

In his book, Dr. Jeremiah wrote something that really made me think: “Remember, however, that angels are always *one-way* messengers. They are God’s messengers to us, and never our messengers to God. No one in Scripture ever prays to an angel, and neither should we. They are not go-betweens or mediators between us and heaven.” That’s a good distinction to make: messengers are responsible for delivering the message, they are not expected to negotiate; mediators have the ability to carry messages both ways, they can negotiate, and they can interpret the message in order to be helpful. Scripture says that Jesus is our mediator, while angels are solely messengers.

All this begs the question: why does God have such an elaborate communication system with humanity? What is God trying to communicate to us? Why does God include us in the work of the kingdom?

Isaiah gives us a clue. *And I said: ‘Woe is me! I am lost, for I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips; yet my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!’ Then one of the seraphs flew to me, holding a live coal that had been taken from the altar with a pair of tongs. The seraph touched my mouth with it and said: ‘Now that this has touched your lips, your guilt has departed and your sin is blotted out.’ Then I heard the voice of the Lord saying, ‘Whom shall I send, and who will go for us?’ And I said, ‘Here am I; send me!’* (Isaiah 6:5-8)

It seems that Isaiah attended one of God’s staff meetings with the angels. God reviews the assignments for the day and looks up for a volunteer to carry a message of judgment to the wayward people of Israel. Immediately Isaiah raises his hand and says, “I’ll go, send me!”

I love the active faith of Isaiah. He doesn’t sit around waiting to be called. He steps forward and volunteers. Too many times we miss the chance to be a blessing using the excuse, “Well, I don’t feel called”. You don’t have to wait until you feel called. You can step forward, like Isaiah, and offer yourself to serve God each day. “Lord, what have you got on the schedule for today? Anything I can do? Count on me!” God is looking for people to step forward and volunteer, because when it comes to carrying God’s message, God will take a human being over an angel any day.

Which may sound strange since Angels are God’s official messengers, but remember that angels are not given permission to negotiate. They are not allowed to adapt the message to the situation. Just imagine if Mary, upon hearing that she would bear a son, wanted to

negotiate with the angel Gabriel: “Listen, this is not a very good time for me. I’m betrothed to Joseph and we’re planning a big wedding. If that weren’t enough, Joseph is talking about a trip to Bethlehem next year. For our family planning it would fit much better into our schedule if we put this off, say 18 months or so. How does that sound?” What would Gabriel have said? An angel doesn’t have permission to bargain.

Angels are perfect messengers when the message is simple and clear; when there’s no room for debate; when “Thus says the Lord...”! However, most messages involve various options. Often the purpose of the communication is to build a relationship more than it is to solve a problem. Many situations require delicacy and empathy in the message.

God sent Isaiah instead of an angel because Isaiah could empathize with those hearing the message. Isaiah’s message of sorrow and struggle, uncertainty and exile would be painful for Israel to hear. Since Isaiah understand sin and forgiveness, second chances and grace, he could deliver the message with compassion. Angels are not wired to empathize with our sorrows and weaknesses. When it comes to messages that require empathy, people who have been through similar experiences are better messengers than angels.

Christians have a word for this idea of carrying messages with compassion and empathy: “ministry.” Scripture invites us to be ministers to each other. In fact, the Bible says that it is the job of pastors to equip God’s people to be ministers and to do ministry.

Why does God send people instead of angels? Because angels are messengers, but people are ministers. When we minister to each other, we add our own stories of struggle and victory to the basic message of God’s love. We are ministers as we give each other empathy at an emotional level, along with wisdom gleaned from prayer, scripture, and life experiences. Ministers do more than simply deliver a message; they relate to the everyday struggles of life.

It’s too bad that the word “minister” is often narrowly applied only to the ordained clergy. We sometimes assume that one needs seminary training and a theological degree in order to be a minister; but nothing could be farther from the truth. In most cases, you are probably a much better minister than I am: because of what you have learned from your own experiences, God wants to send you to help someone else.

Dr. Bruce Humphrey, former pastor of Rancho Bernardo Community Presbyterian Church tells how he nearly lost his high school son to encephalitis, and how his son’s nearly full recovery

from the coma was miraculous. A couple of years later, when he had completed his GED and moved to another community, he happened to be visiting home when a call came to the house. A hospital nurse explained that a high school girl had lapsed into a coma during routine surgery. She was in intensive care. When she awakened from the coma, the family worried there might be a significant loss of mental ability.

Dr. Humphrey agreed to visit. He turned to his son, Nate, and asked if he wanted to come along. He hesitated, but then agreed to go. Together they walked into the intensive care room. The girl was hooked up to all the same kinds of machinery that Nate had experienced two years before. Nate introduced himself to the girl and told her his story. Then he reached out and touched her with amazing words of reassurance. He told her that she was special to God and that her life had great purpose.

Dr. Humphrey says, “I have a doctorate in theology. He had a GED instead of completing high school. I’ve been on hundreds of hospital calls. This was his first. I have the official credentials so that people refer to me as Pastor. He was the minister in the room that night.”

This month we’re Re-Minding ourselves to think more like God, to take our thoughts captive to Christ. Today that means having a new appreciation for our place in God’s scheme and our abilities to do God’s work. God could have sent angels. Instead, God sends us. It doesn’t take a theology degree or seminary training to be a minister. All it takes is someone willing to say, “Here I am, send me!”

Sources:

- Dr. David Jeremiah, *What the Bible Says About Angels*, Sisters, Multnomad, 1996), 61.
- Dr. Bruce Humphrey, “Here I Am, Send Me.” April 3, 2011. www.rbcp.org. Site visited October 20, 2015.

Here I Am, Send Me

Sunday, November 15, 2015

The Federated Church, Fergus Falls, MN

Isaiah 6:5-8

Hebrews 1:13-14

Angels. What comes to mind when I mention angels? Some of us immediately think of an image of wings and halos. Still others think of beautiful, fun, fairy-like beings that bring happiness and good cheer. Before there were baseball teams named angels and fairy-like images on the Sistine Chapel, the Bible mentioned angels as an important part of God’s Kingdom. Unfortunately, most of us know very little about how the Bible describes angels. Evangelist Dr. David Jeremiah wrote a book, *What the Bible Says About Angels*, which is quite instructive. Borrowing some of his categories, let me quickly summarize what the Bible says about the role of angels.

The most common reference to angels in the Bible is as God’s warriors. Using military imagery, the angels are referred to as the heavenly host, a heavenly “army.” God is referred to as the “Lord of hosts,” the commander of this huge army of angels. Angels are God’s obedient soldiers, sent from heaven to do battle on the Lord’s behalf.

Angels are also sent to provide guidance and protection. When Peter sat in prison, arrested for preaching about Jesus, an angel came to the prison cell and released him from his chains. The angel guided him out of the prison before disappearing (Acts 12:7-10). There are many similar stories of angel protection and guidance throughout the Bible.

Finally, angels bring messages of comfort and hope. In Advent we read those wonderful words in Luke’s Christmas story: *The angels said to them, ‘Do not be afraid; for see – I am bringing you good news of great joy for all people: to you is born this day in the City of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord’* (2:10-11).