

It's a Wonderful Life

Introduction

The Text

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. (Luke 2:8–20)

Revelation & Response

- A. Our text brings out a dynamic basic to our human existence and experience: a dynamic of revelation and response.
1. We don't need a text to alert us to this dynamic. We all implicitly get it. It's where we live.
 - a. When you stand before the Grand Canyon for the first time, it's revealed to you and you respond in some way to it—stumble back in fear, take a selfie.
 - b. When the doors of the chapel open, everyone stands, and your bride is revealed to you, you respond—tears, smiles, anxiety, joy.
 - c. When you turn on the news and you see what used to be the twin towers now a pile of smoking rubble, you respond—anger, fear, call a loved one.
 2. We get this. We're always responding to revelation, the facts that are unfolding around us. And how we respond says something about us, for good or for bad.
- B. But we do need a text to help us see how this dynamic plays out in our relationship with God. What does God's revelation look like? And how should we be responding to it?

1. Our text this morning helps answer such questions. In vv. 15-20 in particular, we are given an ascending string of examples of what this revelation and response looks like.
 - a. In response to the revelation of the angels, the shepherds Go and See (vv. 15-16).
 - b. Because the shepherds go and see, there is this revelation around the manger, and the people respond with Wonder and Treasure it all up (vv. 17-19).
 - c. And because they are together wondering and treasuring up all that's taking place in this scene, these shepherds respond to the now fuller revelation of God's grace and faithfulness by Glorifying and Praising Him (v. 20).

(1) Go and See (vv. 15-16)

How Do the Shepherds Respond?

- A. When the curtains are pulled back on the heavenly scene and the angels are no longer visible or audible to the shepherds, what do they do? How do they respond to what has been revealed to them? Here really is the test of a man: what does he do with God's revelation?
 1. Will they question it: "How can we be sure we weren't just seeing things? After all we've been up watching sheep for most the night!"
 2. Will they excuse themselves from it: "I can't just leave my sheep, nor would it be wise to lead them onward from such good pasture. I wish I could go and see this child, but I have too many other responsibilities."
 3. Will they outright reject it: "Sure the Lord may have revealed this to us, but I don't care. I like my life just fine, thank you."
 4. Or will they be able to say with Paul: "I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision" (Act 26:19).
- B. That's what we see here, right? They are anxious to obey, to respond appropriately: " 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" (vv. 15-16).

Revelation as Responsibility

- A. When once a person has received revelation from God, he suddenly finds that he is in a place of great danger. Such revelation is never a neutral thing. It always calls for an appropriate response. It always asks us: "Now that you've seen, now that you've heard, what are you going to do with it?"
 1. In other words: revelation from God comes with responsibility for us.

B. This is a principle quite easily developed from the Scriptures:

1. You have that closing illustration that Jesus makes in the Sermon on the Mount: “²⁴ Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock.²⁵ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock.²⁶ And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand.²⁷ And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it” (Matt 7:24–27).
 - a. Jesus leans in towards His listeners here near the end of this sermon and says in essence: “Okay, now that you’ve heard all of this...what are you going to do about it?!”
 - i. That is the critical point. How will we respond to revelation. Our decision on this point marks the fundamental difference between devils and saints.
2. Has anyone ever trembled like I have over the warnings in Hebrews like this one: “⁴ It is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit,⁵ and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come,⁶ and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt.⁷ For land that has drunk the rain that often falls on it, and produces a crop useful to those for whose sake it is cultivated, receives a blessing from God.⁸ But if it bears thorns and thistles, it is worthless and near to being cursed, and its end is to be burned” (Heb 6:4–8).
 - a. We don’t have time to parse out all this, but the essence is this: if we are drinking in and drinking in the blessings of God’s revelation but never responding to it appropriately, never bearing fruit in our lives, we are in a desperate place, and must turn before our hearts just harden to the idea altogether.
 - i. Are you there? I don’t want to be there?! “Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts” (Heb 4:7).

The Very First Responsibility

A. Now, lest I be misunderstood, let us press into our text a bit more and learn from these shepherds.

1. The first place of our response (our hearing and doing as Jesus puts it) is not what you might think. It does not begin with law-keeping, with good deeds, with striving in our own strength. In fact, it doesn’t have all that much to do with us at all.

- B. The first place of these shepherds' obedience is not so much to go and do, but to Go and See: "Let us go over to Bethlehem and see..." But go and see what? Him! The child. The incarnate Son of God. Jesus the Savior, Christ, and Lord!
- C. This is the fundamental response of the child of God. Go and See, Go and See...Jesus!
 - 1. We start here and we stay here every day of our lives. Go and see, go and see...Jesus! The path to the Son of God is the happy highway of the child of God. We travel it every moment with haste. We wear down every stone that lines this narrow way until its fine dust beneath our feet. We never tire of going and seeing Him!
 - a. As Jesus would say: "This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent (John 6:29)."
 - b. As Paul would say: "No one can lay a foundation other than that which is laid, which is Jesus Christ" (1 Cor 3:11). Whatever else you may build up with, you must be building upon the solid rock of Christ's person and work or it is all in vain.
- D. None of this is intended to mean that we do not actually go out and obey His commands, but it does mean that before we can ever do a thing, we must first Go and See, and believe in, build upon...Him.
 - 1. We must go and see Him born in an animal trough; we must watch Him grow up and go on to fulfill all righteousness; we must shock our souls with another sighting of His sacrificial death for our sins on the cross; we must revel in His resurrection—the payment for my sins accepted, my righteous standing before God secured...
 - a. ...And we must watch now in amazement as the Son lives His life out again through me by His Spirit in me, transforming me from one degree of glory to the next: "Faith working through love" (Gal 5:6b).
- E. All other responses of obedience flow from obedience at this critical point: Go and See!

(2) Wonder and Treasure (vv. 17-19)

The Shepherds Step into a World of Wonder

- A. So the shepherds hasten to go and see, and we read this: "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 (vv. 17-19)."
- 1. Because they were obedient to the heavenly vision, they stepped into a world of wonder, a world to be treasured up, a world full of God's glory and grace.

The Wonder of the Incarnation

- A. It seems to me that one of the reasons we often walk around without wonder, without seeing anything of God to treasure up in our hearts, is that we neglect to do what we just finished speaking of in the first point. We've not yet made a holy habit of Going and Seeing. We don't respond fully at that fundamental level of revelation and so no more is revealed to us.
1. Our hearts can go cold to the incarnation, to the cross, because we don't obey the heavenly vision. We might hear in church that we ought to Go and See this child, but we leave this sanctuary and go on our way, not giving much more thought to the Son of God until we come back the following Sunday.
 - a. (1) We question whether Jesus is really all the Bible or the pastor says He is; (2) We excuse ourselves from responding—we have too much to do, we are too busy, we have sheep to tend to; (3) Or we reject Him outright.
 - i. And so we live in a wonderless world. A world where we see more to grumble at than treasure up.
- B. But if we hear of this Son, and set ourselves to Go and See Him, hastening down that happy highway—in the morning seeking Him in the Scriptures, throughout my day seeking Him in prayer, staying near to Him in the fellowship of the Spirit, walking according to His word—suddenly we find that the whole world around us opens up with wonder—particularly, with the wonder of the incarnation.
1. While the incarnation—God taking on flesh—is certainly historically unique and unprecedented, the principle underlying it is as old as the world. God has always been drawing near to His creatures and giving Himself away in grace. I am not a pantheist, but I do believe God has created this world in such a way that He can communicate His love and grace to us through it.
 - a. Last week I sang that song by Jon Foreman with these words: “I look out the window, the birds are composing. Not a note is out of tune or out of place. I walk to the meadow and stare at the flowers. They're better dressed than any girl on her wedding day. So why should I worry? Why do I freak out? God knows what I need. You know what I need. You're love is strong.”
 - i. He's just lifting this straight out of the Sermon on the Mount ([Mat 6:25-34](#)). The idea is this: When you are walking with Jesus, when you know His love and grace, suddenly you don't look at a bird or a field in the same way. It all starts to minister to you: “God feeds the birds. God clothes the fields. He's a sovereign and benevolent Creator, and He's my Father. ‘This is my Father's world.’”
- C. The whole idea for this sermon actually came while I was on a drive in the Santa Cruz mountains. I can get so claustrophobic in my own life. Just boxed in. Everything is about me and what I have to get done, tasks, projects, etc. I just thought: “Alright, I've got this

new car and it has a sunroof, I'm going for a drive." And as I'm going up the 17 it still wasn't good enough you know. I've got to take the back roads.

1. I just want to slow down and see the story of God that's going on all around me, that's so much bigger than me. I want to rip the roof and sides off of my little box. I want to just be His kid. You just start noticing the feel of the sun on cheek, the smell of spring in the air, the flowers that mottle the hills, the family of deer feeding on the grass in the meadow, the silent hawk perched up on a telephone wire.
 - a. It's a wonderful life, but we often fly right on by it, you know? Going 70 on the freeway, with our hand on the horn. I've got stuff to do. We don't even notice: "He makes His sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust" (Mat 5:45). He's giving Himself away to us everywhere we look.

Do We Have a Treasury?

- A. There is another application point that emerges for us in these few verses as Luke draws our attention particularly to Mary's response in all of this. As the shepherds are sharing the things the angels told them about this child (He's "Savior...Christ...Lord"), some are responding with wonder, "But Mary treasured up all these things, pondering them in her heart" (v. 19).
 1. She's taking the wonder in deeper, it would seem. She has a place to store it, a place to treasure it.
- B. So the question for us is this: Do we have a treasury for the wonders of God? When we Go and See, and we step into a world of wonder, do we treasure up what God shows us, or does it pass like water through a pipe—we're excited and encouraged for a moment, but when hard times come we all but forget?
 1. We need a treasury, whether it's a journal, or just a more intentional time of reflection, or celebrating with our family around the dinner table, or at our Home Group. We need to treasure up the wonders of God's grace in our lives.
 - a. Israel used a pile of stones, taken from the bed of the Jordan river, to remind them God stopped that water and we walked into the Promised Land on dry ground: " ²¹When your children ask their fathers in times to come, 'What do these stones mean?' ²²then you shall let your children know, 'Israel passed over this Jordan on dry ground.'²³ For the Lord your God dried up the waters of the Jordan for you until you passed over, as the Lord your God did to the Red Sea, which he dried up for us until we passed over,²⁴ so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the hand of the Lord is mighty, that you may fear the Lord your God forever" (Josh 4:21–24).
 - i. Don't forget what He has done! The glory of His grace. Don't fear the peoples of this land, even when they surround you. Remember

all that you have seen Him do, and “fear the Lord your God forever”!

- C. Mary, of all people, would need a treasury to draw from, as she would years later stand at the foot of the cross and watch her Son brutally murdered on the cross: “God’s in this. I don’t know how, but my boy is Savior, Christ, and Lord. I remember the angels, I remember the shepherds. God’s in this. I just don’t know how quite yet!”
 - 1. We’re going to need one too.

(3) Glorify and Praise (v. 20)

Ascending to the Climax

- A. Now the movement in the narrative at this point takes us back to the shepherds. And we watch as this whole dynamic of revelation and response reaches its climax: “*And the shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all they had heard and seen, as it had been told them*” (v. 20).
 - 1. Because these shepherds hastened to Go and See, they were shown things to wonder at and treasure up. Because they took part in the wondering at and treasuring up of such things, we now see that welling up in their hearts is a desire to glorify and praise the God who has been even more gloriously revealed to them in all of this.

From the Beginning to the End

- A. The words chosen to describe the shepherds’ activity at this point are far from coincidental.
 - 1. They are the same words used to describe the angelic choir back up in [vv. 13-14](#): With such a linguistic link established, we are meant to see these shepherds now in some way being folded into this angelic choir, this worship, this glorifying and praising of God.
- B. What are Shepherds doing adding their stammering tongues to the melody line of heaven’s angels? Your going to mess the song up!
 - 1. But that’s just it isn’t it? Heaven has come to earth in this child, that, sinners though we be, because of Jesus, we might be brought back God.
 - a. While these words “glorify” and “praise” lead us back to the beginning of our narrative they truly direct us to the end of redemptive history, the ultimate aim of God in sending His Son into the world: namely, that we would join the angels in responding to the revelation of the glory of His grace as revealed in His Son ([Rev 5](#))!
- C. Will you respond to the revelation of the Son, by adding your tongue to that chorus now as we close?!