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The Humble Shepherds



Part 26 (051211AM)

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When God gets to tell the story of salvation, the Coming of the King, the birth of the Lamb of God—what details does He carefully include for us? Here's one that has shaped my whole outlook on life, on worship, on Bible study, and most of all—on prayer. God really loves and responds to humility.

Who came first to the birthplace of the King? The humblest, lowliest, and most unworthy in man's eyes of all the inhabitants living around Bethlehem—the shepherds.

Join me this morning in a stable with men of the least likely profession to see a King—and yet the most honored of all Christ's greeters and seekers. Open to [Luke 2:1-20](#)

Humble shepherds who found Baby Jesus in a stable remind us that the Inn of Bethlehem was full. That there was no[1] 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."[2]

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.

Before we read the story, here is what I want you to see from Luke's inspired words. Let me show you what we are going to see in their lives, then go through the Scriptures and see it—then after we've seen the qualities of these humble seekers, go back and reflect on what we've seen. So before we dig into the Word, here are the characteristics of these incredible humble shepherds of Christmas:

- **The Humble are Undistracted-- the Shepherds listen to God:** remember that God reveals Himself to those who seek Him with ALL their hearts.
- **The Humble are Undelayed-- the Shepherds come at once to God:** remember that because they heard and responded—they were first to see Jesus.
- **The Humble are Unashamed-- the Shepherds come like they are to God:** remember how they come in wonder, in fear, in uncertainty, in hope.
- **The Humble are Undaunted-- the Shepherds come no matter what stands in the way of God:** remember that they had enough excuses that they could have never made it. What would we wear? Who would watch the sheep? What if we can't find Him? What if they won't let us in?
- **The Humble are Unswerved-- the Shepherds go against the tide of culture and the crowd, to get to God:** remember that they were un-welcomed in public. They smelled.

Now that we know what we will find, let's go to the only first hand, eye witness account of the greatest event in all of human history up to that moment--the invasion of earth by God in disguise. Open with me to [Luke 2:1-20](#) as we read with our minds and see with our hearts these humble shepherds.

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- **Luke 2: 1-20** And it came to pass in those days that a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. 2 This census first took place while Quirinius was governing Syria. 3 So all went to be registered, everyone to his own city. 4 Joseph also went up from Galilee, out of the city of Nazareth, into Judea, to the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because he was of the house and lineage of David, 5 to be registered with Mary, his betrothed wife, who was with child. 6 So it was, that while they were there, the days were completed for her to be delivered. 7 And she brought forth her firstborn Son, and wrapped Him in swaddling cloths, and laid Him in a manger, because there was no room for them in the inn. 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. 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**). 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 one 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 for a military encampment; Revelation 5:11 uses it to constitute a number that humans can't comprehend**) praising God and saying: 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!**) 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." 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. 17 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. 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.

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.

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. *I wonder this Christmas—has God ever captivated you?*

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?*

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?*

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.

Sheep are helpless - they can't even clean themselves. Sheep are dumb - they can't even find food unless they are led to it. Sheep are dirty - they walk around and collect any and all filth they come into contact with. Sheep are helpless, dumb, and dirty - and can only be cared for by the patient. *I wonder this Christmas—has God started you down a new path, His pathway for your life?*

So a group of patient men, who sat on the same hills their grandfathers had sat upon were watching the stars and talking that night - and then God came down.

GOD RESPONDS TO HUMBLE SEEKERS

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.

- **Humbly the Shepherds Came to God like they were.** 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!

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

- **Humbly the Shepherds Listened to God when He speaks.** 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.

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!” NKJV

- **Humbly the Shepherds Responded to God at once.** 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!

Luke 2:15a 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

- **Humbly the Shepherds Went against the tide/crowd.** 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!

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

- **Humbly the Shepherds Sought Baby Jesus until they found Him.** 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.

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

- **Humbly the Shepherds Told everyone they could the Good News.** 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.

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

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

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.

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 biblical [3].

James 4: 7-10 gives us a pathway to humility.

Resist the Devil. Pride is the supreme temptation from Satan, because pride is at the heart of his own evil nature. Our only protection against pride, and our only source of humility, is a proper view of God.

Submit to God. Pride is the sin of competing with God, and humility is the virtue of submitting to His supreme glory. We all tend to exaggerate our own good qualities and minimize the good qualities of others. Humility takes off our rose-colored glasses and allows us to see ourselves as we really are[4].

Humble your self in the sight of God. Pride comes in many forms. We may be tempted to be proud of our abilities, our possessions, our education, our social status, our appearance, our power, and even our biblical knowledge or religious accomplishments. But throughout Scripture the Lord calls His people to humility. "Before honor comes humility" (Prov. 15:33); "The reward of humility and the fear of the Lord are riches, honor and life" (22:4); "Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; a stranger, and not your own lips" (27:2).

Humility begins with proper self-awareness, "the virtue," said Bernard of Clairvaux, "by which a man becomes conscious of his own unworthiness." It begins with an honest, unadorned, unretouched view of oneself.

Humility produces spiritual blessing. Just as every sin starts in pride, every virtue begins in humility. Humility allows us to see ourselves as we are, because it shows us before God as He is.

Just as pride is behind every conflict we have with other people and every problem of fellowship we have with the Lord, so humility is behind every harmonious human relationship, every spiritual success, and every moment of joyous fellowship with the Lord.

What we need today is to cultivate Godly Humility.

- Paul said Colossians 3:12 Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; (NKJV)
- Peter said 1 Peter 5:5 Likewise you younger people, submit yourselves to your elders. Yes, all of you be submissive to one another, and be clothed with humility, for "God resists the proud, But gives grace to the humble." (NKJV)
- 1463 egkomboomai {eng-kom-bo'-om-ai} middle voice from 1722 and komboō (to gird); be clothed with) knot or band by which two things are fastened together, to fasten or gird one's self. This was the white scarf or apron of slaves, which was fastened to the belt of the vest and distinguished slaves from freemen, hence in 1 Pet. 5:5, "gird yourselves with humility as your servile garb" means by putting on humility, show your subjection one to another. Also, this refers to the overalls which slaves wore to keep clean while working, an exceedingly humble garment.

Have you decided to be among those seeing Jesus this Christmas time? You can if you will come humbly like these shepherds? These shepherds represent the best of all God's Word about the rewards that come to those who seek and find the Lord. Will you experience the glad tidings of the Gospel? Will you experience great joy? You can if you chose be like them. Here is their pathway that God recorded for us—one that we can make choices today to follow.

- **Decide to Listen to God when He speaks.** Like the shepherds tune your heart to listen and look for God while you are at work, at school, or at home. Remember that the eyes of the Lord are looking down for someone that is looking up and seeking God.
- **Decide to Come to God like you are.** Just as I am--God will receive. Ask Him to change you, melt you, mould you, fill you, and use you. O Lamb of God I come just as I am, for you to fix. There is no time to become someone else, God called us as we are!
- **Decide to Respond to God at once.** Just as they would have missed that moment if they had waited so the Lord tells us—while you hear His voice don't wait. Early will I seek You. First will I seek You. With my whole heart will I seek You.
- **Decide to Seek Jesus until you find Him.** Like Peter, Andrew, James, and John—drop your nets and follow Him. Like Peter say I have left all behind to follow You. Like Paul say I count everything else as trash—so I can have you. Like David say—one thing have I desired above all others and that is YOU, O Lord.
- **Decide to Go against the tide of the world and against the crowd going their own way.** Jesus tells us all that the gate is narrow, the road is hard. We must press into His Kingdom. We must draw near to Him. We can't serve two masters, only One. As Moses cried, we need to choose this day who we will serve. And later Joshua said it clearly, "As for me and my house—we will serve the Lord!" Finally as Paul confessed, life is Christ, death is only better because I am with Him.
- **Decide to Tell everyone the Good News.** As those at Christ's resurrection and at Pentecost—they couldn't stop telling the great news. They went everywhere and told everyone what He had done in their lives. So we in His power can do so in our generation.

Hymn #127 is a prayer for making room for Christ in His special season. Listen to these precious words.

Thou didst leave Thy throne

And Thy kingly crown

When Thou camest to earth for me;

But in Bethlehem's home

Was there found no room

For Thy holy nativity:

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,

There is room in my heart for Thee.

2 Heaven's arches rang

When the angels sang,

Proclaiming Thy royal degree;

But of lowly birth

Didst Thou come to earth,

And in greatest humility:

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,

There is room in my heart for Thee.

3 The foxes found rest,

And the birds their nest

In the shade of the forest tree;

But Thy couch was the sod,

O Thou Son of God,

In the deserts of Galilee:

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,

There is room in my heart for Thee.

4 Thou camest, O Lord,

With the living word

That should set Thy people free;

But with mocking scorn,

And with crown of thorn,

They bore Thee to Calvary:

O come to my heart, Lord Jesus,

There is room in my heart for Thee.

5 When the heavens shall ring,

And the angels sing,

At Thy coming to victory,

Let Thy voice call me home,

Saying, "Yet there is room,

There is room at My side for thee: "

My heart shall rejoice, Lord Jesus,

When Thou comest and callest for me.

Now this Christmas time, will you be a shepherd? Shepherds represent the best of all God's Word about the rewards that come to those who seek and find the Lord. Will you experience the glad tidings of the Gospel? Will you experience great joy? You can if you chose be like them and:

- **Speak to me oh God this Christmas.** Like the shepherds tune your heart to listen and look for God while you are at work, at school, or at home. Remember that the eyes of the Lord are looking down for someone that is looking up and seeking God.

2 Chronicles 16:9a For the eyes of the Lord run to and fro throughout the whole earth, to show Himself strong on behalf of those whose heart is loyal to Him. NKJV

- **I am coming to you just as I am.** Just as I am--God will receive. Ask Him to change you, melt you, mould you, fill you, and use you. O Lamb of God I come just as I am, for you to fix. There is no time to become someone else, God called us as we are!
- **I will respond to you right now.** Just as they would have missed that moment if they had waited so the Lord tells us--while you hear His voice don't wait. Early will I seek You. First will I seek You. With my whole heart will I seek You.

- **I will keep seeking you each day until I find you in Your Word and prayer.** Like Peter, Andrew, James, and John—drop your nets and follow Him. Like Peter say I have left all behind to follow You. Like Paul say I count everything else as trash—so I can have you. Like David say—one thing have I desired above all others and that is YOU, O Lord.

Psalm 63:1-2 O God, You are my God; Early will I seek You; My soul thirsts for You; My flesh longs for You In a dry and thirsty land Where there is no water. 2 So I have looked for You in the sanctuary, To see Your power and Your glory. NKJV

- **I will go against the crowd, against the flow, upstream and seek you with all my heart.** Jesus tells us all that the gate is narrow, the road is hard. We must press into His Kingdom. We must draw near to Him. We can't serve two masters, only One. As Moses cried, we need to choose this day who we will serve. And later Joshua said it clearly, "As for me and my house—we will serve the Lord!" Finally as Paul confessed, **life is Christ, death is only better because I am with Him.**
- **By your strength and grace I will seek to tell someone the Good News.** As those at Christ's resurrection and at Pentecost—they couldn't stop telling the great news. They went everywhere and told everyone what He had done in their lives. So we in His power can do so in our generation.

Acts 5:20 "Go, stand in the temple and speak to the people all the words of this life." NKJV

[1] Barclay, William, *Daily Study Bible Series: The Gospel of Luke (Revised Edition)*, (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press) 2000, c1975.

[2] Author unknown.

[3] Moody Monthly, 11/86, p. 19-20.

[4] MacArthur, John F., *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary*, Ephesians 4, (Chicago: Moody Press) 1983

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