prayers echo the call of the Savior to the lost and hell bound and work repentance and forgiveness in their hearts and release them from their captivity to darkness into the marvelous light of the kingdom of Your Son, we pray in the powerful, life-giving name of Jesus Christ our Lord, Amen.

***May the Lord bless you and keep you
and make His face shine upon you.
May the Lord be gracious unto you;
May the Lord lift up His countenance on you
and give you peace.***

***[And peace be with you also.]
Go in peace.***