

12/24/10

Letting the Good News Impact You – Luke 2:8-20

- The day after tomorrow is the 6th anniversary of one of the worst natural disasters in modern history...
- On December 26th, 2004...the third largest earthquake ever to be recorded by a seismograph occurred in the Indian Ocean...
 - it also had the longest duration ever recorded....lasting nearly 10 minutes...
 - it literally caused the entire planet to vibrate, triggering other smaller earthquakes in places as far away as Alaska...
 - as is sometimes the case, the earthquake produced a tsunami...which in layman's terms is like a massive tidal wave that can result in massive devastation when it hits the coast...
- Tsunamis are very hard to predict for a variety of reasons including the fact that they don't follow a universal pattern...
 - sometimes an earthquake begins the process but not always...
 - many times there is an earthquake but no resultant tidal wave...even a scientist would say that it's not an exact science...
- however, many of us learned this six years ago if we didn't know it before...frequently what precedes a tsunami is the tide receding much further than normal...in other words...you have a whole lot more beach...
- that's exactly what happened on December 26th...in some places, the water receded as far back as 1.6 miles...people were being sent a message...the only question now was, were they going to listen?...
- the results were devastating...many people actually ran out onto the sand and began gathering sea shells and stranded fish...while an unprecedented wall of water was heading their direction...
- there were a number of delightful stories though of people let the warning impact them properly...
 - there was a 10 year old British tourist named Tillie Smith...
 - she had studied tsunamis in geography class at school and she recognized immediately what was happening...
 - she and her parents began running up and down the beach warning people of what was happening and many lives were saved as a result of this little girl heeding the warning and doing something about it...
- Then there was John Croston---a biology teacher from Scotland---he too recognized the signs and encouraged an entire busload of vacationers and locals to seek higher ground and they were saved as a result...
- one story I loved the most occurred on the Indonesian island of Simeulue – which was very close to the epicenter of this event...
 - the folklore on the island included a retelling of another tsunami in 1907 – nearly 100 years before...
 - the islanders looked at the signs...remembered what they had been told even though it was 100 years old, and evacuated to higher ground...
- there was another group of people nearly 2000 years ago who also were given a warning...an announcement...incredibly important news...

- and they had to decide how to respond...
- and just like Tillie Smith, and John Croston, and the islanders of Similelue...they got it right...
- and that's what I'd like to talk to you about this evening...**Letting the Good News Impact You...**
- Doc Smith read part of our passage...I'll re-read a section and then take the story to the next step...
- read Luke 2:1-20 (or 8-20, depending on time)...
- we're talking tonight about **Letting the Good News Impact You...**
- with the few moments we have together, please think with me about three **3 keys to responding well to the gospel.**

I. Understand that the Good News of Jesus Christ is Available to All People.

- the Lord is trying to get our attention tonight, and every time this part of the story is told, when He chose to announce the birth of His Son to a group of shepherds...

A. The significance of the shepherds.

- **Luke 2:8 – In the same region there were some shepherds staying out n the fields...**
- that would have stunned the people of this culture...but then many of the details surrounding Christ's birth were the polar opposite of what we would have expected...
- but shepherds?...
 - you couldn't get any more common than that...
 - many people looked down on shepherds because they were perpetually unclean according to the rabbis because of their occupation...
 - their testimony was not allowed in court because so many of them were liars and thieves...
 - if you were bringing your fiancé home to meet your parents – you wouldn't want to say – he's shepherd...
- but on purpose, God chose this particular group of people to announce the birth of His Son...
- part of all of this is...

B. The beauty of the contrast.

- **Luke 2:8-9 - ...keeping watch over their flock by night. And behold, an angel of the Lord stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them...**
- can you imagine them on that dark hillside...when all of sudden the glory of the Lord appears?...
- we don't know with certainty the spiritual condition of these men, but based on their reaction, it is highly likely that they knew what the Old Testament prophesied about the coming Messiah...
- and this nation had not had any visible demonstration of the glory of God since it departed from the temple because of the sinfulness of the people...
- and now the glory of the Lord appears to them in the middle of the night...
- no wonder they were – as the KJV used to say it – “sure afraid...”

- by time this part of the story is over, the Scripture says that... **Luke 2:13-14 - And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God and saying: "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace, goodwill toward men!"**
- think of it – a multitude of angels...
- you say – how many is that?...a lot...(that's in the original Greek...like, a lot)
- but can you picture the contrast...these common shepherds in the middle of the night being visited by a multitude of angels revealing the glory of God...
- something big is happening...like 1.6 miles of beach has suddenly appeared where the ocean had just been...
- why all the fuss?...it's because of...

C. The centrality of the message.

- **Luke 2:11 - for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.**
- every aspect of that news is important...
 - this one who has been born is the Savior...you wonder what passage or concept from the Scripture came to their minds first...
 - that's one of the beauties of the Word of God.. the way it all fits together...
 - even the smallest of Jewish children were taught that sin demands a sacrifice...
 - Isaac said to his father Abraham as they were walking up the mountain – father, we have the wood, and the fire...but where is...the lamb?...
 - maybe they thought of Isaiah's incredible prophecy...
 - **Isaiah 53:6-7 - All of us like sheep have gone astray, each of us has turned to his own way; but the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all to fall on Him. He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth; like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth.**
- but He wasn't only the Savior – He was the Messiah, and the King...
 - this child was the fulfillment of the OT promises, and He was capable of being their king...the One on charge of their lives...

- and what must have especially impacted the shepherds was when the angel said... **Luke 2:10 - But the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for all the people;**

- the notion of someone being able to pay for your sin and then taking charge of your life – that message is available for all the people...even...shepherds...

- but here's the important point...

II. The Message is not Just Something to Hear, It is Something to Act Upon.

- and the good news is, that's exactly what the shepherds did...
- **Luke 2:15-16 - When the angels had gone away from them into heaven, the shepherds *began* saying to one another, "Let us go straight to Bethlehem then, and see this thing that has happened which the Lord has made known to us." So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger.**
- these shepherds were like Tillie Smith, and John Croston, and the islanders of Similelue...they didn't just receive the message/or memorize it, or tip their hat to it..

- they acted on it...they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph...
- friend, do you know one of the great tragedies of Christmas --- a lot of people confuse having heard the message...with having acted on the message...
- people tell me all the time...well, I believe in Jesus...
 - but what they frequently mean is – I know the story...I could recite the facts...
 - my response is often something like this (if I have some kind of relationship with the person so I can say something shocking without offending them)...
 - congratulations...now you've reached the spiritual status of the devil...
 - and if you know your Bible, you know what verse I'm alluding to...
 - **James 2:19 - You believe that God is one. You do well; the demons also believe, and shudder.**
- see, there's a difference between knowing facts, and truly embracing a message in such a way that you are staking your life and eternal destiny upon it...[cf. the difference between believing in communism, and believing in communism...]
- now, you might say – why would someone be familiar with the Christmas story – but never really act upon it?...
 - that is a very important question...and I can think of at least 2 answers...
 - either they don't believe they need to, or they don't believe they can...
 - let's take them in reverse order...
- I wonder how many people will come to these services tonight believing in their heart that they are too far gone...
 - I was born in a dysfunctional family...
 - I've made all sorts of wrong choices...
 - I could never get my life on track...
 - you can't teach an old dog new tricks...
 - Christianity is only for the beautiful people...blah, blah, blah...
- are you listening to the message?...on purpose, this was proclaimed to the shepherds...
- this is good news...of great joy...for all the people...
- and friend – if you think you are beyond the ability of God's grace – it's obvious that He has a different message for you tonight – you just have to decide if you are going to act upon it...
- Christian friend – are you still amazed tonight that God is willing to save shepherds...and people like you and me?...
- what about the other reason?...it is incredible how pervasive this is in a community like ours...
 - a Savior – why would I need a Savior?...I've got...me...
 - the average person in our culture believes that everyone is going to heaven, or that they can earn their own way...
- if that's possible – then why did we have to have Christmas?...and why do we need a Savior?...

- friend – one of the greatest disservices I could do tonight is give anyone the impression that everyone goes to heaven...
- God has made it possible to go...but you have to decide if you are going to act on the message (to repent, and believe)...
- (cf, a church member who was recently at a funeral – the pastor said that God has made it possible for all of us to spend eternity in heaven, and left it there, as if no decision has to be made...
 - that would be as callous as allowing people to stay on the beach when the pending tsunami was approaching...
 - here it is as clearly as I know how to say it – you need to decide...now...what you're going to do with this message before it's too late...

- now, where does this ultimately lead?...

III. Accepting the Good News will Change the Way You Live Today, and Every Day.

- Luke 2:20 - The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

- that's the other tragedy of Christmas...the number of people who say they have heard the message, and have accepted but the message...
- but it has certainly not made any demonstrable change in the way they live every day...

- whatever that is – it's not biblical Christianity...

- 2 Corinthians 5:17 - Therefore if anyone is in Christ, *he* is a new creature; the old things passed away; behold, new things have come.

- the gospel message was intended to impact you every day...

- the way you order your private world...
- the way you communicate ...
- the way you relate to your spouse...
- the way you raise your children...
- the way you work...
- the way you spend your time...your money...
- your values, your goals, your dreams...

- so here's the question tonight --- Have you let the good news of Christmas impact you?...

- are you like the people who saw the sign of the tsunami, but who walked out in the sand and collected sea shells?
- or are you like Tillie Smith, and John Croston, and the islanders of Similelue...
- you heard the message, and you responded well...