

Special Messages of 2017

You Won't Believe What Happened at Work Last Night!

Edited Transcript

Brett Clemmer

Well, here's our topic for today for this Christmas season. We're going to talk about the shepherds on the mountainside. The title of the talk is You Won't Believe What Happened at Work Last Night. Let's go. Here's our outline. We're going to talk about who exactly were the shepherds and what does it mean to us the fact that the shepherds are part of this story. Then, we're going to talk about what the angel said. The angel said Jesus is here, so we're going to talk about that proclamation. Then, we're going to talk about what is our reaction to that. What does that cause us to do? What did it cause the shepherds to do? Then, what should that cause us to do?

Let's talk about the shepherds. If you have a Bible, turn to Luke chapter two, and verse eight to 20 has this great story that we've memorialized in songs. What are the shepherd songs? Can you think of the shepherd songs? While Shepherds Watched Their Flocks by Night. What's another shepherd song? Hark the Herald Angels Sing, that's about the angels coming. Can you think of another one? The First Noel. The first noel, what? What's the lyric? The angels did say to certain poor shepherds on fields where they lay. Then, probably the most famous one that none of you are thinking of yet, but I'm going to put the lyrics up at the end, is Go Tell It on the Mountain. Go Tell It on the Mountain is really about what the shepherds did after they heard the angels. Let me read through this passage. Then, we'll talk about who the shepherds were.

Verse eight, "In the same region," this is the same region where the verses before Mary gives birth to Jesus in Bethlehem. "In the same region," the region of Bethlehem, "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, and 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 Savior, who is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths 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, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased!'

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 they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." Who were these shepherds? Well, one of the things that we know is that they worked the third shift. You've got these guys. They're out in the field. It does not say on a mountaintop,

even though it was sort of a hilly region. They might have been on a hillside. They're just out in the field. It was dark. They were watching their sheep at night, and these angels appear to them.

Now, you've probably heard this before, but shepherd wasn't really sort of a high ranking job, and especially a third shift shepherd. You weren't the guy that got to walk around with the birds singing and the sun shining on you and helping the lambs and the sheep find water. You were basically trying to keep them all in one place to sleep for the night and trying to stay awake for yourself because you wanted to keep the sheep safe from predators. This was not a probably a particularly well-paying job. You were outdoors all the time. It might have been cold. We don't really know exactly, but it might have been cold during the time of year they were at. You've got these guys working the night shift out in the fields. They were blue collar guys. They were tough guys, but they were noble guys because who are you going to have watch your sheep? Especially the night shift, that's when the animals that would prey on the sheep would most likely hunt. If you're going to put a guy out in the field watching your sheep, it better be a trustworthy guy. It better be a group of guys that are willing to face down animals, that are willing to maybe use a sling or throw rocks or something, not just run away when a predator comes and tries to steal your sheep, tries to eat your sheep.

Though they were blue collar guys, they were noble guys. They were, at some level, trustworthy guys or you wouldn't hire them to put them out in the field. Then, the angels show up. It says they were filled with great fear. I was driving in this morning. You guys probably all had this experience too. I came out of my house, I got in my car, and I was driving in, and it was foggy outside. It was dark, and it was foggy. I was sitting up in my family room reading a little bit this morning before I came. I heard a sound outside. I'm like, "What was that sound?" I'm looking out the window. Something fell over on the front porch. It kind of made me a little uncomfortable. The dark does that to you, doesn't it? You're not really sure what's out there on a foggy morning and you hear a noise, it puts you on high alert. Well, imagine these shepherds. I mean, I was driving in, and I passed a car lot, and they had all the bright lights up high on the car lot. Because of the fog, everything was shining. I thought, "Oh, that's interesting how the light sort of refracts through the fog and makes everything shine," but I've seen that a thousand times.

There's no electric light for these guys. They're sitting in the fields watching the sheep, listening carefully for those sounds that they might hear in the dark that tells them they have to go and take care of something. All of a sudden, all heaven breaks loose. There's a guy standing there. You don't know where he came from. He starts telling you stuff. Then, all of a sudden, a whole multitude, this word is used to talk about an army, an army of angels appears behind him. It's incredibly bright. These guys must have been terrified. They weren't going to show it because they're guys, but they must have been terrified. These shepherds, they're out in the field. They know they're not at the top of the food chain. They know their station in life is not a high station, but they've got these sheep to take care of. They've got this job to do. They're going to do their job. They're noble like most men are. They're noble guys. They're going to do their job.

The fact that the angels came to the shepherds, think about this. Think of the Christmas story that we have. We have two groups of people that came to see Jesus in his manger. Who were they? Or came to see Jesus, actually, the wise men came later, but who were they? I just said it. The shepherds and the wise men, both ends of the spectrum. You've got the shepherds who are sort of the blue collar guys working third shift, and then you've got the wise men who probably came a little bit later, who were the top of the food chain. Rulers of other kingdoms came. God, in his sovereignty, in his omniscience, sets up the story for us. This is what he's saying when he sends shepherds and wise men. He says that this story is for everyone.

Jesus is for everyone, for the lowly shepherd that's working third shift, and for the ruler from another country who, by the way, wouldn't have even been Jewish. Do you notice who did not go visit Jesus in his manger? I don't see any Pharisees in the story. I don't see any religious leaders in the story. If Jesus were to come now, it wouldn't be the famous preachers. If the story stayed true today, it wouldn't be the famous preachers that went to see him. It'd be the guy working down at 2:00 in the morning at the bakery trying to get bread ready for the day, and it would be, I don't know, some dignitary from another country, another continent. That would be the equivalent today. This story, by God doing this, he says that this is for everyone, but it's even more.

Look at verse 10. Let's talk about the concept here. In fact, let me show you the Big Idea. **Our station in life doesn't determine our status in God's kingdom.** This story is for everyone. Look what the angel says. Words are important. "And the angel said to them," verse 10, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people." Look at this next sentence, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Unto who? Unto Mary, right? I don't think the shepherds had a baby, but the angel's very specific in what he says. He says, "Unto you this day is born a Savior." The Savior is for you, you guys working third shift out in the fields hoping that a big animal doesn't come and steal a sheep and you got to fight him. It's for you.

Now, you know, organized religion at times has had a bad rap by being organized for the people that are in charge of it rather than for the people that are the adherence to that religion. Jesus confronted that in his ministry, that the structure of Judaism at the time had come and set up this sort of super religious, super honored level of people, and that everybody else was kind of the riffraff. Jesus said, "No, that's not how this works." Martin Luther came along 1500 years later and said, "We've done it again. We've created this divide between a small group of people who are allowed to talk to God and then everybody else that has to wait and hear what those people." Luther said, "No, no, no. We're all priests. It's the priesthood of all believers." The angels are saying the same thing. They're saying, "To you today is born ..."

Look at who is born. This is sort of the description of Jesus that we get in verse 11, "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." Now, you hear that sentence, you've probably heard it in church a thousand times. It's just a sentence that sort of flows by, but every word in this sentence practically has some weight to it. What this verse is is this verse is asserting the kingdom, the kingdom of Jesus almost in every word. How is it doing that? Well, look at what it says, "For unto is born this day," in where? In the city of David. Who is David? David was the greatest king of Israel. David was one of the people that Israel sort of took their identity from, was from King David.

Why would he say that? Well, because the shepherds would have probably learned growing up about the prophecies, and they would have known that the Messiah was going to come from the city of David, was going to be born in the city of David. It's prophesied in the Old Testament. In the city of David, and then we see this phrase, "For to you born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord." These three words are very specific words. The word Savior, we think of a Savior, we think of that is sort of a cool person. Jesus is our Savior. He saves us from hell. He saves us from sin. Those things are true, but this word actually has a royal meaning. Rulers in the day were called saviors. They were there to save their people. That was a word that was used to describe a ruler.

Who is Israel's ultimate Savior? God. When the angels say a Savior is born, they're really equating Jesus with God. It's a word that really was thick with meaning in the day. They say a Savior who is what? Who is Christ. Christ is the Greek word. The Hebrew word is the word what? Do you know? Messiah. Now, a

messiah, and the word messiah means anointed one. Can you think of someone in the Old Testament who was anointed? David. David was anointed by the prophet Samuel. A king was anointed. When he said Christ, their minds would go to, "Oh, Christ, the Messiah, the anointed one. David was an anointed one. This kid that's being born, this baby that's being born is a king. He's a Savior. He's a ruler. He's an anointed one. He's a king." Then, the icing on the cake, who is what? Who is Lord. Do you know who they called lord in this day, in this timeframe? There was a phrase that was out there. The phrase was this, "Caesar is lord."

In fact, many of the Christians in the years after Jesus ascended into heaven, many Christians in the Roman Empire were crucified, were tarred, and then set on fire simply because they would not say, "Caesar is lord," because Jesus is Lord. The angels are coming to this group of third shift night watchmen, and they're saying, "We're telling you first. There's a new king in town, and he's going to save you." You can imagine to a group of people living under the oppression of Roman rule at the time where the taxes were exorbitant, and they were an occupied country with soldiers that were not of their nationality telling them what to do, making them carry stuff around and providing law and order, that they would feel like they needed to be saved. They would want a new king. They would want God to choose someone to come and be their anointed one. That's what the angels are saying to the shepherds. It is startling news in a startling way. God, in his wisdom, chose to come first to proclaim the birth of Christ to who? To a bunch of guys out in the field, a bunch of night watchmen, because our station in life doesn't determine our status in the kingdom.

What did the shepherds do? Going on in the story, it says as soon as the angels left, they said, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us." They went with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in a manger. Now, I have a little theory here. There's absolutely nothing to back this up. Here's my theory. They went after work. Two reasons, I think. One is they couldn't just leave because the sheep were there. They had to wait for the sheep. Two, I'm pretty sure that Mary and Joseph would not want to have been woken up in the middle of the night when they had a baby. I'm guessing that the angels leave. Maybe it was at the end of their shift, but the angels leave, they can't wait for the new shift to come on so that they can book it to Bethlehem. They go into Bethlehem, and they find Mary and Joseph in the manger.

Now, remember, I kind of skipped over this, but the angels told them exactly what to look for. Look for a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a feeding trough, exactly how you would expect the Savior, who is Christ the Lord, to show up, would be in the feeding trough in a stable or in a guest house, in a guest room, where the animals were kept. That's where you're going to find the next king, but that's exactly where the angels told them to go, so that's where they went. They found Mary and Joseph. You might say, "How did they find them?" You know, probably not a lot of babies being born every day, so probably would only have to ask one or two people, "Hey, was there a baby born yesterday?" "Yeah, they're staying over in our friend's stable over here, over in our friend's guest house over here where they keep the animals." They would find them.

Can you imagine Mary and Joseph when the shepherds showed up? They're like, "You're kidding me, right? You guys just came in from work, and you want to look at our baby? You're probably going to want to hold him too." They were amazed. They had an amazing story to tell. They told Mary and Joseph this story. Can you imagine the encouragement, the reassurance it would have been for Mary and Joseph to have these guys show up and say, "You are not going to believe what happened at work last night. We're just sitting in the field, minding our own business. We hear this sound. We think it's a bobcat coming to steal one of our sheep, and this dude shows up. Then, these bright lights and these

people singing at us, and they told us all about your baby. They said that he is the Savior of the world. They said that he is the Christ. They said that he is our Lord, and so we came to worship him"? Imagine if somebody showed up. How many of you are dads? First night in the hospital, imagine a bunch of dirty guys showing up. What are you thinking? "You guys have been drinking," that's what you're thinking, but they came in and they told this amazing story.

Think about the voyage that Mary and Joseph had taken. Think about the emotional voyage that the shepherds had taken. Everybody went from fear to joy to action. The shepherds went from fear, and the angel says, "Fear not." I'm not really sure that would have solved the problem for me personally. I still would have been afraid. They said, "Fear not." They gave them this great news. They were filled with joy because this would have been promised for a long, long time. Hundreds of years they have been waiting for this, and then into action because they went and they found the Christ Child, but they didn't stop there. Verse 20, "And the shepherds returned," went back to work or went back to their lives, "glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them." Earlier, it says, "All that heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them." The shepherds were not like, "Hey, you know, guys. Let's just keep this on the down low. Nobody's going to believe us anyway." No, no, no. They told everyone. People are like, "You're kidding us, right?" They're like, "No, no, no. I remember exactly what that angel said. He said Savior, Christ, and Lord." The people went, "Whoa. That's exactly what it said in the Old Testament." The shepherds are like, "I know, right?"

It changed everything. It came from a group of third shift night watchmen. Our station in life doesn't determine our status in God's kingdom. God wants us to take action. He wants us to move towards the unbelievable. This was unbelievable that this happened. I mean, I don't know about you guys, but I would have been like, "I can't tell anybody about this. They're going to think I'm drunk or I'm crazy," but they couldn't keep it inside because they were the ones that the angels came and talked to. They couldn't keep it to themselves. They had to go tell everybody. When people heard it, they were full of wonder. You know, a lot of times I think that we prejudge people, that we think that if we tell them about Jesus, their eyes are going to start rolling as soon as we get the Je out in Jesus, that they're not going to want to hear it.

The fact of the matter is is that people are looking for a Savior. Everybody knows that the world we live in is messed up, is broken, that it doesn't work. They know when they look inside themselves that they do things that they wish they didn't do, they think thoughts that they wish they didn't think, that they're filled with heartache and despair and hopelessness. We can not be afraid to tell people about this good news that we have, that there's a new king, that he's here to save us, and that God anointed him. He's been chosen by God to come and do this for us and invite people along to learn about who he is and what he can do for them. There's nobody in this room that can't share that message. There's nobody in this room that can't take the news about a Savior to a lost and dying world, to hopeless and frustrated and depressed people that we're all surrounded with. That's my challenge to you this morning. The Christmas story isn't just about us hearing the news. It's really about us telling other people about the news that Jesus has come. Let me pray, and then we'll break into tables.

Father, it is unbelievable that you would do what you did in sending your Son to walk on the earth, and it is, in keeping with your character, that you would choose shepherds to be some of the first people that heard the news. In their exuberance, Lord, they would rush into town to find this baby that had just been born and tell the parents what you had seen and heard and tell everybody that you came across what you had seen and heard. Lord, you picked those guys. Father, we want to be those guys too. We want to be filled with joy and not with fear. We want to be men of action who are willing to share what

we've experienced ourselves in our relationship with you. Lord, this Christmas season, would you deepen our experience of you, would you deepen our understanding of a Savior who is Christ and Lord, and would you give us the words to share that with everyone that we come across? In Jesus' name we pray. Amen.