

Disruption, Rescue, Restoration

Luke 2:1–20

In those days a decree went out from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be registered. ² This was the first registration when Quirinius was governor of Syria. ³ And all went to be registered, each to his own town. ⁴ And Joseph also went up from Galilee, from the town of Nazareth, to 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, who was with child. ⁶ And while they were there, the time came for her to give birth. ⁷ And she gave birth to her firstborn son and wrapped him in swaddling cloths and laid him in a manger, because there was no place for them in the inn.

⁸ And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, “Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. ¹¹ For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. ¹² And this will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and 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 among those with whom he is pleased!”

¹⁵ When the angels went away from them into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has made known to us.” ¹⁶ And they went with haste and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger. ¹⁷ And when they saw it, they made known the saying that had been told them concerning this child. ¹⁸ And all who heard it wondered at what the shepherds told them. ¹⁹ But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart. ²⁰ And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them.

PRAY

A little over a week ago neighboring states saw an outbreak of catastrophic tornados, one of which cut a groove through 200 miles of Kentucky, leaving death and destruction in its wake. I read and watched interviews with governors and 1st responders and wished I could do something to help... wished I could be there and put my back into it and dig people out... wished I could bind wounds, restore what was lost, be an instrument of healing. The reports showed rescue command centers, large equipment brought in, Southern Baptist Disaster Relief contributing their expertise and resources. I saw heart-breaking videos of people holding pictures of loved ones, tears streaming down their cheeks, heard choked-up pleas: “This is my dad. He's lost. We haven't seen or heard from him since the storm. His house is destroyed. Please help us find him.”

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In Kansas this week extraordinary winds tore down signs and buildings and whipped up prairie fires that raced through miles and miles of dry fields. In western Kansas, where it was the worst, a wildfire consumed a man while he was trying to keep his house from catching fire. Another man evidently ran out of gas on a small rural road and was caught in a raging fire. Before he was found his fiancé held a photo, tears streaming down her cheeks, and cried, "Please help us find him. We haven't heard from him since the storm."

In Eden, cosmic treason sparked and raged against God and ripped the crown of creation away from communion with him, leaving death and destruction of all humankind in its wake. I've read about the destruction... I've felt it! Murder, estrangement, sickness, lying, dishonesty, abuse, contempt... and that's just on a horizontal plane between the children of Adam. On a vertical plane the children who were fashioned for communion and worship were driven away from the table when they declared war against God. So a state of hostility and enmity and wrath has existed since that day. All were lost. All have sinned and fall short of the glory of God and thus earned the wages of sin: death.

As the tornado was destroying the first homes in Kentucky, local officials grabbed the disaster plan notebook off the shelf and began to implement what had been prepared long before the deadly storm hit. In the perfect counsel of the triune God, the rescue plan he established before the foundation of the world was at work as he began unfolding the certainty of rescue and redemption. Since the disaster of Genesis 3 we see the meticulous care of God, his consistent message and agenda revealing that his children, lost and trapped under the crushing wreckage of sin, were neither left to suffer the just consequence of their own rebellion, nor were they left to dig themselves out from under the tonnage of transgression that weighed like the twin towers. God's exhaustive rescue would be led, executed, and underwritten by the Son, who came to seek and save those who are lost.

Today's passage doesn't describe the beginning of God's plan, it describes the next critical step in its implementation. The God who is seeking and saving the lost now takes on the form of the lost and physically enters into the wreckage and destruction and death wrought by the catastrophic fall. Everything about this mission is saturated by grace, and mercy, and love, and power. Those buried under the weight of the fallen twin towers in New York could not dig themselves out any more than those under the crushing weight of sin. Everything about the success of our rescue rides on the capacity and work of the rescuing Son. Good news! Because of his capacity, his obedience, his righteousness, and his resurrection, the outcome of his mission is certain. He will accomplish all he

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intends. With a heart of gratitude, with a heart of worship, with an awareness of his love that overcomes and undoes the death and destruction we have brought down on our own heads, let's see this critical arrival of our Rescuer and rejoice in the hope we have that life, satisfaction, joy, and restored communion and peace are to be found and had in him alone.

That was a long introduction to today's sermon. Two weeks ago we saw the scope of the wreckage of sin when we looked in Genesis 3. Today we see how God disrupts the ruin of sin, rescues the lost.

In Luke 1 we see that there are a handful of people who have been told in advance about arrival of Messiah. Mary, of course, and Joseph, her betrothed. Elizabeth, Zechariah, and John the Baptist, who is now about 6 months old. No one is listening to him. Yet. Perhaps some of the story leaked out here or there, but who is gonna believe a story like that unless an angel comes and tells you? When we get to the first several verses of Luke 2 we see four people who are servants of the Lord as he intervenes in a sin-ravaged world: Caesar Augustus, Mary, and Joseph, and shepherds. Quirinius is mentioned to provide historical context and a time locator, as Luke does so beautifully so that we know these are real historical events. David is mentioned so that we understand that this is the fulfillment of the promise to David and repeated in Isaiah that he would never fail to have his descendant reigning on the throne of God's people. Let's how God uses the three people that Luke spotlights is disrupt the curse and bring about rescue.

Disruption — vv. 1–8 — Disruption in the world and in weariness

v. 1 — All the world is mentioned... all the world known to the power-hungry Caesar Augustus, that is. Augustus is a pretentious title of self-importance sought to stroke his ego. He was a pride-filled government ruler who craved more money and more control as he seemingly made the world a darker place. (Wow, I can't relate to that at all.) He believes his decree is furthering his rule and reign. What he doesn't know is that he is actually a servant of Almighty God acting in complete accord with God's plan to rescue mankind. His registration was not furthering his reign, but undoing it as the Lord's reign was being established.

Take heart: God used a government goofball to move Jesus to the City of David just in time to fulfill prophesy. All human agents serve God, whether they know it or not. He raises up kings and brings them down for his purposes. He orchestrates and works all things out for his glory and our good. Even godless government are servants of the most high King. **Ephesians 1:11** tells us he works all

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things according to the counsel of his will. All things. See the invisible hand of providence that is working all things together for our good and his glory. Don't fret or grow weary. Worship sovereign God!

Now consider weariness... I imagine Joseph and Mary were both weary by the time we get to v. 7. She ends up in labor in a crude manger — this at the end of 90-ish miles of walking. Moms, how does that sound in your ear. That's the grind of their weary world ruined by sin and sinners. Godless governments, difficult circumstances... and poverty. Mary is a peasant girl from backwater Nazareth — “Can anything good come out of Nazareth?” Joseph is a work-a-day carpenter. Neither of them possess anything impressive to the movers and shakers of the world, to the Caesars, or to the “important people.” No money, no education, and no social pedigree. Or, no bucks, no books, no background. So how does it shake out that they get the privilege of parenting the incarnate Son of God? We can deduce some things from the limited information given. They were both worshipers of God and lived in ways that pleased Him. Mary was a humble servant, living according to the moral law, walking with him, as best we can tell, day by day. She was not extraordinary. She was simply obedient. What of Joseph? We know even less about him. We see that he is a gentle man. He did not want to humiliate Mary when he discovered she was pregnant but had not yet learned what God was doing. He could have had her stoned according to the Law. But he didn't. He was just — that is he lived out God's commands. He did what God told him to do. Mary and Joseph both humbly and simply walked with God day in and day out. Not flashy; they're just obedient. And they are obedient in a dark world where God has been silent, if you will, for 400 years. They had the Law, but God had not sent a prophet from Malachi to Matthew. So they lived faithfully in spite of a godless government and a ruined world under the curse.

Finally you have the shepherds. Joseph looks fancy compared to the shepherds. He likely has a job with a roof over it. Shepherds are a class of people that are regarded as unsophisticated, uneducated, and uninvited. By that I mean they smell like sheep and sleep in fields, so they don't make the list for social engagements. But God turns the world's class and merit systems upside by first announcing the implementation of His rescue plan to shepherds. Not Caesar. Not the Mayor — it was to the lowest class.

The application for us is not overly complex. God, for his purposes and by his grace, chooses to advance his kingdom, his rule and reign, through the means ordinary people whose lives are

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submitted to him, who are humbly walking in faith and obedience to what God has said. He does this so that he is glorified and there's no mistake about who is doing the saving.

Do you want God to use you? Be faithful today. In your work, don't worry about the praise of men. Serve faithfully *Coram Deo*, before the face of God; that is the only reality that matters. He fills the hungry with good things as he promises in Matthew 5:6. He sees. He supplies. He rewards. He directs -- even in confusing times that cut against the grain of the world's values. In the middle of diapers and dishes and laundry, serve faithfully. Hunger and thirst for righteousness. In retirement, though with waning strength and stamina, serve faithfully in light of God's goodness and with the awareness of your approaching reward. In class and through homework, learn well, including learning to love God, who is our end and therefore our greatest priority of life. At the work place, whatever your hand finds to do, work with all your might as unto the Lord; we ultimately give account to him. In the midst of the ruin of a broken world from which we need rescue, love God and walk faithfully. The deliverer has come, and is coming again. God will not forsake his children or leave them begging for bread.

So the world was not, and is not beyond God's reach. He governs the work-a-day world with its wicked rulers. Indeed, it is right in the middle of daily responsibilities that God interrupted and executed his rescue plan.

Rescue — vv. 9–14 — His rescue is rooted in his eternal word and in wonder

Word and wonder... God speaks his word to reveal what he is doing. When we hear his word it stirs up faith. He spoke about his plan in Genesis 3. He spoke through prophets, telling about the Rescuing Messiah who was coming. He spoke to Mary through Gabriel, and to Joseph in a dream. And now he is speaking to announce that the Savior is here through his angels. The word, angel, you remember means messenger — He sends them to speak his word.

So God's word — his revealed plan for salvation — comes through angels here, and God's word incarnate — Christ, the Lord — is born in Bethlehem. ***Word of the Father, now in flesh appearing!*** God's word is forever firmly fixed in the heavens, as Psalm 119:89 says. It is irrevocable. And the Word incarnate, Jesus Christ, is the same yesterday, today, and forever. The certainty of our hope and salvation is based on God's word. It is his work finished by Christ. It will not expire or change. He will not rethink it at some point and require merit from us we cannot earn. This stirs up wonder.

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First of all there is a lot of wonder about the experience of a bunch of supernatural beings showing up in the field singing loudly in the middle of the night. Having memorized Revelation 4 and coming to grips with some of the seraphim, I'd terrified, too. But there's a greater wonder about God's rescue plan that begins to blow up their understanding of salvation, and it's revealed in **v. 14** — Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

Peace with God? Remember that at this time the heart of worship, the center of sacrificial worship was **sacrifice**. Week in, week out, there is a reminder that God's wrath is heaped up against sin. Bulls and goats are slaughter week after week. The priests stand over and over with knives killing one animal after another for sin because God is holy and cannot tolerate sin. God is angry against sin every day. (Psalm 7:11) But the wonder of this word: Peace. This last high priest has come and will give himself as an offering, making peace through the blood of his cross. The fullness of that isn't clear to them yet. So there is wonder about this collision between heaven and earth and the promise of peace. The word of God stirs up wonder about God's rescue of the lost through this baby.

Restoration — vv. 15–20 — Restoration involves wisdom, witness, and worship

The shepherds responded to God's word. You know what that is? That's **wisdom**. God spoke and they heard. God revealed his salvation and they reoriented their lives to what the Lord had made known to them. And they did it with haste! Beloved, today God is still speaking and making known his rescue plan of peace. His word is calling you away from the darkness of sin. God, who said, "Let light shine out of darkness," has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. Today is the day of salvation. Be wise and turn to the living God! Make haste, and believe on the Lord Jesus. As it was for them, it is for everyone who comes to this King.

The shepherds looked down in the face of the one who will say, "I am the Good Shepherd; the good shepherd gives his life for the sheep," and they are forever changed. They respond in wisdom to the word of God, and they go out bearing **witness** of the grace and glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ. They witness to everyone who will hear. They are like Peter in Acts: "We can't help but speak of what we have seen." Bear witness this week. Tell of peace with God through Christ.

Wisdom, witness, and worship. **Worship. v. 20** They returned glorifying and praising God. Worship is the response of everyone who meets this Good Shepherd, the one who has come to seek and save the lost. Let's not give lip service to worship. Let's worship. This week make time, budget time to

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stand in awe and wonder of this peace-making infant King, your High Priest, your Good Shepherd who condescended and laid down his life for you, if you are indeed one of his sheep. Don't let the angels out-sing you. They know of Christ the Lord's salvation only through observation and knowledge. His sheep know it by experience and transformation and a new heart. You have been brought from death to life! You have been rescued by the Savior. Worship! He has pulled the mountain of soul-crushing sin off of you and placed it on himself. Worship Christ, the newborn King.