Living Word Lutheran Church
LCMS

Do We Turn Into Angels When We Die?

At Vacation Bible School last month, the 3rd and 4th Graders had an impromptu "stump the pastor" session. Their questions weren't really designed to stump the pastor but came from a sincere desire to know more about God. This is one of the great qualities I see in kids: They aren't afraid to ask their questions. It seems that as we grow older we still have lots of questions, but now - more likely than not - we are afraid to ask them. The question above came during one of our Q & A sessions.

Some questions take a while to answer. This one didn't. This question has a simple, one-word answer: No.   (Angels were created as angels - ministering spirits. Humans were created as humans. Throughout eternity both will remain what they were created to be. Angels will always be angels. Human beings will always be human beings.)

That was an easy question to answer, but it reminded me of another question: If that's not what the Bible teaches, where do people get the idea that we turn into angels when we die? One answer that came to my mind right away was "Movies."

Some of you will remember the old movie that gets a lot of air play each Christmas: *It's a Wonderful Life.* I doubt that's where the humans-die-and-turn-into-angels idea originated, but it sure popularized the belief. That movie had a great message, but some of the details of the message certainly weren't biblical. More recently there was another movie with a good message, *Angels in the Outfield*. But one of the angels in the story makes this statement about a ballplayer who has only six months to live, "Soon he'll be one of us," teaching another generation the unbiblical idea that we become angels when we die.

I could go on for probably hundreds of pages about unbiblical ideas that are taught in movies - like the idea that everyone who dies goes to heaven. But there's a larger point to be made. The point that we need to be very discerning when it comes to religious ideas that come out of the entertainment industry whether it's movies or TV shows or music or novels or greeting cards. (One of my pet peeves is the "Greeting card (and email) angels" who are made to look like cute, slightly chubby toddlers with wings. But you will never, ever, ever find anyone encountering an angel in the Bible and responding, "Oh, cute!" On the contrary angels are always immensely powerful beings, and because of that they inspire fear when they make themselves known.) There are all sorts of ideas that come out of people's imaginations that make for a good story, but that are not biblical. At best these ideas can be "wrong but pretty harmless," and at worst these ideas can be totally contrary to what God has revealed to us in the Bible.

Being discerning about religious teachings is not always an easy thing. As we saw in our recent study on New Age teachings, just because you hear terms that are used in the Bible, (like "angels", "salvation", "sin," "Christ, " etc...) doesn't mean that those terms are given the same meaning as in the Bible. For example, New Age teachings (along with many other religions) catch the attention of Christians when they refer to "Jesus" in an honorable way. But when you dig deeper you find that they teach Jesus was just another human who set us an example. They'll tell you he's not really God-in-the-flesh and certainly his death didn't pay for our sins.

In short, if you want to know what to believe about God and all things spiritual don't get your beliefs from the entertainment industry. Get them from the Bible. (And remember, just because something sounds like it could be in the Bible, doesn't mean that it really is).

Thanks for asking,
Pastor David

Send your questions to pastor@livingwordlutheran.net