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# **And the Angels Came**

**# 972-A**

**Series: Let God Be God**

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INTO HIS LIKENESS RADIO

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To the untrained eye it would have seemed like only a casual conversation. More than that, it would have appeared that He was talking to Himself. This man named Jesus, this carpenter's son, has been all alone out in the wilderness for forty days now. He hasn't eaten the entire time. His only companions have been the wild beasts of the field. All alone He seems to be.

Suddenly He speaks. "It is written," He says. His tone of voice indicates He is speaking with great authority, yet still He speaks with such calm. There is about Him no hint of panic, yet somehow we get the feeling that this is no casual, across-the-fence kind of conversation.

What we perhaps don't realize is that this is the most vital confrontation ever to take place on planet earth. Satan and his demonic hosts, who had set their sights on the destruction of the very kingdom Jesus was coming to proclaim, were suddenly challenging the name of God, the word of God, the mind of God and the purposes of God in a one-to-one confrontation with the Son of God. All of Satan's hopes of destroying what God was attempting to do at Calvary hung in the balance.

No one knew better than Jesus how critical this moment was. The enemy had pulled from his arsenal of evil three vicious temptations which, in effect, represented all he stood for. Were Jesus to yield to any of the three, He could no longer be the Lamb of God without spot or blemish. Eternity was at stake.

Jesus made no effort to defend God. He let God defend Himself. He made no effort to flee. Man, inhabited by God, need not flee the enemy in fear. Amazingly, as Jesus stood there on that momentous occasion, though the storm clouds gathered and the powers of God and the powers of evil garnered their forces for a showdown, He was at rest. The Spirit had led Him into the wilderness, and the Spirit was leading Him while in the wilderness, so His job was not to panic, but to rest.

The principles we can glean from this passage are of infinite

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value. But even more vital than the principles are the portraits. What we are seeing is not only God withstanding Satan, we are seeing God living in a man even when the volcanic powers of hell were erupting in a violent frenzy. We are seeing how God behaves when Satan throws the book at Him. And what we see ought to bring untold comfort to our hearts, for God in us today will behave exactly the same way, and He will produce exactly the same victory, if we'll just let Him.

In our last study, we took a bird's-eye journey into the land of temptation and flew over the wilderness where that earth-shattering, heaven-moving confrontation was taking place. We looked at the preliminaries, the participants, the purpose, the preparation, and the particulars of that incredible event. We saw Satan wait until Jesus was in His most weakened condition physically, but His strongest condition spiritually; and then he attacked. He attacked swiftly, continuously, and deceptively. We saw how God, inhabiting man, responds to the wiles of the devil. Here we look deeper into that event for the patterns, the parallels, and the progression of this war of wars, the battle that would make the most devastating of earth's conflicts appear to be child's play. Today we look to see just how God behaves when Satan lets loose with the heavy artillery.

Today's look at the story of Jesus' temptation in the wilderness will center around three statements made in that passage. These statements seem to be central in the unfolding of the layers of truth that are lovingly wrapped around the written account of this conflict of the ages.

The first of those three statements holds the key to how Satan attacks the child of God. The second holds the key to how God, in man, responds to those attacks. The third holds the key to how a loving Father always ends a successful battle. That's where we are headed. I pray that this journey will bear lasting fruit in each of our lives. The most subtle, but most deadly form of sarcasm in the world, is that which questions the authenticity, the integrity or the authority of another. It approaches a person as though they were really not who they claimed to be, then proceeds to ask them to do something as though they were, just to prove it. It's the "You can't do that, I dare you to..." mentality. It is that tone of rebellion that is so characteristic of the children of Israel. It is that arrogant distrust they hurled in Moses' face time and time again. It is a satanic refusal to accept authority, coupled with a

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demonic dare to those who claim to have that authority, to prove that they are who they claim to be.

This is the first great statement made in this passage that gives us a clue as to the methods and the mentality of the enemy. Satan begins with the sarcastic accusation, “If you are the Son of God...”. Now we must realize the importance of what is being said if we are to come to better understand how Satan will attack us and how we can put on the armor of God and withstand that test.

There are four major aspects of this statement that we need to investigate:

1- Satan will often begin his onslaught into your life by causing you to question the sovereignty of God. He implied that Jesus was all alone, that His Father had forsaken Him, and that if He was going to eat and not die, it was up to Him to do something about it. It is subtle, but it is deadly. He then implies sarcastically, that if Jesus is who He claims to be, then a pastrami sandwich on rye ought to be no problem for Him. The implication is that if God is not meeting your physical needs in a manner acceptable to you, He may not be who He says He is. “Why would a loving God,” Satan asks, “who claims to be the sovereign God of the universe, ask one of His children to die of hunger, to perish in a tragedy, or to suffer seemingly needless pain?” He will overlook the presence of sin in the world and the pre-eminence of the spiritual in God’s frame of reference and always try to bring life down to a physical level and thus dislodge the faith of the believer.

You may be in a horrible fix. Your life may seem to be coming down around you. Satan will whisper to you, “Where is God? *If He is who He says He is*, why did your car break down? Why did your husband leave you? Why did your child get sick? *If He is who He says He is*,” Satan will imply, “then why is the world filled with sickness, disease, war and death?” He, who is the cause of it all, is trying to absolve himself of the responsibility of it all by asking how a loving God could allow it. What a blasphemy... when a loving God has done everything necessary, in spite of the mess Satan and man have made of this world, to restore both man *and* this world to what it was intended to be. Satan will do anything to take our mind off of the Cross and place it on the circumstances of life. He then accrues the responsibility for

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those circumstances to a God who must not be who He claims to be. It is the cardinal lie. Learn to recognize it immediately.

2- Once Satan has raised a question about the integrity of God, he will invariably question the Word of God. If a man isn't who he claims to be, then you certainly can't take what he says seriously. So once Satan has implanted in your mind a question about God's sovereignty, he naturally follows by daring you to challenge His Word at some point. In the second temptation, the devil takes Scripture out of context, hurls it at Jesus, then dares Jesus to make the Father defend His Word. "If you are who you say you are, jump down from this lofty perch and make God prove to You the promise that His angels will take care of His anointed One. Or is that just an analogy? Is it not to be taken literally?" Satan tries to quote the Word of God, using it as a club to beat God into submission. If Satan can take away the utter infallibility of the Scriptures, He has the believer in the palm of his hand. As we shall see momentarily, the Scriptures are the only ammunition given to the Christian to destroy the enemy. If you begin to doubt the power of your weapon, you will fall down in defeat.

3- Through it all, Satan's one goal is to make God prove Himself. If you are who you say you are, prove it. Put yourself in an unbelievable situation and dare God to do something about it. It is the theology of today. It is subtle. It is blasphemy. It makes man the creator and God the creature. Satan's taunting cry was, "If you are God, prove it to me. Here's the only proof I'll accept." God doesn't need to do anything to prove who He is.

The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork. (Psalm 19:1)

For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: (Romans 1:20)

The order of the day is to tempt God. The order of the day is to determine what new miracles God can perform today to prove that He is God. My friend, the fact that you can breathe proves that He is. The fact that the sun rises on schedule day after day proves that He is. The fact that the universe is held together by His very Word proves that He is. Every time a child is born, He is. Every time a flower blooms, He is. Every time the wind blows, He is. Every time the thunder rolls, He is. God does

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not need to prove Himself to you or anyone else. The burden is not on God to prove anything. The burden is on us to believe! He has done it all. In creation, He did it all. In birth, He did it all. In transformation, He's done it all. The very fact that you are today who you are, re-born by the Spirit of God into His likeness is the miracle to overshadow all other miracles. "If you are who you say you are," Satan says, "do this." My child, because He is who He says He is, we must not tempt the Lord our God. If you've been guilty of constantly putting God on a performance basis, demanding that He prove Himself by demonstrating His power on demand, you are not exercising faith. As Satan would lead you to believe, beloved, you are tempting God. And the father of that lie is you-know-who.

4- Satan's goal in questioning God is to bring the Kingdom back into the physical realm so man can force God to operate on Satan's turf. Jesus answered each time by assuring Satan that bread was not the problem, being rescued from playing superman wasn't the problem, but gaining that which was physical at the expense of that which was spiritual was the problem. Satan's whole purpose in making God prove Himself was to take spiritual promises out of context and apply them in the physical realm.

"If you are who you say you are," says Satan. God need not answer that. I AM is. He need say nothing more. You and I will be tempted in a thousand ways. I do not mean to oversimplify the tactics of the enemy. But beware! Behind each of those temptations there lurks the quiet, subtle lie that questions the nature of God, the Word of God and the sovereignty of God, and Satan wants us to test God to make God defend Himself. Don't do it.

So Satan's objective in his onslaught against the Christian is to either get the Christian to question who God is, or to get the Christian to tempt God to prove who He is. You may answer, "But so often he tempts me to commit certain covert sins that have nothing to do with who God is. He may tempt me to lie, to steal or to commit some kind of immorality. How could the Bible say, 'So Satan, having finished every kind of testing, departed,' when, in effect, he never tempted Jesus to commit those sins?"

I believe the answer is that all sin is nothing more than a violation of who God is. When you lie, you are denying who God is. God is The Truth. He has never lied. Satan will try to tell you

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that there are no absolutes; therefore, you can bend the truth in this case, and no one will be hurt. If you listen to him, you will be denying who God is. In the same way, when you steal, you violate the nature of God who lives in you. The God who lives in you gives you what is not yours, but never takes what is not His. For you to do otherwise is to deny who God is. Watch for it. No matter the level of spiritual warfare that the enemy may inflict upon you in the days to come, his objective is to get you to question the nature of God until you no longer take as absolute authority the words He speaks.

How, then, do we respond to such devious and devastating tactics? Though Satan's methods were varied, Jesus' responses were singular. He stood perfectly still, at rest and at peace and said, "It is written." Jesus did not answer Satan. He let the Father answer Satan. He freed the Father in Him to quote the Scripture, which Paul refers to in Ephesians as the sword of the Spirit, and uses it to withstand the wiles of the devil. The Word of God is the "Patriot" anti-missile destroyer of the Kingdom.

Three times the enemy fired his most destructive weapons. Three times the Master quietly responded, "It is written." Now the key to it all is not some magic formula where you say three words and the devil flees. The key to it all is three-fold.

1- Jesus had the Word in His heart. He didn't ask the devil to wait while He went to the library and went through the scrolls of the Old Testament. He didn't whip out His New Revised International Concordance of the Ages and look under "bread" for a verse. The Scriptures were engraved on His heart, and the Father simply spoke through Him, using what had been stored there for an occasion such as this. The reason more of us do not have more continuous victory over the enemy is simply because we are asking God to speak through us using words we have never placed at His disposal. Our minds are memory banks of data. In the case of the Scriptures, the Spirit has access to that data to use when God wants to be God in us. They are His words, and they are what He needs to speak the enemy into silence.

2- Jesus added nothing to the Word. If anyone could have given a few paragraphs of commentary, it was the Master. He simply answered, "It is written." Then He allowed the Father, who was the One who spoke the words and did the works while Jesus was on this earth, to draw from that memory bank and



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speak through Him.

3– Jesus spoke with total authority because there is no higher authority than the Scriptures. He did not apologize for the Bible or try to sheepishly approach Satan with Scripture as though He were testing to see if the weapons had bullets. So often we use the Scripture fearfully rather than cheerfully. We use it weakly rather than meekly. Jesus spoke with authority because He had the only real authority that exists: the Word of God; and so do you, and so do I.

Memorization and meditation of the Scriptures is not a possible alternative to a spiritual elite. It is not a system taught in a seminar or a program published by a group who has discovered its value. It is more than that. It is a divine imperative for all believers who want to stand on the battlefields of life and let God be God. If we are not laying the Word on our heart regularly, systematically and prayerfully, then we are walking into life's most dangerous battlefields unarmed. No small wonder that we seem shell-shocked and defeated so much of the time. The final phrase of such paramount importance in this passage is found at the end of the Matthew account where we read, "And behold, the angels came and ministered unto Him".

The extent of their ministry and the nature of their ministry to Jesus at this time must remain a mystery, at least for now. But the Holy Spirit saw fit to remind us in this passage, as He did so faithfully throughout the Scripture, that angels are very real creatures with very real assignments. Those assignments include ministering to us, the saints, while we are alive on planet earth. They may minister to us through people, and we may not even know it at the time. Hebrews 13 warns us,

Be not forgetful to entertain strangers: for thereby some have entertained angels unawares. (Hebrews 13:2)

We do not know the extent of the angelic secret service assigned to us, but we read such verses as Matthew 18:10 which says:

Take heed that ye despise not one of these little ones; for I say unto you, That in heaven their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven. (Matthew 18:10)

In Matthew 26:53, Jesus responds:

Thinkest thou that I cannot now pray to My Father, and he shall presently give me more than twelve legions of angels?

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We saw them act on behalf of the church in Acts 12 where we read:

And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost. (Acts 12:23)

And was it not the angels in Acts 5:19 who opened the prison doors? In Hebrews 1 we read of their primary task where we are concerned:

And of the angels, he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

Are they not ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation? (Hebrews 1:7,14)

They are God's messengers. They are God's CIA. They are God's nurses and doctors. They are God's centurions. They are God's commanders. They are God's CPA's. They are God's love gifts to the Church. They are His spiritual guardians, sent to watch over and care for His children as they live out their lives in a physical world.

So the angels are real. And they are, even now, watching over us and ministering to us, as God deems it necessary. They may minister circumstantially by arranging things we do not understand. They may minister through people as angels unawares. They may minister through the Spirit in ways we do not fathom. When we get to heaven, perhaps we will be amazed as the veil is lifted and we see the myriad ways the angelic hosts have been used to protect us, to deliver us, to encourage us and to strengthen us.

But the issue here is not just the ministry of angels. The issue is that our God, whatever method He chooses to use, never leaves us without strength, without comfort, or without hope during the trials the enemy puts us through; but more than that, He has special ways of ministering to us AFTER THE TRIAL IS OVER AND THE DEVIL HAS DEPARTED... FOR A SEASON.

God is very clear in His Word. Trials are to be endured in the Spirit. While the great work being done in our character may not be visible until eternity, God has a special encouragement party planned for us just after that trial to let us know how much He loves us and how pleased He is that we let Him be Himself in us. Again, we don't know what form it will take, but God has His ways of letting us know that. For now, the onslaught is over,

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and the weary warrior is destined for a season off the front lines. I Peter 5 explains the process and the conclusion,

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:

Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.

But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, establish, strengthen, settle you.

To him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen.

(I Peter 5:8-11)

Or as the Living Bible paraphrases verse 10 as:

After you have suffered a little while, our God, who is full of kindness through Christ, will give you his eternal glory. He personally will come and pick you up, and set you firmly in place, and make you stronger than ever.

(I Peter 5:10 TLB)

Jesus was on the front lines of eternity. The rockets were firing. The bullets were flying. The bombs were falling, and He was surrounded by the hosts of hell itself. He stood quietly in place and let God be God. He had laid up in His heart the Word, and He humbly let the Father take that Word and use it to pierce the armor of the enemy, until crushed and worn, Satan fled from the scene the loser. Jesus recognized the conflict, recognized the enemy, recognized that the battle was not His, but God's and stood His ground. God defeated the enemy. As Satan did a coward's retreat, the Scriptures resounded with those words of eternal comfort, "and the angels came and ministered unto Him". They picked Him up, set Him firmly in place and made Him stronger than ever. God Himself has promised to do that for you.

Our hearts ought to be racing within us this very moment in awe at what we have just read. Yes, our God will lead us into life's wilderness at times just to be tempted. He will give Satan certain freedoms in order to allow the very test the devil thinks will destroy us to transform us instead. And then, once the enemy's onslaughts have diminished, God's precious Red Cross team is waiting to send someone or some thing into our lives to say, "I love you, my child, well done." We may not always recognize it at the time, but we have a God who quietly waits until the battle is

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over, and then He steals into the secret places of our lives, wraps His loving arms about us and builds us up. He sees to it that the pruning that took place on the battlefield results in lasting fruit.

I can testify in my own life that time after time, the enemy has attacked and attacked and attacked, only eventually to withdraw his forces once God had accomplished what He had desired. And, oh, so many times, in so many ways, God has touched, healed, encouraged, strengthened and whispered quietly in some way into my life, “The battle is over for now.” I didn’t see them, but I know what happened; “the angels came.” And that made the battle worth it all.

Satan’s goal is to take from you the knowledge of who your God is. Whenever you hear: “If He is who He says He is...” don’t listen to that voice. Instead, quietly lay up in your heart the Word of God, and when the battle rages, let God be God in you. He will bring to your mind the Scriptures, and they will be a blast of fire in the enemy’s face that he cannot endure. And rest assured, once the battle is over and God’s purpose is complete, He will lovingly come, pick you up and strengthen your heart. You may not know it at the time, but afterwards, you may well smile and say, “The warfare has ceased for now.” And guess what?

The angels came.

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