

Giving to God Like the Shepherds: A Life Wrapped with Humility

Luke 2:8-20

Open with me please, to Luke 2:8-20.

As we open in our Bibles to the Gospel by Luke, chapter 2, we are continuing to look at the theme God's Word calls us to especially ponder this season: Have we given to God our greatest and dearest treasures this Christmas?

Giving is the theme of this season, and this Christmas season we are going to look at five lives that were focused upon Christ at His birth. Each is a beautiful portrait of giving to Him what they had. Each of them has been immortalized by God for what they did.

Think of that. Five individuals did something that *only God really saw*, and what only a few others barely witnessed as they watched. But what those five did has become a part of what will last forever and ever.

This morning each of us are also offered the opportunity each day to do things only God really sees, and what few if any others get to witness, but when we give ourselves in acts of obedient offerings to God, we become a part of something that will last forever and ever.

Meet the Shepherds of Luke 2

Life for a shepherd in Century One was difficult at best. Cold nights, long days, distant family, and rare friends were part of the territory.

Sheep stink and shepherds smell.

Sheep wander and shepherds search.

Life was never restful; work was never done.

At the low end of Jewish society stood the shepherd. Away from the synagogue, absent from the Temple, and defiled by dead animals – they were outcasts to the Jerusalem crowd. Unable to even be a witness to special events they seemed almost outside of culture. But then everything changed.

That starry night on the hills of Bethlehem left a group of shepherds forever changed.

What they heard and saw was burned into their hearts and minds. What they found was to forever change their lives. Luke tells us they went from the dazzling light show in the

fields and searched until they found Him – of whom the angels sang. And when they found Him – they were never the same. In one moment everything they had ever gleaned from the Scriptures came alive.

God, angels, Heaven, Messiah, promises and prophecies became real at once– it all made sense.

Sacrifices, lambs, offerings, sin, and forgiveness became intensely personal. The sheep they watched and sold became the pictures of mercy and grace. The Temple they served became theirs. The sacrifices were for them.

Stand, read Luke 2:8-20, pray

The Shepherds remind us how God comes to mankind. God is the seeker. God is the initiator. And the shepherds were there, willing to listen and act. God can save the most distant, defiled and outcast

Have you decided to be among those humbly seeing Jesus this Christmas time?

These shepherds represent the best of all God's Word about the rewards that come to those who seek and find the Lord.

Look Again at God's Birth Announcement

Now that we know what we will be looking at, let's go back to the only first hand, eye witness account, of the greatest event in all of human history. Luke captures the exact moment of the invasion of earth by God in disguise. Look again at Luke 2:8-20 as we read with our minds and see with our hearts these humble shepherds.

Shepherds Lived on the Fringe of Society.

*Luke 2:8 Now there were in the same country shepherds (**their work kept them from the Temple and synagogue; they also were made ceremonially unclean by their work; thus they were outcasts**) living out in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night.*

God's Glory is Overwhelming for Humans.

*Luke 2:9 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them (**probably Gabriel who does all of the other announcements about Christ's Birth—signaling the first time in centuries that God's Glory was seen on earth.**), and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were greatly afraid (**this words***

speaks of an intensely great fear).

God Sent a Countless Army of Angels to Announce Christ's Birth.

*Luke 2:10-13 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger." 13 And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host (**this word is used in Biblical times for a military encampment; now turn back to Revelation 5:11, here this same word constitute a number that humans can't comprehend**) praising God and saying:*

Christ's Birth was Glorious.

Luke 2:14 "Glory to God in the highest, And on earth peace, goodwill toward men!" (In Jewish homes the neighbors usually gathered to sing at the birth of a son—since no one knew of Christ's Birth, God sent His own group of innumerable friends to greet Jesus, the Son of God, at His Birth!)

The Shepherds Searched Bethlehem until they Found the Christ.

*Luke 2:15-16 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 that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us." 16 And they came with haste and found (**this word speaks of searching; they found Him only after a careful search was made**) Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger.*

When People Hear what God Does it is Astoundingly Awesome.

*Luke 2:17-20 Now when they had seen Him, they made widely known the saying which was told them concerning this Child. 18 And all those who heard it marveled (**thaumadzo in Greek is used 12 times in Luke and is a chosen theme of this Gospel. Luke wants to challenge us with the fact that God is awesome and wonderfully amazing.**) at those things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 Then the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they had heard and seen, as it was told them.*

Some Christmas Story Truths

Humble shepherds who found Baby Jesus in a stable remind us that the Inn of Bethlehem was full. That there was no room in the inn was symbolic of what was to happen to Jesus. The only place where there was room for Him was on a cross. He sought an entry to the over-crowded hearts of men; He could not find it; and still His search-and His rejection-go on. Yet Luke gets us to look from the inn with no room, to the shepherds with room in their lives for Christ's coming. They made room.

First century shepherds lived in a world that made it hard, to make a living. They struggled and scraped along at minimum wages. In fact someone describes the 1st Century this way—

“Taxes were high; wages were low, hypocrisy was rampant; honesty was rare. Freedom was gone; Roman occupation was hard. The rich were getting richer; the poor were always struggling. Morality was ebbing; rebellion was brewing; cruelty was reigning.”¹

The Shepherds of the Christmas story gives us such a profound lesson. They show us how God delights in using for His glory the humble. God calls some of the most distant, defiled and outcast of all--and through them produces great glory for Himself.

God Opens the Door to the Humble

God resists the proud but gives grace to the humble. The Shepherds remind us how God comes to mankind. God is the seeker. God is the initiator. And he responds to those who choose to humble themselves before Him. Humbly the shepherds responded, willing to listen and obey. God can use the most distant, defiled and outcast.

The greatest plague on earth is pride. More people miss the Christ of Christmas (and heaven) for pride--than any other sin. Wanting our own way is how God described our pitiful condition as lost ones.

Isaiah 53: 6 All we like sheep have gone astray; We have turned, every one, to his own way; And the LORD has laid on Him the iniquity of us all. (NKJV)

Pride was the first sin as Lucifer challenged God. Pride is the ultimate sin.

All conflicts and troubles have flowed downward from pride. The source of every gossip, every hurt feeling, every church division, every departed sheep is pride. At the heart of every fight is pride.

¹ Author unknown.

Twenty years ago Moody monthly carried an article titled, "Pride is Epidemic". In this article Pastor James Bjoanstad writes the following:

At one time, most Christians believed that to have a close relationship with God, a person should magnify God, deny himself and the pleasures of this world, repent and confess his sins, and live a holy and separated life. Their heroes were missionaries who gave up everything to serve God and martyrs who suffered because of their faith.

Today, it's becoming a different story. Many Christians believe that to have a close relationship with God, a person should realize the importance of himself as God intended, pursue his dreams and aspirations, and become affluent and successful. Their heroes are those celebrities and self-made individuals who happened to be Christians. Behind this new gospel stands a variety of distinguished teachers, preachers, and evangelists proclaiming a variety of ways to attain prosperity and success. But examining their theological models and points of emphasis reveals one common element--they are simply not biblical².

The Shepherds were Humble because they:

Came to God like they were. Luke 2:8 Now there were in the same country shepherds **living out in the fields**, keeping watch over their flock by night. NKJV

Instead of backing away with the excuse of lack of education, lack of clothing, lack of standing – they welcomed God’s message in wonder, in fear, in uncertainty, and in hope. There was no time to become someone else, God called them as they were!

The Shepherds were Humble because they:

Listened to God when He spoke. Luke 2:9-14 And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, **and they were greatly afraid.** 10 Then the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy which will be to all people. 11 For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12 And this will be the sign to you: You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, 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, goodwill toward men!" What a wonderful but fearful sight they saw. Yet they did not ignore what they witnessed; they did not run away from what they saw; they did not refuse to hear what the angels said.

The Shepherds were Humble because they:

² Moody Monthly, 11/86, p. 19-20.

Responded to God at once. Luke 2:15 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 that has come to pass, which the Lord has made known to us.” NKJV

What a picture of faith – they received the message and acted upon it. They didn’t doubt, they didn’t disagree, they didn’t question, they didn’t hesitate. They just heard and responded -- and they were first to see Jesus. They had little knowledge and great faith. Jesus would be moved by His parents soon, and they would have missed Him. Their simple faith is richly rewarded. The journey that began in faith will end in joy!

The Shepherds were Humble because they:

Went against the tide/crowd. Luke 2:16a And **they came with haste** and found Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. NKJV

In their day and time they were not welcome. Stay where you came from, go away, we don’t like you -- they were outcasts; they were unwelcome in public. They smelled. Yet they came, they found, they believed, and they went away telling everyone they could!

The Shepherds were Humble because they:

Sought Baby Jesus until they found Him. Luke 2:16b And they came with haste **and found** Mary and Joseph, and the Babe lying in a manger. NKJV

Luke uses terms to help us realize that they had to search for Him until they could find Him – and they did. They took what God had given them, no more and no less and that was all they needed to find Jesus – and they found Him. They searched for Him without giving up.

The Shepherds were Humble because they:

Told everyone they could the Good News. Luke 2:17 Now when they had seen Him, **they made widely known** the saying which was told them concerning this Child. NKJV

Just like the rest of the New Testament would record – these shepherds went back to their old jobs – AS NEW MEN. If anyone is in Christ Jesus they are a new creation, old things are passing away, and all things are becoming new.

So how can we see Christ this Christmas, like the shepherds? By humbling ourselves like they did!

Consider Four Lessons from the Shepherds

1. **God changed them.** That scene they witnessed in the stable would forever change their lives. For, they had found Him and they were never the same. What had happened was that in a moment everything they had ever heard about the Scriptures came alive. God, angels, Heaven, Messiah, promises and prophecies in that moment became real. Finally, it all made sense.

I wonder this Christmas—has God ever changed you?

2. **God became near to them.** Those endless sacrifices, countless lambs, myriads of offerings, countless sins, and promises of forgiveness--became intensely personal. The ordinary sheep they watched and sold became the extraordinary pictures of God's mercy and grace. The Temple they supplied now became the place where sacrifices for their sins were offered. At last all those mysteries rites and ceremonies made sense, for they had found the Promised Lamb of God.

I wonder this Christmas—has God ever become personal, real, and near to you?

3. **God started them down a new path.** Up until that night of nights, their lives as shepherds had been monotonous and predictable. They were used to sheep which vary little in their habits, they walk so often down the same path it is soon a rutted canyon. Just like the rest of the New Testament would record – these shepherds went back to their old jobs – AS NEW MEN. If anyone is in Christ Jesus they are a new creation, old things are passing away, and all things are becoming new.

I wonder this Christmas—has God started you down a new path, His pathway for your life?

4. **God captivated them.** That announcement under the stars, in the hillsides of Bethlehem, left one band of shepherds forever changed. That awesome, fearful moment, they would never forget. The glorious words of that first angel would always echo in their hearts. That blazing light was captured forever in their minds--the light of Heaven and the praises of those angelic multitudes. Luke records that they rushed from the glowing skies over the fields and searched until they found Him.

Does God captivate your heart and mind? How soon do you forget what you read in your devotions? What can't you wait to do next? Think for a moment. If you are left along for more than a few moments, what captures your mind? Truths from the

infinite God of the Universe or some game on your phone?

Be honest. This past week, when you had 5, 10, 20 minutes to do anything you wanted to do, did you go towards God, God's Word, God's ministry, God's Presence, or away from it? Were you this past week often captivated by some "clean" secular music, some electronic game, some visual media online, movie, etc.?

All of those are neutral (note the word clean). If they were sensual, demonic, murderous, and evil then they were sinful. But if they were "clean" then they are fine to spend time on, if God is and stays more important.

But, if you can't remember the last time you just couldn't pull yourself away from reading God's Word or praying: and you can remember your games on your phone, or music, or social media, then you have a problem. If you are captivated by electronic audio and video media and not by memorizing God's Word, or sharing the Gospel then you need a reset.

I wonder this Christmas—has God ever captivated you?

Lets do a heart exam for just a moment.

Bow your heads with me and ask yourself just one question: by my actions this week in time usage, was God more important than my music, games, and friends or was God less important than those things. Be honest. Pick one or the other. Now, still heads bowed, let's do a survey.

How many of you say you struggle with God being more important in your schedule than music, games, movies, being online?

Why not right where you sit cry out to God and ask Him to captivate you this week, offer Him your love and ask Him to show Himself in a new powerful way this week, then prayerfully open your heart to His Word and watch what He does.