

The Message
Sunday December 20, 2009

Luke 2:8-14

Have you ever wondered what Christmas means to a mother who has lost her husband, who must take care of 3 or 4 children, working every day, never quite getting everything done, never making ends meet? What does Christmas mean to her? Have you ever wondered what Christmas means to those who have lost their jobs in this recession who are just barely able to keep their homes let alone provide a Christmas for their family? Have you ever wondered what it means to children who do not have enough to eat. For a lot of people it's just a time of fun and parties. Sometimes I get the feeling that we are like the folks who decided to throw a party to honor a very special friend. They sent out invitations, decorated the hall, and had the food catered. All the people came together at the designated time, but to their surprise, the guest of honor was not there. Finally, they made the embarrassing discovery that no one had ever invited the guest of honor. I wonder, do we go through all the decorating, and buying presents, and preparing elaborate meals, but somehow forget whose birthday it really is? It isn't our birthday, is it? It's the Lord's birthday it's a time to remember His birth and what He is supposed to really mean to us.

So let's turn to

Luke 2:8 – 14

8 And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night.

9 And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid.

10 And the angel said unto them, Fear not: for, behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

11 For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord.

12 And this shall be a sign unto you; Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, 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, good will toward men.

The fact that God made the announcement to shepherds helps us to understand the real meaning of Christmas. "God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son," and He chose to announce that to the shepherds **first**.

Shepherds were at the opposite end of the social structure from King Herod and the influential people of the day. They lived in the fields with their animals. They smelled like the sheep they watched. They had no power or prestige. Yet, God sent his angel to them and said, "Unto **you** is born this day in the city of David, a Savior who is Christ, the Lord." *Unto shepherds a Savior was born.*

In that one simple announcement God made known some very important truths.

First God Knows You, And You Are Important To Him

It tells us, "No matter how insignificant **you** may think **you** are, God knows you, God loves you, God cares about you, **you are important to Him.**"

Throughout scripture we see God honoring and using people and things that the world often overlooks or ignores.

The Apostle Paul writes,
1 Corinthians 1:26 – 28

26 For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

27 But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty;

28 And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

A Jewish boy was sold into slavery by his brothers and carted off to Egypt. Yet, when God wanted to deliver a very message to mighty Pharaoh, it was the slave, Joseph, who was brought out of the dungeon to interpret Pharaoh's dream. God uses the lowly and despised to show His power.

Christ chose his disciples from fisherman and tax collectors, yet after Christ's ascension the religious rulers hearing them defend their faith took note that they had been with Jesus.

Five thousand men, plus women and children, stayed late on a hillside one day, listening to Jesus. The people were hungry, and there was no food for them. There was however, one boy who had 2 fish and 5 little loaves, and he gave them to Jesus. When Jesus blessed them it was enough to feed them all,

When God decided to select a mother for His Son, He went past the fashion salons and beauty parlors of the day. He went past the diamonds and gold, and went to a village called Nazareth, and found a peasant girl. She did not dress in designer clothes. She did not have a sophisticated education. She and her family lived in a cave. But she was pure, and God selected her to be the mother of His only begotten Son. So when the time arrives for Christ birth, He was not born in Jerusalem, surrounded by the doctors of the day, or nurses or assistants. But rather, He is born in a stable, wrapped in swaddling clothes and laid in a manger.

The world looks down its nose and says, "That's foolishness." But Paul says,

1 Corinthians 1:25

25 Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

When God makes His announcement, it is delivered to shepherds. It is like Jesus saying in the Sermon on the mount, "If God cares about sparrows and lilies, then He cares about you." *If God cares about shepherds, He cares about you!*

People do not need to wonder they need to hear that God cares for them. We need to hear that too, Children who do not know their fathers need to hear that. Parents who are struggling to feed and house their families need to hear that. People who are lonely and depressed need to hear that. Parents who have lost their children. need to hear that. People who feel useless and empty need to hear that.

God says, I made the announcement to shepherds, and I made it to you. *Unto you a Savior is born.*"

Second Your Life Matters, Because God Loves You

The second thing this passage teaches us is that life matters. Your life counts with God. Knowing human nature, I can imagine some of the shepherds must have sat around the campfire and wondered if life was really worthwhile or not. "What difference does it make if we watch the sheep or not?" Maybe you wonder, too, "What difference does it make if I get up this morning or not? It seems as if my life is an endless cycle of things that really don't mean anything. Maybe you wonder if your life is worth living at all?"

When God came and made His announcement to shepherds, He is also saying to us, "Your life is worthwhile. Your life is My gift to you. Therefore live every precious moment of it, because your life does matter **to Me.**"

Every life matters. It's impossible to live, even for a few moments on this earth, and not influence somebody in one way or another. We are always influencing someone, either for good or for bad.

Have you ever heard of Bubba Smith? He was a professional football player and when He retired he started making beer commercials. He was the guy who tore the top off of beer cans, and engaged in the argument about whether it is less filling or tastes great. In a magazine article about him, Bubba Smith said that he never drank beer. Drinking any kind of alcoholic beverage just wasn't a part of his life. But he advertised it. It was an easy job. It was an enjoyable job, and it paid a good salary. One day when he went back to Michigan State, his alma mater, as the Grand Marshal of the Homecoming Parade. As he was riding in the limousine at the head of the parade, he heard the throngs of people on both sides of the parade route shouting. And what were they shouting? "Hail to Michigan State?" No! One side was shouting, "Tastes great!" and the other side was shouting, "Less filling!" Bubba Smith realized that he and the beer commercials that he made had a tremendous impact on the students at Michigan State. And the message that they had gotten was that "It is all right to drink light beer."

Later, Bubba was in Ft. Lauderdale during Spring Break, and he saw drunken college kids up and down the beaches, shouting "Tastes great! Less filling!" When it came time to renew his contract, he refused. He said that he didn't want his life to be remembered for something like that.

Some years ago, there was a cartoon in the newspapers. It pictured two farmers standing in a field as snow fell softly. The one turned to the other and asked, "Anything exciting happen today?" "Nah, nothing exciting," said the other farmer. "Oh, there was a baby born over at Tom Lincoln's cabin, but nothing exciting ever happens around here." But that baby born in the cabin of Tom Lincoln one day became the President of the United States. And changed the course of history. One life can make a difference!

I wonder if there were people in Bethlehem on that night so long ago, asking, "Anything exciting happen today?" Maybe they were told, "No, nothing much. Oh, I hear some woman gave birth to a baby in a stable, but nothing exciting ever happens around here." They were in their own world, they did not notice the star that hung over their town. They probably ignored the shepherds who were in town and not in the fields. They did not know that the baby who was born in the stables next to the inn was **their** savior, and would change the course of the world. Life counts. Life matters. Your life matters. Lives of shepherds and lives of kings, all are important to God.

Finally Your Faith Matters, Too

Shepherds were men of faith. Some probably had more faith than some of the scribes and Pharisees who went to the synagogue every day. All of God's chosen people believed in a Messiah. When things got especially hard, during times of poverty and enslavement and exile, they would think about the Messiah and God's promise that one day the Messiah would come. They prayed over and over again, "Let the Messiah come. Let Him come today!" They prayed that prayer for hundreds of years, and they must have wondered, "Does God hear our prayers?" "Does God keep His promises?" "Will the Messiah ever come?" There must have been many who quit praying, and quit having faith. But when the announcement came to shepherds, God was saying, "I have honored your faith, and it is not in vain. I am a God who hears and who keeps His promises. Now the Messiah has come, and I have kept My promise." How about our faith? We have heard that the messiah is coming again for all our lives. Sometimes we become weary. There may be times when we wonder if it is worthwhile going to church, when we wonder if it is worth the sacrificing of living this peculiar live for God.

There have been times, when I feel weary, and I've ask, "Lord, why don't You come today? Why don't you come and take us home, take us out of this misery and pain and hardships." I've heard some of you say almost the same thing. "Oh, come, Lord Jesus," we pray, "come quickly!" We wonder if our prayers are heard. We wonder why is He waiting so long. We wonder if God will keep his promise. But one day He will come. He will come for all of us, shepherds and kings, wise men, peasants and us. He will come for all His people. And He'll dry all our tears and take away all our pain. And there will be no more death, no more good byes. Then we'll say, like the shepherds so long ago "Praise God let us go and worship our king."