Luke 2:8-20

Good News for the Lowly

Sermon

I hope you all had a Happy Thanksgiving! As we now slowly approach Christmas morning, we are going to step away from Ephesians and enter into a series where we'll take a look at some of the famous songs of Christmas.

I remember when I gave my life to Jesus and the Christmas songs I had heard all my life suddenly became very significant as the lyrics now had real meaning. It's also interesting to look at the story behind the music and the musicians who penned these songs. Our first Christmas song is a well-known song entitled, "Go Tell it on the Mountain".

It was just after the Civil War that a man by the name of John Wesley Work developed a choir of African-Americans called the Fisk Jubilee Singers. John Work, an African American from Tennessee, thought it would be important to research and resurrect old negro spirituals sung prior to the Civil War. These spirituals, which usually had a sad and melodic tone, were sung by slaves who often did not know how to write. Therefore, the songs were unpublished and were passed along by oral tradition from field to field to small slave churches in the south. These songs were sung to uplift the slaves from their horrific conditions and remind them of their Savior who saw their lowly condition and promised a future Kingdom and a Salvation - not only from their physical slavery, but from their slavery to sin. The negro spirituals normally centered on pain and suffering. However, "Go Tell It on the Mountain" was a song of rejoicing as one slave working hard in the fields of the south pondered the deeper meaning of a Savior who had come to spread peace to the world. God chose to reveal the Savior's coming through a majestic angelic host, first to a lowly group of shepherds working in the fields.

Here are some of the lyrics that have been reworked over the years.

"When I was a seeker, I sought both night and day, I asked the Lord to help me, and He showed me the way."… "While shepherds kept their watching o'er silent flocks by night, behold, throughout the heavens there shone a holy light."… "The shepherds feared and trembled who lo, above the earth rang out the angel chorus that hailed our Savior's birth."… "Go tell it on the mountain, over the hills, and everywhere; go, tell it on the mountain that Jesus Christ is born." "Down in a lowly manger the humble Christ was born, and God sent us salvation that blessed Christmas morn"…

Can you picture the slave, working hard in the fields of his slave-master, and after hearing the story of the shepherds and of the lowly Son of God born in a nasty, dirty, feeding trough. He is inspired, and creates a song of rejoicing and hope that even in the midst of his unjust treatment there is a Savior born in a manger who sees all and who shows favor to the lowly and despised and rejected. A Savior who promises true and lasting peace.

The people of Israel had been waiting for the Messiah to come and save them from their oppressors. In Luke's story, when God's salvation came through the birth of the Messiah in a lowly

manger, it came suddenly and in glory, and it was proclaimed first to lowly shepherds who were also working hard in the fields.

two things in the story of the shepherds this morning…

1. ***The gospel breaks forth into the darkness (vv.8-14)***

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night*. [this would have been just outside of Bethlehem. We don't know how many shepherds there were, but we know they were doing what shepherds do. They were waiting, they were watching, they were going about the mundane…and God showed up. God seems to often show up in big ways when we are simply going about the mundane work He has called us to in obedience to Him.]* ***[9] And an angel of the Lord appeared to them,*** *[This may have been Gabriel although the text doesn't tell us. Previously in Luke it's Gabriel who comes to Zechariah and to Mary but he is named there. One function of angels in Scripture is to be messengers who provide messages*] ***and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear****. [You have to picture the scene the way Luke is writing it. There they are in darkness, possibly sleeping, maybe a fire lit, and all of a sudden LIGHT BREAKS FORTH AROUND THEM. God in a single moment, after years of darkness for Israel, shines forth to these shepherds. Luke doesn't seem to describe a light in the sky, or an angel floating in the sky or off in the distance. They are SURROUNDED by light and the glory of God – the manifest presence of God is there - with an angel standing in their midst. Like being in a dark room and someone flicks on the lights. It's startling, it's jarring. They are afraid!]* ***[10] And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. [11] For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*** *[The word for "good news" is the verbal form of "gospel". The "gospel" was the word that was used in their day to announce the appointment of a new king. Messengers would ride through the cities and "proclaim the gospel", "the King has come!". The angel is sent as a messenger proclaiming the "gospel" or "good news" of the long-awaited King of Israel, the Christ (the Greek form of the Hebrew "Messiah" or "anointed one"). The future King promised to King David. The King to be born in Bethlehem, the city of David. He was promised through the prophet Micah 750 years earlier to be born in the "city of David", Bethlehem.* ***Micah 5:2*** *– "But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah…from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel, whose coming forth is from of old, from ancient days." The details of the birth of Jesus, the Messiah were foretold hundreds of years before He was born. Prophecy after prophecy is fulfilled in the birth of Jesus. Notice, three titles are given for Jesus: 1) Christ, or Messiah – this speaks of His royalty; 2) Savior – this speaks of His mission – He came to save, though not from Rome, from a greater enemy – sin and death; 3) Lord – this speaks of His authority. He came to rule, He came to save, and to be the ultimate authority. They had waited so long for Him in darkness, now in a sudden moment He comes.]* ***[12] And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger." [13] And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying, [14] "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!"*** *[the one angel is now accompanied by a "heavenly host" or literally, a "heavenly army" (the word host is "army"). They have not come for battle, they have come to worship! They are worshipping and praising God all around the shepherds who are engulfed in a heavenly and glorious scene that would have been breathtaking! "Glory to God in the highest (or "Glory to God, the*

one who dwells in the highest of places). "Peace among those with whom He is pleased". The NIV – "and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests." It is God who chooses to whom He will grant peace, and the angels are in awe of the fact that God, the one who dwells in the highest of heights, would grant peace toward wicked, fallen, humanity.]

I want to briefly mention two types of peace offered in this passage…

First, peace is offered to the sinner who needs to be forgiven. *Don't forget the gospel this Christmas season! The baby Jesus was born in a manger for a greater purpose – to save His people from sin. That is what we celebrate on Christmas morning – the good news that Jesus Christ, the Messiah, the Lord, came first as Savior. He came as a lowly baby born in a manger so that He might become the Savior and die upon a cross. He did this so that we might have peace with God. The Bible says that all of us have sinned against God and our sins have made us enemies with God.* ***Romans 5:10 says, "while we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of His son."*** *To be reconciled, your sin must be paid for and you cannot pay the price. The cost is too high. In the OT a temporary provision was made - blood sacrifices were offered to pay for the sins of God's people, but they could never truly save…they had to be offered over and over. God had a greater plan for His Savior to come and die once and for all sin. Jesus, came as the ultimate, perfect, blood sacrifice when He was crucified on a cross. He became your sacrifice so that you might be reconciled to God – forgiven. How do you receive this? By faith. It is offered to you as a gift this Christmas season that you must receive by faith. When you put your faith in Jesus as LORD He also becomes your SAVIOR. It's given in the form of a gift. Forgiveness in a gift offered to the lowly. It's nothing you could earn, but you have to receive it by faith. You must confess that you have sinned against God, you must turn away from your sin, and you must receive Jesus as your Savior and Lord. This morning you can know this peace with God by putting your faith in Jesus and turning your life over to Him.*

Will you, by faith, receive the gift of "peace" offered to you through Jesus the Savior?

Second, there is a peace offered to the child of God who has been waiting. *Israel had been waiting for hundreds of years for God to act. Have you ever waited for God to show up, and when He did it happened suddenly and in a moment God acted! It's a glorious experience when God comes to the rescue!*

Maybe you've been waiting for God to show up? *Maybe you don't know the answer, you don't know the way forward, and your season of darkness seems like it has no end. You've been praying, you've been faithful to God while you wait…but it seems as though there is no light at the end of the tunnel.* ***Only God knows when light will break forth. But one thing I can say – God loves it when we are empty.*** *When I don't have the solution. When I don't know the way forward. God loves it when I trust Him there. God often allows a situation to become very dark just before the light breaks through…then it comes…BOOM - God shows up! Christmas is about hope - that God can come at just the right time, in just the right way, in just the right location, and fulfill all that He has promised – but there is often a period of waiting. Suddenly, God opens a door, God brings peace, God brings victory, shows you the way, rescues you once again, brings peace where there was worry and fear. Sometimes we have to wait for it. While you wait…continue to be faithful.*

Some of you might be waiting for God, but God is waiting for you. *Getting our kids to listen in the morning as they get ready for school is a constant task. You tell them what to do and often it just goes in*

one ear and out the other. Often Lorrie will stand and just stare at them with her "motherly stare"…and finally, they say, "What?". ***"I'm waiting for you to listen."***

Maybe you are waiting for God to act, but God is waiting for you to listen! *God heal my marriage! God provide for our needs! God help me with my health! God heal my broken relationship! Take away this temptation! Are you waiting for God to act, but God is waiting for you to listen? If that's you, you know it. God will show you. Are you obeying what you know God wants for you to do, while you wait for God to act? Often times we don't know what the next step is, but what we can do is fall back on the step that God has shown us and make sure we are doing that. When you don't know what the next step is, make sure that you are obeying the last step that God gave you. Some people are praying and waiting for God to act and God would say, "I'm waiting for YOU to listen!"*

In ***Galatians 4:4 we read, "when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth his Son".*** *God already planned a specific time for Jesus to be born at just the right time, in just the right place. If God can plan the birth of Jesus perfectly, His genealogy, His upbringing in Nazareth, His birth in Bethlehem, His being called out of Egypt, being from the tribe of Judah, being in the line of David – don't you think He knows how to plan all the events in your life? Will you trust and obey God when you have "no idea" during your "period of waiting"?*

2. The gospel is proclaimed to the lowly (vv.15-20)

15 When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us."
16 And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. [How in the world did they find the right manger? All of the mangers in Bethlehem and they came to the right one at the right time – again, God is working behind the scenes] **17 And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.**

Luke is the gospel writer to the outcast – *in his story of Jesus he writes frequently about Gentiles, women, lepers, and shepherds. The Samaritan is made the hero in the story of the Good Samaritan (Jews hated Samaritans). The "jealous" elder brother (a picture of the religious leaders) is shamed while the prodigal son is received home. Women are the first to witness the resurrection of Jesus. Zachaeus, the hated tax collector, and a Roman Centurion are both symbols of faith. Over and over Jesus comes to the outcast and the lowly in the gospel of Luke. Shepherds in a field are the first to receive the "good news" of the Messiah's birth. It makes sense that Luke would include this story of the shepherds where the other gospel writers left it out. Luke is building a case in his story that* God loves to choose the lowly, the weak, the outcast, the despised, the rejected, as those who receive and then share His good news to the world. *It makes sense the African-American slaves would take such a liking to Luke's story of the Shepherds. Shepherds were the outcasts of their culture. They were considered unclean according to the law, and were frowned upon as dirty, filthy, thieves. They had thankless jobs that were very dangerous as they often had to work in harsh conditions and put their own lives at risk to protect their sheep from thieves and dangerous predators. Still, they were essentially at the bottom of the pecking order. God*

loves to take nobody's and make them somebody's! He takes the kids at recess who are chosen last. He makes Himself known to the weak, not the strong. That's us brothers and sisters! We are the NOBODYS that God has turned into SOMEBODYS! Look at how Paul puts it:

> **God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not,** [translation: "NOBODY'S"] **to bring to nothing things that are, [29] so that no human being might boast in the presence of God. (1 Cor. 1:28-29)**

Do you feel like a nobody? God loves to use the nobody's.

I WANT TO GIVE YOU 3 REASONS WHY God takes the Nobody's and makes them into Somebody's.

The "nobody's" will boast in God and not in themselves.

If you are a nobody, and God comes and makes you a somebody, you will not gloat about how special you are and how great the choice was when God chose you. You will glory in Him because you have no idea why God would do such a crazy thing as choose you!

> **because of him you are in Christ Jesus, who became to us wisdom from God, [**ME?! Someone without a high school education…a criminal…and you would dust me off and use me to share the glorious, unsearchable wisdom of God!] **righteousness and sanctification and redemption, [31] so that, as it is written, "Let the one who boasts, boast in the Lord. (1 Cor. 1:30-31)**

That's who you are…a nobody made a somebody…somebody who IN CHRIST. Never tell God what He can or can't do through you! Never limit the limitless God! Never say, "no way God…not me!" God will use a donkey to speak to a wayward prophet, Balaam. Certainly He can use me! When He does, you cannot boast in any of it because you were a nobody and God made you somebody IN CHRIST.

The "nobody's" are an example of God's mercy.

Paul was a murderer of Christians…and God chose him! It's astounding that God would use such a man. When Paul was confronted with the fact that he was killing followers of Jesus the Messiah, all he could do was fall on his face, "what do you want from me God?" The humility, the shame of what he had done, and yet God FORGAVE HIM OF IT ALL! Paul understood that God chose him, yes to be a missionary to the Gentiles, yes to pen much of Scripture, yes to be a witness to His resurrection, even to proclaim him before kings and emperors, but listen to what impresses Paul the most about God choosing him:

> **The saying is trustworthy and deserving of full acceptance, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am the foremost. [16] But I received mercy for this reason, that in me, as the foremost, Jesus Christ might display his perfect patience as an example to those who were to believe in him for eternal life. (1 Tim. 1:15-16)**

The "nobody's" will faithfully proclaim the gospel.

When God shows up you can't help but go onto a mountaintop and shout it out! I love the shepherd's response in v.20 – "And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." They had witnessed a miracle! They were overwhelmed by it, and therefore they returned "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen." How could they keep it to themselves! When God does a miraculous work in your life you cannot contain it, you

must tell others, you must praise God! When light comes all around you and God speaks to you all you can do is say – "GLORY! GLORY!" and praise Him for it!

This Christmas season, as you shop, as you celebrate, as you go about your mundane lives, will you welcome every opportunity to "glorify" and "praise God" to those who are around you for all that God has done in your life? The shepherds had a story. You too have a story…your story is more than enough to share with others and to glorify God for what He has done in your life. ***The Fisk Jubilee singers eventually took their song "Go tell it on the Mountain" onto the global stage even journeying to England as freed men to sing before Queen Victoria.***

Have you told others your story? Here's a challenge: pray that God would give you one person this week to share your story with. You'd be surprised how God can use your simple story to draw people into a relationship with Him. The Bible says, "Whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved"…but right after that verse Paul says this:

> **How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? (Romans 10:14)**

God used an angel to bring the good news to the Shepherds, God now uses you and me to bring the good news to the world. They will not hear unless we share – "how are they to believe in Him of whom they have never heard". God has saved you to give you a story…and He wants you to share that story to glorify Him before others.