

Are You Getting the Message?

Luke 2:8-20

December 11, 2011

There was a man by the name of James who grew up in Ireland many years ago and at the age of six was placed in the care of others so that his father and mother could travel to the distant country of Barbados to serve as missionaries. James would never see his parents again because they died on the mission field. After their death, James was placed in a school in England. Academics was not his strength at that time so he was removed from the academy and placed as an apprentice with a local baker. James soon ran away from that placement and bounced around until he landed a job working for a newspaper. He had a gift for writing and became a valued employee. The paper he worked for published very strong political views and the owner of the paper was persecuted so much that he left the country. James took advantage of the situation and bought the newspaper, renamed it and continued to publish political opinions. Twice his political views landed him in jail but only to emerge very popular with the people. James also shared the strong Christian faith of his parents that led them to serve as missionaries. He was a constant advocate for the Christian faith and the mission of the church. Some years later in his career he was reading the Gospel of Luke the second chapter and was moved by what he read. He wrote a poem near Christmas time based on the story of the angel appearing to the shepherds. The poem was popularly received and published multiple times in his newspaper. It was such a success that a musician took James' poem and set it to music and it became known as the song we sing this morning, "Angels from the Realm of Glory." The man's full name of whom I speak is James Montgomery. He is a reminder how God's presence was able to cut through all the darkness of grief over the loss of parents at such a young age, the darkness of rejection and failure as he tried to grow up and take his place in life. He knew the truth that God provided messengers of

love and hope that changed his life. James got the message of God's loving power in spite of all the adversity he faced and through his writings becoming song, he became a messenger to millions. (Then Sings My Soul, Robert J. Morgan, p.91)

Today we read from the gospel of Luke how God sent a message to shepherds and made them also his messengers. Please stand for the reading of scripture.

Luke 2:8-20

God has a message for everyone, but a personal message for each of us. v.8

Verse 8 tells us "In the region there were shepherds living in the fields keeping watch over their flock by night."

We often talk about the shepherds as being humble men who had a job that was looked down upon by their society. Since the angel appeared to them, one message we often focus upon is God's concern for the people who are forgotten by the rest of us. That is certainly a relevant point that gets talked about at Christmas time as it should. But what if there is another implication to the fact that the angel of the Lord with the most important **message** for the world spoke to shepherds who are at the bottom of society's list? Maybe the point about the shepherds is no matter who we are God has a message for us. God connects with us personally and has a personal message for each of us. When Jesus once said in Matthew chapter 6 that not a sparrow falls without the Father knowing and sees our needs, he was also indicating God knows the situation of each person. When Jesus said in the Gospel of John chapter 10 that he is the good shepherd who calls his sheep by name, he was indicating the personal nature of relationship we can have with God. The question is are we getting the message? The season of Christmas with a story of an angel appearing to shepherds could be that special time to catch the message God

wants us to have. Because to receive the word of truth and hope from God is what changes lives like it did for James Montgomery, orphaned, rejected, persecuted and yet came through it all as follower of Christ.

God brings the divine into the daily v.8

Luke says as the shepherds were “watching over their sheep by night the glory of the Lord shone around them.” vs. 8-9

The shepherds were doing their typical job when God sent a messenger in the form of an angel with a very special message. The shepherds were just working the night shift. They were not going through any crisis, nor were they recovering from any great persecution, they were just doing their job. God sent a message into their every day lifestyle.

The scripture also says the glory of the Lord shone around them. The word glory means to reveal God’s presence. That means God’s message was like a light shining in the darkness of their typical habits. It means that they definitely knew something was going on different from their routine. It means they realized they were not alone in the darkness of the fields. God revealed himself in a special way so the shepherds could receive the message.

I was reading an article in Newsweek Magazine this past week about the need to foster creativity in our teaching processes in schools especially in the early years. Some of the points from the article indicated that high IQ or intelligence doesn’t mean we’ll necessarily be a creative person or come up with creative answers. The research states that **creativity occurs when there is a shifting back in forth from what we do and know to thinking about answers and ideas that are outside of the norm, the expected, our routines.** (Newsweek, July 19, 2010, pp.44-47)

I thought that description of creative thinking is so biblical like this story in Luke. God came into the typical routine of the shepherds but gave them an experience beyond what they expected.

Christmas reminds us we get his message when are willing to move back and forth between our everyday lives but also hear a wisdom from above that is not limited by our assumptions. We move back and forth from whatever situation we face and seek to handle it like Jesus.

God rescues and leads us v.11

Every messenger has a message and the angel told the shepherds, **“Do not be afraid for see I am bringing you good news of great joy for all the people: to you is born this day in the city of David a savior, who is the Messiah, the Lord.”**

The angels assured the shepherds that their news was good and it was filled with joy **because a savior/ rescuer has been born and he is the long awaited messiah or deliver. The person born is two in one.** He is a savior which means he rescues and he is messiah which means he leads the way for those who will follow. It was great news for the shepherds, unless you don't think you really need rescuing or you really don't care about being led anywhere than where ever you want to go.

It could be that Christmas may not be a season of joy because we really don't think we need rescuing now or we need God's leading us now. Maybe we don't get it or really want the message that Jesus came to rescue and lead us now?

I read where Pastor Francis Chan used an analogy to describe how we Christians can be so caught up in our pride about our knowledge. We can push our beliefs and ideas with out loving and we wind up doing more harm than good. He said it is like when a basketball player on the team takes five shots at a goal and makes all five shots. However his teammates come to him and tell him man you've made all your shots at the opposing team's goal. And the player says, “Yeah but I went 5 for 5.” He doesn't really want

to be saved from his pride and making the same mistake over and over and he doesn't want to be lead.

Are we living in such a way that demonstrates we are getting the message that Jesus being a savior and messiah is about one who rescues us but also leads. If we don't let him do both, we live our lives making baskets at the wrong goals in life that really don't count.

Two provisions to God's messages vs. 12-14

Two things God's message will always give us and we should look for so we can follow his leading. v.12-14 **“This will be a sign for you: you will find a child wrapped in bands of cloth and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace among those whom he favors.”**

First, God's message will give us enough truth, enough evidence to get started. The angel said “you'll find a child/baby in a manger. God's message to the shepherds gave the shepherds enough to get started. A baby lying in a manger was not common place and enough to start their search.

- Maybe the enough God gives is some clues for us but it is not the complete picture.
- Maybe it's a goal to reach but the strategy to reach the goal is still to come.
- Maybe it's the concern of a certain person or situation but yet your role and purpose has yet to become clear.

Secondly, God will give the inner emotional urgency to get moving when the message comes. Scripture tells us, a choir of angels burst forward. What's the point of a choir of angels singing? To me it was God's way of adding confirmation and

inspiration about the message from the first angel. God is going to lead us using both our heads and our hearts.

Signs were getting his messages vs. 15-17

Not only are there two ingredients in the message that God sends us but there are also two indicators we are getting the message. Luke writes that (vs.15-17) **“When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, Let’s go now to Bethlehem and see this thing that has taken place, which the Lord has made known to us. So they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the child lying in a manger. When they saw this, they made known what had been told them about this child.”**

God’s messages are for action not procrastination. The shepherd’s response was “lets go now and see about what the angels told us.” Verse 16 says they went with haste. **Urgency demonstrates we’re getting God’s messages.** Apathy, procrastination, sluggishness is the message killer for God’s movement in us. When God gives us a message it is time to move. If God gives us a message, he knows in ways we don’t that the window of opportunity is there in ways that we cannot. He knows the events that will unfold that we cannot. **So he gives us enough to get going and then we must act.** God give us freedom of choice and we can chose to move or not.

The second indicator that we are getting the messages God sends is when we become messengers for him. The Bible says when shepherds saw the child, “they made known what had been told to them.” God’s message just wasn’t for the benefit of the shepherds; it was also for the benefit of others. This is why as Christians we should never consider our relationship with God is private. It is personal; but it is never private. Because as we have experiences of God breaking into our lives it is always going to be

some how beneficial for others. Not every experience can be used as a testimony in front of the church or turned to an inspirational book or song, but at some point it is for being “made known to others.”

This past week I took communion to Lucille Parker. As we talked she brought up the fact about her loosing three sons. She said sometimes people would say to me “God must have wanted your boys.” Lucille said I tell them “God didn’t take my boys but he accepted them.” I think Lucille has it right. How can we trust God if he causes the innocent to suffer. I would imagine, like many of you, Lucille has had her share of days and nights with the darkness of grief all around her. But her answer tells me that God over the years did for her what he did for the shepherds. His glory has been revealed in the darkness of her grief with a message of hope and strength to console her. And like those shepherds, she became a messenger to make known what God has done for her.

Conclusion

God’s message is one of love to meet us like we are. He doesn’t want us to stay that way. When God sends a message it is never going to be one of just checking in and stay the way your are. God’s message is always going to have some step to alter our hearts and minds to conform them more in the ways of Jesus. If we believe don’t we need messages from God challenging us to some type of growth and purpose - go immediately to the morgue; otherwise be watchful to treasure especially at Christmas his words that break into our everyday lives.