

FRIDAY 28 October 2022 "Angels!" (1 John 4:1-3)

Hello, my dear "Walking with Jesus" friends,

When you hear the word "TEST" I wonder what memories come into your mind and what anxiety fills your heart? Maybe you are one of those people who froze up on test day at school or struggled with your driver's license test or maybe that word makes you think of medical tests your doctor recommends? *As you think about your spiritual health, have you ever experienced things which tested your spiritual strength or tested your faith in God?* The apostle John calls us to consider this as he begins writing his fourth chapter of his first letter to Christians in the first century.

Now let's remember life was very difficult for any person who either claimed to be or was suspected to be a '**Christian**' in the first century. Persecution of Christians was widespread and often gruesome. John is spreading out his parchment ready to write: ***"Dear friends, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are from God, because many false prophets have gone out into the world. This is how you can recognize the Spirit of God: Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God, but every spirit that does not acknowledge Jesus is not from God. This is the spirit of antichrist, which you have heard is coming and even now is already in the world."*** (1 John 4:1-3)

May I ask, does that kind of talk trouble you, my friends? Does it sound mystical or too much like Hollywood? *When you hear the word 'spirit' or 'spirit world' what picture comes into your mind?* This weekend, particularly if you are in North America, you will likely see widespread evidence of something called Halloween. I wonder what 'Halloween display' in a store window or the front yard of some home will be most graphic? John's paragraph, and what we'll see with Halloween displays over the next few days, call us to ask some important spiritual questions:

- 1. Is there a 'spirit world'? That is a world of beings who are unseen yet are just as real as you and me and all the other living things you and I see in our world?*
- 2. If there is a 'spirit world' where is it and what interaction does this world have with our tangible, practical world, especially planet earth?*
- 3. If there is a 'spirit world' who are the 'spirit beings' who reside in this 'spirit world'? What is their nature, their purpose, their characteristics and what interaction do they have with us, human beings?*
- 4. What is John trying to help us understand with the 3 verses?*

These questions and others like them are so important I'm going to take the next few days helping us unpack what the Bible tells us about this 'spirit world' and these 'spirit beings'. It seems very appropriate that we do so on Halloween weekend.

So, let's begin... without getting too complicated let me simply say *YES there is very much a 'spirit world' and it is populated by 'spirit beings' just as real as you and me, yet they are normally unseen by human eyes. Also, YES this 'spirit world' does interact with our very practical world, especially planet earth, and YES these 'spirit beings' do interact with us human beings!* Do those statements surprise or frighten you, my friends?

The Bible is filled with stories of these 'spirit beings' in both the Old and New Testaments. *As you might imagine there are good 'spirit beings' and normally they are called ANGELS in the Bible.* That word "angel" means "messenger from God" and almost always, any Bible story which includes one or more angels is a story in which those 'spirit beings' have come to earth on a specific, God given mission. *These angels normally come to a human being with a message directly from God.* Amazingly, these angels seem to know planet earth geography very well and they also have the ability, evidently, to speak any language human beings speak! Why do I say that? Because never once do we have an example of an angel asking someone for directions to find a particular town nor do they ask a human being to help them locate and introduce them to the particular person God has sent them to! I'm sure you remember the angel Gabriel appearing twice in two different places in Luke chapter 1. First the angel Gabriel is sent by God to Jerusalem and specifically to the priest Zechariah and that shocking rendezvous took place in the Holy Place in the Temple as Zechariah was praying at the Altar of Incense. You'll find that remarkable event in Luke 1:5-22.

We learn quite a bit about these 'spirit beings' called angels from that encounter between Gabriel and Zechariah. So, let's take a brief look: ***"An angel of the LORD appeared to Zechariah, standing at the right side of the altar of incense in the Temple. When Zechariah saw the angel, he was gripped with fear. But the angel said to him: 'Do not be afraid Zechariah, your prayer has been heard. Your wife will bear you a son and you are to give him the name John..."*** (Luke 1:11-17) The angel went on to explain a great many things about this miracle boy John. Now what do we learn about angels here? I see that the angel knew exactly who he had been sent to, where and when to find him in the Temple, and the details of the remarkable message of a miraculous pregnancy Zechariah and his wife Elizabeth were going to experience! The angel knew Zechariah's name and that Zechariah had been a prayerful man and that his prayer had been heard by God. The angel could speak Zechariah's language and the angel also knew a great deal about who this miraculous son would become.

But look at what happens next: ***"Zechariah asked the angel, 'how can I be sure of this? I am an old man and my wife is well along in years? The angel answered, 'I am Gabriel. I stand in the presence of God and I have been sent to speak to you and to tell you this good news..."*** (Luke 1:18,19)

What do we learn here my friends about these 'spirit beings' angels? I see that this angel had a name, and I presume all of them do! This angel Gabriel made it clear he had a personal relationship with Almighty God and spent lots of time in God's presence! I see Gabriel understood he was sent by God to a specific person with a specific message from God! I also see that Gabriel evidently understood whatever language Zechariah was speaking and he was intelligent enough to process Zechariah's question and give an intelligent, succinct answer.

And if you read two or three more verses in this story, you'll discover one other thing about these 'spirit beings' angels... Gabriel evidently was given power by God to strike Zechariah mute, unable to speak, for the next 9 months! Finally, one more thing. This angel Gabriel simply 'appeared' and when his mission was completed, his message delivered, he disappeared! That means Gabriel is a 'spirit being' who took on some physical, recognizable form during the duration of this encounter with Zechariah, and then shed that form when his mission to planet earth and Jerusalem was finished. We presume Gabriel returned to heaven and the presence of God from which he had come!

Now ponder that a moment my friends and consider that a similar experience happened both to Joseph and Mary. You remember these 'spirit being' visitations from the Christmas story, right? Again, in Luke 1, but not in Jerusalem, rather this time the angel came to the town of Nazareth to find a young girl named Mary. Once again, this angel is identified as Gabriel and as with Zechariah, Gabriel has a very specific message for a woman he's never met, but he knows her name...Mary. Gabriel's shocking message from God was what we understand as the incarnation of God, the miraculous conception of Jesus Christ! You'll find the record of this in Luke 1:26-38. This visitation occurred about 6 months after Gabriel's visit to Jerusalem and Zechariah, according to Luke 1:26.

And then sometime later, an angel came to Joseph to explain why and how Mary was already pregnant, but that God wanted Joseph to take Mary to be his wife. Matthew records this remarkable angelic visit in Matthew 1:18-25. Once again, the angel knew who he was looking for and where to find him. The angel knew Joseph's name and family heritage. The angel knew Joseph was deeply troubled by the rumor he had heard about his fiancé's pregnancy. While the angel who came to Joseph does not introduce himself by name, he understood the complex situation into which he had been sent and he delivered his message of instruction to Joseph in such a tender and convincing way that Matthew writes: ***"When Joseph woke up, he did what the angel of Lord had commanded him to do and he took Mary home as his wife."*** (Matt. 1:24)

I'm sure you know many other stories in both the Old and New Testament about angels, these holy, God honoring, 'spirit beings' whom God frequently sends here to planet earth to instruct or assist us human beings in the challenges we face in life.

But perhaps you also know there is another category of 'spirit beings' who are also angels, created at the same time as these holy angels, but they are evil angels because they rejected God and God sent them out of His Holy presence and allowed them to establish an evil, dark kingdom. Tomorrow I'm going to help us learn about these 'evil angels', their character, their purpose here on earth and their evil power.

For today, let's pause right here and thank God for the amazing, wonderful reality that there is a 'spirit world' and these holy angelic 'spirit beings' sometimes come here to our planet, to visit us 'human beings' *on specific missions of encouragement from God!* And here's a song to help us worship God and thank Him for this, and tomorrow I'll meet you right back here for more...

Today's Scripture is 1 John 4:1-3.