Reflection on Gospel Reading from 2025: Luke 8:41-56

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qYh-HIAGKag

The reading is from St. Paul's Letter to the Hebrews 2:2-10

Brethren, if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation? It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will. For it was not to angels that God subjected the world to come, of which we are speaking. It has been testified somewhere, "What is man that thou art mindful of him, or the son of man, that thou carest for him? Thou didst make him for a little while lower than the angels, thou hast crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet." Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see Jesus, who for a little while was made lower than the angels, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one. For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering.

- **November 8:** Synaxis of the Archangel Michael & the other Bodiless Powers: Gabriel, Raphael, Uriel, Salaphiel, Jegudiel, & Barachiel.

- **Hymn from Matins:** O Chief Commanders of the heavenly armies, * we the unworthy now entreat you in earnest, * to fortify us by your supplications to the Lord, * and shelter us beneath the wings of your spiritual glory, * guarding us who run to you and fervently entreat you: * As the Commanders of the hosts on high, * rescue us faithful from dangers of every kind.

- "***The message declared by angels***"

Angels declare several important messages in the New Testament:

> **Luke 1:26ff:** In the sixth month the angel Gabriel was sent from God to a city of Galilee named Nazareth, **27** to a virgin betrothed to a man whose name was Joseph, of the house of David; and the virgin's name was Mary. **28** And he came to her and said, "Hail, O favored one, the Lord is with you!"

> **John 20:11ff:** But Mary stood weeping outside the tomb, and as she wept she stooped to look into the tomb; [12] and she saw two angels in white, sitting where the body of Jesus had lain, one at the head and one at the feet. [13] They said to her, "Woman, why are you weeping?"

But Hebrews has in mind a specific message "declared by angels."

> Jubilees 1:26-28: And He said to the ***angel of the presence***: Write for Moses from the beginning of creation till My sanctuary has been built among them for all eternity…And the ***angel of the presence*** who went before the camp of Israel took the tables of the divisions of the years …

> Jubilees 2:1: ***And the angel of the presence spake to Moses according to the word of the Lord, saying***: Write the complete history of the creation, how in six days the Lord God finished all His works and all that He created, and kept Sabbath on the seventh day and hallowed it for all ages, and appointed it as a sign for all His works.

This is sometimes understood among ancient Jews and Christians to exalt the Law. See the mention of this reality in Acts, where Stephen chastises those who want to kill him by describing the Law as something so sacred that it was delivered by angels:

> **Acts 7:53:** And they killed those who announced beforehand the coming of the Righteous One, whom you have now betrayed and murdered, [53] you who received the law as delivered by angels and did not keep it."

In Galatians, however, St. Paul uses this to show that the Law is not the final will of God, but was given only for a time, and merely through an intermediary - not through God's own hand:

> **Gal 3:19-20:** Why then the law? It was added because of transgressions, till the offspring should come to whom the promise had been made; and it was ordained by angels through an intermediary. [20] Now an intermediary implies more than one; but God is one.

The intermediate agency of angels has a different purpose in Hebrews. The logic of Hebrews is to compare everything in the Old Testament to Jesus, in order to show that the Old Testament was **really** important, but Jesus is **even more** important. Here is the opening line of Hebrews:

Hebrews 1:1-2
In many and various ways, long ago God spoke to our fathers by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son…

In many and various ways…

Long ago	God	spoke	to our fathers	by the prophets,
but in these last days	he	has spoken	to us	by a Son…

· *a minore ad maius*	"from the lesser to the greater"
· *qal wa chomer*	"the light and the heavy"
· *synkrisis*	comparison

Outline

1:1-3	Introduction	
1:4-4:13	Superiority of Jesus as God's Son	
	1:4-2:18	Over the Angels
	3:1-4:13	Over Moses
4:14-7:28	Superiority of Jesus' Priesthood	
8:1-10:18	Superiority of Jesus' sacrifice	

> Why? 1, in order to show the priority of the revelation through Christ and 2, in order to show the special place in God's plan of those who believe in the revelation through Christ. Look at the exaltation of Old Testament saints in Hebrews 11, but notice how it ends:

Hebrews 11:32ff: And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— **33** who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, received promises, stopped the mouths of lions, **34** quenched raging fire, escaped the edge of the sword, won strength out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. **35** Women received their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, that they might rise again to a better life. **36** Others suffered mocking and scourging, and even chains and imprisonment. **37** They were stoned, they were sawn in two,[b] they were killed with the sword; they went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, ill-treated— **38** of whom the world was not worthy—wandering over deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.**39** **And all these, though well attested by their faith, did not receive what was promised**, **40** ***since God had foreseen something better for us***, ***that apart from us they should not be made perfect.***

And this returns our attention to our present passage, which begins with this statement:

> …if the message declared by angels was valid and every transgression or disobedience received a just retribution, ***how shall we escape if we neglect such a great salvation*****?** It was declared at first by the Lord, and it was attested to us by those who heard him, while God also bore witness by signs and wonders and various miracles and by gifts of the Holy Spirit distributed according to his own will…

The Old Testament carried great punishments if it were neglected, as follows:

Deuteronomy 7:2-5: "If there is found among you, within any of your towns which the Lord your God gives you, a man or woman who does what is evil in the sight of the Lord your God, in transgressing his covenant, **3** and has gone and served other gods and worshiped them, or the sun or the moon or any of the host of heaven, which I have forbidden, **4** and it is told you and you hear of it; then you shall inquire diligently, and if it is true and certain that such an abominable thing has been done in Israel, **5** then you shall bring forth to your gates that man or woman who has done this evil thing, and you shall stone that man or woman to death with stones.

> Hebrews is urging people to understand that the message of the Gospel is superior to the message declared by angels, and so it carries an even greater immediacy. We might imagine the opposite, that the replacement of the Law with Faith means that we can now relax and not take God so seriously. But look what Jesus says about the Law:

Matthew 5:21: "You have heard that it was said to the men of old, 'You shall not kill; and whoever kills shall be liable to judgment.' **22** But I say to you that every one who is angry with his brother[a] shall be liable to judgment; whoever insults his brother shall be liable to the council, and whoever says, 'You fool!' shall be liable to the hellof fire. **23** So if you are offering your gift at the altar, and there remember that your brother has something against you, **24** leave your gift there before the altar and go; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift. **25** Make friends quickly with your accuser, while you are going with him to court, lest your accuser hand you over to the judge, and the judge to the guard, and you be put in prison; **26** truly, I say to you, you will never get out till you have paid the last penny.

- **The Christology of Hebrews and our passage:**

The Christology of Hebrews draws on a variety of raw materials in order to show the superiority of the Son over all of God's creation and all God's agents. There is no attempt to reconcile all the different traditions. The purpose is to emphasize the power of the Son to save today and in the future. On the other hand, the Christology cannot be dismissed as merely rhetorical flourishes either. There is a pattern of preexistence, incarnation and exaltation in many places:

Verse 1:3 has the sense of Preexistence (a-b), Incarnation (c), Exaltation (d):

> In many and various ways God spoke of old to our fathers by the prophets; **2** but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son, whom he appointed the heir of all things, through whom also he created the world. **3** He reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power. When he had made purification for sins, he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high, **4** having become as much superior to angels as the name he has obtained is more excellent than theirs.

The pattern is partially presupposed in 7:3, 10:5 and 13:8:

> 7:3: He is without father or mother or genealogy, and has neither beginning of days nor end of life, but resembling the Son of God he continues a priest for ever.
>
> 10:5 Consequently, when Christ came into the world, he said, "Sacrifices and offerings thou hast not desired, but a body hast thou prepared for me;
>
> 13:8: Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever.

And the pattern is on full display in our passage in 2:8-13:

> Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. As it is, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. **9** But we see Jesus, ***who for a little while was made lower than the angels***, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for every one.**10** For it was fitting that he, for whom and by whom all things exist, in bringing many sons to glory, should make the pioneer of their salvation perfect through suffering. **11** For he who sanctifies and those who are sanctified have all one origin. That is why he is not ashamed to call them brethren, **12** saying,"I will proclaim thy name to my brethren, in the midst of the congregation I will praise thee."**13** And again,"I will put my trust in him."And again, "Here am I, and the children God has given me."

- **The "pioneer" of our salvation (or "captain" – the Greek word is ἀρχηγός). To St. John Chrysostom, we see here how Christ is both like, and unlike, humanity.**

  Greer: Chrysostom expresses the difference between Christ in His divine nature and Christ in the Incarnation by the phrases "separate us" and "bring us together":

  > "The Captain of their salvation", that is, the cause of their salvation. Do you see what a vast difference there is between the two? He is a Son, and we are sons; but He saves, and we are saved. Do you see how he (Paul) both brings us together and then separates us? By saying "bringing many sons to glory" he brings us together; by saying "the Captain of their salvation" he separates us.

  The "bringing together" refers to the Word's "clothing Himself with flesh ... and with brotherhood". This is the sense in which Chrysostom understands verse 14. The "sharing of flesh and blood" is meant to show the reality of the Incarnation. The Word became our "brother" not by assuming a Man of our nature, but by uniting Himself with our nature. Insofar as Christ is regarded as a concrete entity, He is to be utterly distinguished from men. And this "separation" is made between Christ as the divine Sanctifier and men as the sanctified. Though Chrysostom continues to distinguish the natures, his emphasis is upon the one Christ in whom God brought men salvation.