

“Announce! The Blessing of Peace”

Reading: Isaiah 40:1-11; Luke 2:8-15

Written and preached by [Luke Richards](#)

Many people have said that history is written by the victors. The strong get to tell their stories, while the weak are only remembered as being the losers, if they're remembered at all. And as long as you're strong enough, you have license to do whatever you need to do to stay strong. Strength brings victory, and in time, for the most part, no one will remember anything other than the final score. It's just the way the world works. We really only care about the winners; we only notice people who do noteworthy things. And the little people are too little to pay attention to.

Open up just about any history book and you'll see what I mean. A history of the Roman Empire, for example, is bound to be a history of the Caesars and their wars. Those who make decisions impacting millions of lives get the attention, while those millions of lives really only get mentioned in passing. We keep track of history by who's in charge, what good and bad decisions they make, what wars they win and lose, and how money is made. Sometimes, if there's nothing more important going on in history, we'll pay attention to some great artists or philosophers or religious leaders. Jesus would probably get mentioned in a history of the Roman Empire, but of course Jesus has impacted billions of lives.

History is written by the victors, the great and the good, the powerful and the wise. And that's why it's so striking that the armies of heaven gather in celebration in the company of a few sleepy shepherds. We record the stories of Julius Caesar or Herod the Great, but history will not remember the daily activities and conversations and decisions of a backwater Jewish shepherd. Even in our Christmas story, where these shepherds have a place in our nativity scenes, we still don't know their names. They enter the story and are forgotten. They're just normal folks like you and me; they're not the people history remembers.

So why are the angels of the hosts of heaven appearing in glory to these nobodies? This is in some ways even a bigger deal than the other angelic announcements we've seen over the last few weeks; Zechariah and Mary and Joseph all only had one angel come and give them their announcement. Maybe the angels came to these shepherds because they were the only people available, we might say. But then let's look at what the angels say: they bring “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.” And then they begin to glorify God and proclaim this: “on earth peace to those on whom God's favor rests.”

Shepherds were hardly the great and the good of first-century Jewish society. There was sort of a nostalgia for shepherds because if you went far enough back in Israel's history, they got their start as a bunch of sheep herders, and there were a lot of poems and prophecies comparing Israel to God's flock of sheep. But that was a long time ago, and shepherding is a dirty and smelly job; nobody *wanted* to be a shepherd. In our culture we have the image of a pioneer living in a handmade log cabin as part of our national myth; this country was built by brave, rugged people like that. But not many people want to live in that sort of bare-bones log cabin out in the wilderness any more, and we're kind of suspicious of anyone who does want to live on the fringes of society like that.

The armies of God Almighty are specifically coming down to announce the birth of the savior to the kind of people everyone else ignores. King Herod, meanwhile, doesn't hear a thing. The high priest doesn't get an announcement. The generals and the emperors are left in the dark. The angels would seem to be wasting their breath, assuming angels breathe. Why bother telling shepherds?

And what's more, why bother announcing peace to these shepherds? What are *they* going to do about peace? These guys are the last ones to have any sort of influence in the world. They're hardly going to broker a peace deal between intractable enemies. They didn't even have a vote. What good is a proclamation of peace to people who have no power or influence? Even today with our participatory governments we feel pretty powerless at solving the world's conflicts; that was even more the case for these shepherds.

I remember reading about a study a few years ago that tried to determine the value of different jobs to society. The idea was to come up with some numbers to compare how much a person was paid with how much their work either added to or subtracted from the rest of the society. What they found was that one of the most valuable jobs they studied was a hospital cleaner. The people who clean hospitals create ten dollars' worth of value for every dollar they're paid. People who work in recycling centers were also very valuable, they found. But some jobs that we reward with huge amounts of money and power did not fare so well: high-powered investment bankers, for example, were actually found to be a net drain on society. We sometimes think of people like custodians and garbage collectors as being some of our least desirable jobs, when in reality they do great good for the rest of us. I've worked as a custodian in several different places through the years, and it's good, honorable work, and so I was glad to see a research study that quantified that good.

Our world has some pretty messed up priorities. We aren't very good at judging value. It seems silly to us that the armies of heaven would waste time making their announcement to shepherds, custodians, garbage collectors. What do these kinds of people have to do with peace on earth? Sure, Jesus may be the prince of peace, but what do these humble people have to do with bringing that peace? Surely the kings and politicians would be better recipients of this announcement.

And yet as we look through the story of what God has done among humans, we see over and over again that He uses humble people just as often as He uses great ones. The story of God's people is just as often told through paupers as it is through kings. There are just as many, if not more, sinners in the story of salvation as there are saints. I think of the prophet Amos, who was just a modest farmer of figs, of no great name or consequence, when God told him to march straight into the center of religious and political power and preach the word of the Lord to the corrupt leaders who were there. Or Ruth, a foreigner and a widow whose faithfulness placed her in the line of the Messiah. Or the fishermen and tax collectors Jesus called to be His personal messengers. Jesus once told a parable about a party God was throwing, and the rich and powerful were too busy to come, so God decided to invite the humble, the meek, and the lowly instead.

There is a passage in Ezekiel 34 where God gives His people a promise of a future covenant of peace. It's a beautiful passage that begins with a condemnation of the irresponsible shepherds of God's flock, the selfish leaders who have been abusing the people for personal gain, and God promises that He Himself will rescue His sheep and be their shepherd. And He will give them a covenant of peace, and the peace He has in mind is all-encompassing and far-reaching. Sometimes we

water down the call to peace by claiming that the Bible is really only concerned with having peace in your heart, peace within, and so when the angels announce peace to those shepherds, they're just announcing a nice, quiet, peaceful night for Jesus to be born. The cattle are lowing, the baby awakes, but little Lord Jesus, no crying He makes. But the peace on earth God has in mind is much, much bigger than that. Ezekiel talks about a peace that affects economics and nature and politics and agriculture *and* the human relationship with God. "Peace on earth" is a proclamation of an entire creation that is in harmony because its Lord has returned.

So while the rest of the world might think it's pointless to tell a few shepherds about peace on earth, God sends His angels to make their proclamation to all of creation, and these shepherds are part of it. They're perfect recipients of God's message. The mighty kings would take God's call to peace as a threat, but these shepherds are able to hear it for the good news it is. God's kingdom is no respecter of persons — He doesn't care about your title or your accomplishments — but He does care about your heart, and if you won't listen to the message, He's less likely to waste His time.

These angels are announcing some of the most important things for us to know about this child born at Christmas. They told Zechariah that God was going to fulfill His ancient promises, and that there is a way for the lost to return home. They told Mary that this child would be so great that He would rule over a never-ending kingdom. They told Joseph that He would be able to redeem those who are broken in their sins. They make these announcements because they want people to prepare for what this King will bring. Important changes are worth making yourself ready for.

And today we have to ask ourselves if we're making our lives ready for peace on earth. The announcement may not be taken seriously by the powerful people in our world, but we can't answer for their choices. It's up to us to hear the announcement of the angels and decide what we will do in response. They cry out for peace on earth because of the birth of this child, a peace that changes the whole of creation, that reconciles enemies and brings harmony to chaos. We have to put ourselves in the place of those shepherds to hear that announcement of Christmas.

Maybe we would hear the angels and think, surely there's a mistake, surely this baby born to humble parents in a place no one would notice can't be able to bring peace on earth. What can He do? And even today, when we know about the rest of Jesus' life, we still wonder how He can bring peace on earth. So we respect Him and love Him, but we're not sure if we believe that He is enough to bring that peace. We need Jesus *and* something or someone else: Jesus *and* strength, Jesus *and* money, Jesus *and* politics. But no, the angels just point us to that baby in the manger, nothing else, and they announce that with Him comes peace on earth.

Or maybe we hear the angels and think, surely there's a mistake, surely they're not talking to a nobody like *me*. *I* can't do anything about peace on earth. *I* can't be a messenger for a King. *I*'m just a shepherd. *I*'m just a sinner, a mess, a nobody. *I* don't know the first thing about peace on earth. Maybe we hear that announcement and think that they must be mistaken about the time, because surely there can't be peace on earth *now*. Surely not *here*. Evil is too strong. The night is too dark. We need more than this baby, and we need better people than me.

But the angels don't give us much choice. A Savior is born, they say. On earth, peace. And we are faced with a choice. Will we leave history to the great and powerful people, the victors, to

continue doing with history what they have always been doing? Or will we trust that this Savior is *the* Savior, the only one the world needs, the only one who can bring true peace? Will we trust that you and I are called to take part in His plan of redeeming the world, that you and I, as small and powerless as we are, are called to be peacemakers in a world of pain? The announcement is not just for our information, it is a call to action.



This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution-NonCommercial-Share Alike 2.5 License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-sa/2.5/)