

Making A Scene
Week 3: Shepherds Fly

I. We're taking a look at the Christmas story from the perspective of God:

[Slide]: Making A Scene

A. When we consider the unusual cast of characters that God pulled together to usher in the birth of Jesus, it's quite unexpected! God is communicating something to us loud and clear:

[Slide]: Everyone's invited into His story!

1. Some will choose to reject the invitation for various reasons. Some will decide the things of this world are too enticing and will hold on to status, money, comfort, or independence. Others will reject the love of God because they feel disqualified, stuck, or angry regarding the circumstances of their lives.

II. Today's message is for those (for whatever reason) who feel like they're on the outside looking in. When God makes His scene around the birth of the King, He wants to be clear that no one is left on the outside looking in unless they choose to do so. His arms are open to all people!

A. Let's look at the Christmas story through the eyes of the shepherds. There is something very telling in the first people (outside Joseph and Mary's families) to receive the birth announcement of Jesus being shepherds.

Let's turn to Luke 2 starting with verse 8.

Luke 2:8-12 [Slide]: 8 In the same region, shepherds were staying out in the fields and keeping watch at night over their flock. 9 Then an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified. 10 But the angel said to them, "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people: 11 Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be the sign for you: You will find a baby wrapped tightly in cloth and lying in a manger."

1. In the 1st Century, shepherds didn't have a great reputation. It wasn't an occupation that naturally exuded moral excellence. God giving the birth announcement of His Son to a group of shepherds on the night watch would be like God giving the birth announcement to a group of guys on the night shift of a road construction crew. Please don't throw tomatoes at me; I'm making a general statement. The life of a shepherd was nomadic. It necessitated an irregular schedule. It was gritty, hands-on work. All these aspects combined to make a fairly tough lot of men when it came to shepherds. There was a reputation associated with shepherds in the 1st Century that goes beyond the night shift, manual labor analogy of today:

[Slide]: Shepherds were despised and rejected.

2. But God has never shied away from messy people! Think about God's calling on shepherds throughout the Old Testament. Abraham, Moses, and David were all shepherds when they received their calling!

Jesus who was also despised and rejected would be identified as the Good Shepherd!

John 10:14-16 [Slide]: 14 "I am the good shepherd. I know my own, and my own know me, 15 just as the Father knows me, and I know the Father: I lay down my life for the sheep. 16 But I have other sheep that are not from this sheep pen; I must bring them also, and they will listen to my voice. Then there will be one flock, one shepherd."

3. The birth announcement of the King goes forth to a group of shepherds which makes some sense when considered against God's unfolding plan of salvation revealed through the Old Testament. And that Jesus will Himself identify as the Good Shepherd in the context of His own ministry. This doesn't negate the reputation that shepherds had, it is a clearly communicated message that the good news is for:

[Slide]: All people!

4. There are no qualifiers here; all means all! We should never be stingy with the good news. God has a good record of doing the unexpected!

5. The glory of the Lord shone forth against the darkness of the night as "an" angel of the Lord imparted a new chapter in God's eternal plan of salvation! The glory or perfection/weightiness/holiness of the Lord stood out in sharp contrast against the night sky and the shepherds were terrified. They knew that something in their sight was different from everything else. The angel settles the shepherds down by the excitement in the angel's voice!

Luke 2:10 [Slide]: 10 "Don't be afraid, for look, I proclaim to you good news of great joy that will be for all the people:"

6. We're going to focus on the angel's response to the birth of Christ for Christmas Eve. I'm itching to share more, yet I'll refrain. But just from the shepherd's response, we know this isn't some stogy, monotone, announcement. The angel says:

[Slide]: For Look!!

Or "behold!" This is good news of great joy!! And it's intended for "All Y'all's! The good news entails a message of great joy because salvation and joy are a package deal. The angels stand in awe of what God has done for humanity (1 Peter 1:10-12) and the angel was excited to be God's messenger!

B. In case we've lost the significance of the good news, let us be reminded today. Humanity chose to rebel against a good and gracious God. There was no possible man-made solution to bridge the gap between our sin and God's holiness. God sent His Son to live a sinless life and die for the penalty of our sin. The only One on whom death had no claim, willingly laid down His life so that we might live. Because of Jesus Christ, we have the invitation of eternal relationship with God the Father!

1. The good news hasn't changed! It's still accompanied with God's joy. And it's still a message for all people. Do we believe this today? If so, we should be excited to pass along this great news! If we're Christ followers, we've been entrusted with this good news. Good news intended for all people. Sometimes, we overcomplicate what we've been charged to do. We have a core value statement that says:

[Slide]: We Clear The Path To Jesus!

2. Our charge is to simply make the introduction. We can't change a person's heart, but who are we to determine which heart God can change? We simply share the good news, and the Holy Spirit does the heart transplant.

3. There is a fine line between celebrating God and self-promotion. I mess that line up sometimes and I am certainly more prideful than I even realize. But I'd like to share a God story with you that recently happened because it's a reminder to stay open to God's prompting. We don't have the authority to determine whose heart God can change.

Recently, I met a young man, and it was a brief encounter, but in a setting long enough to have a decent conversation. The young man was using the name of Jesus more frequently than I sometimes do in sermons. I knew this guy was a little rough around the edges, because he was referencing Jesus a lot and yelling about his strip club on a phone call. When he ended the call, I said hello to him and mentioned he was talking about Jesus a lot. I casually told the guy I was thankful for Jesus because he changed my life when I least deserved it. I came to find out he heads up security for one of the local strip clubs and when I met him, he was 5 months sober from a drug and alcohol addiction. He was trying to white knuckle his path forward through self-determination, but he was an angry dude. I wish I could tell you he said a prayer of repentance, but he didn't. He did confide in me his struggles and a genuine desire to trust God, but he still had some hang-ups. I told him where to find me and that he is always welcome at Tab Church. I believe that from Norfolk to the nations, all people - means all people.

C. An angel imparts the birth announcement of Jesus to a group of shepherds in a field. It's very plausible they were sitting around the fire telling crude jokes or what they were getting into Friday night. But the message is for all people and when God gets a hold of a heart, He can soften it just like that!

1. After the shepherds received further confirmation from a host of angels, they responded to the message by:
[Slide]: Doing It!

2. They did what they were told to do!

Luke 2:16-20 [Slide]: 16 They hurried off and found both Mary and Joseph, and the baby who was lying in the manger. 17 After seeing them, they reported the message they were told about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary was treasuring up all these things in her heart and meditating on them. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

D. There are a few takeaways from the scene God pulls together by including these shepherds.

1. The most obvious is that there are no prerequisites to participate. All we need is: faith! Faith is living our daily lives in response to God's promises. We can say we have faith, or trust in God, but genuine faith makes itself evident through doing what God has instructed.

2. Some of us might be deliberating on a word that God's already delivered! These shepherds had an occupation of tending their sheep but when they were told to "go" they "got!" It doesn't appear like they worked through all the details and then obeyed. They dropped what they were doing and responded to the message. Because of their obedience, what God had foretold they experienced as fact!

3. After experiencing God's word as He foretold it would be, they reported the message they had received.

Luke 2:11 [Slide]: 11 Today in the city of David a Savior was born for you, who is the Messiah, the Lord.

This is an extraordinary message being delivered by some very ordinary guys! These guys were the very first Jesus freaks! They shared the message with Mary and Joseph and everyone else they came across. "All who heard it were amazed!" We encounter God through obedience to what He has instructed.

E. What I love about the shepherds is that the word of God compelled them to do something, and they did it! We can miss out on experiencing God when we limit His word to an individual moral standard. That's half of it but a wholistic approach is to:

[Slide]: Live out God's word in God's world!

1. This is where our faith comes alive! The good news is a message of relationship that God has extended to the worst of sinners! The message given to the shepherds wasn't one to go clean up your life. It was a message to come and see what I've done for you!

They returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had:

Luke 2:20 [Slide]: 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had seen and heard, which were just as they had been told.

2. These shepherds didn't go to Bible school. They didn't have a position in the church. They were men who simply obeyed what God had told them to do and they experienced it just like they'd been told. There aren't any special programs or positions we must obtain before we can experience God.

It's much simpler and yet more difficult:

[Slide]: We obey.

3. What have we seen and heard? God hasn't ceased to be active in our world. God is moving in extraordinary ways, but we join Him by responding to His word. The shepherds weren't the religious leaders of the day. They were far from it. They probably couldn't even read or write, but they had the faith to not sit around and deliberate about a word that God already delivered. They flew into town to see for themselves, and God sent them away praising!

F. The invitation has been extended to us, and I pray we've accepted the invitation. It's a message for all people. I've been reminded through the shepherds that God's invitation is to know God which isn't the same as knowing about God. God's message is an invitation to relationship to walk with Him and worship Him as we live out His word in the world.

1. It's my experience that people are more open to spiritual conversations than we may think if we approach it from a humble posture. Prayer has been a great avenue recently.

One approach is to start broad with something like, "Is there something in our community right now that you think needs prayer?" If the person responds with something, which they typically do, then ask if we can pray about it.

Secondly, ask, "is there something within your family or circle of friends that you would like pray for?" If they respond with something, ask to pray for that too.

Lastly, ask the person, "is there something in your life you would like prayer for?" This usually reveals something that person is dealing with, and typically they appreciate being prayed for. God opens doors and closes them as He sees fit, but most of the time the issue isn't with God opening doors; it's our willingness to step out in faith.

2. Our world is hungry for good news, and we've got it! We don't persuade or argue anyone into belief. We point to Jesus and the invitation to know God through trusting in His Son. We might be surprised at who responds to the message.

3. There is no one on the outside looking in when it comes to God's plan of salvation. Sure, there are those who choose to reject the message, but we might be surprised at who does! God's been making a scene for some time, and He loves pulling together the most unlikely of characters. His message will always be for all people!