

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Dearly loved by God, who stand protected by His holy angels,

The existence and service of angels makes evident that there is a whole world that we cannot see; that there is a spiritual reality that we, in our natural sinful state, are blind to. As Jesus speaks, He is revealing that world to us, as a seeing person leading the blind, so that we would not stumble over our own obsession with greatness and fall into the pit of hell.

We would be wise to listen to Him because the reality of this spiritual world is often the opposite of what we perceive in our sin corrupted world. So let us be reminded of some of these realities from our Gospel text.

As follows in Jesus' name:

At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"

And calling to Him a child, He put him in the midst of them and said, **"Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.**

"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." (ESV)

This is Your Word, heavenly Father; sanctify us in the truth, Your Word is Truth. Amen. (John 17:17)

Jesus tells us of a world where angels always see the face of our heavenly Father.

This seems like worlds away from our reality, but it isn't.

These worlds are not separate worlds, they are intimately connected.

The angels see both our physical reality and our spiritual reality; they see both us and God... and they are given by God to serve us, as Jesus indicates saying that even the **little ones** have **"their angels."**

We get a limited view of these two worlds as we read accounts in Scripture like we do in 2 Kings.

Elisha had been telling the king of Israel where the Syrian army was setting in ambush.

When the Syrian king found out, he sent a detachment of horses and chariots to arrest Elisha.

In the morning, Elisha's servant saw the Syrian troops surrounding the city and he was terrified.

But Elisha calmly stated,

"Do not be afraid, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them."

and then prayed, **"O Lord, please open his eyes that he may see."** 2 Kings 6:16-17

And behold, the servant was able to see the reality:

the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

The angels were there all along, but the servant was not able to perceive it until his eyes were opened.

Just so, we live in this two-world reality,

both the physical that we can see, and the spiritual which we are blinded to.

And not only are we blind to it, we don't naturally understand it.

Remember how the disciples asked, **"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?"**

Weren't they expecting Jesus to indicate one of them?

After all, He had singled them out to be His chosen disciples.

... But how did Jesus answer them?

By pulling aside a child and telling them that greatness in the kingdom of heaven is found in humility, and "**unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.**"

This is sooo different from what we experience in this world.

As we watch the news and see the different conflicts between countries around the world, we see power plays, land grabs, terrorizing, and boasting of over enemies.

In this election year, we hear the campaigns trying to show that they are superior over their opponent, some perhaps with the desire to be a true public servant, others desiring the public to serve them.

And as we hear of various gangs in cities throughout the US, some new, others well-established, we see what the world thinks is greatness, and how you become worldly "great," and it isn't pretty.

And even more certain than the evil that we can see, so there are evil forces that we can't see.

St. Paul teaches us to recognize our true enemies, when he writes to the Ephesians,

... **We do not wrestle against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the cosmic powers over this present darkness, against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly places.**^{Ephesians 6:12}

These rulers, authorities, cosmic powers and spiritual forces of evil are the opposite of humble.

They fight to attempt to grab power and glory and honor away from the one true God.

They seek after greatness, but they will never attain it.

...

But it's not just the world out there.

The corruption that is in the world, is the same as is in each one of us... just as it was in the disciples.

We may not be so crude as to plainly ask, "**Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?**" (probably because we know that we don't believe we have a fighting chance).

How can we compare to the apostles or prophets or patriarchs or the saints.

So we don't ask that question, but perhaps we are just more subtle, or crafty, in our pride.

For example, consider how we compare or rate ourselves to others.

We do it in our own families. We want to be served, but struggle with gladly serving others.

You want to eat, but not clean or put away the dishes.

You want a clean house, but don't want to clean it.

Adults sometimes consider themselves more important than children;

some parents despising their unborn children, crying "My body, my choice;"

Older siblings look down on their less mature siblings for their ignorance and immaturity;

More experienced co-workers mock the newbies.

And in order to get a little greater, we don't mind stepping on someone or tearing him down in order to feel better about ourselves.

At work, you hate it when others get credit for something you did,

or when they don't credit you for your part in the project

but how easy is it for you to proudly take credit yourself, when others had a hand in it?

But until we receive some blowback in this physical world, or until we are disciplined by our parents, it's hard for us to see the spiritual reality, the spiritual battle being waged when we do such things.

But what are we, pathetic mortals, compared to the glorious and eternal angels that surround us?
They are wise, they're holy, they're powerful, and yet, they willingly, meekly serve us.
They do not think it below them to serve and protect us in our mortal weaknesses.
And yet, even the angels are not the greatest in the kingdom of heaven.
That spot is reserved for and taken by one Man alone, your Lord Jesus Christ, the ruler of the angels,
So humble, in fact, that He doesn't even name Himself as the greatest.

But in Him we see the eternal and infinite humility of God as He came to serve His servants.
The writer to the Hebrews tells us, "**Since therefore the children share in flesh and blood,
He Himself likewise partook of the same things,** Hebrews 2:14
that through death He might destroy the one who has the power of death, that is, the devil."

In Jesus, we see the Son of God, not just become like a little one, but become one in reality,
conceived by the Holy Spirit and born of the Virgin Mary into our sin-corrupted world.
Here *He suffered under Pontius Pilate*, who thought he was greater because he was a Roman governor,
Here *He was crucified*, and taunted by the High Priests,
tempted to display His power and majesty by coming down off the cross.
And yet, Jesus displayed His true greatness **and humbled Himself and has become obedient unto death,
even the death of the cross...** even the atoning death for His enemies... for us... for you.
He was not only fighting against men, but against the temptations and torments of devil.

And here again is the reality of those two worlds existing at the same time, even if one is unseen.
If we can not see the spiritual battle, then do expect that you can see the spiritual healing.
The pouring out of His blood on the cross was the atoning blood poured out on the altar of God.
There your desire for worldly greatness, was paid for.
There your feeble attempts to exert yourself in pride was covered over,
so that your heavenly Father no longer counts them against you, but has pardoned you entirely.
We don't see the blood of Jesus in the water that has washed away our sin in Holy Baptism,
and has united us with Jesus and made us the little children of God.
We don't see His holy body and blood given to us in the Lord's Supper,
we don't see its forgiveness flow into us or give us spiritual strength for the battles ahead.
We don't see Christ come to us as we hear and receive Him in His Word.
We don't see the work of the Holy Spirit sanctifying us as we hear and receive His Word.
We don't see Christ in others as we serve and love them as God's little ones.
And yet, this is the reality, for Jesus clearly says,
"Whoever receives one such child in My name receives Me."

He has revealed these truths to us and He calls us to be like little children and believe it.
You are secure under God's grace and protected by His holy angels, whom He sets guard over you.
You are secure to be a little child and receive His Word with joy.
You are secure as a baptized child of God to go out confidently and boldly,
and to serve willingly, joyfully and with great humility those you meet,
unconcerned with thoughts of greatness or grandeur,
simply content to be His beloved and saved child and heir.

In Jesus' name. **Amen.**

Soli Deo Gloria