

You Better Watch Out - Luke 2:8-20

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[0:00] We've been journeying through, kind of lead up to the Christmas story. Looking at those who were instrumental and who are part of the coming of Messiah.

The season leading up to him, just as we are in a season leading up to the Messiah's coming. We looked at Zacharias and Elizabeth. Zacharias, business as usual. Not ready for the Lord to do anything outside of what he was comfortable with.

Elizabeth, very excited to receive the news that she was going to have a son. And we saw Mary and Joseph, the same kind of response. Mary receptive and Joseph not so much. And it's interesting that the women were like, okay, let's do this.

And the men were like, no way. Which fits, because what does scripture say? It says that, looking all the way back to Eve, that the woman is more likely to be kind of let into things.

She's more likely to be deceived. You say, ah, those women, so easily deceived. Yes, but they're also more likely to receive than guys are. We're much more stubborn. We're like, no, no, no, no, I'm not going to do that.

[1:06] Right? But also then once we kind of get into a mindset, we hold on to it. So you see how God has just put those two pieces together so well. That when a man finds the truth and a woman finds the truth, they complement each other so well.

But now we're going to look at the shepherds, which, and then next week we'll look at Jesus' birth, obviously. And then the week after, Herod and the three wise men, their response. So the shepherds kind of bridge that gap. They're part of those that were there before the Messiah is coming, but they're also right at his coming.

So we will be in Luke chapter 2 starting in verse 8. And so the title for today's message is, You Better Watch Out.

And no, I don't mean Santa Claus. The shepherds weren't looking for Santa. But they were looking and they were watching. So the shepherds, they're in the field.

They're keeping watch. Watch the text if you want to kind of break it down in some chunks. You have verses 8 through 12. The angel tells the good news, right? He shows up and he's going to tell them the good news. 13 and 14, he's joined by the multitude of angelic hosts, which is also rejoicing in the good news.

[2:18] Verses 15 and 16, the shepherds search for the good news. 17 and 18, the shepherds tell the good news. And in verse 20, the shepherds live in light of the good news.

And so as we've said before, the days of the coming Messiah, they were unprecedented times.

They were foretold by scripture. They were filled with spiritual darkness.

They were a time of spiritual apathy. And yet they're days of great emotion. We said it's the same thing today. The spiritual darkness that's in the world, it's so dark. Yet people are so apathetic to it.

They just don't care that there's after school Satan clubs. You know, they don't care that Satan is mutilating people's bodies. They're like, eh, whatever. They're days of great emotion as well. I mean, I read a thing that said that the British Airlines now is not allowing this Jewish sitcom to be played in flights.

Because they don't want it to look like they're taking sides. Sides of what? Like, we can't have the Jews in the world, so we're not going to present anything. It's just, it's crazy. Great emotion. Great, you can't talk about issues with people without them having great emotion.

[3:25] So we're going to look at these shepherds. And as I was kind of looking at the text, I'm like, okay, Lord, you know, I kind of set myself up for this. You know, we're going to look at all these different people. There's a lot on Zacharias and Elizabeth.

There's a lot on Mary and Joseph. Not very much on the shepherds. I was thinking, is this a week to do communion? Eat up part of the end of it. But there is a lot here. And the Lord just kind of opened my mind that Scripture talks a lot about shepherds.

Do you know that? There's a lot to say about shepherds. And we're going to see a lot to do with these shepherds. I want you to turn real quick to Ezekiel chapter 34. We're going to kind of look at a few places and kind of get God's heart on shepherds and his expectations of them.

34. Ezekiel 34. I'm going to read a good chunk. I'm not going to really expound on it. It kind of speaks for itself.

But God is speaking to Ezekiel and telling Ezekiel, you know, in his prophetic message to him, he's saying, Ezekiel, this is what's going on in my nation right now.

[4 : 28] And I cannot believe this, Ezekiel. So I'm going to read Ezekiel verse 2. And then I'm going to read verses 11 through 23. So Ezekiel 34 verse 2. The Lord says, And jump down to verse 11.

For thus says the Lord God, Behold, I, even I, will both search my sheep and seek them out. As a shepherd seeks out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered, so will I seek out my sheep and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day.

And I will bring them out from the people and gather them from the countries and will bring them to their own land and feed them upon the mountains of Israel, by the rivers, and in all the inhabited places of the country.

And I will feed them in a good pasture. And upon the high mountains of Israel shall their fold be. There shall they lie in a good fold. And in a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. And I will feed my flock. And I will cause them to lie down, saith the Lord God. I will seek them which was lost. And bring again that which was driven away.

[5 : 46] And will bind up that which was broken. Will strengthen that which was sick. But I will destroy the fat and the strong. I will feed them with judgment. And God also has a responsibility not just to the shepherds, to the flock as well.

There is a responsibility that they have. And as for you, O my flock, thus says the Lord God, Behold, I judge between cattle and cattle, between the rams and the he goats. Seems it a small thing unto you to have eaten up the good pasture, that you must also tread down with your feet the residue of your pastures, and have drunk of the deep waters, but you must foul the residue with your feet.

And as for my flock, they eat that which you have trodden with your feet, they drink that which you have fouled with your feet. Therefore, thus says the Lord God unto them, Behold, I, even I will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle.

Because you have thrust with the scythe and with the shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns, we have scattered them abroad. Therefore, will I save my flock, and they shall no more be a prey.

And I will judge between cattle and cattle, and I will set up one shepherd over them. And he shall feed them, even my servant David. He shall feed them, and he shall be their shepherd.

[6 : 57] David meaning the son of David, the Messiah, that he will set up. God has a lot to say about a shepherd. Then Jesus, in John chapter 10, verse 11, 14, and 16, speaking of himself as that good shepherd, that one shepherd that shall be set up, he says, I am the good shepherd.

The good shepherd gives his life for the sheep. I am the good shepherd, and know my sheep, and I am known of mine. And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold, them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice.

There shall be one fold. How many shepherds? One shepherd. One shepherd. So here we see that same parallel from Ezekiel. Jesus is presenting himself as that shepherd.

And then Jesus goes to heaven, bodily to heaven, and kind of then gives this commission to us, to his body. He says in 1 Peter chapter 5, verses 2 and 4, he says, Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly, not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind.

Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples of the flock. And when the chief shepherd shall appear, you shall receive a crown of glory that fades not away. So a good shepherd does not take advantage for himself of the flock, but he feeds it and he cares for it.

[8 : 13] And then next week we'll look at this verse. In Matthew, speaking of, I'm sorry, not next week, the week after, this is when the wise men come, and they ask, and Herod calls in the religious leaders, and he says, where is Jesus going to be born?

Or where would the Messiah be born? And they say, in Bethlehem, because of this scripture. And thou, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are not the least among the princes of Judah. For out of thee shall come a governor that shall rule, or literally that shall shepherd my people Israel.

So God has a lot to say in his word about shepherds. You may have heard that supposedly shepherds were outcasts, and that they were kind of the yicky part of society.

Nobody would trust them. And so if the angels came to them, it was just God's, you know, showing God's grace on these people. I can't find that anywhere. The only place I could find that, that's from Aristotle, from like 400 years before Christ was born.

That's the way the Greeks looked at him. Doesn't seem that way in the Bible. Doesn't seem that way in Israel at this time. The Egyptians we know, back when Joseph was bringing his father and family into Egypt, they at that time didn't like shepherds.

[9 : 20] But as far as I can tell, there's nothing to indicate that in the scripture. And then we have Jesus coming on the scene and saying, I am the good shepherd. You know, if shepherds were known to be thieves, he'd be like saying, I'm the good thief.

And it's like, hmm. So I don't know if that's kind of the case. And if you think of the people we've looked at so far, what have their hearts been? Well, they've kind of been receptive. Even Zacharias and Joseph, once God, as they put the screws on them, but once he kind of gave them a better view of things, they were receptive.

That the news was coming to those whose hearts were ready to receive that the Messiah was coming. And we're going to see how they react. And so I think that these shepherds, for their part, were kind of looking for the Messiah.

So here I have an old map. I'll be able to like this. This is from like the mid-1800s. When Great Britain, before the British mandate, after World War I, when they were in charge of this region, and then they created the two nations.

At that time, they were going to make the two nations, one for Israel, one for the Arabs. And the Arabs rejected that and left. And so Israel is a nation. This was before that. This is the mid-1800s, when they were over there doing kind of like research and discovery.

[10 : 32] And that's where this map is from. But there you see Bethlehem. You see all the fields around it. So if you remember, I told you back when we were first looking at Zacharias and Elizabeth, and it said that Zacharias was of the course of Abiah.

That meant one of the 24 courses in which the priests were all divvied up, and that he would have served then twice a year outside the feast days for his one week. That would have come up twice a year, once every six months.

So he would have either been, because you start at Passover and then count, and he was like the fourth one. So he would have been at Jerusalem serving his time and his course, either in June, July, or December, January.

And then it says that the angel Gabriel came to Mary and says, your cousin Elizabeth, because Mary, you're going to conceive, she's in her sixth month. So if you go back six months then to one of those dates, and then from there you go nine months forward with Mary, you can figure out when Jesus was born, right?

So either Jesus was born in December, January, or September, October. The shepherds kind of give us a stamp to let us know, help us understand when he was going to be born.

[11 : 46] He was like, well, okay, that fits. He could have been born in December, January, right? Why not? Okay. Well, it says the shepherds were in the fields, keeping over, I'm going to read it, so I don't butcher this.

And the shepherds were in the same country, abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flocks by night. So they were in the same country. They were around Bethlehem. We're going to see when the angel comes to them, they run right to Bethlehem.

They're not far away. And the wording there where it actually says field is in the Greek, the root is agricultural. So this would be the only time of year that the shepherds would be allowed to bring their sheep in. It can't be the spring because you have new crops there, right?

They bring them in and harvest. Before it gets too cold for them to be out in the fields, they would bring them in and let them eat the stubble off and kind of remove everything from last year and then fertilize as well.

That would have been in the fall. That would be September, October time period. So that puts Jesus' birth September, October, as opposed to December, January, because the shepherds would

not be in the fields at that time.

[12:47] A couple other things. Remember last week we talked about Octavius or Augustus Caesar and how he made a census. Well, the Roman world at that time was in one hemisphere and in one climate zone, right?

It wasn't like it was winter in Judea and summer in Rome. It was the same. So if he's going to make a census and everybody has to travel, when would they be traveling? You're not going to travel in the middle of December, in the middle of January.

It doesn't make a lot of sense to do that. And while it's a warmer climate, when we were in Israel, we were there in March, and you go up into the higher elevation, we went up into Jerusalem. It's cold. It is brisk. And that wind is cold. So Joseph is going to take his pregnant wife, Mary, and they're going to travel because of the census.

And if she's great with child and it's the middle of December, that doesn't seem like a very wise thing to do. It doesn't seem like it fits with what the scripture is showing us.

[13:47] So the shepherds are in their fields. And again, the only time they really do that would be in the fall, which does line up with what we know of Zacharias and Elizabeth, and then with when Mary can see. Why does that matter?

Great, I just ruined your Christmas story. It matters because it matters what the Word of God says. When we've been going through Genesis, right? What little twist Eve put on that scripture she was given from Adam.

You shall not eat of the fruit of the garden lest you die. And she said to the serpent, you shall not eat of the fruit, neither shall you touch it lest you die. And he's like, oh, God didn't say.

He didn't say that. You can touch it. So what happened? She touches it. She doesn't die. And she goes, God's Word isn't true. God's Word failed. And so that little twist caused her to discount God's Word and enters the world, and here we are.

So while tradition is fun, and you might hear today, some people say, well, yeah, I know it's not actually accurate to the scripture, but it's got the essence of it. You know what? Eve's response to the serpent had the essence of what Adam told her.

[14:54] And yet, that little bit, removing her from the truth of the scripture, that Satan was able to get in there. But I think it does matter. And also, we're going to see eventually next week where, you know, it says that there's no room for him in the inn.

Right? Well, that word inn doesn't mean like the holiday inn. We'll look at that next week. But as we've looked at already, it seems like Mary has been rejected from her family. Because here she's with Joseph already, but they're not yet completely technically married.

But I think we're going to see next week that there's different context to just that there wasn't room for them, like it was too full. I think it's, there wasn't room for them. Like, hmm, you go over there. There's not room for you here with the family. We'll look at that next week. So it's very important to stick to the scripture. Right? So as we go through this, let's pick up again in verse 8.

And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the flock, keeping watch over, abiding in the field. They were in the flock too. Keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them. Glory of the Lord shone round about them.

[16:01] They were sore, afraid. The angel did not appear to kings or rulers. He did not appear to the wise and the rich. He did not appear to the influential and popular.

He appeared to shepherds, blue-collar workers in their fields. The angel of the Lord appeared to the shepherds who were faithfully doing what? This is kind of the part that blew my mind.

I'm like, Lord, it's shepherds. What's the big deal of shepherds faithfully tending their flock during the night season? Oh. Hmm. The angel appeared to the shepherds who were faithfully keeping their flocks in a season of great darkness.

However, it was also the season of the coming Messiah. What are we doing today? Right? We're the flock of God. Faithfully. And we're going to look today at what faithful shepherds do. And I'm not doing this to say, hey, guys, a litmus test.

Which, yes. Okay? Go find a faithful shepherd. If you can't find one here, smack me upside the head and say, what are you doing? And then go find a faithful shepherd. But our faithful shepherd is Jesus. And also, I think that the same characteristics we've been seeing these guys we can learn from.

[17:11] So what does a faithful shepherd do? It says they were keeping watch over their flocks. A faithful shepherd, the first thing he does, he watches over his flock in all seasons, doesn't he? 2 Timothy chapter 4.

Preach the word. Be instant in season and out of season. Reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine. For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine. A faithful shepherd watches over his flock in all seasons, whether the night season or the day season. And the second thing we see from these two verses, a faithful shepherd is awake. A faithful shepherd's awake. 1 Thessalonians chapter 5, verses 6 and 7. Therefore, let us not sleep as do others, but let us watch and be sober.

For they that sleep, sleep in the night, and they that be drunk are drunk in the night. What is the night for? Sleeping and getting drunk, according to the word of God. For sleeping and being intoxicated with the things of the world.

[18:12] He says, not us. We are those who are in the night. There's a night season, for sure. But for us, what's the night for? To be watchful and to be alert. So a faithful shepherd is awake.

What are these shepherds doing? They're keeping watch over their flocks by night. They are abiding in the field in the same country. They brought them into good pasture, didn't they? A faithful shepherd leads his sheep to good pasture.

Psalms 23, we know that. The Lord is my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me to lie down in green pastures. He leads me beside the still waters.

A faithful shepherd leads his sheep to good pasture. And then the last, for these two verses, a faithful shepherd abides. They're abiding, weren't they?

They're in the same country, shepherds abiding in the field. John 15, 4, Abide in me, and I in you, as the branch cannot bear fruit of itself, except that abide in the vine, no more can you except you abide in me.

[19:10] Jumping down to verse 10, Jesus says, And if you keep my commandments, you shall abide in my love, even as I have kept my Father's commandments, and abide in his love. So a faithful shepherd watches over his flock in all seasons.

He's awake. He leads his sheep to good pasture. And he abides. So that's who this angel has come to. He goes, just shepherds. So what? Yes, these are faithful men who are looking for their Messiah.

Verse 10, And the angel said unto them, here we have now, he brings his good news. But first he says, Hey, fear not, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. The word good tidings means to announce good news, to evangelize, meaning especially the gospel. Acts chapter 5, verse 42, it's used. It says, And daily in the temple and in every house they cease not to teach and preach Jesus.

Preach is the same word there for good tidings. They cease not to teach and proclaim good tidings of Jesus. Do the same thing again in Acts chapter 8, verse 25, after they've gone up to Samaria, because there's a revival happening, and on their way back, it says, And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel, many villages of the Samaritans.

[20:29] The word gospel there is the same word for good tidings. Preach the good news. So the angel comes and says, Fear not, behold, I bring you a gospel. I bring you good news. I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

Good news. Well, the greater the news, the greater the joy, right? So the gospel here is the greatest news. But who does it come to?

We said it came to the shepherds, didn't it, right? The message was for all people, but only told to the faithful shepherds. Well, Jesus said the same thing, essentially, to his disciples when he went to heaven at the end of his ministry.

He says, Go therefore into all the world, teaching all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I've commanded you. You, go teach what I commanded you. I have a message, but I'm giving it to you to go and take to others. Why don't you just have a bunch of angels appear to everybody? And that's not how the Lord has chosen to do it.

[21:32] The Lord comes to those who are faithfully continuing in the calling they've been given. And then he says, Now you go, you tell others.

For unto you, verse 11, is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you, you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Those two verses are so contrasting. They're like oil and water. For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is the anointed of the Lord. Yes! He's come.

The Messiah is here. Where is he? Is he on a white horse? Is he trampling Rome? What palace is he in? And this shall be a sign unto you, you shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger.

Well, that didn't go out of plan. That wasn't what was expected. But a faithful shepherd knows his Bible, doesn't he? For unto you is born this day in the city of David, a Savior, which is Christ the Lord.

[22 : 31] City of David, well, what's that mean? What city is that? I don't know what he's talking about. Christ the Lord, who's that? They know the word, and they could respond to what's being told them. A faithful shepherd also understands the signs of the times.

This shall be a sign unto you. He understood the sign. But that sign wasn't exactly as they expected, was it? The Messiah's coming was what? It was not how expected, as expected, or where expected.

If you look there in verse 12, you shall find the babe. That's not how they expected him to come.

The Messiah wasn't supposed to come as a baby. He's supposed to come as He-Man.

He's supposed to come as Captain America, or somebody who's going to do a dirty on the Romans. Come on. It was not as expected.

Wrapped in swaddling clothes. Well, if he's going to be a baby, he should be wrapped in king's garments. He should be wrapped in robes of crimson or purple. And it wasn't where expected.

Lying in a manger.

[23 : 33] Come now. A manger? Maybe a crib. But it should be like an ornate crib. But God's signs are clearly marked out, aren't they? This wasn't just some kind of like, oh, well, the Messiah's come.

I hope you find Him. No, God had very clear signs that He gave to these shepherds. God's sign of the Messiah was unique. It was unmistakable.

And it was identifiable. It was unique. The way God works is very unique. It's unmistakable. You're not going to think, well, maybe that wasn't the Lord.

Because He lays it out very clearly when He gives us His Word and tells us what's to come. And it's identifiable. They knew when they found that baby. Now, it's interesting, too. The way God presents His signs, He does it in a way that requires faith, doesn't He?

They could have gone into Bethlehem and they could have found Jesus. And I'm like, yeah. But maybe it's a coincidence. Maybe it's just another baby that was laid in the manger. You know? I don't know.

[24 : 37] Wars and rumors of wars and pestilence and one-world currency and markets. It could just be a coincidence. You know? It might not be the Lord, really. But a faithful shepherd and a faithful flock understands the signs of the time.

Right? They see that God's hand is all over God's plans, isn't it? And so when God is moving and we're moving with Him and we're seeing His signs, we don't have to question ourselves and go, I don't know.

Is that really the Lord? Because He's not trying to trick us. He wants us to know. He wanted these shepherds to know. And lastly, what did that scripture tell us there? You shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes.

What was a given? They're going to go look. And what can you not find? Something you don't search for. You don't look for it. You can't find it. Can you? Yeah? Like when you're a kid. Go hide and seek.

Your siblings tell you, you go hide and we'll find you. And they'll never come and find you. And you're there for a long time. Then you realize, oh, okay. I see how this is. They're not going to find me. I'm not sure who won in that scenario.

[25 : 41] You didn't find me. But you can't find something you don't search for. Jeremiah 29, 13 and 14. And you shall seek me and find me. When you shall search for me with all your heart.

And I will be found of you, says the Lord. What's the condition for finding Him? You have to seek. You have to search. New Testament parallel to that. Matthew 7, verses 7 and 8.

Ask and it shall be given to you. Seek and you shall find. Knock and it shall be opened unto you. For everyone that asks receives. And he that seeks finds. And to him that knocks, it shall be opened.

And we know in the Greek that is asking, keep on asking. Knock and keep on knocking. Not because God isn't going to answer or hear. God wants a continual relationship. Please keep coming back. Keep asking.

Keep knocking. Whatever you need. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly hosts praising God and saying glory to God in the highest.

[26 : 37] And on earth, peace, goodwill toward men. The Messiah has come. These men living in the days of the coming Messiah. Just going about their business. Faithfully tending their flock in the night season.

Awake. Alert. And now they get this wonderful news. And here this whole host of angels now come. You know, as a kid I always thought it was like a bunch of angels showing up.

Awake. It's just one who gives them the news. And then a bunch of them singing glory to God. If they all showed up in one big host, they probably would have killed them. You know. We don't know who the angel is, but it's probably Gabriel.

He got to come and tell Zacharias and Elizabeth and Mary. So he's probably getting to come to these shepherds. Glory to God in the highest. On earth, peace, goodwill toward men.

The Messiah is coming. What does it do? It affects both heaven and earth, doesn't it? The seen and the unseen. Here we have the multitude of the heavenly host as well as the shepherds here responding to the coming of Messiah.

[27 : 35] When Jesus comes back for his bride and when he comes back again to this earth, it's going to affect the seen and the unseen. The Messiah's coming results in praise to God. It reveals the heart of God, doesn't it?

And on earth, peace, goodwill toward men. God's desire is for man to be at peace with him. And it opens the door for all. All qualify. Goodwill toward men.

All men. We all get a chance. And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let's go to Bethlehem.

Let us now go unto Bethlehem and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord has made known unto us. And they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger.

All right. How long did that take? That's just like, oh, walk into Bethlehem and tripped over the manger. There it was. What would have been easy to find, guys, the little drummer boys going, the ox and lamb are keeping time.

[28 : 33] Right? It was easy. I don't know where that one came from, that tradition. I don't. But. So I don't think, and we'll look at this next week, Jesus wasn't born in a cave off in some Judean hillside.

Right? They went into where? Bethlehem. Okay? As far as I know, there's no caves in Bethlehem. At that time, in Israel, they would have stabled their animals right next to their house.

It would be like part of their house, like their garage almost. And so they're coming and they're looking for this Messiah in a manger in the place where they're expecting to find the animals. So they know, okay, it's going to be in someone.

Someone's garage is going to be lit up. Right? There's going to be a light somewhere. And maybe they heard a baby crying, but they're walking through Bethlehem. It's quiet. It's not a big place. You know? And then all of a sudden they see.

There was no star at this time leading them. There was no wise men with their camels parked outside. Just faithful shepherds searching for the Messiah. And then imagine, you know, there's a light on over there.

[29 : 42] Let's go see. Kind of poking your head in. There he is, lying in a manger. The king of the world. I was thinking this week, I've been listening back through Narnia again.

When I have time. And I said, I want a king. I love to have kings. I want a king. You know? I want a king to faithfully serve. And to kneel before and have him say, well done.

You know? And I have a king. And I'm so excited about that. I've just been thinking about that this week. I have a king. I answer to a king. I serve a king. And here's this king laying there. Just wrapped in swaddling clothes.

Which I thought Mary was, she was quite a girl. As we looked at last week, her name can also mean like rebellion. As well as blessed and bitter. She must have had some spunk. Because there ain't no way my wife. Not that you don't have spunk. Sorry. That came out bad. But there's no way with our first child, me either, would I have laid the kid in a feeding trough. I would have been like, no, no, honey. I know you need a break.

[30 : 39] Let me hold it. But she's just like, why? Because she had to fulfill scripture. Because the Lord, right from the beginning, put it in her heart. Just lay the baby there.

She was quite a woman. And they came with haste and they found Mary and Joseph and the baby lying in danger. Faithful shepherds respond in faith to God's word, don't they? How did they respond in faith to the news of the Messiah? What did their faith look like? It looked like this. It looked like belief. They responded in belief. They believed what was told them. They responded in unity. Come now, let us go. We're all going to go do this, boys. Let's go. In participation. Man, I want to be a part of what God's doing. In anticipation. They were so excited. The Messiah had come. They've been anticipating. And in haste. They didn't say, well, let's wait until tomorrow. You know, let's just wait. No, the faithful shepherds responded in faith. And what did they do?

[31 : 39] Faith comes by hearing. And hearing by the word. Before they ever saw, they believed. Belief came before sight. Because the faithful shepherds, they came to see, but they already now knew.

They believed the angel. The angel said, this is what you will find. They said, I believe that. I'm going to act on that. I might have been more skeptical. I'm glad I didn't live in this time. I either would have been a Pharisee. Or one who was like, this is nuts.

I'm out of here. You know? I mean, when it says that all the sick and the diseased and the lepers came to Jesus. You think, I want to be there with Jesus when he's healing people. No, you don't. No, not when all the sick people are coughing on you and the lepers brushing against you. You're like, ah! Right? You don't want to be that guy. And I think, if I was these guys, like, ah, wow, that was crazy, guys. But you know what? I mean, if Satan can appear as an angel of light, I'm going to stay here.

And you go check it out. I might have been more skeptical. I'm so glad the Lord, he knows us and deals with each of us. But the shepherds were convinced, not by the presence of the angel, but by the message.

[32 : 40] They said, let us go and see this thing we have, which has been told us. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying, which was told them concerning this child.

So they go down, they respond in faith to the word that was spoken to them. And then what did they do? They're excited. I don't think they went from house to house in the middle of the night. We're like, guess what?

This baby's been born. But I think the next day, they were so excited as they saw different people throughout the town. They went home to their wives. Honey, you won't believe what happened. And when they'd seen it, they made known abroad the saying, which was told them concerning the child. The shepherds shared what they had personally experienced, didn't they? Their personal experience aligned with God's word.

And when faith and sight combine, it creates testimony. We walk by faith, not by sight. But when our faith and our experience of faith combine, that creates a testimony.

[33 : 38] And we then have that to share. Hey, I put my trust in God. I saw him do this. Let me share that with you now. And that's what they've done. 1 John writes and tells us the same thing in chapter 1, verse 3.

He says, that which we have seen and heard, declare we unto you. This is what we've experienced, guys. We're declaring unto you what we've experienced of God and his word, that you may also have fellowship with us. And truly, our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ. And the shepherds, in that scripture, in verse 17 there, what does it say? And when they heard, and when they had seen it, they made known abroad what had happened to them. Their experience. No. They made known abroad what was told them concerning this child. Again, this is probably where I would differ. I'd be like, ha! The angel came to me and my buddies. We were having this little conference, you know, over here with the flock.

God appeared to us and told us to tell you these things. But just remember who he appeared to. I saw the angel and the heavenly host. What they were so excited about was what God had told them. They went and made known abroad what was told them.

[34 : 42] They emphasized the word of God above their experience. These are some remarkable men. In verse 18, And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told them by the shepherds.

We see the same thing when Jesus comes off the mountain, the Mount of Transfiguration. He comes down into the valley. And there's his disciples trying to deal with the crowds, the demon-possessed and the sick and all that, without Jesus.

Okay? That's one thing to deal with that with Jesus. The sick and the hurting and the needy and the demon-possessed. But trying to deal with that without Jesus, that's no fun. And Jesus answering said, when they said, hey, we can't cast out the demon out of this kid.

He said, oh, faithless and perverse generation, how long shall I be with you and suffer you? Bring your son here. And as he was yet coming, the devil threw him down and tear him. It tore Jesus' heart, too, I'm sure.

And Jesus rebuked the unclean spirit and healed the child and delivered him again to his father.

They were all amazed at the mighty power of God. But while they wondered, and there's that word, all they that heard it wondered of what the shepherds told them.

[35 : 49] While they wondered, everyone at all things which Jesus did, he said to his disciples, let these sayings sink down into your ears, for the Son of Man shall be delivered into the hands of men. The wonder is the fertile soil from which either faith or skepticism may grow.

It does not necessarily lead to faith. You see, all through Jesus' ministry, they were amazed, they wondered, and they crucified him. It didn't lead to faith. When God does something wonderful in our life, it doesn't necessarily mean it's going to result in faith.

It can result in skepticism just as easily. That's why we must anchor ourselves, not in our experiences, but in God's word. And let God's word shine light on our experiences, inform our experiences, and then we can truly own those experiences as testimony.

But faithful shepherds do what? They go forth and speak God's word. Faithful shepherds speak forth God's word. And looking back to that verse in Ezekiel 34 that we read, verse 14, he says, I will feed them in a good pasture.

Upon the high mountains of Israel shall be their fold. There shall they lie down in a good fold. In a fat pasture shall they feed upon the mountains of Israel. And what is that fat pasture that we feed on?

[36 : 59] It's God's word, God's truth. And so a good shepherd speaks forth God's truth. And then the last verse we'll look at today. And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things that they heard and seen as what was told unto them, aligned with God's word.

Their experience aligned with God's word. A faithful shepherd always returns to his flock. A true move of God will never separate a shepherd from his flock. You know, these shepherds, they had a new sense of notoriety.

They had a book deal waiting for them. They had television appearances, right? They said, no, no, no. We're going back to our flock. But they didn't go back the same, did they? They went back glorifying the Lord, praising the Lord.

And just as we said at the beginning, that they received the truth. They responded to the truth. But then on top of that, they lived in the truth of that good news. A true move of God will never separate a shepherd from his flock.

And the shepherds had found everything to be exactly as God said it would be, didn't they? The coming of Messiah results in praise and glory to God, doesn't it?

[38 : 11] And they returned to their flock doing just that. You know, a shepherd may not be much in the eyes of the world. They're just shepherds. They're part of the story. They fit in the manger scene so well.

You know, without that whole one size is, I mean, you got the three wise men on this side. You didn't have the shepherds. It would be lopsided. You got to put the shepherds in there. Makes it so even. But they mattered a whole lot.

To God, yes. But you know who else a shepherd matters a lot to? His sheep. It matters a lot to his sheep. What does a faithful shepherd do? He watches over his flock in all seasons.

He's awake. He leads his sheep to good pasture. He abides. He knows his Bible. He understands the signs of the times. He responds in faith. He speaks forth God's truth. And he always returns to his flock. And that's not just for shepherds, for pastors. That's for each of us. As God has said, go forth into all the world, teaching all nations to observe those things which I commanded you.

[39 : 09] God allowed the coming of the news of his Messiah. Like, all history was waiting for this. And who did it come to? Well, guess who that news is coming to today, guys?

It's not the big churches, mainline churches. You know? The old things not getting up there and telling people to get ready for the Messiah. Because he's coming. Right? It's the faithful flocks, like this one.

It's the remnant church. It's like, Jesus is coming. And we get to go out there just like these shepherds. And declare the testimony of what God has done. It is true, whether you believe it or not.

I'm sure there are those that are like, okay. Yeah, Mary got pregnant by an angel and you saw an angel. Sure. This world is going crazy. And look what Satan was doing at that time.

It was a time of one of the greatest movement of demonic activity in the world. I mean, you saw that before the flood in Noah's time with the demonic activity.

[40 : 07] You didn't see that again until Jesus' time. You don't see that in Acts. You have like one or two demons cast out. In Jesus' day, they're everywhere. Satan's loading up because he wants people to go, that's just another spiritual phenomenon.

Okay, you saw a UFO and you saw an angel. Whatever. Except we have something they don't have. We have God's Word. That we can align our experience and what God's doing in this world with His Word.

And we can say, yeah, but this is what God's Word says. This is what the good tidings. So as a close, I'm going to read in Luke 15, verses 4 through 7.

Jesus says this, speaking of His heart towards sheep. He says, What man of you, having a hundred sheep, if he lose one of them, does he not leave the ninety and nine in the wilderness and go after that which he lost until he found it?

And when he's found it, he lays it on his shoulders saying, rejoice. Or lays it on his shoulders rejoicing. When he comes home, he calls together his friends and neighbors saying to them, rejoice with me, for I have found my sheep which was lost.

[41 : 12] I say unto you that likewise joy shall be in heaven over one sinner that repents. More than over ninety and nine just persons which need no repentance. And maybe you feel like you're playing hide and seek.

That you've gone to hide and nobody wants to come and find you. But the Lord, He left the ninety-nine to go find the one. This seems like amazing to me. Right? Because we read in the Bible, this is God's heart.

But it's not that amazing in the everyday world. So a shepherd goes and finds one sheep. Who cares? He's got a whole flock. Why does it really matter if he lost that one? Well, who does it matter to? It mattered to that sheep.

It sure did. It did. And it also mattered to the shepherd because he cares for every single one. Fear not. Behold, I bring you good news of great joy.

Great joy that will be for all people. For us today, great news. Good news of great joy. The Messiah has come and we are in the season leading up to where the Messiah will come.

[42 : 13] And maybe you feel alone, but you're not. We've got our small flock, right? And there's many small flocks around. And they're a faithful shepherd. So let's be awake. Let's be watching.

And let's take the testimony we have out into a dark world. Lord, as we close now, we just want our hearts to be responding to you, Lord.

Lord, you tell us to be doers of the word and not hearers only, deceiving our own selves. Lord, the action so often we think that we're called to do is like some extroverted thing to go out and make noise and make a name for ourselves or prove something.

But, Lord, the action that you care about is faith. It's of the heart. So, Lord, we want to respond to you now in prayer from our hearts, Lord.

Lord, what you've spoken in each one of us, Lord. Lord, as I just go through this, through your word, Lord, and just teaching this and just declaring this, Lord, it just speaks to me so much.

[43 : 15] So, Lord, I know the things you've spoken to my heart. The things you've spoken to each of our hearts, Lord. Let us now ratify them in prayer. Ratify them saying, yes, Lord. Yes. I want you to do in my heart the things you've spoken.

We love you, Lord. In Jesus' name. Amen. I was thinking of Zacharias, what he said. In chapter one.

And Zacharias filled with the Holy Spirit and prophesying, saying, Blessed be the Lord God of Israel, for he has visited and redeemed his people, and has raised up a horn of salvation for us in the house of his servant David, as he spake by the mouth of his holy prophets, which had been since the world began, that we should be saved from our enemies, from the hand of all that hate us, to perform the mercy promised to our fathers, to remember his holy covenant, the oath which he swore to our father Abraham, that he would grant unto us that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies, might serve him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before him all the days of our life.

And he jumps down, talking of John the Baptist in verse 79, is to give light to them that sit in darkness and in the shadow of death that guide our feet into the way of peace.

God's desire for us is to serve him and to live without fear, but to live in peace. Amen. God bless you, y'all.