

The Shepherds (Quality Good)

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- [0 : 0 0] I'd like us to think together if we can about the shepherds in Luke chapter 2.
- See if we can learn something from what was said to the shepherds and what they did in response to what they were told.
- First of all, why did God send the angels to shepherds? Why not farmers?
- Why not builders? Why not stonemasons? Why not vineyard dressers? Why shepherds?
- There must be a reason for that, surely. There's a reason for everything that God does. So, first of all, why did God send the angel to bring this news to shepherds?
- [1 : 1 3] Thinking about it, it seemed to me there were at least two reasons that we can think about. First of all, the shepherds were the providers of lambs for the sacrificial purposes.
- Secular historians tell us that in many places there were people whose whole occupation was breeding sheep for the very large demand that was made for lambs.
- Remember when the temple was dedicated by Solomon that 120,000 lambs were sacrificed.
- Can't imagine how many that is. Can you? 120,000 lambs. So, at one point in Israel's history, Misha, the king of Moab, paid an annual tribute to Israel of 100,000 lambs.
- See, lambs were needed every day for the daily sacrifice, morning and night.
- [2 : 4 3] When the time of Passover came round, every family needed a lamb. And there was this continual demand throughout Israel, not for just the odd lamb here and there, but for hundreds, thousands of lambs all the time.
- And so the shepherds, as the carers of the flock, the breeders of the sheep, would have been responsible for the providing of the lambs.
- Their job would have been to carefully nurture them and protect them and provide them for the temple sacrifices and for God's people on those annual occasions when they all needed them to sacrifice.
- Then, the shepherds are the most ancient and honourable trade of all. Because Abel, Adam's son, was a keeper of sheep.
- And you remember that God had respect to Abel for the offering that he brought when he sacrificed a sheep as opposed to Cain who brought up the offerings of the ground and was not accepted.
- [4 : 1 4] Remember also, in the case of Abraham, when he was told to offer up his son Isaac for a sacrifice and he took Isaac and he took Isaac and said, what's going on?
- And where's the lamb? And his father said, God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering. So there's been this idea of provision of a lamb.
- Right from ancient times, lambs had to be provided. It seems therefore fitting that it was to the shepherds that the message of the newborn king was brought, the good news of the birth of the Saviour, who is the Lamb of God.

These providers of lambs were the first to hear of the greater provision of God, of the Lamb.

So that what they and their forebears have been doing for generations in providing lambs for sacrifice is now being done by God himself.

[5 : 39] And so we can think of the words of John this morning as we meditate on the birth of Christ. Behold, the Lamb of God who taketh away the sin of the world.

Perhaps also there is a second reason why God chose the shepherds to receive this good news. Because by their very calling as shepherds, they were types of Christ, the good shepherds.

So we think of the other aspect of their work in caring for, leading and protecting the flock in their care.

But the good shepherd, you remember, tells us that he is the good shepherd, and the good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep.

Way back in the times of Jacob, when he was pronouncing the blessing as he lay dying on the twelve tribes, you find this statement, it's found in the blessing of Joseph.

[6 : 58] From thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. So from early times, the idea is God is going to provide a shepherd.

The shepherd to look after his sheep. The shepherd that David could sing of and declare the Lord is my shepherd. The shepherd of whom the prophets wrote to Israel, describing the relationship between the Lord and his chosen people.

He is the shepherd. And they are the sheep. And so for the second reason, it seems to me befitting, that the message would come to the shepherds.

Shepherds. And as they paid homage to the babe at Bethlehem, here is a group of shepherds, worshipping the chief shepherd.

For so is he described in the word of God. Then, we'll be looking at this section in Luke, from, where are we, from verse 9, or from verse 8 really, through to verse 20.

[8 : 21] I want to divide up into four sections, with regard to the shepherds. They heard, they came, they saw, and they testified.

First of all, we notice that they were just going about their normal duties. As those who were caring for sheep, it was their normal task to stay with them, to provide for them, to care for them.

And so verse 8 tells us that they were just there in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. These were the night watchers, among the shepherds.

And then, on this memorable night, something most amazing happened. They were spellbound, as they listened to a message, brought to them, from the angel of the Lord.

Verse 9, the angel of the Lord, came upon them. Not many people, have seen angels.

[9 : 45] Some have, a number of, illustrations of that, through the Old Testament. But in certainly New Testament times, in modern times, very few people, would say they'd seen angels.

Their normal ministry is unseen. They're very real, as the servants of God. And they go about, that work of serving God, and serving the people of God.

But in, an unseen way. There are indications, in the Bible, that angels are present, when God is worshipped.

There, there's indications, particularly in the early chapters, in Hebrews, that angels, have a very specific ministry, toward, the people of God.

But we cannot say, we've ever, seen, an angel, or yet heard, an angel talk. But, the shepherds, both saw and heard, the angel.

[10 : 58] And, with, the coming of the angel, the glory, of the Lord, shone, round about them. The angels, came in glory.

Now I can't tell you, what that means. I can't explain, what the glory, of the Lord is.

Not in any, adequate way. We may think of, bright light, as being one indication, of the glory, of God.

And that would be true. God is light, and in him, is no darkness, at all. So one can imagine, that in the darkness, of this night, the light, of the glory, of God, shone, round about them.

There's this, maybe a dazzlingly, bright, light, accompanying, the angels, as, he came, and spake, to them.

[12 : 07] Secondly, there must be something, heavenly, about the glory, of the Lord. They'd come, from heaven, and they, bring with them, something, of the, the spirit, of the heavenly, places.

When we think, of the glory, of the Lord, we cannot help, but think of, heaven. A place, which is holy, sin, free, suffering, free, darkness, free, sorrow, free, a holy, happy, place.

There's something, very heavenly, about the glory, of the Lord. And then, of course, there's something, you can't think, of the glory, of the Lord, without thinking, of the Lord himself.

The Lord, of glory. So, they come, bringing with them, as it were, in, a visible, way, something, of the glory, of God, light, holiness, love, resplendence, in, the reflection, of, the essence, of God, himself.

But, the main purpose, of their coming, was not, to draw attention, to themselves, and the glory, from which they came, but to bring a message. A message, that began, with those memorable words, fear not.

[13 : 38] For, there is this ingredient, in the glory of God, it is calculated, to instill, fear, in the heart, of man.

If you were to, suddenly be confronted, with an angel, who come from the glory, of God, what would you want to do? You'd probably want to, crawl under the seat, to get away, from the glory, and the light, and the splendor, and the heavenly holiness, of this, visitor.

But, fear not, was his words. He hadn't come, to judge them, he hadn't come, to destroy them, he'd come, to bring them, the most wonderful news, that ever man heard.

I bring you, good tidings, of great joy, which shall be, to all people. This, angel, who'd come, from the glory of God, from the presence of God, with the, authority of God, brings, now, the message of God.

I bring you, good tidings, of great joy, which shall be, to all people. Here is good news, the most wonderful news.

[14 : 55] Here is the news, that the earth, has been waiting for, for centuries. And it is, to be, to all people. So there's a sense, in which the, the message, of the gospel, goes forth, from this point onwards.

The first, gospel messengers, as we shall see, were, these, shepherds. What a message, they had to deliver. And it's the same message, we have to deliver, today.

But more of that, or not. So, they received, the good news, which should be, to all people. Unto you, is born this day, in the city of David, a saviour, which is, Christ, the Lord.

That is, a wonderful verse, verse 11. Unto you, is born this day, in the city of David, a saviour, which is Christ, the Lord.

If we could, carry that verse with us, into the day, then it would be, a good day. Unto you, is born, this day, in the city of David, a saviour.

[16 : 16] The message, of salvation, delivered to the shepherds. Their saviour, he is, Christ, the Lord.

Moreover, God would give a sign, to the shepherds, you will find the babe, wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying, in a manger.

It's a, remarkable sign, isn't it? Here is, the eternal son of God. Just as the, angels, have come from glory, so has the son of God, come from glory.

But you won't find him, with a halo, around his head. You won't find him, with visible tokens, of majesty, and power, and glory.

You'll find little baby, tightly, wrapped around, with swaddling bands, lying, in a manger. A feeding trough, for animals.

[17 : 25] That's the sign. What is a sign? It's a sign, of, humility. The high, and holy God, has, come down, to this, lowly place, to be born, of a virgin, and laid, in a manger.

And as the angel, completes his message, suddenly, there is, with the angel, a multitude, of the heavenly host, praising God, and saying, glory to God, in the highest, and on earth, peace, and goodwill, toward man.

The birth of Christ, is the delight, of heaven. It is the subject, of the song, of angels. And it's punctuated, with this message, from God to man, peace, goodwill, toward man.

It's utterly, vain of men, to seek for peace, anywhere, than, in Jesus Christ. He has come.

And this, is the message, this, is, what God is bringing, to men, in Christ. Peace, and goodwill. God, and man, reconciled.

[18 : 52] All, the, bitter, enmity, between a holy God, and a sinful man, swept away, in, Christ.

How important, it is then, to have, a personal, relationship, with Christ. There's no peace, says my God, unto the wicked.

There's only peace, in Jesus. Jesus. So, they heard, this message, a glorious message. They beheld, the glory of God.

Secondly, they came. I was going to say, they obeyed, the command, to go to Bethlehem.

But, studying the, the verse, there isn't, a direct, command, to go to Bethlehem, but there is, an implied, command, isn't there?

[20 : 01] You, shall find, the babe. So, if they were going to, find the babe, then they had to go, to Bethlehem.

They came. You remember, when we were, studying, Stephen, in his, speech, before, his martyrdom, one thing, that he said, he said, that, the people, had received, the law, by the disposition, of angels, and had not, kept it.

Well, now, we have, the reception, of the gospel, by the disposition, of angels, and they kept it. And what a wonderful, example, they set to us.

They came, and, they found. It's good, if we, have heard, the gospel.

It's good, if we are not, ignorant, of the way, of salvation. It's good, if we are convinced, that there is no salvation, in any other, than the Lord Jesus Christ.

[21 : 23] But that isn't enough, on its own. Because we, like the shepherds, must come, to him. We must come, by faith.

And, worship him, and trust in him. two things, about their coming, that I would, emphasize, this morning.

First of all, they encouraged, one another, to come. I've said before, that there is, a ministry, open to every, Christian believer.

It is a ministry, of encouragement. And, it is a ministry, that is not, taken up, very much, today.

We get a lot, of discouragement. But, not very much, encouragement. When did you last, speak to a Christian, brother and a sister, and try and encourage them, in, following the Lord, in, serving him.

[22 : 35] Well, these shepherds, set a good example, as they said, to one another, let us, now go, even unto Bethlehem. Come on, they said. But what about the sheep?

Never mind the sheep. Come on. Because, we've received, a message, a message, that cannot, remain, secret.

A message, that must be published. let us go, even unto Bethlehem. And secondly, their example, is that they came, with haste.

They didn't, dilly-dally around. They came straight away. They'd received the message. They'd heard the good news. They'd been told, where the Saviour was.

Straight off they go. Thirdly, they, they saw. Verse 17, when they had seen it.

[23 : 48] That is, Mary and Joseph, and the babe, lying, in a manger. They saw it, exactly, as, the Lord told them, it would be.

God is always, true, to his word. Whatever he says to you, about, himself, about the Lord Jesus Christ, about the gospel, is absolutely, true.

You may rely upon it, completely. And to the, final detail, there was the babe, just as the angels, had said. Then finally, they testified.

They gave, their testimony. First of all, in verse 17, when they'd seen it, they made known, abroad, the saying, which was told them, concerning this child.

They gave their testimony, first of all, to Joseph and Mary. They said, you know, the angel told us, this is how it would be, and it is.

[25 : 01] They would have said, the angel brought, these, good tidings. That this baby, Mary, that you're holding, is our saviour. That's what God has told us.

He is our saviour. He is the one who's come to save us from our sins, to redeem us from the curse of the law, to give unto us eternal life, to open the doors of paradise.

He is our saviour. That was their testimony. Then in verse 20, the shepherds returned, glorifying, and praising God, for all the things, that they had heard, and seen, as it was told, unto them.

They talked, about Jesus. And in so doing, they glorified God, and they praised God. They were, eyewitnesses, of the greatest, miracle, that the world, had ever seen.

They were the most, privileged people, apart from Mary, and Joseph, on the face of the earth. They were the first, to come and see, God, incarnate.

[26 : 19] The babe, lying, in a manger. And they could not, keep it to themselves. They had to, testify. Well now, just thinking then, of those four things, of the shepherds, they speak to us, don't they?

They describe, the life of a Christian. They describe, Christian experience. It always, it always begins, at the same point, where the word, of God, God, has spoken.

If God, had not spoken, then we could not speak, we would have nothing to say. But God, has spoken. Have we, heard, what the Lord, has to say?

I trust, that many of us, have, heard, the Lord, speaking to us, through his word. Through the preaching, of the word. He doesn't send, any more angels, to preach the gospel.

He sends, weak, faulty, feeble, frail, men. Men, entrusted, with the same message, that the angels, were entrusted with.

[27 : 44] Men, who have the same purpose, that the angels had, to make known, something of the glory, of God, in the gift, of his dear son.

Have you heard? Do you know, the way of salvation? Secondly, then they came. They came to see.

They came to grasp, the facts, to appreciate, the sign, that God had given to them. They came to prove, the reality, of what they had heard.

The reality, of what we have heard, can be discovered, when we come to Christ. Everything, that the gospel says, is true. The gospel says, that Jesus received sinners.

How do you know? Well, you know, because God has said so. You also know, because you've come to him, as a sinner. And he's received you. That's what the shepherds, are setting forth, this morning.

[28 : 57] And when you see, when you know, something yourself, of the grace of God, it's not, given for you only. It is given for you personally.

We all need a personal faith, in the one Savior. But receiving that, that gift of grace, personally, then, it is, our place to testify, to speak, of the Savior, the wonderful Savior, who has, saved us, from our sins.

So let me close, with that thought, friends, this morning. Has the Savior, saved you, from the guilt, and power, and condemnation, of your sins?

Then say so. Testify, before men, to the glory, of God. First, the testimony, of the shepherds, was to Joseph, and Mary.

They speak to us, of the church. Of course, they were believers. And, to them, was entrusted, this, amazing privilege, of, the Son of God.

[30 : 17] They testified, to the church. And then, they testified, abroad, to whoever, would hear it. Because this news, has got to be spread, abroad.

This news, must be told, around the world. Because that, is the divine, divinely appointed, way, whereby, the message of God, will reach, the hearts, of those, upon whom, he has set his love, from all eternity.

May God bless, his word to us, this morning. Bless you all.