

"...As It Is in Heaven"

Text: Matthew 18:1-10

Grace, mercy, and peace be yours through faith in Jesus Christ. Amen.

Fellow Representatives:

How many of you flew around this week on Air Force One, or hung out in the White House? No one? Why not? Because you're not the President of the United States, therefore you are not entitled. Everyone gets that.

So walk it back a bit. How many strolled into the governor's mansion, kicked off your shoes and watched some TV or helped yourself to whatever was in the refrigerator? No one? Why? Again, because you are not the governor, so you would never presume to have such privileges. Just like you wouldn't presume to just walk into any private residence and make yourself at home.

What we get from this is that the American people still have at least a modicum of understanding as to the limits of their entitlement. But even that tiny scrap evaporates when it comes to God himself. There, for whatever reason, our society has come to image that they deserve virtually everything, always, and in every situation. No matter that they reject God's Son as their Savior, they still image that God must hear and answer every one of their prayers. Though they have sinned – and are unashamedly unrepentant – they imagine that God owes them forgiveness. Though they freely admit that they have in no way earned it, they still image that God owes them heaven.

Yet all of these things, and countless others, are not entitlements that God grants to the general public. They are special privileges that he promises only to his children – to you who believe that Jesus Christ paid your sin debt. You are entitled to such things because God has promised them to you. The godless have no such promise.

We focus in part this morning on yet another privilege to which our society mistakenly believes they are entitled: the continual care and protection of God's holy angels. Are they so entitled? We turn for answers to our text for this morning, found in Matthew's Gospel, the 18th Chapter:

^{ESV} **Matthew 18:1-10** *At that time the disciples came to Jesus, saying, "Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" ² And calling to him a child, he put him in the midst of them ³ and said, "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven. ⁴ Whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. ⁵ ¶ "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, ⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ ¶ "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes! ⁸ And if your hand or your foot causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life crippled or lame than with two hands or two feet to be thrown into the eternal fire. ⁹ And if your eye causes you to sin, tear it out and throw it away. It is better for you to enter life with one eye than with two eyes to be thrown into the hell of fire. ¹⁰ ¶ "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.*

These are the words of our God, given by inspiration of the Holy Spirit for our growth, instruction, and edification. That these great gifts might also be our personal possession through the study of these holy words, so we pray, **"Sanctify us by your truth, O Lord. Your word is truth."** Amen.

Jesus' own disciples were not immune from the entitlement mentality, were they? They began (badly) in our text for this morning by asking Jesus to settle an argument about who would be the greatest in the kingdom of heaven. We would like to be able to put a good spin on this, but this is obviously something that the disciples thought about a lot and argued about on more than one occasion. They wanted to serve Jesus, but there always seemed to be an element of "What's in it for me?" That spirit was eventually exorcised by the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, but it plagued even Jesus' closest followers throughout the time of their earthly walk with him.

Yet just here, before we go one step further, stop and ask yourself just how you feel about that. Not how you feel about wanting to be called great in heaven – we'll get to that – but how you feel about condemning this unseemly attitude or character flaw in Jesus'

disciples. We could pretty much condemn others all day long and it wouldn't really bother us in the least, would it? Why is that?

The obvious answer is that it is easy and non-threatening to point out problems in others. In fact it would be hard to imagine a better way to make the Christian faith more superficial and less relevant than to spend our time pointing out the flaws and failures in others. Even if we were to go a step further and conclude our general condemnation of others with a good strong proclamation of how Jesus died for their sins and therefore earned forgiveness for all of their sins, we would still remain insulated and detached from the whole exercise. Examining even the truth will turn that truth into mere trivia unless and until that truth is applied personally.

The problem, of course, is that that sort of thing *does* insulate and detach us. Examining and condemning faults in others doesn't tend to help us, guide us, encourage or strengthen us. In fact it's exactly that sort of thing that turns Christians into good little Pharisees – those who strain gnats and swallow camels, or who pick at specks in the eyes of others while ignoring the massive plank that is all ours. A good Pharisee comes to imagine that condemning sin in others is actually the good work that he does to earn his way into heaven – which is an extremely seductive lie.

You and I have way too many obvious failures in our own lives to spend our time and energy on others. So also in our text for this morning we err greatly if we read these words and think of others. These words were not preserved down through the ages just so that the living could condemn the behavior of dead men. They were preserved as warnings for you and me. More specifically, this sentence we are about to read again was not carried across the centuries for Peter, James, and John but for you and me. ***"Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, ⁶ but whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in me to sin, it would be better for him to have a great millstone fastened around his neck and to be drowned in the depth of the sea. ⁷ ¶ "Woe to the world for temptations to sin! For it is necessary that temptations come, but woe to the one by whom the temptation comes!"***

Did you think about yourself or someone else when you heard or read these words? Did they perhaps bring to mind some other parent that is failing in particularly spectacular fashion to raise his or her children as they ought, or your own failures?

Like any good, properly applied spanking, the law has to sting intensely to do any good, and it has to sting *me, not someone else*. You and I have to feel the pain, or we won't be interested in our Savior. The problem here is actually two-fold. Not only can we get pretty good at insulating ourselves by applying the law always and only to others, every time we do so we diminish our Savior – we make him more and more unnecessary. That's when we start to get bored with and detached from the Christian faith. Worse still, the problem has a cumulative effect. It builds up over time. Every time I apply God's Word to someone else, I become a little more self-righteous and a little more detached and disinterested.

Remind yourself therefore, every time you read God's Word, that God is there speaking not to others; he is talking to you – young, old, married, single, parent, or grandparent. You. This morning, for example, our text is not just talking about being a bad parent. It's talking about giving offense – the sin our society has all but forgotten.

God's Word identifies two different considerations that each of us is supposed to apply to our own actions. The first is whether or not God has either forbidden or commanded that particular action. The second consideration – the one that is routinely ignored today – is the effect my actions will have on my neighbor, including also my family members. The first looks inward and asks *"What about me?"* The second looks outward and asks *"What about everyone else?"* An action that is not in itself wrong can still result in great harm to those around me. Examples abound. Here's just one: *"Am I sinning every time I skip church or refuse the benefits of Bible Class?"* A better question would probably be, *"What lesson am I teaching my fellow Christians – including my own children – every time I do?"*

Here is where we finally get to our theme for this morning, *"...As It Is in Heaven."* The connection between our *Sunday* theme (All Angels) and our *sermon* theme is, of course, angels. In the Third Petition of the Lord's Prayer we pray: *"Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven."* God's Word is masterful in providing timeless standards to which everyone of all ages can relate. In the second table of the Law (***"You shall love your neighbor as yourself"***) he gave us a timeless standard of how we should love others - knowing that every one of every age will have a natural love of self. God didn't there tell us to love ourselves. Knowing that every human being already does, he identified that as the standard for how we ought to love and treat our neighbor. So also in the Lord's Prayer the standard of following

God's will on earth is how his will is carried out in heaven *by his angels*. Their obedience is perfect in every way – without hesitation, without question, without objection. That's how you and I, according to the new man in us, want to carry out God's will every moment of our time of grace.

But is that it? Is all of this just an exercise or function of the law? Is that what Christianity is all about – doing the right thing? Is Jesus telling us these things just because he is angry with us, or just because he wants to correct our behavior? Certainly not. He is telling us these things because he loves us, and he wants us to be with him for all eternity. We really cannot repeat it often enough: *Jesus didn't come to earth just to correct our conduct. He came because he wanted to spare us the eternal torments of hell and have us instead join him in heaven. He came not to condemn or demand but to provide and save.* Our Lord is not here threatening *us*; he is addressing that which carries the potential to *destroy* us – and others.

This was Jesus' aim and goal every moment of his time on earth. It is why he came to earth – not to condemn and correct our behavior but to pay the debt that we could not. All of you are well familiar with John 3:16, yet the verse that follows is just as beautiful, just as comforting: ***"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only Son, that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life. ¹⁷ For God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through him."*** (John 3:16-17)

Jesus came to pay our sin-debt. He came to remove the barrier that was preventing us from entering heaven – our sin. This he did. You and I stand holy and forgiven in his sight. What now concerns our God is *not* whether or not our sins have been paid for. They have. What concerns him now are those things that destroy the saving faith that he has created within us. That is also therefore (obviously) *our* concern. So it is that we pray that God's will might be done on earth as it is in heaven not because we need to make up for our sins. That debt has already been paid. We pray *"Thy will be done"* first, because according to our new man we hate sin, and, second, we know that sin deteriorates and will eventually destroy the faith that now saves us. Our Savior loves us too much to simply ignore so great a threat to our eternal souls.

All of this, and angels to watch over us. How richly our God has blessed us and continues to provide for and protect us, moment by moment. Give thanks to your Savior that he not only came to seek and to save,

he still makes our salvation his ongoing concern – as well as the concern of the angels he created to carry out his will in the service of undeserving sinners like us. Amen.

Scripture Readings

^{ESV} **Daniel 10:10-14** And behold, a hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. ¹¹ And he said to me, "O Daniel, man greatly loved, understand the words that I speak to you, and stand upright, for now I have been sent to you." And when he had spoken this word to me, I stood up trembling. ¹² 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. ¹³ 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, ¹⁴ and came to make you understand what is to happen to your people in the latter days. For the vision is for days yet to come."

^{ESV} **Revelation 12:7-12** Now war arose in heaven, Michael and his angels fighting against the dragon. And the dragon and his angels fought back, ⁸ but he was defeated, and there was no longer any place for them in heaven. ⁹ 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. ¹⁰ And I heard a loud voice in heaven, saying, "Now the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God and the authority of his Christ have come, for the accuser of our brothers has been thrown down, who accuses them day and night before our God. ¹¹ And they have conquered him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony, for they loved not their lives even unto death. ¹² Therefore, rejoice, O heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to you, O earth and sea, for the devil has come down to you in great wrath, because he knows that his time is short!"

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The 16th S. a. Pentecost (All Angels) – September 29, 2019

The Opening Prayer by the Pastor

The Opening Hymn – 4 (Red Hymnal)

"God Himself Is Present"

The Order of Service – Supplement page 12ff. (Brown Hymnal)

The Scripture Lessons: (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

The First Lesson: (Daniel 10:10-14) As with all things unseen, the subject of angels has long fascinated God's people. As is always true of that which we cannot see with our eyes, our understanding of angels is limited. Our first Scripture reading tells of the Archangel Michael, whom we regard as Israel's prince and defender. As with many things taught in the Bible, our full understanding of such things will be limited until all is clarified in heaven.

The Psalm of the Day – Psalm 91 (Page 33)

The Second Lesson: (Revelation 12:7-12) In our New Testament Lesson we again find reference to Michael, who with "his angels" fought against and defeated Satan and those that followed him in his rebellion against God. The good news is that Satan was defeated. The bad news is that he and his evil angels were cast to earth, where they now seek to destroy God's children. While we may have many question about why God did what he did, for now we content ourselves with those facts that we do know and with thanking our God for the gift of his holy angels. God created them to serve and defend those that are his.

The Confession of Faith -

The Apostolic Creed (Brown Hymnal page 15)

The Pre-Sermon Hymn – 254 (Red Hymnal)

"Lord God, We All to Thee Give Praise"

The Sermon – Text: Matthew 18:1-10 (Printed on the back page of this bulletin)

"...As It Is in Heaven"

The Offertory – (Supplement page 16 insert)

The Post Sermon Hymn – 256 (Red Hymnal)

"Around the Throne of God a Band"

The Prayers

The Benediction

The Closing Hymn – 257 (Red Hymnal)

"Jesus, Brightness of the Father"

Silent Prayer

Welcome! - We warmly welcome any visitors who might be with us this morning and invite you to join us every Sunday at this time. St. Paul is a congregation in fellowship with the Church of the Lutheran Confession (CLC) – a conservative Lutheran synod with churches and missions throughout the United States, as well as Canada, India, and Africa. We are glad you are here. Thank you for letting us share the Word of God with you. Please record your visit in our Guest Book, and come again!

Attendance – Sunday (41) Average (40)

This Week at St. Paul:

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| Today | -9:00 a.m. | – Sunday School and Bible Class |
| | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Fellowship and coffee hour |
| | -5:00 p.m. | – Special Service in Bowdle |
| Wednesday | -6:00 p.m. | – Confirmation Class |
| | -7:00 p.m. | – Midweek Bible Class |
| Friday | -6:00 p.m. | – October Time Out |
| Next Sunday | -9:00 a.m. | – Sunday School and Bible Class |
| | -10:00 a.m. | – Worship Service |
| | -11:00 a.m. | – Fellowship and coffee hour |

CLC News – Pastor Wayne Eichstadt is considering the call to ILC. Pastor Rob Sauers is considering the call to serve as third foreign missionary. Bethel of Morris has called Pastor David Ude. Pastor Joel Fleischer of Berea – Sioux Falls has resigned from the public ministry for personal reasons. Trinity of Sioux Falls has called Steven Sydow, who formerly served as a pastor in the CLC but who is currently a lay-member of Messiah – Eau Claire.

Gullerud Farewell Service – A special service is planned for this evening in Bowdle to thank our Lord for the faithful service of retiring Pastor Mark Gullerud. A fellowship meal is also planned, following the service. Pastor and Sandy Roehl plan to attend.

October Time Out – This month's Time Out is next Friday (October 6) at 6pm. Meet at the church.

Confirmation Class and Midweek Bible Study – We have returned to our regular weekly schedule, with Confirmation Class and Midweek Bible Study on Wednesdays at 6pm and 7pm respectively.

Women's Fellowship Officers – At the Wednesday meeting, the following were re-elected: Cindy Ollenburger – President, Carolyn Johnson – Treasurer, Sandy Roehl - Secretary.