

Star Struck

Title: Part 2 – May I Have Your Attention Please

Date: December 3, 2023

Transition: Video Ends

Amen! Hey welcome to everyone in the house and especially to those joining us online. If you are anywhere in the Bay Area I'd like to invite you to join us for Christmas Eve, EVE! Two service times at 5 pm & 7 pm on December 23rd, we'd love to be a part of your celebrations this year and thanks for spending some time with us wherever you are today.

Today we are continuing a collection of messages that will take us all the way to Christmas called "Star Struck." As I said last week the goal of this is pretty simple. In the hustle and bustle of the next month I want us to stop long enough to rediscover the hope, promise and expectation of Christmas.

For many of us, Christmas means overstuffed schedules, credit card debt, and skyrocketing stress. We struggle to find the connection between our holiday to-do lists and the story of Jesus' birth. Amen? SO, this year let's change all of that! Let's allow ourselves to be "Star Struck" once again as we reorient our hearts and lives around this event that changed all of history.

The title of my message today is:

May I Have Your Attention Please

In the old days, does anybody remember the old days? Anybody? You're like, how old? I mean, like the old, old days. Anybody remember Tom Brokaw or Dan Rather on the news? What about Walter Cronkite, anyone here old enough to know that voice? But when something major happened in the world, whatever you were watching on television, they would break into it, right? "We are interrupting your regularly scheduled program with an important news alert." When that happened you just missed your show, they broke in, then after 5 or 10 minutes they went back to your "regularly scheduled program already in progress." Eventually we moved on from that to where they just make it scroll across the bottom. Now you can keep watching your program, but you can see there's a thunderstorm coming or there's a boil water notice or whatever. BUT back in the day they would have to break in with an important announcement.

AND the cool part of today's message is I get to tell you this is exactly what God is trying to do today! In fact, this is what God's always trying to do! God is trying to get our attention this Christmas season and every season!

It stuns me, honestly, that God has to even get our attention in the first place. And I am just talking personally here, why don't I just give God my attention more often? Are you with me? I'm wondering why we don't wake up in the morning and go, "God, you've got my attention today because you are running the universe and I'm not so I wanna be in alignment with you." But that's not the way humanity works is it? And so, God is constantly breaking into our story with important announcements about life, about who we are, about what He created us to be, and how He wants us to live.

AND there is no more important announcement than what we're gonna see today as we continue to allow the Christmas story to fill us with awe and wonder again. If you have your Bible with you or access to the Bible app we are going to be in **Luke 2** which is probably the most famous of the Gospel accounts of Jesus' birth.

In the first few verses, Jesus is born, I think you know that, but a census went out from Ceasar a be taken. Everyone had to return to their ancestral home to be counted. So, Joseph went from Nazareth down to Bethlehem because he was of the house of David. And there Mary, who was expecting a baby, gave birth to the baby and they wrapped Him in cloth and put Him in a manger because there was no room for them in the

inn. If you didn't know, that's Luke chapter 2. God has done the miracle of miracles. He has found a way to birth deity in humanity and it happened in a quiet moment that nobody knows about.

SO, now God needs to get everybody's attention with this important announcement. And that's what happens beginning in verse 8:

And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night.

Before we read on, switch outta someone playing a little jazz piano in the background next to the fireplace while the kids run around in their matching buffalo plaid pajamas. Switch outta that and into the actual moment for a second, the darkness, the cold, the isolation, the exhaustion, even the smell... There were shepherds living out in the fields keeping watch over their flocks at night, verse 9:

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 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." Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God, and saying, "Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those 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.

I got some takeaway's that I want to give you this morning from this familiar text to hopefully stir some awe and wonder again in our hearts this Christmas. So, if you are taking notes, the first thing I want you to see today is that:

This announcement first came to the shepherds.

And we all know that in the story because they're on the Christmas card and they're a part of the nativity scene, but it's important that you know the significance of this in the story.

See the shepherds would have been the lowest class of people at this time. In Christ's day, shepherds stood on the bottom rung of the Palestinian social ladder. They shared the same unenviable status as tax collectors and dung sweepers, AND only Luke mentions them in his Gospel.

During the time of the Patriarchs (Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob), shepherding was a noble occupation. The wealthy sons of Isaac and Jacob tended flocks. Jethro, the priest of Midian, who would become Moses father-in-law employed his daughters as shepherdesses. BUT when the twelve tribes of Israel migrated to Egypt, they encountered a lifestyle foreign to them. The Egyptians were agriculturalists. As farmers, they despised shepherding because sheep and goats meant death to crops. Egyptians considered sheep

worthless for food and for sacrifice. Neighboring Arabs—their enemy—were shepherds, and Egyptian hatred climaxed when shepherd kings seized Lower Egypt.

So, over the course of the next 400 years, the Egyptians prejudiced the Israelites' attitude toward shepherding. Jacob's descendants became accustomed to a settled lifestyle and forgot their nomadic roots. After they settled in the Promised Land, shepherding ceased to hold its prominent position. As the Israelites acquired more farmland, pasturing decreased. Shepherding became a menial vocation for the laboring class. In the days of the Prophets, sheep-herders symbolized judgment and social desolation. Smug religious leaders at the time of Christ's birth maintained a strict caste system at the expense of shepherds and other common people. Shepherds were officially labeled "sinners"—a technical term for a class of despised people.

What does all this mean? It means if they went into Jerusalem, which was nearby, and they went up to the temple to worship, they wouldn't let the shepherds in because they had all of the "yuck" of the sheep all over their lives. And so, these shepherds are doing the work of raising the sheep that are gonna be the sacrifice in worship, but they themselves can't even go into worship. Are you getting the picture?

And so, when the announcement is gonna be made, when God is saying to the world, "May I have your attention please," where is that announcement going to be made? To the richest people in town? To the religious people? To the educated people on the top end of the spectrum? No, God is choosing to make His announcement to the despised, second-class citizens of the world.

Why does that matter to you and me today? It matters because according to that great theologian, Garth Brooks, God's got, "Friends in Low Places." Right? What an offense to the religious leaders who were so conspicuously absent from the divine mailing list. Even from birth, Jesus moved among the lowly. It was the sinners, not the self-righteous, He came to save.

SO, maybe you are here today or watching this at some point in the future and you're thinking, "If God made a world changing, history changing announcement today, He would not make it to me because I don't even know if I'm on the radar anymore with God." Listen to me, I want you to know today that the God of heaven who does miracles that no one else can do, that God has a word for you! And you may feel like you're too far away, like you're too far down, that you are too far out for God. But God's making a point here! When you can't make it into worship where He is, He can bring the worship to where you are! When you can't get close to the altar of God, He can bring the altar right to where you are!

He wants to do that for someone in this gathering today. The second thing I want you to notice is this:

There was awe and wonder at the birth of Jesus.

And I'm praying that will be rekindled in me this year, that I won't just kinda waltz my way through Christmas. But I'll remember that when the announcement was made of the birth of Jesus, that they were terrified when the glory of God shown all around them.

It wasn't **{Carol of the Bells}**. No! When God showed up and the announcement was made at the birth of Jesus and these shepherds saw the glory of God around them they were **terrified!** The word we translate as "terrified" in English in Hebrew is the word, I think I'm saying this right, "I-soiled-myself." I think I'm saying that right away, "I soiled myself," that's what I learned in Bible college anyway. BUT the angel says for the third time, in two short chapters, "Don't be afraid, I know this is a lot to take in, but don't be afraid."

There was awe and wonder at the birth of Jesus.

AND maybe this is a perspective you've never considered. We had the angel with THE message. But imagine what the angels of heaven were thinking in this moment. I don't know if we've ever really backed up

at Christmas and really processed it, but in this moment of the birth of Jesus, the throne of the King of the Universe is vacant! And so, the angels of heaven are going, "Where is the King?" The angels are not functioning in the whole story. We know that from the text we're about to read. They didn't get a printout or an email describing fully what God was doing. The angels are functioning in their celestial roles and all of a sudden the King of Glory is not on His throne.

And I can't really get into the conversation among angels, I have no idea, but in their thinking there had to be some kind of processing going on. *"Where is the King of Kings?"* "I don't know but I heard a rumor He's in the womb of a human girl." *"What?"* "I know." *"Well, why is He in a human womb?"* "Because He's gonna be born in human flesh." *"What? But why?"* "So that the Father can bring the rebels home." *"Why would He do that? Why wouldn't He just tell 'em, fine, have it your way?"* "Because He loves them, and He created them for a relationship with Himself." *"Well then why doesn't He just bring 'em home?"* "Look around. They couldn't live here in the holiness of this place. There's gotta be a work done and the King has left His throne to do the only thing that can be done. Give His life for theirs..."

Can you imagine the angels? In our minds we have all the angels around the throne and it's Christmas and everybody's happy... BUT the angels of heaven are looking into this story in real time going, "What in the world is happening!" The angel had the message, but the angels are not really sure. Look at the way Peter wrote this. Peter, in his first letter, 1 Peter chapter 1 verse 10, he says it this way talking about salvation that was foretold by the prophets. He said: (v.10-12)

Concerning this salvation, the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of the Messiah and the glories that would follow. [In other words, even the Old Testament prophet who makes an announcement about the work of God coming through Christ doesn't fully understand exactly how all this is going to come together. But then look in the next verse, verse 12] It was revealed to them that they were not serving themselves but you, when they spoke of the things that have now been told you by those who have preached the gospel to you by the Holy Spirit sent from heaven. [And here's the line, look at this] **Even angels long to look into these things.**

In other words, the angels are trying to fully grab onto the announcement that's being made, "Glory to God in the highest and peace on earth among those whom His favor rests." What is he saying? What does this mean?" Right? Can you imagine? What did all this look like from heaven?

There is a painting of the Last Supper, not the famous one that we all know, but one by the Italian Renaissance artist Jacopo Tintoretto from 1590 and in this particular painting you see all the normal characters in the last Supper. But Tintoretto also paints angels on the ceiling peering in from heaven at Jesus, breaking the bread at the table and the looks, the countenance, the stooping down to see what is going on...

I pray that some of that awe and some of that wonder will be stirred up in me again and in us again as we walk through this Christmas season. That we become Star Struck once again by this wondrous event. The third thing I want you to see is that:

The announcement was something that God had already done.

What did the angel say, "Today, a baby has been born. I'm letting you know what God has already done."

Why is that important? Because a lot of you are wondering where is God in my story? And I'm telling you I can't explain it all, but I know this. I know God is on the case and I know God is doing more than you think He's doing! AND at some point an announcement's gonna be made. And when the announcement is made, you're gonna realize, "Oh, God was at work, God was working!" Amen?

No one knew that God was working, but God was doing a miracle. God was like, "I got a plan, and I've told you from hundreds of years before that I'm gonna bring forth a Savior and guess what, may I have your attention please. I just did what I said I was gonna do. I just fulfilled what I have promised. And I know there's been a long gap of silence, but I've been working the whole time."

Some of you just need to hear that today! God's doing more than you know in your story right now. He may seem silent, He may seem distant, you may not be able to discern it from your circumstances, but God is bringing forth in your life the things He has already done! Do you receive that today?

The fourth thing I want us to know today is:

This was an all-points bulletin.

In other words, when the angel said, "I've got good news of great joy for all the people," he was saying this is a global story! I just want us to remember today that Jesus wasn't born at Macy's.

He was born in Bethlehem, currently in one of the Palestinian occupied territories. This is not an American story, it's not a western story. It is a global story. It is good news of great joy for all the people on planet earth.

AND God picked the crossroads of the ancient world, literally the crossroads of the ancient world to make the most important announcement that's ever been made. The 12 words of Christmas, "A savior has been born to you, He is Christ the Lord." And then the announcement, "Glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those whom His favor rests." Not world peace. That has not happened since the announcement. But peace in a troubled heart on a broken earth among those whom His favor rest.

The fifth thing I want you to see is that when these angels arrive, we realize that:

Heaven is multilingual.

You're like, what are you talking about? Well, the angels didn't actually say "Glory to God in the highest" because had they said glory to God in the highest, the shepherds wouldn't have understood them because news flash, the shepherds didn't speak English! Have you ever thought about this? The shepherds would have spoken in Aramaic which was the common language of the day. So, if you were there, when God wanted to speak to them in their own language, you would've heard the angel say:

{Doxa in *hyp-sis-tee-os* theo ki epi ges *er-ain-a* in *anthro-poise* *you-doe-kia-s*}

It just doesn't have the same ring to it does it? I don't know if Beethoven could work with that or not. My point is the official language of heaven is not English. You're like, well what are we gonna do when we get there? That's a good question because heaven is multilingual, and the angels are miraculously multilingual.

AND when they appear to make the announcements of the grand story of God, they speak to people in the language that they understand. I love that! Because when God wants to speak to you He can speak to you in a way that you understand too, amen? Let's take God out of the westernized, sanitized, rationalized box we put Him in and put Him back on His throne in all His wonder and awe and mystery!

The sixth thing that I want us to see in this story is that:

The only way we know about this great announcement is because we read about the announcement.

Unless you were there, anybody seen the YouTube video of the angel coming down and saying, glory to God in the highest? Anyone seen it on TikTok, maybe the angel is doing a dance as he makes the announcement. But unless you were there or knew someone who was then the only way we know about the moment in history where God said, "may I have your attention please," is because we read about it.

Luke was not only an amazing physician, but he was also an incredible historian. And so, in his account of these events in the Gospel of Luke and in the Book of Acts, what we have is the history of the beginnings of our faith. Luke interviewed the shepherds. He's saying, "What happened that night? I've heard the stories, but you tell me what went down that night." He's talked to Mary, he's talked to the disciples, he's gotten all of his reports filled out. And then he writes an orderly account of the great announcement. And through God's sovereignty these documents have been remarkably preserved so that we could read about it and have confidence in the events of that night.

Which brings us to the seventh important thing in the text:

That's great news, if you're not one of the billion people who do not have the Bible in their language.

Because then you can't read about the great announcement, you can't read that there's good news of great joy and it's for ALL the people! Including the people who don't have an account of the Good News in their own language.

There are roughly 8 billion people on planet earth right now. One out of every eight people on this planet do not have Scripture in their own language in our current modern world. They do not have a digital version of the Bible in their heart language that they can just dial up to. They do not have a printed Bible in their own language and it's not just a language or two, it actually 3,617 languages!

So, the fact that we can read the announcement is phenomenal, but the fact that a billion people can't is something that God wants you and me to be about I think. If we want to rekindle some of the awe and wonder of this season then one of the ways I think we can do that is to help make a difference in these statistics. Last week we gave everyone a Christmas season devotional to help guide you through a deeper understanding of these events, but this week I am asking you and your family to consider giving something to help others understand the great announcement!

I want to introduce you to something called the 12-verse challenge:

[QR Code]

Right now, eleven of the leading Bible translation agencies and their global partners are working in a unified and coordinated effort to see the Bible translated and delivered to the remaining language groups by 2033. That's only 10 years from now! Because of their unified approach, this monumental task, which just a few years ago was slated to be completed in 2150, is on track to be finished in 2033. On average it costs \$35 to fund a verse of Scripture. As of today, there are roughly 24 million verses left to be translated. So, if just one percent of the Christians in America alone would fund the translation of 12 verses at \$35 per verse, this task would be completed!

In other words, if you scan this code and commit to giving \$35 a month for the next year you can help be a part of getting the Bible to people who have never read the angels great announcement! Who have never read about Jesus and the cross! Who have never read the Psalms! Who have never read John's Revelation! You can be a part of blank pages being filled with the Good News in those billion people's own language!

And I know some of you will want to go home and pray about this, but some of you also know that would be ridiculous because you already know that you don't really need to pray about it because you'd be asking God if He wants you to help fund the translation of His word to people that don't have it and of course He's gonna say yes. The only question would be what are we gonna have to adjust or modify so that we can be a part of that?

The angels announcement is great news, if you're not one of the billion people who do not have the Bible in their language. AND the last thing I want you to see today is that:

You personally can help get this announcement to people.

You don't have to join the Bible translators or move to another corner of Earth to personally be a part of blank pages coming to life.

Here's what I mean. When wonder, whether it was Mary's, she stored up all these things in her heart. Whether it was the shepherds going, what in the world is going on? We gotta go see! Even when it was the angels in heaven going, what is God up to right now, this is crazy! When we allow wonder into our hearts it always erupts in worship. That's what we are after this Christmas season.

In Hebrew there is a word in the Old Testament for worship. It's the word Avodah. Can you say avodah with me? We're a little multilingual today. Avodah means worship in the Old Testament but if you look up the word the definition comes out as worship, work, service. In other words, God didn't delineate between these. He didn't say, "Worship, singing songs of praise, honoring God, blessing God, lifting our hands to God, that's this word. AND working or serving is this other word. What you do on Sunday or in your alone time with God, that's one thing. But what you do at your desk at work or helping someone, that's another thing." NO! He says, avodah, worship, work, service.

In fact, if you want to go even deeper the word can be used to describe agricultural work, can anyone say, "Shepherds who were keeping watch over their flocks by night." What were they doing? Avodah! Worship, work, service. AND I know it's all the same word but as I was studying all this I thought, "Wow, this makes a perfect blueprint to restore awe and wonder this Christmas..." Worship, work, service.

So, what about worship? Let's not let the busyness of this season with all of its demands keep us from worshipping God on Sunday and especially on Christmas Eve, EVE as we celebrate the birth of our Savior. Amen?

Well, what about work? I don't see that as avodah at all. Listen to me, the most important thing God did to mankind was to give them meaningful work. You gotta find meaningful work! That is why you were created. You have a gift, an aptitude, an ability, something that you are good at so that you can contribute to the common good of the planet and the people who live on it. You have a reason and a purpose. There is something in you that God has wired you for! He did that with Adam and Eve and He did it with you! Not so the economy can move along, but so that we can contribute our unique gift to the world.

Think about it, you spend 60, 65 minutes in corporate worship every week, but you spend 40 to 50 hours at your desk, so where is your primary place of worship? Avodah! We get up and say, "The way I'm gonna do what God's wire me to do is gonna be a gift of praise to God! I may not get any applause from my coworkers, but I'm telling you one thing, I'm gonna light up heaven today. I may not get the top recognition from my company today, but I'm gonna get the attention of heaven because my work is my worship! The

