

The God Who Speaks: Jesus Is More Superior

Hebrews 1:3–2:3

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Introduction

Today we continue our study of the book of Hebrews. The primary message of this letter is that God has spoken to us in Jesus — therefore, listen to him. That is the burden of the entire book, and it gives our series its title: *The God Who Speaks*.

Last week we focused on the opening three verses of Hebrews 1, where the author offers a sevenfold description of Jesus: he is the heir of all things; through him the world was created; he is the radiance of the glory of God; he is the exact imprint of God's nature; he sustains the universe by the word of his power; he is the purifier of sins; and he is the ruler, seated at the right hand of the Majesty on high. Seven characteristics that together describe the perfection of the Son.

Today we encounter another sevenfold portrait — this one showing how Jesus is superior to angels. And because this is also Mother's Day, I want to spend some time near the end of our study thinking about motherhood in light of this passage, because I believe the connection is more illuminating than it might first appear.

Lifting Our View of Angels

Before we can appreciate what the author of Hebrews is saying about Jesus, we need to recover a biblical view of angels — because our culture has nearly destroyed our ability to take them seriously. In the popular imagination, angels are either bumbling sentimentalists stumbling through Christmas movies or cherubic infants floating on clouds. They have been reduced to harmless heavenly accessories, decorative at best, irrelevant at worst.

But that is not the picture Scripture paints. There are nearly three hundred references to angels in the Bible, and the beings described there are nothing like our cultural caricatures. They are powerful, purposeful, and deeply involved in the affairs of heaven and earth.

Many interpreters have assumed that the author of Hebrews was addressing a congregation that had developed an improper, perhaps even idolatrous, fascination with angels. I disagree with

that reading entirely. The author never once tells this community to stop worshiping angels. What he does say, repeatedly and urgently, is: do not neglect your salvation. Do not drift away. Do not lose faith. That was the real crisis. This was a community of believers becoming timid in their faith, in danger of quietly slipping away from what they had received. The author's strategy is not to tear angels down but to lift Jesus up — using the community's already high regard for angels as a launching point to show that Jesus is higher still. He is not correcting an error; he is building an argument.

To feel the force of that argument, we need to take angels seriously. So let us spend a moment doing exactly that.

What Angels Do

Scripture presents angels as having four primary roles. First, they continuously worship and praise God. They surround the very throne of heaven, proclaiming his holiness. The picture in Revelation 5:11–12 is staggering:

Then I looked, and I heard around the throne and the living creatures and the elders the voice of many angels, numbering myriads of myriads and thousands of thousands, saying with a loud voice, "Worthy is the Lamb who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing!"

And I do not believe this is a single future event. I believe it is happening right now.

Second, angels communicate God's message to humanity. This is, in fact, where their name comes from. The Greek word *angelos* means messenger. The Hebrew word *mal'akh* means the same thing. An angel is a messenger bearing a word from the throne of heaven. This is what we mostly see them doing in Scripture — assisting in the giving of the law, speaking to the prophets, announcing births to Zechariah and to Mary, proclaiming the arrival of the Savior to the shepherds in the fields. Angels speak with special authority precisely because they carry a message that is not their own.

Third, angels minister to believers. There is a particular care that angels exercise toward those who trust in the Lord. The psalmist writes:

The angel of the LORD encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them.

And the author of Hebrews will return to this theme at the end of chapter 1: "Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation?" We see this throughout Scripture. An angel brings food and water to Elijah in the wilderness when he is too exhausted and depressed to go on. An angel opens the doors of Peter's prison cell.

Angels rejoice over every sinner who repents. This is active, powerful, personal ministry — and it is directed, in a special way, toward the people of God.

Fourth, angels are agents of God’s judgment. The book of Revelation describes angels blowing trumpets and pouring out bowls of divine wrath. Angels will one day separate the wheat from the chaff. The power they exercise in this role is not symbolic. Consider what happened to Herod Agrippa in Acts 12:

On an appointed day Herod put on his royal robes, took his seat upon the throne, and delivered an oration to them. And the people were shouting, “The voice of a god, and not of a man!” Immediately an angel of the Lord struck him down, because he did not give God the glory, and he was eaten by worms and breathed his last.

That is judgment. Swift, precise, and final.

So: angels worship God without ceasing. Angels carry his message with authority. Angels minister to his people with power. Angels execute his judgment without failure. They are remarkable beings, and it is entirely appropriate to hold them in high regard.

And then the author of Hebrews says — but Jesus is greater.

Seven Reasons Jesus Is Superior to Angels

The argument begins in verse 3:

After making purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, having become as much superior to angels as the name he has inherited is more excellent than theirs.

The name Jesus has inherited is *Son*. To be clear: Jesus has always been God the Son. Our understanding of God is that he is Father, Son, and Spirit — one God in three persons, existing in perfect unity. Jesus has not become the Son; he has been revealed as the Son. Through his obedience unto death, his resurrection from the grave, and his ascension into glory, he has been publicly declared, vindicated, shown to be who he always was. As Paul writes in Romans 1:4, Jesus “was declared to be the Son of God in power according to the Spirit of holiness by his resurrection from the dead.” The author of Hebrews is pointing at the risen and ascended Christ and saying: *look at him. Look at what happened. That is who he is.* And because of who he is, there are seven reasons he deserves your full attention.

1. Jesus Is Ontologically Superior — He Is God

For to which of the angels did God ever say, “You are my Son, today I have begotten you”? (Psalm 2:7)

The word *begotten* here does not refer to biological origin. It refers to sharing the same essence, being of the same kind. The word *ontological* describes the nature of being itself. A tree is ontologically different from gold. A rock is ontologically different from a living creature. They cannot be placed in the same category — they differ in substance. And God is ontologically different from everything he has made, including angels. Angels are spiritual beings, heavenly beings, beings of extraordinary power — but they do not share in the divine substance. Jesus does. He is not a superior creature; he is God. That alone is reason enough to give him your attention.

2. Jesus Is Relationally Superior

Or again, “I will be to him a father, and he shall be to me a son”? (2 Samuel 7:14)

This quotation comes from God’s covenant with David, pointing forward to the Messiah who would come from his line. The relational intimacy expressed here is absolute. There is no closer bond in all of existence than that between the Father and the Son. There will always be voices in the world claiming special insight, special access, special authority. But no one will ever be as close to the Father as the Son. Therefore, if you want to know the Father — if you want to be known by the Father — there is no better voice to heed, no better guide to follow.

3. Jesus Is Superior in Glory

And again, when he brings the firstborn into the world, he says, “Let all God’s angels worship him.” (Deuteronomy 32:43)

The author is drawing from the great song of Moses — a song taught to Israel so that they would remember to listen to God. The angels themselves, those same beings of awesome power and majesty, bow before Jesus. Every knee in heaven bends at his name. If that is how the angels relate to him, how much more should we?

4. Jesus Is Superior in Time — He Is Eternal

Of the angels he says, “He makes his angels winds, and his ministers a flame of fire.” But of the Son he says, “Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom.” (Psalm 45:6)

The description of angels as winds and flames is evocative — these are things that move, that flare brightly, and that pass. But the Son’s throne is forever. He does not belong to a moment in history; all moments belong to him. Within a single lifetime, we watch technologies rise and collapse, fashions appear and vanish, entire cultural frameworks become obsolete. VHS became DVD became streaming. Televisions that once weighed two hundred pounds now hang like paintings on a wall. But Jesus never becomes dated. The more deeply one comes to know him, the more revolutionary, the more counter-cultural, the more inexhaustibly relevant he proves to be. This is why we are told to build our lives on him.

5. Jesus Is Superior in His Obedience — He Is Pleasing to the Father

You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions. (Psalm 45:7)

This is the anointing of the Messiah — the one upon whom the Spirit of the Lord rests, sent to bring good news to the poor, to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives. When Jesus stood in the synagogue at Nazareth and read from Isaiah 61, he was claiming this identity publicly. And his entire life bore it out — obedient in all things, even obedient to the point of death. When Peter, James, and John saw Jesus transfigured on the mountain, and Moses and Elijah stood with him, the voice of the Father broke through the cloud with the simplest and most authoritative of commissions: “*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him.*” The reason the Father gives for why we should listen to Jesus is that he is pleased with him. That is reason enough.

6. Jesus Is Superior in Perfection — He Is Immutable

You, Lord, laid the foundation of the earth in the beginning, and the heavens are the work of your hands; they will perish, but you remain; they will all wear out like a garment, like a robe you will roll them up, like a garment they will be changed. But you are the same, and your years will have no end. (Psalm 102:25–27)

Immutability means not changing — and it is the mark of perfection. If something is truly perfect, it cannot be improved upon, and therefore it does not change. The author of Hebrews applies the language of Psalm 102 directly to Jesus: his character, his love, his mercy, his grace, his patience, his kindness — none of it shifts. His faithfulness to his promises does not waver with the seasons of our lives or the moods of our hearts. He is perfectly wise, perfectly good, perfectly just, perfectly consistent. His love for you today is the same as it was the day you first believed, and the same as it will be on the last day. That is a voice worth trusting.

7. Jesus Is Superior in Authority — He Reigns

And to which of the angels has he ever said, “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet”? Are they not all ministering spirits sent out to serve for the sake of those who are to inherit salvation? (Psalm 110:1)

Jesus alone is enthroned. He alone holds all authority in heaven and on earth. The angels, for all their power and glory, are ministering spirits — servants. He is the King. There is no rival throne, no competing authority, no voice in heaven or on earth that can claim what he claims. Why would anyone give their ultimate trust, their deepest attention, to anyone or anything else?

The Application: Pay Attention

Seven reasons. Jesus is greater than angels ontologically, relationally, in glory, in eternity, in obedience, in perfection, and in authority. Which brings us to the opening verses of chapter 2:

Therefore we must pay much closer attention to what we have heard, lest we drift away from it. For since the message declared by angels proved to be reliable, and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?

The word *angel* means messenger. In declaring Jesus superior to angels, the author is declaring him the greater messenger. Listen to him. That is the point. The entire theological argument of chapter 1 exists to answer a single practical question: *Who do you listen to? What voice do you give authority over your life?*

We live in what sociologists have begun to call an attention economy — a world in which the primary resource being mined is not oil or data but human attention. Every institution, every platform, every corporation is competing for the same thing: your eyes, your ears, your hours. Phones buzz and chime and vibrate. Social media algorithms are designed, at extraordinary expense, to pull you down one more scroll. Studies now suggest that people are spending between seven and seventeen hours a day looking at some kind of screen. We set out to check the news and find ourselves, twenty minutes later, reading about tinfoil on doorknobs.

Into that world, the author of Hebrews speaks with urgency: pay much closer attention. Not to your feed, not to the voices that shout loudest, not to the messengers who promise the most — but to Jesus. The ancient church was not drowning in smartphones, but they faced the same temptation in a different form: the gradual drift that happens when other voices, other priorities, other allegiances slowly crowd out the one voice that matters. That is still our danger. And the remedy is still the same. Turn your attention to the Son.

A Word for Mother's Day

There is a quote attributed to Abraham Lincoln in many collections of American speeches: “*All that I am or ever hope to be, I owe to my angel mother.*” Augustine, the most formative theologian of the early church, describes his mother Monica in similar terms — a woman who never stopped praying for him through years of prodigal wandering, an angel who held him before God when he refused to hold himself there.

I used to read the word *angel* in these tributes as purely metaphorical — a way of saying that a mother is unusually godly. But after sitting with this passage, I find myself reading it somewhat more literally. Look again at the four roles of angels. Angels continuously worship God and carry that worship into the lives of those around them. Mothers are often the most persistent prayer warriors their children will ever have. Study after study confirms what experience already teaches: when a father disengages from the faith of the family, children frequently follow; but a mother's faith has a particular staying power, a stickiness that shapes children long after they have left the home.

Angels communicate God's message. So do mothers — as educators, as moral guides, as the people who most often first place the words of Scripture in a child's ear and heart. And long after childhood, there remains a voice in the back of the conscience that sounds remarkably like Mom, asking whether this is something you could tell her about.

Angels minister to those in their care with remarkable sacrifice and power. The designation *mama bear* did not appear from nowhere. There is a fierce, protective, self-forgetting quality to the ministry of a good mother that has no real parallel in human experience.

And angels are agents of judgment — of consequence for wrong, and of praise for what is right. Any honest account of moral formation will acknowledge that on this earth, few things carry more weight than a mother's disappointment or a mother's approval. There is a reason we say: *if Mama ain't happy, ain't nobody happy.*

I do not think it is too large a leap to say that the proof of angels may be found, in part, in the reality of mothers. Randy Travis put it simply:

Are you telling me that you've never seen an angel? / Never felt the presence of one standing by? / No robe of white, no halo in sight — / Well you missed the most obvious thing. / Man, are you blind? / Just look in your mother's eyes.

Who went through the pain and smiled through the tears on the day of your birth? Who counted your fingers and toes and thanked God you were whole? Who came running every time you cried out, and left the light on while she waited and prayed that you came home? Honor her today.

Closing

Jesus is greater than angels. He is greater than every voice competing for your attention. He is the Son of God — proven in his resurrection, enthroned in his ascension, faithful in his love for you. The author of Hebrews asks the most searching question: *how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation?*

We will not escape. So do not neglect it. Pay much closer attention. Listen to him.