

Good News for Shepherds and Other Sinners

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Preacher: Pastor Bart Leger

[0 : 00] Well, let me tell you this morning about some shepherds. Let me read a little bit about background of shepherds. They were the last people that you would expect God to take notice of.

First of all, they were religious outcasts. According to Jewish religious law, these men were unclean. Their line of work prevented them from participating in the feasts and holy days that made up the Jewish religious calendar.

And we might ask, well, why is that? Well, somebody had to watch the sheep. When everyone was making the trip to Jerusalem to make sacrifices at the temple or to participate in one of the annual feasts, they were out in the fields watching over the sheep.

And shepherding or sheep herding was a relatively nasty job. And because of that, they were continually ceremonially unclean.

And in order to go through the process of becoming ceremonially clean, it took a period of time. And they were typically not in from the field for that long.

[1 : 14] And they were out back in the fields with their sheep. As far as not being there available for worship and being always out on the job, a modern-day example might be a trucker or a shift worker whose job keeps them from regularly attending worship.

It wasn't really their fault, but they were looked down on from a religious point of view. Whatever might have been in their hearts, they weren't able to participate fully in the religious life of the community.

And not only that, but they were also borderline social outcasts. They were looked on with suspicion, kind of the way that people look at gypsies or carnival workers.

If something came up missing, the typical line would be, well, it must be one of those shepherds, because they were not always necessarily that reputable.

So they were often accused of being thieves, maybe because they just weren't understood. They didn't spend much time in town, and they probably had spent so much time with their sheep, they didn't spend much time socializing with other people.

[2 : 26] And so they probably were looked upon a little bit curiously. And as a matter of fact, according to Jewish law, shepherds were not even allowed to give legal testimony, because they were looked upon as being dubious.

Whatever they had to say, people figured they couldn't be trusted. So they were not allowed to give legal testimony in court because they weren't considered trustworthy. Kind of interesting, isn't it?

That it was to these religious and to these social outcasts that an angel appeared proclaiming the birth of our Lord and our Savior, Jesus Christ, with such an awesome message.

Now let's take a look at this cool story. We look in Luke chapter 2, where we're going to be primarily this morning. Luke chapter 2, verses 10 and 11, But we're going to begin back in verse number 8 to get a little bit of the feel and where this story started.

In verse number 8, we read, Now there were in the same country shepherds living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid.

[3 : 51] Then the angel said to them, Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ the Lord.

So what do we do with these verses, or what do we have in these verses beside a bunch of awesome angels and a group of smelly shepherds?

Well, I think we see some awesome news, not only for these shepherds, but also for the rest of mankind and the rest of us today.

Here are some practical and encouraging news. And before we get started into, I believe, the three main things that are encouraging to us today, let's go to our Lord in prayer.

Father, this morning we thank you for this opportunity to be gathered together on this Sunday morning before the day that has been chosen to celebrate the birth of our Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ.

[5 : 03] Father, we know that this was the dawning of a new day, a day when hope came to earth. And one day this hope would be laid on a wooden cross and would be raised and who would take our sin upon Him and who would die and would later rise again alive and proving that God was satisfied with the payment for the penalty of our sin.

We pray this morning that you would help us to see the practical and encouraging news that this angel had for these shepherds out in the field.

We thank you. We praise you this morning for it's in Jesus' precious and holy name that we pray. Amen. So the first thing that we see is in verse number 10 and we see that this angel said they were bringing tidings of great joy.

So the first thing we see is that in verse number 10 the reaction and the response of the shepherds.

How did they respond? They were greatly afraid. And what we see in so the angel announced the end of fear.

[6 : 39] Then the angel said to them verse number 10 do not be afraid. That was the angel's first words out of his mouth. That was how the conversation started.

That was what came right after the appearance of this I am sure glorious angel. Don't be afraid. Don't fear.

Because I've got some great news for you. Now to be contextually correct this pronouncement was given as a direct result of the angel's awesome and frightening appearance.

Now fear not were two words that we hear at almost every angelic appearance. The reason for that is I am sure that this was a frightening experience.

Now before you say that was no big deal it was just an angel or like I heard someone say this past week pshaw that's an interesting word you want to try and say it sometime it's really cool to say.

[7 : 46] But the next time you feel incredulous towards something just pshaw but before you stop and before you think oh well that wasn't a big deal well imagine this you're out with your sheep it's in the middle of the night and you don't expect anybody else to tap you on the shoulder and say pshaw hey or most likely the way it happened was this heavenly being appears to you and in a bright light that shines all around you lighting everything around you like you'd see in a scene from a sci-fi movie you would probably be afraid as well.

And so the angel starts out by saying fear not. Okay so in the context that's why the angel said don't be afraid but I think we can take it even beyond that and I think it runs even deeper.

The term that we see in verse number 10 that they were verse number 9 that they were greatly afraid it literally means they feared a great fear.

it emphasized the terror that they experienced it it spoke of them trembling and being afraid and not knowing what to do not knowing what would come next would their lives even be in danger and so so the angel says do not be afraid but I think that the issue of fear runs even deeper the first evidence of the fall was fear we see in Genesis chapter 3 verses 8 through 10 and Adam and Eve heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day and Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden then the Lord called to Adam and said to him where are you so he said I heard your voice in the garden and I was what

I was afraid they were afraid of how God would deal with them because they all of a sudden realized for the first time in their existence what sin and disobedience felt like and so they had the guilt that they were feeling and now God who was perfect in essence and in presence appears to them and is calling for them and they hid themselves because they were afraid fear has been stalking mankind down through the ages down through the centuries Abraham feared and so Abraham lied about Sarah his wife because of fear we see that in Genesis chapter number 12 Jacob was afraid of Esau Genesis chapter 32 Moses was afraid of Pharaoh and afraid of rejection

[11 : 06] Exodus chapter 4 verse number 1 Israel was afraid to enter the promised land Numbers chapter 14 so Jesus when he appears on earth would move through the countryside traveling and dispelling fear do you remember the disciples and the storm what did Jesus say come on guys it's me why are you so afraid what's wrong with you and then he stills the storm blind Bartimaeus feared he would never see again Jesus comes in and he dispels that fear and grants him sight the ten lepers feared they would never be able to spend time with their families again Jesus comes in and he provides healing to them so they were able to be clean physically and be able and not no longer contagious and they would be able to go back to their families and experience a hug again from their family can you imagine that

Mary and Martha feared that they would never see their brother alive again Jesus took care of that now we all have many fears around Christmas time that people may be afraid of fears over health family world conditions finances life all of these things are issues that might present fear in our lives but faith is the opposite of fear have faith don't be afraid Jesus Jesus would tell his disciples oh ye of little faith what is your issue if you had faith you wouldn't be afraid because you know that I have all things taken care of and they're all in hand so we're saved by faith we also live by faith so the angel starts out by saying don't worry don't be afraid

I've got good news for you and that brings us to the second thing that we see in verse number 10 the angel announced the birth of joy he says in verse number 10 don't be afraid and after that he says behold I bring you good tidings I bring you good news of what great great joy and it was because of for whom the announcement was about and he says I bring you good news of great joy we sing songs of joy at Christmas most all the Christmas songs are songs about joy songs about this is a time when we can rejoice and we can be excited and we we can because of the birth of a Savior now there's hope for mankind so during this time we sing songs of joy now why why this joy why sing songs of joy because a Savior has been born because if we look back at the time period when this angel appeared the

Jewish people were caught up in the in the strictness and in the difficulty of trying to be good and in trying to be good to please God and that's what they were hearing from the religious leaders of the time we have to abide by all these many laws and so they were living in a period of time where there was a great burden that had been placed upon them and they were wondering how can we do this how can we be right with God and they also saw the way their religious leaders lived they always enjoyed having the best seats at the theater they always enjoyed people bowing to them or honoring them and they saw that they were able to get by with some things that others couldn't and so when the Savior came but also they were under the thumb of Rome so not only were they having some religious issues they were also having some political problems they were chafing under the leadership of Rome and they were looking forward to a time where their

Savior would come their Messiah would come and in their minds they were looking for someone who would take them out from the reign of the emperor and the Jewish people could have a place in society again and so in their minds this was a great joyous time because the Messiah that had been promised from the Old Testament had been born and there would be great joy this term joy that we see here the Greek word *kara* is when we see it in the Gospel of Luke most often this term *kara* joy is associated with salvation associated with the salvation that the Messiah would bring to us so I think it's not too much of a leap for us to understand that this birth of a Savior that it had its meaning in that he was our salvation he would be our

[17:06] Savior he would be the Savior of mankind so why did these angels that begs the question why did these angels appear to these anonymous shepherds why did not the angels appear first to priests or to scribes why didn't the angels go and appear to influential people who would have been able to take this good news and would have had the resources and would have been looked upon by society when they told them there would have been a little bit more credibility so why would the angel why would God in his infinite wisdom choose to send this awesome angel to a group of smelly shepherds out in the field well think about it this way by visiting the outcast by visiting the religious unclean I believe this angel was showing grace the grace of God toward mankind that it wasn't to the wealthy it wasn't to the wise it wasn't to the well connected it wasn't to the those who were seen as holy necessarily that these angels appear they they appear to a common worker out in the field showing that

God's grace is available to all of mankind so it was good news for the shepherds but it was also good news to the rest of us sinners that God's grace was available to everyone it was within our reach you see verse 10 when they saw the star they rejoiced with exceeding and great joy we see in Matthew chapter chapter number two so they saw the star and they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy they were excited they were happy it was not a yay moment it was jump up and down and be excited because they rejoiced with what kind of joy not just great exceedingly great it was like super great joy they were excited because this was a momentous occasion for mankind they were excited because the scripture had been fulfilled we see in Isaiah chapter 7 verse 14 the prophecy was therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and shall call his name

Emmanuel and so this has been prophesied that a virgin would bear a child and this child would be called Emmanuel God with us God in our midst and he would be our savior there was great joy because Christ is the Lord and we can come to him and have joy that's why we can rejoice verse number 11 John chapter 15 these things I have spoken to you that my joy may remain in you so Jesus is saying I've spoken in these things to John saying that you may have joy my joy in you and that your joy may be full we can trust this savior today we can trust

Jesus Christ that God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten son that whosoever believes in him should not perish but have everlasting life the greatest gift that you could receive this Christmas season is the gift that our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ has already paid bought with a price for you and is already wrapped and is waiting for you to simply receive it and that is the gift of salvation that comes when we realize that we need it that we are needy you know there's all we always talk about the person who has everything and what do you buy for the person that has everything or seemingly has everything they don't really need you know anything necessarily and whatever we give them just would be a token of our love for them so what do you buy the person who who has everything well when we think about the gospel

Jesus Christ is providing the greatest gift of all to those who eternally speaking have nothing and so we have available to us the gift of life you know we talk about eternal life and you know when we are sharing maybe sharing the gospel with someone we have a tendency sometimes to and times do change and when we are sharing the gospel with the average person today do you realize the average person today doesn't care about tomorrow because we're going to live forever you know modern medicine you know we have we have us living in our 80s 90s late 90s possibly and you know what I don't have to worry about tomorrow and especially the the the millennials generation Xers you know they're not back 50 years ago people were concerned about eternity today people aren't that concerned about eternity so when you say you know what

[23 : 08] Jesus can give you everlasting life and and people and I've even heard people say this big deal but not only that Jesus can give us life today think about it we don't have to wait till we die to experience the benefits of salvation because the Bible says that those who are in Christ are a brand new creation today the moment you trust Christ as your Savior we don't have to wait for the benefits of salvation someday that might be for some might be 50 60 years off we can experience the benefit of new life today sins forgiven slate wiped clean and being right with God being having a brand new it would be like having everything all of your goofs all of your sins all of all everything just gone it's like it's like it's like losing a hard drive on your computer like it's just gone just never never can't find it ever again it's that way when

Jesus Christ comes into our life God doesn't even remember it he remembers our past our sin no more as far as the east is from the west God separates us from our sin and so we can trust him today the birth of joy but not only that we also see in verse number 10 and following we also see the beginning of evangelism the beginning of evangelism we see the end of fear we see the birth of joy but we also see the beginning of evangelism let's look together in verse number 10 and I'll show you then the angel said to them do not be afraid for behold I bring you good tidings of great joy which shall be to all people and then what we also see is after verse 15 so it was when the angels had gone away from them into heaven and the shepherds said to one another let us now go to

Bethlehem and see this thing which the Lord has come to pass which the Lord has made known to us and they go and they also go around and they're telling others as they go so all need the Savior every single one of us why because all are sinners every one of us need a Savior let's look at Romans 3 23 for all have sinned and come short of the glory of God we've all fallen short of God's standard of perfection some say well maybe I can live a good enough life follow the Ten Commandments give to the poor help a little old lady cross the street whatever it is that we think is a good work or a good deed and some people say well you know what I think I have more good deeds than bad deeds I've done more good than bad in my life well the issue is none of us make it none of us we all miss the mark none of us are perfect and because of that because of our great need

God so loved the world that he gave his only he gave his unique son scripture says Romans chapter five verse number eight but God demonstrates his love toward us in that while we were still sinners Christ died for us so he's available to all people so how did the shepherds respond so it was when the angels had gone away from them into heaven that the shepherds said to one another let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass which the Lord has made known to us and they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger now when they had seen him they did what they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this child what did they do they went all over the place and they were telling everybody about this great news that they had heard and all who heard it marveled at those things which were told them by the shepherds wait a minute aren't those shepherds how did they get the news before we did and so people marveled at what at the appearance of an angel and what had happened so many of them said this can't be true this is a bunch of shepherds how can we trust what they had to say but then over time people beginning to realize that yes a savior had been born we're also to be going out with the good news we're not to sit back we're not to sit and soak on our way to heaven we're to go out and share the good news of our

Lord and our Savior Jesus Christ so in conclusion the first thing that we see here is our first big takeaway is God meets us where we are he met a group of shepherds out in a field hadn't been to temple and who knows how long knew they probably were never going to get back to the temple if they stayed in that line of work the angel appeared to a bunch of social and religious outcasts God meets us where we are secondly we can come to Jesus with our sins and our fears and receive the free gift of life new life now and a place with God in eternity in heaven and then thirdly we see that we have the good news that we can share with everyone behold I bring you good tidings of great joy we have an exciting story to tell the world needs what we have to offer it's

[29 : 52] Jesus Christ let's pray father this morning we've come together in your name and we pray that we would be able to honor you glorify you in all that we do for anyone Lord that may be listening to this message and is not sure of their relationship with you where they stand with you I pray heavenly father that this morning they would realize that your word says the Bible says we're all sinners we've all missed the mark we're not perfect and neither can we be but you sent your son Jesus Christ to die on a cross in our place pay the penalty for our sin and it's by grace through faith that we're saved and you've given us the promise that all who call upon your name will be saved so father

I pray this morning that you would be drawing others to you today they would come to know Jesus as their savior thank you lord god for this great news that was brought to the shepherds by these by this angel and then together the angelic host appeared praising you and saying glory to god in the highest and on earth peace goodwill toward men we pray this in Jesus name and for his sake amen