

“THE WORD DRAWS THE WORLD”
Isaiah 49:16-23, Hebrews 10:19-25, Luke 2:8-20
December 17-18, 2022

“A lifeguard was on duty when he noticed a gentleman was in trouble. He dove into the water and swam out to the struggling man, stopping about three feet from him. From this short distance, the lifeguard realized that the victim was a large fellow. Not wanting to be taken under, the lifeguard considered his dilemma. Not only was his ward sizable, but he was also trying to save himself. He was afraid. He was thrashing around. He was panicking. He was in trouble. In an effort to save himself, the man was swinging wildly against the water and was draining his energy quickly.

“The lifeguard continued to tread water a short distance away, not because he didn’t care but because he was waiting on the man to stop trying to save himself. He knew that he would be unable to save the drowning man as long as he was using his own methods, insisting on his own strength, and relying on his own ability. His cry for help contradicted his efforts to save himself. His strategy of trying to save himself was hindering the lifeguard’s planned rescue.

“Finally the man’s energy left and he had no more fight. When he stopped beating the water, stopped leaning on his own understanding, and stopped using his own methods, the lifeguard took over. The lifeguard worked his way around to the man’s back, reached over his shoulder, cupped the chin under his hand, and put an elbow in the middle of his shoulder blade. This allowed the man’s body to come closer to the surface of the water and rest on the hip of the lifeguard as he side-stroked in to the edge of the pool.

“Even though the man was large, the rescue was possible because he was resting in the strength of his savior. Once the man was safe and calm, he thanked the lifeguard. He gave the lifeguard complete credit because he realized his own resources couldn’t have gotten him out of the mess he had found himself in.”¹

Friends, we are all in a similar situation as this gentleman was in. We may not be in a pool, but

¹ (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, [Chicago, IL: Moody Publishers, 2009] pg. 126, #379)

our lives are in trouble, and while we may be calling out for help, we tend to use all our own resources to try to get ourselves out of that trouble, but we only find our energies wearing out, and nothing is accomplished, and we're still in trouble.

You see, we are surrounded by the sea of sinfulness, and the waters are dangerous and deadly. When we get in over our heads, there's only so much that we can do to try to stay on top of everything. Yet, no matter how much we try, all of our attempts to remain above water are fruitless, and we must rely upon the help of another. But other humans are just as helpless in their pursuit of staying above the spiritual water level as we are, so no one else can save us from the wages of sin. Only one person can do that job; only one Lifeguard can rescue us from the consequences of our sinfulness. And that is Jesus.

God saw our desperate situation and heard us call out to Him. He told His people long ago that there was One coming who knew their situation, and He let them know that they were not left on their own to flail around in an attempt to save themselves. All people are loved by God and He cherishes each one of us, so much so in fact, that He tells us through Isaiah, "*See, I have engraved you on the palms of My hands...*" (49:16). Max Lucado says it best, "If God had a refrigerator, your picture would be on it. If He had a wallet, your photo would be in it. He sends you flowers every spring and a sunrise every morning... Face it, friend. He is crazy about you!"

Because God loves us so much, He does not want us to drown in our sinfulness. He doesn't want us to be destroyed because of our rebellion against His will and His ways. Yet, we **cannot** come before a holy God with all our sins hanging out and expect Him to say, "Come on in just like you are!" Our sins must be forgiven and our souls must be saved from all of our sinfulness if we expect to be with Him when this life is completed. So God had the right person ready to go to remedy the situation. At just the right time, when all of our own resources were expended, His Word became flesh and dwelt among us to save us from certain death. "...*the Sovereign Lord says: See, I will beckon to the nations, I will lift up My banner to the peoples; they will bring your sons in their arms and carry your daughters on their hips ... those who hope in Me will not be disappointed*" (Is. 49:22-23).

Think about it this way. “Suppose you are a doctor and there was a disease that everybody had. Even though their symptoms were different, everybody who caught the disease died and everybody had it. Let’s also say that you, as a skilled physician, came up with the cure.

“What would you say about a doctor who knew everybody else was dying without a solution, and wouldn’t share the solution he had?

“This is the situation for many Christians. The Bible says that the whole world is dead in trespasses and in sin. If we have met Jesus, we’ve found the cure. How dare we keep it to ourselves! How dare we be on our way to heaven and not care that people are drowning and on their way to a Christ-less eternity! How can we not make sharing the gospel a priority?!”²

That’s why we celebrate Christmas every year. God made saving humanity a priority by giving us His Son, Jesus, as His remedy for the sin of the world. The Word of God became fulfilled for all of us, and He is beckoning each one of us to come to Him.

And even when Jesus had been alive as a human only a few hours, the Angels in heaven came to announce to the people the greatest news that the world had even known - the Messiah, the Savior who takes away the sins of the world, has been born in the town of Bethlehem. Listen to how Luke relates this account of God making known to the peoples of His Son’s birth. This is Luke 2:8-20. (READ Luke 2:8-20)

Now, shepherds were just about the lowest you could get on the social elite scale. They were right there just above the likes of the lepers. They were simple minded; they had no real estate to call their own; they had very little, if any, education; and their influence on society was absolutely nothing. They would be the ones many would call “zeros” in our world today. They were “losers,” spending their time out in the wilderness watching and directing sheep or goats. Their whole existence consisted of protecting the animals in their care, making sure they had enough to eat and drink, and keeping predators from eating them. There was nothing special about a shepherd according to the rest of society.

² (Tony Evans, *Tony Evans’ Book of Illustrations*, pg. 94, #263)

Yet it is to this low class of people that God determines to bring the best news in the history of mankind. The angels didn't go to the royal family of the country to tell the Good News of what God had done. They didn't go to the senate, or to the Sanhedrin, or to the Pharisees or to the Scribes or to the priests with this great news! They didn't go to the wealthy merchants, or to the teachers of the Law, or even to the working class. The angels went to shepherds, to the meek and lowly ones who loved to make up stories to pass the time away, who loved to compose music to sing to the sheep, and who dreamed big dreams of what might possibly be. It was not to the establishment that the angels went to tell about the great gift of God to the people. It was the smelly, dirty, coarse, sinful, sometimes toothless shepherds that the angels went with this fantastic news that God had brought a lifeguard onto the scene to save those drowning in their sin.

But why would God not go to the elite to share this good news? For one, they weren't paying attention to anyone but themselves. They were too busy doing business, or lording over others, or making decisions for the population under them. They knew what was best for the people, and no one was going to tell them how to do it. Not even God.

Two, they were not concerned with the saving of another. Their lives focused on the saving of themselves only - maybe their family, or their bloodline, but certainly not all the others. They had to look out for their own number one first and foremost. They were too busy looking out for themselves to pay attention to anything that God might have to say.

Three, they would have become offended by the news, because the Savior might displace their positions of power and authority. The savior might beat them to the top of the cultural ladder and have more popularity, more authority, and more power than they would. No, the elite would not listen.

Shepherds, on the other hand, had all the time in the world to listen to the Lord God for what He had to talk with them about. They had no aspirations to climb the cultural ladder in order to rule over people or make them do what they wanted them to do. They were at the bottom of the ladder as far as humanity was concerned, but they didn't mind. Their simple life suited them just fine and they enjoyed

life given to them from God. For them, God was supplying their daily needs, and that suited them well. So they were open to hearing what the Lord had to tell them.

So it was to this low class of people that the first angel came to share the Good News of the birth of the Savior. And what a message it was! *“Don’t be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; He is the Messiah, the Lord. This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger”* (Luke 2:10-12). And if that wasn’t enough to get the shepherds moving, a whole host of angels join the first one and call out to the Lord, *“Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom His favor rests”* (Luke 2:13-14).

Now when angels show up proclaiming good news and praising God for all that He has done, something magnificent has happened for the world. I can just imagine being there that night, surrounded by the darkness, sitting around a small fire to stay warm, and suddenly the whole night sky explodes with light. I would have to be told not to be afraid, too.

You see, at that very moment God was calling out to these humble shepherds, inviting them into His great plan of Salvation so that they could be the first evangelists in the world. Their hearts were strangely warmed by the announcement of the Savior’s birth, and they determined that they would go and *“see this great thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about”* (Luke 2:15). They didn’t just turn to each other and say, “No one is going to believe this.” No, they got so excited about the news that they got up, left their flocks in the fields around Bethlehem, and went into town looking for the new born Savior.

“A baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger” the angel had told them. How many kings are born in a stable? How many Saviors are born so lowly as not to be in a fine hotel, or palace, or resort when they are born? Yet the shepherds didn’t question it, they just received it, believed it and then went looking for the One the angels proclaimed as the Messiah. I like the way that the music group, Downhere, explains it. In their song, “How Many Kings,” they sing:

“How many kings step down from their thrones?
How many lords have abandoned their homes?
How many greats have become the least for me?
And how many gods have poured out their hearts
To romance a world that is torn all apart?
How many fathers gave up their sons for me?
Only one did that for me!”

You see, at that very moment, God was informing the whole world that His plan of Salvation had gone into action, and that anyone who would believe in Jesus, receive Him into their hearts and proclaim Him as their Savior would find forgiveness of their sins and be welcomed into the very presence of God for all eternity.

That’s why the writer of Hebrews boldly proclaims, “*Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, His body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for He who promise is faithful*” (Hebrews 10:19-23).

God’s great love for each one of us was completed in the giving of Jesus to the world. His humble birth meant that His Salvation was for everyone on the earth to enjoy. No status, no class, no economic division, no political separation, no race, no language or no nation would be denied the saving grace offered to us in such a humble way. Every single person in the world is invited to come to the Lord and receive forgiveness of their sin through the Word of God, made flesh in the Savior, Jesus Christ. Only He brings newness of life! Only Jesus transforms our lives from sinner to saint as we put our trust and faith in Him! Only through Jesus do we find hope for eternal life, for He has come to save all people from their sin.

And that’s the excitement that the shepherds got upon seeing Jesus right there in the stable, surrounded by farm animals, covered by simple strips of cloth, using a feeding trough as a bed. God’s gift of Salvation was wrapped up in a small package in the human body of a newborn son, given for the

whole world to receive. And once given, no one could take Him away, for He was God's gift to the world, that anyone who would believe in Him might have eternal life.

The shepherds left that stable with such great joy of what the Lord had done, that they began telling others what they had heard and seen. *"...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"* (Luke 2:17), the Savior of the world had come.

Even today, the Word of God, Jesus, is drawing the peoples of the world to Him. The invitation for rescue is being given through groups like the Voice of the Martyrs, Samaritans Purse, and the JESUS Film Project, among many others. Listen to just one report of what is taking place around the world.

"Millions can now understand Jesus when He says 'I love you' in their heart language through the film, 'JESUS.' And they are responding. **Research shows that in 2021 more than 51,000 people came to Christ every day.** Every day!

"Among those who have recently believed is a group of rough refugee men from the Middle East. They were in Germany, about to watch a showing of "JESUS." Four of them were under the influence of drugs and became very loud and argumentative. A refugee woman in the audience felt threatened and urged them to stop. The men responded by loudly hurling insults at her. It was chaotic.

Then an amazing miracle occurred ... one of the ministry hosts gently spoke to them. A fellow worker wrote what happened: *"Out of nowhere, a heavenly peace entered and filled the room like a massive cloud. Finally, all of the refugees watched the film intently to the end, and Jesus powerfully touched the hearts of these four men with huge repercussions.*

"Many men, including those under drug influence, stood up at the end and came to the front for personal prayer, one after the other, deeply moved. They yearned for the touch of Jesus, the Prince of Peace and Savior. And Jesus touched and healed these men. Depression and pain left, hope and peace filled these refugees' hearts. 'Can you also pray for my friend?' asked one of the men and brought his friend [to them].

*“Jesus, the Prince of Peace, visibly touched the earth on this day. And those, who had previously disrupted the others in their drug-influenced state, humbly thanked the hosts and, with New Testaments in their hands, boarded the bus back to the refugee home.”*³

All around the world, news of the Savior born in Bethlehem is being shared with others so that they might believe Him, receive Him and trust in Him as their Savior. Jesus is drawing the World to Himself as the faithful believers in Christ share Him.

It happened to Shankar living in Nepal, whose life drastically changed from being in the Communist Party underground. He went from being a guerrilla warfare trainer, to being a soldier of the Cross with Jesus as His Master and Savior. He went from destroying Christians and their churches to becoming a pastor reaching out to those he had been training, planting 28 new churches ranging in size from about 30 to 130 worshipers.⁴

It can happen in the life of anyone who hears the Good News of God proclaimed to them, and believes in what they are hearing. The news of the Word of God becoming flesh among us, being born in Bethlehem, draws all people to Him as they understand Him to be the Savior for us.

We are invited to be just like the shepherds, taking the great news of Jesus to the world with such excitement and hope that many find faith in Him. Will you do it? Let’s pray...

Father, You have blessed us with the birth of Your Son, Jesus, who is the Savior of the world. He is the source of all life, and He calls us all to Him. Give us the courage to believe in Him and receive Him as our Savior. And then, may we be so bold as to proclaim this great Good News to everyone we encounter, even if it might be ones we consider our enemies. We all need Jesus! Give us the hearts of the shepherds, who unashamedly told everyone what they had seen and heard about Your gift of our Messiah. Help us to share the news of Jesus so that it may continue to “*cause great joy for all the people.*” He is our only hope for rescue. This we pray in Jesus’ precious and holy Name. AMEN.

³ (JESUS Film Project Newsletter, December 13, 2022)

⁴ (Voice of the Martyrs magazine, December 2022, vol. 56, No. 12)