

A Message for Nobodies

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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." 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's 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. But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.
– Luke 2:8-20*

In his book *No Little People*, Francis Schaeffer insisted that if Jesus Christ has made you His own, then it is impossible for you to think of yourself as insignificant.

If the demographics of our country are any indication, we can safely say that many readers of this article have had deep disappointments. We have suffered setbacks in business or not attained the career goals we set for ourselves; we have been through divorce or are children of divorce. Often, we are tempted to think that we are rejected, to believe that we are insignificant. Luke 2:8-20 offers an answer to this temptation, an answer that is the core of the Christmas message. In God's family there are no "rejected," "worthless," or "insignificant" people. There are no little people.

In Luke 2, an angel announces this truth to shepherds watching over their flocks. The angel says, "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." Then a great number of angels appeared, praising God and declaring, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace to men on whom his favor rests" (Luke 2:14). You may have heard this story many times. The shepherds, praising God joyfully, go and find Jesus and then spread the word, telling others what they have heard and seen.

A Message that Is the Same for Everybody

I recently received a letter in which a woman told me of unimaginable abuse in her past. She described herself as the queen of self-condemnation and the duchess of others' contempt. She wrote, "I have become a person of rage, bitterness and self-hatred. People told me I was worthless, they rejected me, and I believed them." However, she went on to write, "I am beginning to understand that this is not true, that God loves me, that Christ died for me, and that as I surrender my life more and more to Him I get it back more and more. I'm set free, I'm given dignity." This is such a clear statement of God's grace. God loves to take a nobody and make them a somebody, giving them the message of grace that is the same for everybody.

This is the story told in Luke 2:8-20. Next to lepers, shepherds were the biggest nobodies in Israel. Shepherds were denied basic civil rights. They were not permitted to testify in court, because it was assumed that all shepherds were dishonest. They were not allowed access to the temple. They might have even thought that God Himself rejected them. It is to these men that the angel makes his announcement, "Unto you a Savior has been born." Christ the Savior comes to the nobodies. For nobodies He has been born, and for nobodies He will die. God Himself, no one less, announces the same words to you. Christ was born for you, and He has died for you. You are not allowed to think of yourself as insignificant, as worthless.

What is the response to such grace? The response of the shepherds was to worship God. Think of what you know about worship. Worship inevitably transforms a person. If you worship your house, you will find that you become as worthless as your house. If you worship your career, you will soon act like you are of no more worth than your career. However, the Bible promises that when you worship Christ, you become like Christ. God takes nobodies and transforms them to be like Christ. If you are like Christ, nobody can call you a nobody.

God could have announced the birth of His son to any number of people. The religious experts of the day were waiting, studying carefully, expecting the arrival of the Messiah. There were others who were more socially prestigious. The shepherds, however, were on God's short list. Other than Joseph, Mary and their immediate family, shepherds were the first to know the good news. They were the first to see the Savior after His birth. We cannot simply assume that the shepherds were not devout men. Like the religious experts, they might have been eager for the consolation of Israel. We do now see clearly in the passage, however, that the shepherds were aware of their need. They recognized the good news so readily because they were desperate for deliverance.

There is a true story of Francis Schaeffer walking in the streets of France with a group of friends. They passed a prostitute and Schaeffer stopped and asked her, "How much?" His friends were horrified but the woman gave him her price. He replied, "No, how much?" She gave her price again. "I do not mean that," he said. "I mean, how much are you worth?" She did not know how to answer such a question. He explained that she was made in the image of God, and that Christ had died for sinners so they might have fellowship with God. She was worth much more than the price she had quoted. She was worth the price of the blood of the Savior.

A Free Message

Was she looking for this message? Did she somehow deserve it, because of something in herself? No more than you or I. God found this woman, and He found the shepherds, and He finds you and me. You could have been born in another part of the world. You could have died in your sleep last night. Those things could have happened, but there is something actually happening. That is certain. This message is being put before you right now. God announces to you just as He announced to the shepherds, “Christ the Savior has been born.”

Why should He bring that news to you, whether it is the first time you have heard it or the thousandth time? He brings this good news to you simply because He chooses to, because He elected to. God predestined that you would hear His good news right now. I use the word predestination because it is used in the Bible. The Bible simply states it as fact: God chooses to bring His good news to those whom He will. In fact, the Bible does not argue the point, it simply offers a hymn of praise when God announces His good news.

Do you see what this means? God has chosen to bring this announcement to you. You can be offended by it. You can think that you somehow deserve it, and offend God with your attitude. You can even waste your time trying to explain all of the details. Or you can recognize that God has brought this message to you for the praise of His glorious grace. He delights in saying to people – to you – “Christ the Savior is born for you.”

A Message to Share

Notice that once they embraced this message, the shepherds could not resist sharing it. What can we see from these verses about the message that these men shared? We know from the angel, in verse 10, that it is a message of joy. Do you give the impression to others around you that the Gospel is a message of joy? Paul said that the good news of Christ is not a matter of rules; it is about righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit. Is there joy and laughter in your life? Watching you, would the world suspect that the Gospel is a message of great joy? Secondly, we see that this message is for all people. The angel told the shepherds that the message was for all people, that it would spread beyond the borders of the Jewish nation. It was a message for the Gentiles as well. The angel was announcing the missionary heart of God.

One Sunday, a man pulled me aside to ask if I allow former drug addicts to come to our church. I responded, “Look at all of these people. All of these people are addicted to something. They are addicted to their clothes, their cars, their houses. They are addicted to their jobs, their children, their egos, and their sin. This church is full of addicts, and their pastor is no exception.” He began to smile, and I asked him, “Do you feel at home now? Do not let the Sunday clothes fool you. We are all messed up.”

The Gospel is the message of great joy for all people. Do our churches welcome all people? Are we nervous about inviting friends to church, that they will not be accepted? If so, what are we doing in church – do we think we are more acceptable than they are? Maybe the opposite is true. Maybe we know how messed up we are and come hoping that all of the other churchgoers, who have their lives together, will rub off. Not a chance. We are all messed up, but the Gospel is a message of kept promises. The shepherds went to look for Jesus, and they found Him. Everything was just as the angel had told them. We live in a society that does not know the keeping of promises. When you hold out Jesus to people, and they come to embrace Him, they will find He is just exactly as the Bible says He is.

A Message of Salvation

A few years ago, I met a very dear elderly woman in a nursing home. She told me the story of how she, an African American, was found as a baby on the side of a railroad track by a rich Jewish woman. The woman

took her home and raised her as her own daughter. She was given everything she wanted, including security and love, but the woman's family resented that this child had been brought into their home. They persecuted this little girl until, when she was a teenager, she ran away from home.

For the rest of her life she had lived with the regret that she could not find the woman who had taken her in, who had saved her. As she told her story, I could only think of those who reject the gracious knowledge that Jesus Christ has come to save sinners. However, the woman's story did not stop there. She went on to tell us how another Jew had found her, found her while she was trying to reject everyone, and had announced to her: "I am Christ the savior. I was born for you." She had embraced Jesus as her Savior, and she sang praises with us, announcing to us the good news of the Gospel, just as she did with everyone around her. This is the message that God delights in delivering over and over again. He takes nobodies and makes them somebodies by His grace, and then gives them a message that is for everybody, even for people like you and me. This is the message of Christmas. ■

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