

ANGELS UNAWARES

“Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares” (Heb. 13:2 KJV).

The writer to the Hebrews had just reminded his readers of the spiritual nature of Christian worship. Whereas Judaism featured physical things like a mountain you could touch, a fire you could see, and a trumpet you could hear, Christianity featured spiritual reality that could not be experienced by our five senses. Note:

“You have not come to a mountain that can be touched and that is burning with fire; to darkness, gloom and storm; to a trumpet blast or to such a voice speaking words that those who heard it begged that no further word be spoken to them, because they could not bear what was commanded: “If even an animal touches the mountain, it must be stoned to death.” The sight was so terrifying that Moses said, “I am trembling with fear.”

“But you have come to Mount Zion, to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem. You have come to thousands upon thousands of angels in joyful assembly, to the church of the firstborn, whose names are written in heaven. You have come to God, the Judge of all, to the spirits of the righteous made perfect, to Jesus the mediator of a new covenant, and to the sprinkled blood that speaks a better word than the blood of Abel.” (Heb. 12:18-24).

It is in this vein that this inspired writer immediately reminded his readers to entertain strangers. Just as there is a spiritual dimension to Christian worship, there may also be a spiritual dimension to a stranger. In fact, there is a spiritual dimension to everything. Whatever we do in word or deed we are to do in the name of the Lord Jesus (Col. 3:17). Since we have become a “new creation” we no longer regard anyone or anything from a worldly point of view (2 Cor. 5:16). In Christ, we consider everything to have a spiritual dimension. Who are angels? They are “ministering spirits” specifically sent to minister to those who will inherit salvation (Heb. 1:14). When we meet some stranger, therefore, it is wise to consider they they might be sent by God to help us. Just possibly some “stranger” might be an “angel unaware”.

As you know, God knows our name, and is vitally interested in everything we do. In fact, the very hairs of our head are all numbered (Matt. 10:30). God loves us so much that He carefully monitors everything that happens to us. Like a loving Father he keeps close watch over His children. He has promised to never allow us to be tempted beyond what we are able to bear (1 Cor. 10:13). Because of this, we can be confident that He Who has begun a good work in us will carry it on to completion (Phil. 1:6). He will never leave us or forsake us (Heb. 13:6). God is not a policeman, He is our Loving Father. He does not want anyone to perish (2 Pet. 3:9). He actually wants us to be with Him in heaven. When Jesus needed help, the angels attended to Him (Mk. 1:13; Lk. 22:43) and He was tempted in all points like we are (Heb. 4:15). This means that since angels ministered to Jesus, they will also minister to us!

The Hebrew word for angel is “*mal’akh*”. In the [King James Bible](#), the noun *mal’akh* is translated "angel" 111 times, "messenger" 98 times, and "ambassadors" 4 times. While we usually associate the word with a supernatural being, it also is used to refer to human messengers. For example, Jacob sent “messengers” before him to Esau (Gen. 32:3) Moses sent “messengers” from Kadesh (Nu. 20:14). Even Jezebel, sent a “messenger” to Elijah (1 Ki. 19:2). Etc. This word translated

as “messenger” is the same word translated elsewhere as “angel”. Sometimes it refers to human messengers and sometimes it refers to supernatural messengers. Supernatural “angels”, of course, are greater in power and might than we are (2 Pet. 2:11). It took only one “angel”, for example, to kill 185,000 Assyrian soldiers in a single night (2 Ki. 19:35). As a point of interest, the last book of the Old Testament Scriptures is called “Malachi”, which means “my messenger”.

The Greek word for angel is “angelos”. In the King James Version it is translated 179 times as “angel” and 7 times as “messenger”. This word too sometimes refers to human messengers. John the Baptist, for example, was a “messenger” sent by God (Matt. 11:10). John also sent “messengers” to Jesus (Lk. 7:24). Rahab received the “messengers” sent out by Joshua (Ja. 2:25). Again, while these passages refer to human “messengers” it is still the same word used to describe supernatural “angels” like the ones who spoke from heaven to the shepherds and announced the birth of Jesus (Luke 2:15).

The point is, we need to be aware that “angels unaware” can be supernatural beings that appear like men, but they can also be human messengers sent by God. In either instance, however, we need to not be forgetful to entertain them!

ENTERTAINING STRANGERS

The Hebrews were urged, not only to continue loving their brothers, but also “strangers” Heb. 13:1,2). If a “stranger” comes to our house, however, who brings false teaching about Jesus, we are not to welcome him or help him in any way. To do so would be to partake of his evil ways (2 Jn. 9-11).

Having said this, let us return to our text. Entertaining strangers can result in supernatural blessings. Publius, for example, was the “chief official” on the Island of Malta. When Paul and his companions were shipwrecked on that island they were “strangers” to him. Publius welcomed them, however, into his home and “entertained” them for three days. It was a good thing he did for while he was there Paul prayed for and healed his father. Paul also healed the rest of the sick people on the island (Acts 28:7-10). Publius was wise indeed to welcome strangers.

One day Abraham looked up and saw “three men” standing nearby (Gen. 18:1-15). Even though they were “strangers”, Abraham welcomed them and hurriedly had a meal prepared for them. These “men” were really “angels” sent by God. They were, in fact, the divine messengers who announced to Abraham and Sarah that the next year God would work a miracle and they would finally have a son. This leads us to wonder if Abraham and Sarah would have had a baby if they had not entertained these angels? A similar story involves the Shunammite woman who gave hospitality to Elisha (2 Ki. 4:1-37). The point is that while welcoming strangers some have entertained angels unawares.

The rest of the chapter (Gen. 18:16-33) reveals that two of these angels had been sent by God to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah. Because Abraham was the friend of God (Ja. 2:23), the angels told him what God was about to do. Abraham was bold enough to negotiate with them to save the city. His efforts were in vain, however, for in the entire city of Sodom not even ten righteous people could be found.

The next chapter, Genesis 19, tells how Lot also welcomed these “angels unaware”. Again, it is a good thing he did, for they helped him and his two daughters escaped from Sodom. As they were fleeing from the city, the angels commanded them not to look back. Lot’s wife, however, disregarded

that command, looked back, and was turned into a pillar of salt (Gen. 19:26). Jesus made reference to her and the destruction of Sodom to teach his disciples not to place too much value on earthly things. Jesus warned that when Jerusalem was surrounded by an army, those on the house top or in the field were not to return to their houses to save their possessions. It is in this context that Jesus said “Remember Lot’s wife” (Lk. 17:32). She is the only woman in the Bible we are commanded to remember. Lot was a wealthy man and all of his wealth was in Sodom. Lot and his daughters escaped with none of that wealth. Lot’s wife didn’t salvage any of that wealth either, but died looking back and longing for those earthly treasures.

There is, of course, a certain risk in entertaining strangers. In this regard we need to pray for wisdom. If we ask in faith without doubting, God will give us the wisdom we need (Ja. 1:2-8). Jesus told the story of a man who was attacked by robbers. They stripped him of his clothing, and left him half dead by the side of the road. A priest and a Levite saw this stranger but didn’t ask God for wisdom. Consequently they passed by on the other side and refused to get involved. The Good Samaritan, as you know, had compassion on him, bandaged his wounds, took him to an inn, and paid for his care. Jesus ended the story by saying “Go and do likewise” (Lk. 10:25-37). There are many other examples of such hospitality in the Bible. Please consider:

- The parents of Samson welcomed an angel (Judges 13:1-25).
- Boaz welcomed Ruth who was a stranger from a foreign land (Ruth 3:1 – 4:22).
- Obadiah entertained a hundred of the Lord’s prophets and saved them from Jezebel. He not only hid them but fed them with food and water (1 Ki. 18:13).
- The widow at Zarephath welcomed Elijah into her home (1 Ki. 17:7-24).
- A Shunammite woman extended hospitality to Elisha. This resulted, as you know, in the miracle working power of God being brought under her roof (2 Ki. 4:8-37).
- Job rescued the poor, the fatherless, the dying, the widow, the blind, the lame, the needy, and the stranger (Job 29:12-17). The Bible describes Job as “blameless and upright” (Job 1:1).
- Jesus and His disciples depended on hospitality in order to continue their ministry. If they were welcomed into a house, their peace rested on it. If not, they shook the dust off their feet and went somewhere else (Matt. 10:11-16).
- Those two discouraged disciples on the Road to Emmaus did not realize they were talking with Jesus until they invited Him to stay and eat with them (Lk. 24:28-35).
- No man should be a leader in the church who is not given to hospitality (1 Tim. 3:2)
- Etc. Etc. Etc.
- In some mysterious way when we “entertain strangers” we might actually be entertaining Christ Himself: Note: **“Then the righteous will answer him, ‘Lord, when did we see you hungry and feed you, or thirsty and give you something to drink? When did we see you a stranger and invite you in, or needing clothes and clothe you? When did we see you sick or in prison and go to visit you?’ ‘The King will reply, ‘Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine, you did for me.’”** (Matt. 25:37-40).

GETTING INVOLVED

- Paul reminded Timothy that a soldier is not to get involved in civilian affairs, but is to dedicate himself to pleasing his commanding officer (2 Tim. 2:3). Our “commanding officer”, however, has ordered us to “entertain strangers”. By obeying this command we might be entertaining “angels unawares”.

- It is easy to say “no” and to avoid hospitality like the priest and the Levite in the parable of the Good Samaritan. It is also easy to avoid “strangers” and “strange circumstances”. Obedience to God, however, requires “involvement”. The man who buried his talent in the ground and took no chances was condemned as “lazy” and “worthless” (Matt. 25:14-30). If we are to “entertain strangers” we have to take a risk and get involved!
- While Moses was tending his father-in-law’s sheep on the far side of the desert, the angel of the Lord appeared to him in flames of fire from a burning bush (Ex. 3:1-4:17). Moses could have passed by and ignored that bush, but he didn’t! He drew near, took off his shoes, listened to the angel, and got involved. This was a turning point in his life. Because Moses dared to get involved God used him to deliver His people from Egyptian bondage.
- When Joshua met an angel he also took off his shoes and got involved. That “stranger” he met was the commander of the army of the Lord. Joshua obeyed his instructions and that’s why he conquered the city of Jericho (Josh. 5:13-6:27).
- Gideon was threshing wheat and minding his own business when the angel of the Lord appeared to him. The angel said “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior” (Judges 6:12). Welcoming this angel enabled Gideon to defeat the Midianites and take his place among other heroes of the faith such as “Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets” (Heb. 11:32).
- Sadly, not everyone entertains strangers. Jesus, for example, came to His own and His own received Him not! (Jn. 1:11). Jesus was despised and rejected of men (Is. 53:3). How utterly incomprehensible that Jesus stands at the door and knocks and many will not let Him in (Rev. 3:20). When we dare to open that door, however, we will assume a new identity and a special place at the family table of God!
- The point is, we need to not forget to entertain strangers for by so doing some have entertained angels without knowing it!

WHAT IF GOD WANTS YOU TO BE AN ANGEL UNAWARE?

- Please consider this prayer request of Jesus: **“When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd. Then he said to his disciples, “The harvest is plentiful but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field.” (Matt. 9:36-38).**
- After His disciples prayed this prayer, Jesus chose 12 of them to be apostles and sent them to the lost sheep of the house of Israel (Matt. 10:1-42). Sometimes God expects us to answer our own prayers. When Jesus sends us out, however, He does not abandon us like orphans (Jn. 14:18). He has promised to be with us unto the end of the age (Matt. 28:18-20).
 - The Greek word translated as “send” in this passage is “ekballo”. W. E. Vine lists 12 different words translated as “send” in the N. T. Scriptures. This particular word implies force. It is a compound of two words “ek” which means “out” and “ballo” which means “to throw”. Thus the word literally means to “throw out”.
 - “Ekballo” is used 80 times in the N.T. Scriptures and the KJV translates it 52 times as “cast out”.
 - As we have said, the use of this word implies force. Jesus, for example, “cast out” the money changers from the temple (Matt. 21:12; Mk. 11:15; John 2:15). It is used to describe the way that Jesus was “driven” into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil (Mk.

1:12). Paul and Barnabas were also “driven” out of Antioch of Pisidia (Acts 13:50). The point is that “sending” out workers into the harvest fields may involve extreme pressure.

- When the word of the Lord told Jonah to preach against Nineveh, for example, he rejected that call and went in the opposite direction. Even though he initially didn’t want to do it, after he spent three days in the belly of a great fish, gasping for air with sea weed wrapped around his head, he finally decided to do what God told him to. God “sent” him, with the use of force.(See Jonah chapters 1 and 2)
- When God “sent” Saul of Tarsus to preach to the gentiles that too involved a forceful experience. His famous experience on the Damascus Road involved being totally blind for three days (Acts 9:1-19). It was, as you know, an unforgettable experience. That story is found three times in the book of Acts and probably was repeated by Paul hundreds of times in the course of his ministry.
- When God “sent” Peter to preach to Cornelius that too involved unusual circumstances. Peter received the same vision three different times and then God commanded him to go with the messengers sent by Cornelius without doubting (Acts 10:1-48).
- God does not want us to be like a horse or a mule which has no understanding and must be forced to obey. He prefers that we be so sensitive to His will that He can guide us with His eye (Ps. 32:8,9). If we refuse to be “sent” in an easy way, God can “send” us any way He wants to!
- So, if God wants to “send” you to help someone, He might well apply pressure. Remember! Do not despise the chastening of the Lord for whom the Lord loves, He chastens (Heb. 12:6).

THE COMMANDMENTS OF GOD ARE NOT BURDENSOME

“This is how we know that we love the children of God: by loving God and carrying out his commands. In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome” (1 Jn. 5:2,3).

Of course we must obey God no matter how hard it is. Fortunately, while His commandments are not convenient, they are not burdensome. Obeying the commands of God produces joy unspeakable and full of glory (1 Pet. 1:8). Every rewarding activity, of course, involves effort and following Christ is no exception. Testing our strength and resolve makes success more satisfying. There is no joy in racing a person who is paralyzed. True satisfaction comes from triumph in our trials for we are to count it pure joy when we face trials of many kinds (Ja. 1:2-8). Remember: **“each will be rewarded according to his own labor, for we are God’s fellow workers” (1 Cor. 3:8,9).** While entertaining strangers may not be easy, it still need not be burdensome. It is still more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35). Entertaining strangers can therefore bring more satisfaction and joy than your favorite game or activity. This is especially true if that stranger is an angel unaware.

Jesus set the example! He dared to get involved. He was, as you know, in the very nature of God. However, He did not count His equality with God something to be grasped, but emptied Himself and became a man (Phil. 2:5-11). His incarnation was the most important event that had ever happened in the history of the universe. No one ever dreamed that God would do something like this! The angels were shocked with amazement and the devil was stunned. Imagine, if you can, the shame and embarrassment of the innkeeper in Bethlehem who had no room for Jesus (Lk. 2:7).

Dr. George Washington Carver was one of the most famous scientists of all time. In fact, he is known as the “Father of Synthetics”. In 1885 he applied for admittance to Highland University in

Highland, Kansas. He was accepted as a student, but when they discovered that he was black they refused to let him enroll. By making this decision they exchanged fame for infamy. How embarrassing!

Here are some other examples from history to stimulate your thinking:

- Walt Disney was fired by the Kansas City Star in 1919 because the editor said “he lacked imagination and had no good ideas”.
- In 1867 Thomas Edison was fired by Western Union for spilling acid on the floor.
- Albert Einstein didn’t speak until he was 4 and didn’t read until he was 7. He was subsequently expelled from school and later denied admittance to the Zurich Polytechnic School.
- Isaac Newton was good at math, but a poor student in other subjects. He tried to run the family farm but failed.
- Abraham Lincoln racked up a long list of failures before finally becoming president of the U.S.A.
- Vincent van Gogh sold only one painting during his life. It was sold to a friend for only a small amount of money. His paintings now, as you know, sell for millions.
- Steven Spielberg, the famous movie producer, was rejected 3 different times by the University of California School of Theater, Film, and Television.
- The famous basketball player Michael Jordan was once cut from his high school basketball team.
- Famous author Rudyard Kipling was fired by the San Francisco Examiner in 1889 because the editor concluded that he didn’t know how to use the English language.
- Rocket pioneer Robert Goddard’s ideas were rejected by his peers as outrageous and impossible.
- Henry Ford went broke 5 times before starting the Ford Motor Company.
- Soichiro Honda was turned down for a job by the Toyota Motor Corp. He started making scooters at home and eventually started his own company making Honda automobiles.
- Harland Sanders famous recipe for Kentucky Fried Chicken was rejected 1,009 times before a restaurant finally accepted it.
- Books by the famous author, Dr. Seuss, were rejected by 27 different publishers.
- While these examples could easily be multiplied the evidence from both the Bible and history should be sufficient to encourage us to be hospitable.

NOT AS THE WORLD GIVES

Jesus said: **“Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (Jn. 124:27)**

These words were spoken to His disciples on the night before Calvary. Judas was not there. He had already gone to betray Jesus for his infamous 30 pieces of silver (Jn. 13:30). While it is difficult to understand, Jesus endured the cross because of the joy set before Him (Heb. 12:2). Though paradoxical, it is still true that those who save their life will lose it, and those who lose their life in submission to God will find it (Matt. 16:25; Mk. 8:35; Lk. 9:24). This, as you know, is not the way the world thinks! That’s why the peace that Jesus gives is not as the world gives. The world wants you to serve yourself but miserly people are invariably miserable! Those who think only of themselves are

not only miserable on earth, but also throughout eternity. Happiness is a by-product of serving others. You don't find it, it finds you.

This brief lesson has been about angels unawares. Remember! Angels are ministering spirits. They do not appear at random but only when sent by God on a mission. Invariably they help us to focus on a divine purpose God has planned for our lives. Abraham, Moses, Gideon, Samson, Joshua, and many others were encouraged in their assignments by angels. In obedience to these angels the heroes and heroines of the faith found fulfillment. When Jesus was sweating blood in Gethsemane an angel from heaven appeared and strengthened Him (Lk. 22:43). Perhaps God will also send an angel to strengthen you in your own hour of weakness.

But, as we have pointed out, the word "angel" merely means "messenger". God not only commands "spirits" to help, he also commands "people" to help too. Paul, for example, received a vision one night of a man from Macedonia begging him: **"Come over into Macedonia and help us" (Acts 16:9)**. Paul pondered that concluded that God was calling him to preach the gospel to them. Paul obeyed the Lord and that's how the gospel came to Europe.

- Apollos was a great help to the brethren in Achaia (Acts 18:27).
- Timothy and Erastus, two of Paul's helpers, were sent to Macedonia to help (Acts 19:22).
- Phoebe was a great help to many people including Paul (Rom. 16:1,2).
- Paul asked his true yokefellow to help Euodia and Syntyche (Phil. 4:2,3).
- Mark was helpful to Paul in his ministry (2 Tim. 4:11).
- Paul told Titus to help Zenas and Apollos (Tit. 3:13).
- Just think! God might send special messengers to help you!
- ENTERTAIN THEM!
- Just think! God might send you to help someone else.
- DO IT!

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