

Praising God: The Shepherds

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[0 : 00] Let's turn now to Luke's Gospel, Luke chapter 2. Luke chapter 2, and we're going to read from verse 8 to verse 20.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them.

They were filled with great fear. 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.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you. You'll find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

[1 : 08] 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.

And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child.

And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen as it had been told them.

And may God bless that reading from his holy word. This morning we turn to look at the response of the shepherds to the announcement of the birth of Jesus.

And indeed they're seeing the Lord Jesus, the baby, the baby Christ. We want to look at three aspects of that passage that we read, particularly from verse 15 to 20, as we see how the shepherds responded to that good news of the birth of Jesus.

[2 : 22] It's not just the shepherds, but Mary herself, and those to whom the shepherds spread the good news of the birth of Jesus. That's exactly what we're seeing in their witness to the reality, the truth of Jesus having come.

And we're thinking of the response as we've been looking at more than one occasion, this whole aspect of praising God for the coming of the Lord Jesus.

Because last Lord's Day morning we were, well, we were listening to the angel song, the angel song of praise to God, praising God for the coming of the Lord Jesus from heaven to earth.

And that song of praise was heard by these angels, by these shepherds. These shepherds, that dark night and just over Bethlehem, watching over their flocks.

These shepherds, that dark night and just over the coming of the Lord Jesus, shepherds who'd be the first to worship the newborn child, worship the Lord Jesus, worship the Lord Jesus who came as the good shepherd.

[3 : 56] And these humble shepherds, they were those who cared for their physical flock. But they came to see the one who came to gather in his people, his flock, as the good shepherd, who came to gather in his sheep, who came to gather in his sheepfold, who came to bring in his kingdom, so that you might find his eternal security and safety.

And you know this, 2,000 years on, it's still the poor, it's still the humble, it's still the meek, it's still the lowly who see Jesus. You see him, you see him with eyes of faith.

You see the one who came for you. You see him without any pride in your heart. You don't have any self-righteousness to bring before Jesus.

You don't come with any merit of your own. You who are humble in heart, you see him and you worship him. But you're not seeing him now in a lowly manger.

But you're worshipping the one who's in the very throne room of heaven itself. And it's there where angels are praising him. It's there where saints who've gone from earth to heaven, saints in glory are praising him.

[5 : 13] Heaven's full of the praise of the Saviour who came to give himself for undeserving sinners such as ourselves. And so we're going to continue this focus on praise.

Praise, praising the Lord Jesus, praising even in relation to the announcement of his birth. And that's why we're going to look at the praise of these humble shepherds.

As we see their visit to the Christ child and as we said the responses that they gave and that others gave in relation to the coming of Jesus. Now I know you've heard this passage many times.

I'm sure it's been preached many times. I've preached it more than once, I think, here in my years here. But you still grasp that amazing truth of the coming of the Lord Jesus.

As we can never dismiss this account, this God-given, God-breathed account of the birth of the Lord Jesus. And we will find marvellous truths, new, we might say new things to grasp and to give glory to God for as we look again at this passage.

[6 : 19] So let's look first of all at verses 15 to 16, the response to the good news, responding to the good news. Because as we read even earlier in the passage from, you know, from being absolutely terrified at the suddenness of that angelic appearance to these shepherds, now the shepherds are at peace.

They've been told this wondrous story, this wondrous news of the birth of the Savior. They've been told that the promised Christ has now arrived. They've been told that they're going to find the Savior, they're going to find the Christ lying in a manger.

They're going to be told, and they were told, that the sign will be, yes, lying in a manger and wrapped in strips of cloth. And so they take the word of the angel as truth.

And to a man, they agree that, yes, they're going to go and see what they've been told. As one man, they're going to go to see what they've been told.

And they know that, yes, an angel has been sent from God, so they believe this is the word of the Lord. The angel's been the messenger. And they're going to respond to what the angel has said concerning the signs that prove that, yes, the Christ has come.

[7 : 38] They're going to see for themselves what is this good news of great joy. And they're going to leave their flocks for something far more important.

They're going to see the Lord Jesus. That's their desire. Such is their desire. They want to go and see him, and they go in haste. And as we read there, they find Mary, Joseph, and the baby, just as they've been told.

And, you know, as we look more closely at what the passage tells us of the shepherd's response and of their other responses, I want to look at five things.

Five things to notice, but five things to notice for your worship and your application. The first thing to notice, then, is what we might call wholehearted resolve.

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's happened. Wholehearted resolve. There's no hesitation.

[8 : 37] There's no doubting the angels' words. There's no long discussion about whether they should or shouldn't go, whether what the angels said is, well, was it true or not? No, no questioning what was said to them.

They will go. They've got this wholehearted determination to go and see for themselves all that they've been told of this wonderful news of great joy. And surely it's that kind of devotion, that kind of attitude that each one of us needs to apply when we come to the Lord Jesus, when you seek him.

Don't put off. Don't put off that meeting with the Savior. And notice the shepherds, it wasn't just one shepherd after another, it was the shepherds together.

And I think that's so important that even, yes, you come to the Lord individually, absolutely crucial, but come as well in the company of others.

You see, the shepherds went together to see the Lord. And they were as one in their determination to see Jesus. And whether it's physically, as you're in the building this morning, whether it's remotely, because of these current restrictions that we're still having to face, but we can still say we're coming together.

[9 : 56] We're coming alongside one another. We're coming to worship. We're coming together in fellowship to praise our Lord and Savior. And if humble shepherds, these humble shepherds who only had just heard that good news, if they were resolved to see Jesus, then you and I, who've heard on multiple occasions, who've heard of the good news, the good news of the birth of Jesus, I've got no excuse not to seek him.

It's for you and for me to seek him and to seek him early. Just as the Lord declares in Proverbs 8, 17, I love those who love me and those who seek me diligently find me diligently.

That wholehearted, that desire, that true desire, that strength of desire to meet with our Lord and Savior. Is that you?

Is that you? Are you seeking the Lord with your whole heart? Do you delight to come and worship, whether it's online, as in the necessity of many, or together, such as ourselves here in this morning, is it your delight to come and worship the Lord and our Lord and Savior in the company of one with another?

Well, look at the resolve of the shepherds. I pray that's an inspiration to you, to be the more resolved, to have that wholehearted desire, that wholehearted resolve to come and worship our Lord and Savior.

[11 : 31] But then, note the secondly, faith. They have faith to leave their precious flock. Let us go over to Bethlehem. So there they are on the hillside, just above the town.

They're going to have to abandon their flock. They've been watching over their flock, no doubt, for many, many nights. I mean, they're shepherds. They've got the responsibility over sheep that have been given to them to look after.

And it's very interesting, the very location where these shepherds were, just above Bethlehem, with the strong indication that these were sheep that were intended for sacrifice in the temple in Jerusalem.

Bethlehem's only about seven miles away. So in a sense, these weren't ordinary sheep. They're special. They're going to be used in a special way, a particular way.

So even to abandon these sheep for a short time, running the risk of these sheep being attacked by wild animals, or the sheep wandering off in the dark night, and therefore not being able to be used for sacrifice in the temple.

[12 : 41] But the shepherds had that faith to leave these sheep behind, to entrust them to God's care, because they were, for what would seem anyway, from what the passage indicates, sheep designed for a very particular purpose.

And you know, we can look at that in application for ourselves. It's application of faith. You know, faith when God calls you to himself, when God calls you to serve him, when God calls you to wait in him, when God calls you to do his bidding.

It may well be that when God calls you to serve him, that will mean that you have to entrust others to his care. Think of missionaries.

I'm here to worship service this morning. Missionaries who go out to other lands to spread the good news of great joy. Inevitably, they're going to leave behind a culture and even a family to do God's will.

But you know, in any work, in any work of the Lord, to some extent, that's going to involve leaving behind something or someone that's very precious.

[13 : 54] But by faith, you follow the Lord's command to serve him and to seek him and to do his will as you entrust even your loved ones to his care and keeping. That's what the shepherds did here in their wholehearted resolve in their faith.

Faith and trusting God to care for what was under them. But then, as we hinted just a few moments ago, there's this recognition, thirdly, this recognition of the Lord's word because they recognized that what the angel told them, they said, which the Lord has made known to us.

Yes, it was an angel who gave the words. And the message, of course, at the time would have seemed incredible that the Savior of the world, the promised Christ, had been born, had been given the sign.

The evidence that, yes, truly, the promised Christ had come in human flesh and the three signs that, first of all, he's a baby and then he'd be wrapped in strips of cloth and then you'd find him laid in a manger.

Now, to those of no faith, that would have seemed just a pipe dream. But to those of faith, faith in the word of God, faith in God the Lord, the shepherds believed what the angel told them.

[15 : 15] Even when that word seemed strange, the promise Christ promised in the Old Testament times, coming as a baby, wrapped in cloth, lying in an animal's feeding truck.

But they took the angel's word as the Lord's word. Yes, the poor, humble shepherds, but God had made known to them his wonderful word and given them signs accompanying that word.

You who truly do believe, you who truly do trust in the word of God, yes, it's mediated to you through God's servants, but it's still God's word.

And yes, at times, it may well be that the word that's mediated to you might even seem difficult to comprehend. But by faith, you know that what the Lord God has made known to you is true.

Even think of the, we might say, the essentials of the faith. The virgin birth, you know is true. By faith, you know is true. Christ's substitutionary death, dying on your behalf, you know it's true.

[16 : 24] By faith, you know and trust his word is true. The resurrection of the Lord Jesus, you know is true. You believe what you've been told through his word. The ascension of the Lord Jesus, the promised return of the Lord Jesus, all true.

And of course, to an unbeliever, these are just dismissed, considered of no truth whatsoever. But you who've been gifted faith to believe, you know it's all true.

And so you trust in what God has promised, promised for you, promised for his church, promised for all who are his. All true. You recognize the Lord's word as true.

Because his word is true. God is true. And then, fourthly, we find here in the passage, urgency. The shepherd's urgency in leaving and they went, verse 16, and they went with haste.

They didn't linger on the hill. They didn't walk, you know, carefully and slowly through the dark night. They went hurriedly. That's what the word tells us. They went hurriedly.

[17 : 35] I mean, it was their heart's desire to see what the angel had told them. You know, later in Jesus' life when Jesus was going through Jericho and little Zacchaeus wanted to see Jesus, little Zacchaeus climbed up into a sycamore tree so they'd get a better view and hearing of Jesus.

Jesus, remember, called him with these words. Zacchaeus, hurry, hurry, and come down for I must stay at your house. So he hurried and came down and received him joyfully and that's surely the response of all who truly are seeking the Lord Jesus.

Come to him quickly. Hurry to him. He's calling you. Come to me. Come to me. If you don't know him yet as a saviour, he's calling you, come now.

Come with urgency. You don't know if you'll ever get another opportunity to come to the Lord Jesus. Come to him. Yes, and even you who know him as saviour and Lord and commune with him, there's still that call to hurry to Jesus.

Come to him in haste and know that fellowship with the Lord, that precious fellowship. You know, these times when it's for you to unburden your heart.

[18 : 54] I'll burn your heart. Come to him. He's not going to hold you back in your coming to him in faith. The shepherds, they hurried. They went to see Jesus in haste.

And then, fifthly, they were led. They were led to the manger and found, they were told, they found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger.

Now, how exactly they found that place where Jesus was born laid in the manger, we were not told. I mean, you know, it's a dark night, pitch black.

The angel itself didn't exactly say where Mary, Joseph and Jesus were. But it's quite evident that the Lord led them to that place.

We're not going to conjecture what scripture hides. It's not for us to try and find out. But, you know, think of the example of, compare scripture with scripture.

[19 : 53] Think of Abraham, for example. When God called Abraham to leave his home, we read in Genesis 12, 1, God said to him, I'm going to send you to the land that I will show you. Now, Abraham didn't know exactly where that land was, but Abraham went in faith as God directed him.

And whether it's shepherds, whether it's Abraham, whether it's yourself, there's going to be times when you will venture forth in faith. When God calls you to serve him and he asks you to trust in him, trust him for his leading, trust him for his guidance.

You might not know exactly where, but when God calls you, he leads you. And be assured in his calling and leading you. So he does it in love.

As a father loves his child, so God loves those who fear his name. He will guide you. He will guide your steps. And he'll do it for his praise and for his glory.

So what was the response of these shepherds? Well, we've seen their wholehearted resolve to see the Lord Jesus. We've seen their faith in entrusting God to care for the sheep under their care.

[21 : 06] They go in haste and they go trusting God to lead them and to show them what the angel had promised. And when they see the Lord Jesus, they respond, well, what we're told verse 17 to 19, they spread the good news.

They've been told good news. They've responded with that urgent need to see Jesus. And as they've been told good news, they're going to spread that good news.

They're not going to wait till morning. They left their sheep. Well, then you know they've left their sheep in a pitch black. And they found Jesus just as they'd been promised.

And having seen Jesus, having seen for themselves the Savior, they tell others. When they, verse 17, when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning the child, they made known.

They made known. Literally, having seen, they made known. Having seen Jesus, they made him known. They had to tell others.

[22 : 12] They were so full of joy at seeing the promised Christ. They had to show that what was promised was revealed to them.

And they can't keep it to themselves. God had given them, these humble shepherds, this great privilege of seeing Jesus. The first to, yes, the first to hear the good news that the Savior had been born, the first other than Mary and Joseph to see the baby itself.

And now they're going to be the first to make Jesus known to others. The shepherds, they saw, with their eyes, they physically saw Jesus. They had to tell others.

And you who see Jesus, you who see him by faith, you have to tell others of Jesus. The shepherds knew they had that responsibility to tell others.

You have a responsibility to tell others what you've seen, who you've seen, the joy in your heart in knowing Jesus. But as you know, as we see in the passage, when you tell others of Jesus, there's going to be a reaction.

[23 : 26] It happens. You know, for some, you're going to face hostility. In most cases, it's going to be indifference. Maybe even some kind of benevolent neutrality.

But others are going to receive the good news with joy. But there is always going to be a reaction. Just as there was a reaction to the birth of Jesus. Three different groups react to Jesus.

There's the people who heard the shepherds' news. There's Mary herself and of course, yes, the shepherds, which we'll look more closely at in a moment. Let's look at, first of all, the people who heard the shepherds' news.

All who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. In other words, they were astonished. That was it. Just wonderment, astonishment.

What the shepherds told them just seemed so fantastic. You know, an angel announcing to them the birth of the Christ, the Messiah. The angels singing in praise of the Christ who's come.

[24 : 30] And then these humble shepherds being told what they've been told and seeing what they've seen. But astonishment in and of itself won't lead a person to Christ.

A wonder in and of itself won't lead someone to a saving knowledge of the Lord Jesus. Now I'm sure at this time of year many people do wonder at the Christmas story.

Maybe even astonished at the recounting of the supernatural events of the virgin birth and the angelic announcement. But no further, no further than wonder and astonishment.

No complete devotion to the Savior. If that's any of you this morning, it's a simple wonder. It won't save you. Astonishment won't bring you eternal life, but only faith in the Lord Jesus, trusting in the Savior who came for you and died for you.

Come to him. Listen to him calling you to himself. Just, yes, wonder in and of itself, not in a common faith to know the Lord Jesus as your Savior.

[25 : 45] But what about Mary? Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. See, the shepherds, they showed forth their joy.

They were exuberant with joy. They let others know that. But Mary, Mary had that internal joy, the joy of the heart, the treasuring of what she'd known, what she'd been told, what had happened through her.

She treasured. It was treasure to her. You know, the time that Mary was living in was the time of the Roman conquest. The great treasures of Rome were as nothing compared to the treasure that was in Mary's heart.

And I pray that's an encouragement even to you this day, that you treasure, and know the treasure that's in your heart, you who know the Lord Jesus as Savior.

Treasure that good news. Yes, show forth joy, express that joy, but have that joy within your heart that the Lord Jesus has come for you.

[26 : 52] You know, when you think of treasure in an ordinary sense, the world's saints, you know, treasures are kept safe. If it's treasure, it's obviously immensely valuable.

It's worth so much more, so much more than ordinary everyday effects. But how much more than the treasure that's given to you in your heart? Keep it safe.

Treasure the Word of God. Treasure God's Word. Know that that Word itself is utterly, utterly valuable. Treasure, the true treasure in your heart.

Give thanks to God for it. Care for it. It's that treasure that Charles Spurgeon, the great Baptist, preachers, the 19th century preacher, the mid-19th century preacher.

He knew that treasure in his heart. I may have mentioned this before, but I'll mention it again. On the 24th of December, 1854, Charles Spurgeon preached a sermon, a Christmas Eve sermon.

[27 : 51] And he said these words, Celebrate your Saviour's birth. Do not be ashamed to be glad. You have a right to be happy. Rejoice, but in your feasting, think on the man in Bethlehem.

Then these words, let him have a place in your hearts. What Mary treasured in her heart. Let him have a place in your hearts. Give him the glory.

Think of the virgin who conceived him, but think most of all of the man born, the child given. Treasure, treasure the Lord Jesus.

Know that treasure that's in your heart. But then, finally, what about praise? The praise of the shepherds for the birth of Jesus.

And the shepherds, verse 20, returned, glorifying and praising God for all that they'd heard and seen as it had been told them. You know, after they'd made Jesus known, we're told actually in verse 20 that they returned to the hillside.

[28 : 58] But you know, from that time when they were first on that hillside, having heard the angelic announcement, having gone to Bethlehem and returning to that hillside, they were changed men.

They'd never be the same again. And you know, 2,000 years on, you can still hear the praise of these humble shepherds. You can still hear them shouting for joy and singing praise to God.

And they're glorifying God the Lord. Praising God for his mercy. Praising God for his covenant faithfulness. Blessing God for the blessing of the gift of his son.

Praising God. Is that your response? Whether this time of year or throughout the year? Praising and glorifying God for all that you've heard and seen in the Lord Jesus.

praise to God for Jesus. Is that your first and ultimate response? Well, I pray that the light of the Lord Jesus, that his light will be shining in your heart, even today and always.

[30 : 11] That that light will shine in your heart. We're living in dark and difficult times. But I pray that that light, the light of the Lord Jesus, that light will so shine in your heart that will prompt you that you'll be able to do nothing else but respond with hallelujah to the Lord Jesus.

Hallelujah to God the Father. Hallelujah. Praise God for the gift of his eternal son. Well, may there be hallelujahs in your heart this day, even as you rejoice and give glory to God and praise him for the birth of Jesus.

Amen. Lord, may there truly be that praise and gladness in our hearts. We treasure what you have told us by your word of the Lord Jesus Christ.

And we may be like these shepherds praising, glorifying and praising you, our God, for all that we have heard and seen of the Lord Jesus. Continue with us now, Lord, we pray.

Continue in your blessing, we ask. Again, we pray your pardon for our many sins, in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.