

Mark D. Reichert

The Festival of St. Michael and All Angels

Daniel 10:10-14, 12:1-3 – Guardians of the Godly

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*“What if I told you that God and the devil made a wager, a kind of standing bet for the souls of all mankind? No direct contact with humans. That would be the rule. Just influence. See who would win. Maybe just for the fun of it.”*

*“People are born capable of terrible things, but then sometimes something else comes along and gives us just the right nudge.”*

*“Angels and Demons can't cross over onto our plane. So, instead we get what I call the influence peddlers. They can only whisper in our ears. But a single word can give you courage, or turn your favorite pleasure into your worst nightmare.”*

Now I want to make sure we're clear: those aren't my words or the Bible's words. Those come from the movie *Constantine*, that came out in 2005 starring Keanu Reeves. I've seen a number of times, it's kind of one of my guilty pleasures, but being a fictional Hollywood film about angels and demons, there's only so much you can expect when it comes to reliable truth.

Now it is true that there were some things that John Constantine, the main character, got right. There are such things as God and the devil, heaven and hell, angels and demons, and there is a spiritual war going on all around us. But there were also some things that he got very wrong, and that's what we're celebrating here today. We don't have to lay awake at night worrying and wondering about what's going to happen to us in this life or what's lurking in the shadows or where we're going when we die. We can live with joy and sleep in peace because God sends his holy angels to care for us and watch over us. We have his guarantee that at every moment these guardians of the godly are serving and protecting us, and that means in the war between angels and demons, it's not a fair fight and our eternity is never in doubt.

So maybe you've seen this movie *Constantine*. A main premise of the movie is balance between the forces of good and evil in this world, and John Constantine's job is to try to maintain that. The two sides are at war with each other with our souls caught in the middle of the fray, and we can't be totally sure which side is winning or which side we're even on. Is God happy with us? Will he fight for us? Or have we done something to lose our place in heaven? Is God content to wash his hands of us, cut a deal with the devil, and leave us to him?

Our lesson from Daniel for today answers those questions. *“A hand touched me and set me trembling on my hands and knees. He said, ‘Daniel, you who are highly esteemed, consider*

*carefully the words I am about to speak to you, and stand up, for I have now been sent to you.’ And when he said this to me, I stood up trembling.”* Why was Daniel trembling and afraid? Well, it's not every day an angel from heaven appears to you out of nowhere, of course, but on a deeper level, he was a sinful man in the presence of holiness and heavenly glory. He knew he was totally inadequate and he knew that he *had* done something – lots of things, in fact – to lose his place in heaven. We all have, and yes, because of our sins, God should leave us to the devil.

But was God *content* to do that? No, he loves us way too much for that. Remember, the angel calls Daniel *highly esteemed* – to God, Daniel was dearly treasured and invaluable. Daniel was a precious prize to God because he was an eternal soul whom God created for himself and whom God redeemed in the blood of Christ his Son. And that means by faith in Jesus your Savior, friends, you too are highly esteemed before God. You too have his grace and favor for everything you do and everywhere you go in life. You too have his promise to hear and answer for your good whenever you go to him in prayer. And what you prize you protect, so then that also means that you too have God's promise to send his guardian angels to watch over you every hour of every day, just like they did for Daniel.

And the angel from our reading for today gives us a glimpse into why we need that protection. *“The prince of the Persian kingdom resisted me twenty-one days. Then Michael, one of the chief princes, came to help me, because I was detained there with the king of Persia. Now I have come to explain to you what will happen to your people in the future, for the vision concerns a time yet to come.”*

It's just like Constantine said in the movie: behind our everyday lives and even more so in the great events of world history – whether in our homes or in kings' courts – there is an unseen battle going on in the background that can either help or hurt God's people. See, when our reading mentions *princes* here, it seems like it's not talking about normal human princes. It's talking about powerful spirit beings that are either good or bad – it's talking about angels and demons fighting for influence and precedence in the Persian government and its political policy. However exactly that worked, it seems like this angel is telling us that demons fight to influence world happenings against God's plans and purposes and people, but God sends his angels, his guardians of the godly, to stop them and to make sure history plays out just like God wants it to for our sake.

From the Garden of Eden, to the flood, to the empires of Egypt, Assyria, Babylon, Persia, Greece, and Rome, and even down to this very day, Satan's demons have been working in this world to hinder God's Will. This world has always hated God, his people, and our Savior, and all throughout Bible history we've heard the stories of how the forces of evil tried with all their might to destroy God's plan of salvation. After all, no people of Israel, no

Promised Land to live in, and no perfect sacrifice for sin means no fulfilled promises, no Savior, and no salvation for us. It's no wonder they've been working so hard! But no matter what they've done, friends, they've never been able to stop us or destroy us. Nothing could stop God from keeping his promises to bring our Savior Jesus into this world, and nothing can stop him from bringing us, his people, to be with him in heaven forever. That's because God's angels are constantly at work breaking and defeating every evil plan and purpose of the devil in this world that tries to accomplish that.

See, the picture in our text isn't one of angels and demons locked in mortal battle, like *Constantine* tries to make it seem. This is not a fair fight, this is not an even matchup. The picture here is of the Angel of the LORD detained there in the Persian court pinning a demon down to the ground, with his foot on his neck, waiting for Michael the archangel – the strongest, the highest ranking, the leader of all the angels who carries with him the unparalleled helping and saving power of God – to arrive and take over so he could deliver this message to Daniel. Everything was in hand; nothing was in doubt. And that's the way it is for us still today, too. We are on the good side, we are on God's side, and even though powerful forces of evil have always been at work against God's people in this world, still more powerful forces of good are at work opposing that evil and dooming it to failure. No matter what the devil and his demons might try to do to us in our lives, those who are with us are greater than those who are with them, so that means the victory is ours because no one less than the archangel himself is fighting for us and protecting us.

And to the victor go the spoils. That certainty is nowhere to be found in *Constantine*, or in the hearts of the vast majority of people in this world. In fact, the plot in *Constantine* said that Satan had a son who was going to come and throw everything off balance, tip all the scales toward evil, and turn this world into a hell on earth, and only our old friend Keanu Reeves could do anything to stop him before it was too late.

But of course, Satan doesn't actually have a son, and if it's too late for anybody, it's too late for the devil and his demons because nothing they do can ever take away what the Son of God did for us when he lived, died, and rose again to save us, and no amount of distress they bring on this world can ever overcome the protection of St. Michael and all angels for the people of God. As our text says, “*At that time Michael, the great prince who protects your people, will arise. There will be a time of distress such as has not happened from the beginning of nations until then. But at that time your people—everyone whose name is found written in the book—will be delivered. Multitudes who sleep in the dust of the earth will awake: some to everlasting life, others to shame and everlasting contempt. Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever.*”

Our second reading from Revelation for today said that as the end draws near, Satan will be filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short. From now until then, with every day that goes by, Satan will get more and more furious and he will do everything he possibly can to destroy God's plans for our salvation. He knows he can't defeat God anymore, knows he can't keep Christ from dying and rising for us anymore. But if he can sever us from God, then he can at least still win the consolation prize. And so he's going to do everything within his power to scare us and intimidate us and hurt us and to destroy our faith and God's truth and to drive us away from Christ.

But he won't be strong enough, friends, and our Lord will send St. Michael to make sure of it. Just as he's done throughout all of human history, the archangel will lead his guardians of the godly to defend us and preserve us in our faith and life until we finally reach our promised land in heaven. In fact, not only will the devil never be able to take us for his own, but one day everything he worked so hard for will come crashing down. See, the devil is the one who brought sin and evil and suffering and death into this world. But on that day when our Lord Jesus comes back to us, all that will cease. Every bit of it will be undone and even reversed. Sin will give way to holiness, evil to righteousness, suffering to glory, and death to life. The book of life – God's own family register – will be opened, and our names – signed and sealed in the blood of Christ himself – will be read for all to hear, and not the devil nor all his demons will be able to stop us from going home. We're going to rise up again that day – perfect this time – we're going to throw off the last of the chains the devil still holds us with in this life, and in one final act of service to his people, God's angels will gather up every last one of us into Christ's presence forever, and these guardians of the godly do not fail. We'll never be apart again, never subject to the devil's attacks again; we'll be with our God and Savior and all our fellow believers, shining like stars and singing with the angels for all the rest of eternity.

So no, it's not like it is in *Constantine*. Sure, I enjoy the movie, but when it comes to the truth of the war between angels and demons raging all around us, I'm going to trust what I read in God's Word an awful lot more than what I see on some silver screen. Psalm 91, our psalm for today, says that God himself is our refuge and fortress, and he has pledged by his own arm to save us. He's also solemnly tasked his legions of angels, the guardians of the godly, to stand by our side and defend us as we walk the path to heaven. And finally he's given us the sword of the Spirit, the Word of God, to guide us and protect us against whatever temptations might come to us. Not any single one of those three truths can the devil possibly stand up against, so having all three of them together means we can have the surest confidence of our eternal salvation. No, this isn't some supernatural horror movie, this isn't a fair fight, and your eternity is not hanging in the balance. Your fight was finished at the cross, your victory was won at the empty tomb, and your eternity is assured, because God sends his holy angels to make it so. Amen.