

The Shepherds – How to Respond to God’s Voice
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We are in a sermon series called the Cast of Christmas. Week one was on The Prophets who prophesied about the birth of Jesus. Last week I preached on The Angels who proclaimed the birth of Jesus. Today I am preaching on the Shepherds and how they responded to God’s voice.

God is a speaking God and He speaks many ways. Primarily He speaks through His written word – the Bible. But He also speaks through the Holy Spirit, the gifts of the Spirit, other people, circumstances, dreams and visions. As we saw last week, He also speaks through angels. That’s how he spoke to the shepherds in the Christmas story and through them we learn how to respond to God’s voice. Their story is found in Luke 2:8-20 –

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is Christ the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom His favor rests."

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about."

So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them...

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

There are three things I want to share from this passage:

1- We should respond to God’s voice with instant obedience

Luke 2:15-16 says:

When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, "Let us now go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about." So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

When the shepherds heard the message from God, they said: “Let us go now” and then they hurried to find Jesus. There was never a thought of disobeying or delaying. There was never a thought of not going to find Jesus. They made no excuses.

I’m sure the shepherds could’ve come up with some good excuses not to instantly obey like:

“Wait a minute – who’s going to watch these sheep?”

“That was just a dream, those angels weren’t real, right?”

“I’m tired. We’ve been out here working hard all day. Let’s go tomorrow.”

But the shepherds made no such excuses! Rather, they instantly obeyed God!

God expects instant obedience. That’s obedience without hesitation or procrastination. That’s obedience without delay or excuses.

Other people in the Bible also instantly obeyed God without excuses. For instance, Matthew 4:21-22 says that when Jesus called James and John to be His disciples:

Jesus called them, and immediately they left the boat and their father and followed Him.

When we hear from God – we should instantly obey. What excuses are you making to excuse yourself from obeying God? You might think – “Well, I would obey too if an angel appeared to me and gave me a word I knew was from God.” Really? Are you obeying the written word of God that you know is from God? Or do you think God gave us 10 suggestions rather than 10 commandments?

Many people see the truth of God’s Word for everyone else, but never for themselves. We must stop excusing ourselves from obeying the Word. For instance, some people say:

I know I should tithe, but God knows I can’t afford it.

I know I should not have sex outside of marriage, but God knows I have needs.

I know I should read by Bible and pray, but God knows I don’t have time.

I know I should worship God with all my heart and strength, but God understands it’s just not my personality type.

Oh really? I don’t think so. You have deceived yourself into thinking God’s commands don’t apply to you! Wake up! Repent and renew your mind with the Word of God!

By the way, you don’t have to understand everything in order to obey it. In fact, the amazing thing is that as we continue to do what is right – even when we don’t understand it – *then* our understanding will increase.

In John 7:17, Jesus said:

If anyone chooses to do God's will, he will find out whether My teaching comes from God or whether I speak on My own.

In other words – obedience to God leads to greater understanding of His word and His ways. Walk in the light that you have and you will receive more light! That's one of the benefits of obedience!

What are some other benefits? Eternal life is one. Jesus said in Matthew 7:21

Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but only he who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.

The Bible does not teach that we are saved by our works – but when we are saved – good works will be the result. Salvation is not earned by doing great works for God.

In John 6:28-29 a crowd asked Jesus:

"What shall we do, that we may work the works of God?" Jesus answered and said to them, "This is the work of God, that you believe in Him whom He sent."

Everything in the Christian life starts with faith in the finished work of Jesus Christ on the cross! We can add nothing to that to earn salvation. But one of the ways you know you are saved is that your heart is changed from serving yourself to serving God and good works are evident in your life.

Another benefit of obedience is having a stable foundation in your life. Jesus said in Matthew 7:24-27

Therefore whoever hears these sayings of Mine, and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock.

But everyone who hears these sayings of Mine, and does not do them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand: and the rain descended, the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And great was its fall.

Some Christians get the wrong impression that when we serve God, we will never have any tough times. They think the Bible should say the unbeliever's house fell because the rain and wind came against it. And the believer's house stood because the rain and wind did not come against it.

But that's not what the Bible teaches. In this passage, Jesus said that rain, floods and winds came against everyone - the believer and the unbeliever. The difference was not their circumstances, but their foundation! And what determined their foundation?

It wasn't just hearing the word because the Bible says they both heard the word. The difference is one obeyed the word and one did not!

If you want stability in your life – you must obey the word of the Lord. And our motivation for obeying God is not a wrong fear of God or a desire for a reward. Our main motivation is love! Jesus said in John 14:15

If you love Me, you will obey what I command.

So, don't say you love God if you don't obey Him! In fact, 1 John 2:4-5 says:

If someone claims, "I know God," but doesn't obey God's commandments, that person is a liar and is not living in the truth. But those who obey God's word truly show how completely they love Him.

So, we've seen that the shepherds obeyed the voice of God and went to find Jesus. After that, Luke 2:17-18 says:

When they had seen Him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

2- We should respond to God's voice by sharing what we've heard

We are called and commanded to be witnesses for Jesus Christ. What does a witness do? They tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth about what they have personally seen or heard. That's what the shepherds did. When they discovered Jesus – they did not keep that experience to themselves! They told everyone!

The Christian life is based on revelation and confession. Revelation of who Jesus is and what He did on the cross for us. And then confession of faith in the Lordship of Jesus. Romans 10:8-10 says:

The word is near you; it is in your mouth and in your heart, that is, the word of faith we are proclaiming: That if you confess with your mouth, "Jesus is Lord," and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with your heart that you believe and are justified, and it is with your mouth that you confess and are saved.

Salvation requires belief in the heart and confession with the mouth. Some people say, "My relationship with God is private." But you never find that in the Bible. In fact, Jesus said in Matthew 10:32-33

Whoever confesses Me before men, him I will also confess before My Father who is in heaven. But whoever denies Me before men, him I will also deny before My Father who is in heaven.

1 Timothy 6:12 says:

Take hold of the eternal life to which you were called when you made your good confession in the presence of many witnesses.

The Bible says that we are saved when we believe in our heart and confess with our mouths to others that Jesus is Lord. You don't have to be a biblical scholar to tell someone about Jesus. You are called to be a witness about what you have personally experienced with God. What has God done for you? That's what you witness to.

By the way, I want to take the pressure off you to convert people. Witnessing is what we are called to do, not convert, save, win souls or change hearts. That is God's job. When we do our part, God will do His part. Our part is to witness, to tell what we've experienced, what God has done for us.

You might think witnessing is not for you, but there are people you know that only you can reach! You might hope and pray they get saved by watching Christian TV or some other means, but it takes people to reach people!

I've seen the statistics about how people come to faith in Christ:

Less than 1 % are saved through TV or a Crusade.

The vast majority - 74% are saved because someone they knew – family or friend – cared enough to share Jesus with them.

We are surrounded by people who are lost and dying and headed for eternal hell – do we really care? Think of those around you who don't know Christ – do you care about those family members, friends, neighbors, co-workers?

We know God cares and we know how much God cares. How do we know how much He cares? By what He was willing to do about it. John 3:16 says:

For God so loved the world, that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God loves people and He gave His very life to save us. That's good news – but there's also bad news. John 3:17-18 says:

For God sent not His Son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through Him might be saved. He that believes on Him is not condemned: but he that believes not is condemned already, because he has not believed in the name of the only begotten Son of God.

I wonder if we really believe that Jesus is the only way or if we believe that all roads lead to God and Jesus is one of many options. I wonder if we really believe in heaven and hell and that the saved go to heaven and the lost go to hell. I wonder if we really believe that we are God's plan to reach the world.

I wonder if we really believe God wants to use each one of us? It's only as we truly care about those around us that we can reach them for Christ. Do you care? Do you have a heart for the lost? The vast majority of Christians will die not having led anyone to the Lord. God help us! Give us a heart for the lost! Let us be like the shepherds who told everyone about Jesus!

3- We should respond to God's voice with praise and worship

Luke 2:20 says:

The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The shepherds returned where? Back to their fields and their flocks and their work. Back to their ordinary, everyday lives.

When we have supernatural mountaintop experiences with God – we tend to want to stay there. But God wants us to go back to our natural lives with a supernatural message and praise for God on our lips! We tend to want to stay on the mountaintop of God's presence and experience the goosebumps – but God not only wants us to touch heaven – He wants us to change earth!

Here's the thing about supernatural mountaintop experiences. You always have to come back down to reality. I did a study on mountaintop experiences in the Bible. Almost every mountaintop experience was followed by a major problem in the valley.

In Genesis 22 Abraham went up Mount Moriah where he passed a major test of his faith in God. God provided a lamb. When he came down he had to face the death of his wife Sarah.

In Exodus Moses went up on Mt. Sinai where he met God face to face and was given the 10 commandments. When he came down he had to deal with people worshipping idols.

In 1 Kings 18 Elijah defeated the prophets of Baal on Mt. Carmel by calling down fire from heaven. When he came down he had to face the death threats of Queen Jezebel.

In Matt. 17 – Jesus went with some of His disciples to a mountain where the disciples saw Jesus in His glory and they also saw Moses and Elijah. The experience was so powerful that Peter suggested they build tabernacles and just stay there. But Jesus took them back down the mountain where they immediately encountered a demonic attack.

When Jesus preached the Sermon on the Mount - He came down from the mountain and was immediately confronted by a leper.

The point I want you to see in all these stories is that spiritual highs are usually followed by times that require us to give out rather than take in. But we usually want to stay on the mountains. It's easier up there. After all, God's supernatural power and glory are on the mountaintop; ordinary life and death are in the valley.

God's presence is on the mountain top; people are in the valley. Sinful people – demon-possessed people – needy people. But, we cannot stay on the mountaintop because the people in the valley who are sinning or sick or possessed – need the power and glory of God we've experienced. They're not coming to the mountain - we must take the mountain to them!

In Mark 5, Jesus set a demon-possessed man free. Mark 5:18-20 says:

As Jesus was getting into the boat, the man who had been demon-possessed begged to go with Him. Jesus did not let him, but said, "Go home to your family and tell them how much the Lord has done for you, and how He has had mercy on you." So the man went away and began to tell in the Decapolis how much Jesus had done for him. And all the people were amazed.

This man could not go with Jesus because Jesus knew that the man's greatest impact would be in the area where people knew him as a crazy demon-possessed mad man. And history records that a great revival broke out there because someone experienced the power of God and returned home to praise God and witness to others!

Mountaintop experiences with God are great! But we must learn how to come back down the mountain and take the mountain to the people in the valley!

Almost every time Jesus healed someone or set them free – he told them, "Go your way." Most the time they wanted to stay with Him, but He always told them to move on. The shepherds might have wanted to stay in Bethlehem with Jesus – but they returned to their everyday lives with praise on their lips!

So I want to finish with this: you must move on after a move of God! After the mountain top experiences, move on to the valley. God will be with you there just as much as He was on the mountain. In fact, most miracles happen in the valley, not on the mountain!

There will be disappointments in life, but every day that passes is one day closer to the time when we will be with Jesus. So move on!

Everything's gonna work out in the end – so if there's still some things that need to be worked out – you're not at the end yet! So move on!

God has a future and a hope for you, so move on!

God has plans that are good for you, not evil. So move on!

Don't give up, don't give in, don't give ground to your enemy, don't give place to the devil, and don't give way to the world!

God is moving so keep on moving with Him!

Get in His presence – obey His voice – tell others about Him – and keep giving thanks and glory to God for all He has done!