

“What is?

Well, there is not the message of Christmas.

There are many messages of Christmas. And that's what I want to try to share with you just a little bit this morning, some of the many messages of Christmas. Christmas is a different holiday, they call it Christmas season.

You don't have the Fourth of July season.

You don't have the Veteran's Day season.

But we have the Christmas season.

And Christmas season used to start after Thanksgiving. Now it starts after the Fourth of July, like it seems like, you know.

But the message of Christmas, as I said, are many.

And I'm going to read you the entire 20 verses of what is called the Christmas story. I know you've heard it a multitude of times, but you know the only time this gets read is in the month of December. Very seldom preach Luke chapter 2 in the middle of summer.

So, you bear with me, you listen, and maybe, just maybe, hear the Christmas story.

For the very first time.”

“Luke chapter 2 beginning in verse number 1. It came to pass in those days that there was a decree from Caesar Augustus that all the world should be taxed. And this taxing was made when Sirenius was governor of Syria, and all went to be taxed, everyone into his own city.

Joseph also went up from Galilee out of the city of Nazareth into Judea under the city of David, which is called Bethlehem, because it was the house and lineage of David. You remember last Sunday, we talked about why Bethlehem, and God had a purpose and a plan for it. So it was that while they were there, the days were accomplished, that she should be delivered.

And she brought forth her firstborn son and wrapped him in slothling clothes and laid him in a manger because there was no room for them in the inn.

That is significant.”

“And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the fields, keeping watch over their flock by night. And lo, the angels, the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them, and they were sore afraid. And the angels said unto them, Dear Noth, for behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this will be a sign unto you, just to find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angels a multitude of the heavenly host, praising God and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, good will toward men.”

“And it came to pass, as the angels were gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds said one to another, Let us now go even unto Bethlehem, and see this thing which has come to pass, which the Lord hath made known unto us. And they came with haste, and found Mary

and Joseph and the babe lying in a manger. And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the saying which was told them concerning this child.

And all they that heard it wondered at those things which were told to them by the shepherds. But Mary kept all these things and pondered them in her heart. And the shepherds returned glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen as it was told unto them.

Now, that is what they typically call the Christmas story.”

“Some shorten it, some lengthen it, but those 20 verses contain what we are talking about with the Christmas story. And as I said, the message in that is not a message or the message.

It is many, many messages.

And I want to share this with you this morning.

And this is the message I have preached before I told you. This is one of my favorite, favorite Christmas messages because of everything it has in it, okay?

There are three distinct ministers here, if you will.

We're going to look at the angel and the heavenly host.

We're going to look at the shepherds.

We're going to look at the innkeeper.

And they all brought a message, multiple messages.

First, we're looking at the heavenly host.

The first thing they told the shepherds was to fear not.

Don't be afraid of what you don't understand.

Man, is that difficult.

Don't be afraid of what you don't understand. Don't be afraid of the things you can't control. I was talking with my oldest grandson this past week.”

“He'd been doing research for something they were doing at school. And he shared something with me that was very, very discouraging for me. He said, do you know what the leading cause of death among my age group is?

And I thought a lot of different things, you know. And finally, his Grammy said, well, probably accidents. He said, let's listen to the two.

Do you believe cause of death among the 18-year-old generation that generation is?

That really caught me off guard.

And the world says, well, there's more guns now than there ever have been.

Not really.

People have less regard than they ever have had.

And it's very easy for that to strike fear. If you have a teenage child, if you have a college-aged child, it's very easy for that alone to strike fear. So what do we do with that?

Well, I'll tell you what you do with it.

You place them in the hands of God and ask God to raise up a head round about them.

Well, I don't understand how it happened. Neither do I.

That's the point."

"These shepherds did not understand how they're out here in the middle of the night, out here with their flock, and all of a sudden an angel appears unto them, and with that angel, then a whole army of angels, that's what the heavenly host translates to mean, an army of angels, shows up, and they begin to have this big church meeting out there in the middle of the night. And my goodness, the shepherds didn't understand it. They were afraid of it, and that's why the angel said first thing, fear not.

Do not be afraid.

That is the first message of the shepherds.

Don't worry. Don't be afraid.

Now, I realize the world we live in today can be a scary place.

You know, it just can be.

But we need to put our faith and confidence into something bigger than us. We need to trust God. John 16 and 33, Jesus said, Be of good cheer.

I have overcome the world. The scary world that you live in, Jesus said, I have overcome this world. I am still on the throne.

I am still in control. I know what's happening.

I know what's going on."

"1 John 4 and 18 tells us that perfect love casts out all fear. If we have the love of God in our lives and in our heart, we can stand in the midst of all we don't understand, in the midst of all the things that frighten us, and know and have faith and confidence in the God that's able. It's in the news every day.

Young people losing their lives.

Older people losing their lives.

But church, I'm telling you, we need the calming message of the angels. We need to calm in the midst of the storm. We need to calm in the midst of chaos.

I mentioned Walmart earlier.

I don't know why, but I went to Walmart on a Saturday morning.

Oh, you think I'm not a man of faith?

My goodness.

And there was just a lot of people there.

And I'm early.

I'm like 8.30. That's early for most folks.

But in the midst of the chaos.

You know, when you go in Wal-Mart, they have a, they have a, and I'm using air quotes, a greeting.

Some of them don't look happy, at all. But yesterday, this lady looked happy."

"And she smiled, and she said, Good morning. And I smiled, and I said, Good morning. And then when I left, she smiled, and she said, Have a nice day.

And I said, You have a nice day, as well.

And you know, that took about 10 seconds of my life, and about 10 seconds of her life.

But I remember, it stood out.

It made a difference in my day, and I hope I made a difference in her day. So that's all it takes in the midst of all the chaos, in the midst of all the things that can scare you in the world. If you can smile, if you can say, Merry Christmas, if you can sincerely mean it, it changes people, folks.

We have, we can find calm in the midst of the chaos because the angels said, Fear not.

Fear not. That was the first message they had.

They also had a saving message because they said there in the last part of the 10th verse, in the 11th verse, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, all people, everyone. This is not just for select few"

"He said, good tidings.

You know, when seven, hey, I hate it when people say, well, I got good news and I got bad news.

Which one you want to hear first?

All I want to hear is the good news. Keep the bad news.

You know?

Have you ever called someone on the phone with the intent of encouraging them?

And when you got off the phone, you were just as discouraged as they were?

It happens, but it's not supposed to work that way.

We're supposed to be the encouragers, you know?

Good tidings, which is good news.

Great joy for everyone, for the entire world. Great joy, which should be to all people. And he says, let me break this down.

Behold, I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people, for unto you.

It was a personal message.

They were sharing with the shepherds to share with the entire world.

For unto you is born this day in the city of David, the Savior.

This is Christ the Lord.

Now, he was given three distinct names, or titles, right here.

He was born a Savior.

First title, a Savior.”

“You know what Savior translates to mean?

Deliverer.

Deliverer.

And that's what he did as his sacrifice on the cross.

Savior, which is Christ. Christ.

Why did he call him that?

That's the Son of God.

That is the fulfillment of Old Testament prophecy.

It had been prophesied since the beginning of time that there would come a Savior for the world. There would come someone who would save the world.

The Christ, the Lord, the Lord.

We want to be worshiped.

Jesus was called Stable, not teacher, not great example, but stable.

Now, let's look at this for a moment.

If our greatest need, and that's what God came to fulfill, our greatest need. If our greatest need was information, He would have called him teacher.

That's not our greatest need.

If our greatest need was technology, God would have sent a scientist to technology.

If our greatest need was money, He would have sent an investor, someone who knows about investing money. If our greatest need was entertainment, He sent an entertainer, obviously.

If our greatest need had to do with the military, He would have sent a general.”
“If our greatest need was justice, He would have sent a judge.

If you know what our greatest need was and is today.

We need to experience forgiveness, and we need to give forgiveness. The experiencing it changes us, giving it changes us also.

Our greatest need is, was, and is forgiveness. That's why God sent His Son a Savior, a Deliverer, to bring us forgiveness, because God said that is the greatest need this world has. So, we have a calming message of fear not from the angels.

We have a saving message of Christ being a Savior.

We also have a directional message.

You should find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in a manger.

He pointed those shepherds to where Jesus could be found.

That's our whole goal.”

“That's our whole thing we want to do at this church and have been as long as I've been here and as long as this church has been here. If the job is to point people for Jesus, not for us, not for what we do, how we found the singing, anything else, if we're not pointing people for Jesus, we are missing the mark because it is not about anybody up here. It is not about me.

It is not about this building.

It's not about any of that.

It's about Jesus.

The message of salvation to the shepherd of Jesus Christ.

And that is our job. The message of the angels for the shepherds was directional, pointing them to Jesus, telling him exactly where to find them without telling them exactly where to find them. That is the neatest thing in the world.

The angel did not say, you go to Bethlehem, and you go down this street, and you hang a left, and then you go down there, and you turn right, and you know where old So-and-So used to live?

You go two houses past that.”

“That's how we used to give directions when I grew up.

You know where So-and-So lives?

Yeah! We didn't have street names when I grew up. We had people we knew where they lived.

They said, you go three houses past that, and you go another side of the road.

And we knew where we were going.

I go back to the little town I grew up in right now, they got street signs down.

They say it's on So-and-So Street.

I don't have a clue where it's at.

Well, who lives there? Well, they tell me.

I mean, I've been gone so long, I don't know who lives there anymore either. Folks, the angels made it plain for these shepherds. And I'm going to go deeper into that in just a minute.

But we need to be pointing people toward Jesus. The angels didn't point the shepherds toward Jesus.

All right, it was a directional message.

It will also, last but not least, for the heavenly host, it was a message of praise to the Lord.

Okay.”

“Now, verses 13 and 14, it's something that was with the angels, a multitude of the heavenly hosts, praising God and saying, glory to God in the highest honor, peace, goodwill toward men. Have you ever slowed down enough to envision this? To think about what it had to sound like?

I do not believe the angels and the army of angels got there and said, and whispered, glory to God.

Glory to God.

Oh, praise the Lord.

I don't think that kind of went.

I think it was loud. I think it was long. I think it rolled over the hills.

I think it stirred those shepherds, something in their heart. When we sing these songs, I want it to stir something in your heart.

I want you to get the message in the future.

I've said it for as long as I've been here.

There's a message in the music, and you need to get the message in the music.

And it happens when you get a whole multitude, a message of praise and worship and glorifying God.

And that's what this talk is about.

I mean, my goodness, they already had an angel there.”

“Wouldn't that be enough? God said, no, that's not enough.

I'm going to send a whole bunch. I'm going to send a whole angel choir. I'm going to send a whole multitude, and they're going to glorify my son that's being born for the salvation of the world.

That was the message of the heavenly host.

Why else do you think they were there?

Well, I've never thought about it.

That goes back to that awareness I was talking about earlier.

We've got to be aware of what this Bible says and how it says it and what it means.

Okay.

That is the heavenly host.

That is the angel's message.

All right. Let's move on to the shepherds.

And I touched base with them just a little bit last week.

I want to show you a couple of other things.

Tony, you got my map there?

If you would put it up for me, please.”

“Now, what you're looking at is obviously by the title, Jerusalem in the time of Jesus. Now, I'm going to fast forward to the death of Jesus for just a moment, and then go back to His birth. You remember when Jesus was with His disciples praying in the Garden of Gethsemane?

That's it, right there, that green spot, where Jesus was arrested in the Garden of Gethsemane.

And then He was taken, if you remember, He was taken to the house of Caiaphas, the high priest, right there.

See, Jesus was a high priest.

Right there, He was taken there.

He's here. He's in the Kidron Valley. The Mount of Olives is over here.

They come in the bottom of the Kidron Valley, it's the Garden of Gethsemane. So they brought Him into the city.

This is the part I want you to get.

Do you know what gate? Because the ancient city had 12 or 13 gates all the way around it, and each one had a name. Do you know what gate?

They brought Jesus in when they took Him to the House of Caiaphas, because they wanted to pray to Him all the way through town"

"They brought Him in right there. Can you read what that says?

That says Sheep Gate.

Sheep Gate. Okay?

Why that gate?

Oh, so glad you asked.

In the NIV, John 5 and 2 says this stuff, there is in Jerusalem near the Sheep Gate, a pool, which in Aramaic is called the Thetian or Bethesda.

Right there is Bethesda. That's the pool.

Right there is the Sheep Gate. They're nearby.

Exactly.

History, archaeology has recorded exactly what the Bible says. The more they discover doing the archaeological things, it confirms the Word of God. So Jesus came in the Sheep Gate.

Do you know what the Sheep Gate was used for, by the way?

What's up, Brace? You bring sheep in?

Yes, I know that. But what for?

You know what that right there is?

That's the Temple Mount.

Right there, the Temple Mount.

They got the sheep in there for sacrificial purposes.

For cleansing, for rolling forward of sins.

The Bible says, when there is a shedding of blood, there is no remission of sin.

So sin was rolled forward until the time of Jesus.

It was just rolled forward."

“These lambs, these sheep had to be without spot and blemish. Do you remember what John the Baptist said the first time he saw Jesus?

He said, Behold, the lamb of God. Behold, the lamb of God.

These guys that arrested Jesus had no idea what they were doing, but they brought him in through the sheep gate, the gate that all the sacrifices came in through and marched him all the way down through town. Jesus was to be the sacrifice for you and I, for mankind. Now, at one point, this whole wall around Jerusalem was knocked down and torn up.

And back in the book of Nehemiah, about the third chapter, God laid it on, about the second chapter, God laid it on Nehemiah's heart to go rebuild the temple, or rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

Do you know what gate he started at?

He started at the sheep gate.

Why?

Because that's the one that mattered the most, to bring the sacrifices in, to get back the order, to get back the worst for the king of kings and the Lord of lords.”

“So when they took him from the Garden of Gethsemane and brought him in through the sheep gate, it was for a plan for it that they didn't even know about.

I love it.

I love, love, love it when God makes the devil pay the bill and God lets the ungodly do the things to verify prophecies, to set everything in motion just like God had it. And they think they're doing something so big and so bad, all they're doing is being led by God.

They don't even know it.

Man, I love that.

I do.

Y'all might not, but I do.

So that's where it is.

That's what it's about.

How does that play in to the shepherds?

Okay, hang on.

Leave it out for just a second, Tony, please.

The shepherds, by their nature, were supposed to allow cats, considered unclean, because they could not come to the temple on a regular basis for cleansing. Back then, they had, they were called, they're still called, McBoss. They have a set of steps going in, and a set of steps coming out.”

"The idea is, you go down this step, into this ritualistic cleaning, and it's just water. You walk down into it, but you can't walk back up those steps because you walked in unclean.

These steps over here are the clean side.

I know, it's the same water as the others, but it's the ritual.

It's ritualistic.

They could not go for the cleansing to the temple because they had to wash the sheep.

So they were considered outcasts.

They were considered unclean.

BMI rebuilt that gate, went all the way around the city, ended at that gate because they put so much emphasis on the sacrifice, upon the ritual cleansing, all right? Now, I'm telling you all that. I'm telling you all that.

I want you to bear that stuff in mind until I get down to it, okay?

The shepherds were considered unclean.

And yet, this is the bunch that God chose to reveal His son to be perfect, His son to be perfect, okay?

And they're coming in, they thought they were just doing things.

No, He had an inner machine, and He was going to be the last sacrifice."

"The message of the shepherds, the first one is a message.

What did the angels say? What's the 15 and 16?

It seems to pass as the angels are going away from them into heaven, and the shepherds said one to another, let us now go. Let's go to Bethlehem and see this thing.

A few years ago, I took some trips between John 4 and 29, the story of the woman at the well, where she went back and told the city, come, see the man.

Remember, we had a banner in the front that said, come and see, come and see.

That's what the angels would tell her to share.

Let's see, let's see, let's see.

And then they were going to tell everybody, hey, come and see, come and see.

That's what the message, that's what come and see, the message of obedience, obedience.

Now, I don't want to see your hands.

Those of you who are parents of little ones, or have been parents of little ones, or even grandparents, and you got little ones, how many times has your child or your grandchild said, Paul, Paul, Grammy, come look at this, come see?"

"How many times have you said, I'm coming?

They hollered again. I'm off my way!

You know what, amen, which y'all know exactly what I'm talking about, because y'all have done it. You may have done it in the past week, I don't know.

That's the message of the shepherds.

Come and see. Come and see.

It's up to you to get up and do it.

It's up to me to get up when my kids were little, when my grandchildren say, come and look at this.

It's up to me to do it.

It's up to you to get, to heed the message of the shepherds, to go see the salvation of the world.

Okay?

That's the first message, the message of obedience, being willing to do what God asked us to do.

The second one is a message of opportunity.

Opportunity.

They were told, they took the past which the Lord hath made known to us, and they came with haste and found Mary and Joseph of the Babel lying in the manger."

"And when they had seen it, they made known abroad the same which was told them concerning this. They made known abroad. They went to every place saying, hey, we have seen the birth of the saints.

And they went and told everybody that would listen, and half the people who wouldn't listen, they told them anyway.

The message of opportunity.

They were called to give the world an opportunity to know about this Savior named Jesus.

Now, we're 2,000 years down the road, plus the world still has the opportunity.

The last message the shepherds had was a message change.

I told you, remember I told you, this was a bunch of, they were considered social outcasts, they were considered unclean by Jewish law because of their job, because of what it involved, what it entailed.

They could not go to the temple like good, worshipping Jews did at that time.

But yet.

No matter they were, before they came to visit the Christ Child, it was different when they left.

How do I know that?"

"After they saw that child, when they had seen it, and they'd known up for all, the saying that was told to them concerning this.

In the 21st century, shepherds returned glorifying and praising God to all the things that they had heard, seen, and it was told, as it was told unto them.

Their hearts were changed.

They were not the same after they saw Christ as they were before they saw Christ.

That is the message of change.

That is the message the world needs to hear more than anything else. If you have an experience with Jesus and you are still acting the same way you acted before that experience, you didn't really meet Jesus. You just had a warm, fuzzy feel in the church and went on about your life.

Your life will be different. You will talk different.

You will act different.

You will think different.

You will conduct your life differently after you meet Jesus.

Or if nothing at all changes, maybe you didn't meet Jesus."

"Maybe, like I said, you just got that warm, fuzzy feeling and you felt better about the whole deal, you know, and you're good to go. That's not salvation, folks.

That's just a warm, fuzzy feeling.

And it will not last.

Salvation will. Salvation does.

The message of change.

Now, these guys were still shepherds.

They still had the same circumstances in their lives.

They still had the same livelihood. They were still seen by people the same way. What was different?

The change on the inside.

Their lives were forever changed by the Christ of Christ.

They were changed by they had seen the sign. They found that babe wrapped in swaddling clothes lying in that manger.

It had changed their whole lives. They had been seen an angel.

All of that. It changed them on the inside, but the outside, they were still shepherds.

This is the group.

God chose to reveal this sign.

Normal, common, every day, in parlor working.

Just like us. Just like us.

There was a... some Bible scholars, saints, these shepherds, were the keepers of the sheep.

The use of the sacrifice. I personally don't agree with that. It's just my opinion."

"I'm giving you my opinion here.

You search it out for yourself.

Our rationale is the shepherds who watched the sacrificial lambs were Levites.

Or Levitical group.

They were religious people.

I think these shepherds were the common people.

I think they were just like us.

And I think God knew every day person needs to know about Jesus.

And that's who they went to. They went to every place they could go to about Jesus. All right.

You've had the message of the angel in the heavenly host.

You've heard the messages of the shepherds.

Now...

There's not a lot said about the innkeeper.

In fact, he is really never mentioned in the Bible story.

The Bible story just says it because there was no room for them in the inn.

We filled in our own blanks about the innkeeper.

The innkeeper obviously polled Mary and Joseph and pull up.

And he was pulled up because everybody that was a house and lineage of David had come to Bethlehem to be counted.

That's what this taxing was. It was a census."

"They could count to know how many people they could tax.

So he's true.

The inn was.

He had a house somewhere, or at the very least, he had a bed in the inn somewhere.

His, he turned away.

We live in a me-first generation.

What about me?

What about me?

I had a conversation. I have conversations in certain places.

I had a conversation with the guy next to me at the bank and the drive-through things.

I knew him, you know.

And we had a conversation.

He said, you know, I wonder something all the time. He says, why do bad things happen to good people?

And I said, well, that is it.

It's true.

It's true.

None of that matters.

There is not a section in heaven for preachers or Sunday school teachers or deacons or anybody else. That's my homocedum. It's only up to there.

Why not me? Yes, bad things happen to good people all the time. Why not me?

We can try to rationalize everything, but for me to say, well, it shouldn't happen to me because I'm this, this, this, and this is selfish."

“Well, Lord, I'm doing all this stuff for you, and this is what you let happen to me.

The last thing I had and the thing I'm still dealing with, I know why it happened.

So I could talk to one guy in that hospital room that night. I know it. I know it just as well as I'm standing here.

And I'm telling you, if it wouldn't put my family through it, I'd do it again just to talk to that kid. It works, folks.

God will never fail you nor leave you. Your situation may change, and mine definitely has. But I can do one or two things.

I can say, why me? I can say, why not me?

I choose to say, why not me?

We need to not be selfish. We need to not be like the innkeeper. He had opportunity.

He had the world's greatest opportunity, and he blew it.

Because he was selfish.

The message of selfishness.

What?

He refused. You know, you hear this all the time. No room for Jesus.

He had no room for Jesus.”

“You know why he had no room for Jesus? Because he was unwilling to move something in his life to make room for Jesus.

You know why people aren't saved today?

Because they're unwilling to move something out of their life to make room for Jesus.

They think, oh, my life will be empty without that.

Yes, that whatever it might be.

I got saved. I mean, I was, and I'm not glorifying anything, but I was, let's just say I was a totally different person before I met Jesus than I am now.

And I had people, after I got saved, especially, I heard, don't wonder how long this is gonna last, more times than I can.

Okay?

It was 40-some odd years, and it's still as strong and renowned as it ever was.

But I had them say, well, look at everything you have to give up.

I didn't have to give up anything.

I just didn't want to do the old junk anymore.

Didn't want it.

Didn't need it.

Used to think I couldn't live without it.”

“But I have all these years, church. You gotta make room for Jesus. You gotta move some of that junk out that you think is the greatest thing in the world and find something even greater.

That is the message of the innkeeper. He was selfish and wanted it his way.

His other message he had, another message he had, he had a message of sadness.

Sadness.

There was no hope.

I don't have room.

I can't help you.

You just, no hope.

No hope.

And that's true.

There are people in the world today who feel...

There is hope.

If you are still drawing breath, there is hope.

We serve at God of hope.

Christmas is about hope.

And finding hope in what they say is a hopeless world.

The last message of the interview group is the message of separation.

By his choice, he separated himself.

The greatest gift heaven has ever given is the gift by his soul. This is a separation. Have we separated ourselves?

The thing I wrote that this is, this is like, well, y'all can't see that, but I've got messages sideways, six different ways to use it.

I added this another time”

“People sit on these two Sunday at the Sunday, and they are so close.

If you see right there, I have the opportunity.

I've given you a multitude of messages this morning. Let me close the distance. This is a fact.

Each of our lives.

People are watching and listening to you and me.

They're watching you in real time.

The Christmas song has been out a few months. The guest line of praise in it is, I want my life to preach.

Your life is, when we're living, Let your life appreciate what you're saying.

Is your life saying what your mouth says?

Is your mouth saying what your life says?

We're all doing that.

Let me break it down into just what I've talked about today.

Here's our life's message.

Is it like the angels?

Is it pointing in to Jesus?

Is it pointing people toward the Christ of Christmas?

This is the easiest time of year to witness to people, because they're already feeling good about Christmas, and they've already known about the babe in the manger, and all this stuff.

Man, the door is already cracked.

All you got to do is walk through it.”

“Are we like the shepherds?

Is that our message?

Are we filled with joy, wonder, and spreading the message of Christmas to everyone that will listen to us?

They went everywhere, and they came back rejoicing.

But what the Bible doesn't change is not everybody received their message.

They didn't go out and tell everybody, and everybody they told them went, all right, I want part of that.

That's not the way it happened, and it still doesn't happen that way today.

But they kept telling, they kept sharing.

So it was our message like the angels, putting in the Jesus, like the shepherds.

They're filled with joy and wonder, and they're spreading the word.

He was right there.”