

8In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night. 9And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 10But 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; 11for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. 12" "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger." 13And suddenly there appeared 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 men with whom He is pleased."

15When 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." 16So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

Last week we considered the simplicity and humility of Jesus birth. Luke gets the job done in about 8 words.

God chose two people who have almost no resources and no particular importance from a small out of the way village that also has no importance, for the task of hosting the 2nd person of the trinity. God on earth.

He was born helpless as any other baby. Completely dependent on Mary and Joseph for all of His needs.

But similar to Jesus words as He approached Jerusalem for the passion of the cross, when people were crying out their Hosanna's and the pharisees told them to stop, Jesus said, if these are silent, the stones will cry out

Jesus birth is as small and humble as any birth could be, but God will have some fanfare anyways.

The stones didn't cry out, but the angels did!

8 In the same region there were some shepherds staying out in the fields and keeping watch over their flock by night.

There is rich irony in this passage. It is filled with depth and we hope to at least scratch the surface.

God sent His herald angels to shepherds. In Israel, shepherds were at the bottom of the social order. They were nobody's and not only that but because of the rigors of their profession, they could not meet all of the religious rigamarole that the pharisees and scribes had put in place.

The rock stars in Israel were the top religious men. Important pharisees and scribes who were part of the sanhedrin, the ruling body of movers and shakers. Rich, powerful men who the people oohed and ahhed as they moved about. Rock stars.

Shepherds were at the other end of that society. Dirty, unclean, nobody's. Camped out with the sheep in order to protect the sheep.

And let's talk about the sheep. Because of the proximity of these

shepherds, just a few short miles from Jerusalem, and easy walking distance, and they walked everywhere, it's easy to assume that the sheep they are watching are dedicated to temple sacrifices.

This was the business of the big dogs, the Sanhedrin, the pharisees, the important religious men, priests and high priests. They were the richest men in Israel partly, because of sheep.

It was big business once a year at passover when over a million people would descend on Jerusalem and take part in passover. The blood would run out of the back of the temple like a small river as sheep were sacrificed signifying death and blood necessary for the forgiveness of sins.

These shepherds then are perhaps temple shepherds, employed by the rich important religious top dogs. Those men made huge profits selling the animals to the people who came to Jerusalem to worship.

The shepherds are just slightly above the sheep in this social order. And the angels have come to announce that these guys are about to be out of a job.

Now I'm sure they didn't feel threatened. They didn't understand that. Not yet. But the angel is announcing the lamb of God, who takes away the sins of the world, once for all.

For centuries their religion has pictured bloody sheep saving people from the guilt and punishment of their sins. Salvation comes from a blood sacrifice.

God requires death as the punishment for sin. Something has to die. And God has provided a temporary solution for His people the Jews in this sacrificial slaughter of multiple thousands of sheep.

But it was only a picture of the ultimate lamb that God would provide to die for every man's sins, once for all.

The debt of sin, and salvation from that debt was built into the Jewish mind frame. That bloody business was ever before them, ever hanging over them. These shepherds were raising sheep to be slaughtered for sin. Sheep for salvation.

With that fresh in your minds then, listen to the herald, the angel that God has sent to announce a Saviour.

9 And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened. 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; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.

You're just out shepherding the sheep like shepherds have done for centuries and suddenly, the shekinah glory of God lights up the darkness.

That glory had departed the temple like 600 years ago when the glory of God departed Solomon's temple. It hovered over the portico, then it moved up over the mount of olives for a time, and then it was gone.

God's people were taken captive and Solomon's temple was destroyed by invaders who carried the people away to Babylon.

This temple that these sheep would shed their blood in was a conglomeration of a lesser rebuilt temple when the people returned to their land, Ezra's temple, and then it was greatly expanded and

glorified by Herod, an Edomite. This was Herod's temple.

But the glory of God never returned. Until this night, in fields where shepherds were keeping watch over sheep. Suddenly the glory of God, the Glory of the Lord shone round about them.

Terrifying glory. We move about in the comfort of the world that God created for men and we forget how small we are and how immense He is. Everything is normal. We feel secure. But occasionally God sends tiny little stirrings to remind us how small and helpless we are.

Storms and fires can frighten us. The booming of a lightning bolt a half block away. Very little things to God, but our security is disturbed. Imagine these shepherds, drowsy around a campfire, one of them has the watch while the others idle perhaps.

And suddenly there is terrifying light and an angel! That'd wake you up! And it did.

9And an angel of the Lord suddenly stood before them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them; and they were terribly frightened.

I should hope so. You know the Bible tells of a future time when all the lights of the universe go out and the Glory of God lights up the sky when Jesus returns to this earth.

But that time there's no angel to say, don't be afraid. Because that time Jesus is coming in judgement, and the terror will be such that mens hearts will turn into jelly, and others will cry out for the mountains to crush them so they can hide from His glory.

But this angel has come to announce not judgement, but grace. A

truce with men who are at war with God. *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; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

This angel says there is reason for rejoicing, not sorrow. Great joy.

The angel says I have good news. And the greek word there is evangelion. Good news. And from that word we draw the term evangelical. Evangelicals are supposed to be the people with the message of the good news.

And the good news is that God is offering clemency to sinners. Grace. He has swung the doors open for anyone, the angel says great joy is available for everyone. All peoples.

And that good news is salvation from the debt you owed God for your sin. Death and punishment and seperation from God loomed over you. Grace is available. Peace with God.

There is no better news than that. *I bring you good news (evangelion) of great joy which will be for all the people; 11 for today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

Good news. Great joy! For who? All people. Everyone is included. Every human on the planet is a candidate for this good news. All people.

What is it!?! What is this good news for all people??

A Saviour!

We live in a complex society. Advanced civilization. Nothing quite like it in the history of the world.

I was listening to KNPR this morning on the drive to the post office (friday 11-16-2018) and they were interviewing people in a tent city in a parking lot near Chico, Ca. And they were saying that it was astonishing how much wealth had poured out of everywhere to try to give the folks whose houses are gone some comfort.

It was like Walmart. Everything people need. Food, clothes, blankets, medicine, water, and on and on. Piles of stuff flooded to try to give these unfortunate folks a bit of comfort while they try to figure out what they'll do next.

And I thought, only in America is the wealth so extravagant that something like what they were describing could happen. One lady said that hot coffee was delivered to the tent she had stayed in that night.

Even when you're a refugee, in America, you're drowning in an overflow of wealth. Read the history books, there's never been such a glut of wealth like we have before, ever.

And so an angel says there is a Saviour for ALL people, and quite honestly, the people in America are saying, what is it exactly that you think I need to be saved from?

I mean, my house burned down and I have every comfort afforded me and we'll figure out which new house to buy in another place as soon as the insurance claim is processed. What is it that I need saving from. I've got it pretty good. Even the refugees who are rendered homeless for a short time, have it pretty good.

This is 'murica! Saved from what?

Well, apparently, before I can announce good news, I have to explain that there's really BAD news. We have to sort of begin there in this culture.

And the bad news is that God is furious with the human race. Since Adam, the family of man has been born in sin and we are, collectively, a family of people, on a planet, that is at war with God.

Satan has usurped the throne, the authority to reign on this earth, and honestly, you don't have to look very far to figure out that this planet is at war with it's Creator.

Collectively and individually we are shaking our tiny fist at God in full on rebellion. How dare you say that what I decide to do is sin. How dare you say that You, God, own me, just because you created me, and provided this comfortable world and yes, you will give me my next breath, even though I'm in full on rebellion.

So, here's the scenario. God, who created us for His glory, and who has provided this planet where it is survivable and often even comfortable and beautiful, that God, instead of being glorified by His creation, is in a war with this planet full of people who are in rebellion against His sovereignty and ownership.

And a day is coming fast, in which He is going to depose Satan and retake this planet for His glory, and that is going to involve mass judgement against every rebellious human. Every human is spoiled by sin and rebellion. From birth forward. Sin that must be punished by a Holy God.

As it is now, as soon as this tiny thread we call life, is broken, we go into that judgement, immediately upon death. But a future day

is coming when God is going to clear the decks of wicked rebellious people and He will rule this planet.

We ask for that day every single time we pray the words of the Lord's prayer. Thy Kingdom come, Thy will be done on earth, like it is in heaven.

That prayer is asking the God of creation to come and judge Satan and all wickedness and rule this place, just as He now rules heaven. That day is coming.

Meanwhile, we're in a bit of a delirious daze. We have no idea how much trouble we're really in. We're duped, and blinded and dazed in the darkness. But God's judgement is swift and sure. And we believe it will be soon. Very soon.

So perhaps that gives the angelic messengers news a bit of new meaning for you. Given the rebellion and the coming judgement, perhaps we ought to re-think what it is we need? A Saviour. Someone who can intervene in the judgement that is already rolling our direction like a tidal wave.

We need a Saviour. Badly. This is serious as a heart attack. This world needs a Saviour, and that's exactly what this angel is announcing to a bunch of shepherds, in a field, the dregs of society, the nobodies of Bethlehem.

And this Saviour has a name. A title. He is Christ. The Messiah of Israel. Christ is the greek for the hebrew; Messiah.

The Saviour of the world is born. He is Christ. Oh, and one other thing. He IS Lord. Ultimate authority to reign over every human is His. He has all the authority of the Creator of the universes.

A Saviour who is Christ, the Lord. The Saviour of the planet is the Lord, the owner of the planet. And the good news is He can save every person. All people. That is the possibility.

You say; I'm relieved that you're swinging sort of toward free will here, universalism, salvation for everyone. This all sounds very good. A bit more non-calvinistic than usual.

Well, hold that thought, because the other angels are going to spoil that punchbowl for you.

12 "This will be a sign for you: you will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

Just in case there was more than one baby born in Bethlehem that night, always a possibility I suppose, the Christ who is Lord of every created thing, is the one laying in an animals food trough.

Most babies born in that time and that place would be wrapped in swaddling cloths. Babies love to be wrapped up tight. Warm and secure. So that might not narrow it down, but the Lord of the universes is in an animal shelter laying in a feeding trough.

The Saviour of the world, the Lord of everything, is a helpless baby wrapped up in cloths and lying in a manger. That's the sign.

God gives signs so we can narrow this down to the right person. Isaiah had also given a sign long ago. Messiah will be born of a virgin. And Micah had given a sign. He'll be born in Bethlehem.

Bethlehem, virgin birth, wrapped in cloths, laid in a manger. Those are the identifiers that must all come together so we know, this is the Saviour.

13 And suddenly there appeared 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 men with whom He is pleased."*

OK, get ready for your brain to hurt. Because here the angels take off their arminian semi-pelagian hats and put on their calvinist hats.

Glory to God in the heavens. We're back to the Lord's prayer. Same two places get mentioned. Heaven, where God rules now, where He is glorified, and earth where He will be glorified when the Christ sits on the throne of this earth and rules.

The angels say there is glory in the highest, and on earth, there will be peace.

Let's just stop right there for a moment first, before I make your heads hurt.

Has there ever been peace on this earth, since Adam's fall and God's departure, Satan's reign? Ever.

It's a rhetorical question. Of course there hasn't. The first sinner born murdered the second sinner born.

We talk about peace; nonstop. But let me share a truth with you. There is no peace and there will be no peace as long as Satan is on the usurped throne ruling this world. Talk talk talk. But no peace.

Some of you are politically motivated. You truly believe some man in some political party can bring wellness? Get over it. There will never be peace on this earth until what these angels sang about is fulfilled. The Christ, will depose Satan, judge sin from the earth,

and reign on David's throne, and then, a 1000 years of peace.

But, not before. Until then, there will never be a day when wars have ceased. Sorry Pete Seeger.

But, there's more to this verse. Because in this age of grace, God is offering peace to individuals. No world peace, but God, even now, with Satan on his usurped throne, God offers peace to those who will repent of their sin and come out of Satan's authority to reign, and come under God's authority to reign.

When you become a christian, when you truly repent and receive Jesus as your personal saviour, you come out of this rebellious world and go into Jesus. We are in Him. Christians leave this world behind and come under the rule and ownership of Jesus.

During the age of grace, peace is one heart at a time. And those of us who know Jesus, and have had our debt of sin cancelled, and have come into His house, under His roof, belong to Him, we have a peace inside of us that we wouldn't trade for anything this messed up world could offer instead.

Jesus said; Peace I leave with you; My peace I give to you; not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid. Jn. 14:27

These things I have spoken to you, that in Me you may have peace. In the world you have tribulation, but take courage, I have overcome the world. Jn. 16:33

God offers a peace that is based in forgiveness of the debt of sin, and it's a radical kind of peace. It is a peace that is seperated from this world that is controlled by sin and Satan, a peace where you come out of the rebellion and are seperated to God. You belong to

Him. He is your new ruler. And He gives you His peace. A deep seated peace in your heart. Inner peace.

The world can be launching nuclear war heads at each other, and nothing can touch the peace that God gives. It's seperated from this world of trouble. Because we are seperated from this world of trouble. We are His, and His peace is ours. And He is bigger than this world with all of it's tribulation.

And the angel said; *“Do not be afraid; for behold, I bring you good news of great joy which will be for **all the people**; I lfor today in the city of David there has been born for you a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.*

That Joy that comes from a Saviour who will release you from this world and it's debt of sin, your debt of sin, is available to all people. Every man, woman, child. All people.

And then the angelic host says;

*14“Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased.”*

God's peace, is selective. And it always has been. Suddenly we're back in Exodus 32 where God tells Moses, "I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy.

These angels are singing Glory to God, in the heavens, and part of that glory is His sovereignty which says, peace among men. All men? No, the men that it pleases God to give peace to. That's quite literally what the greek says.

You can all be good Bereans and go study that for yourselves. Peace among men, of His good pleasure. He will have mercy on

whom He will have mercy.

He will give peace to who He will give peace.

Told ya. So which truth is true then. Good news for ALL men in vs. 10, or peace for men with whom it pleases Him to give peace in vs. 14.

Those sound mutually exclusive. And they're only 4 verses apart from each other. Universalism and free will, and 4 verses down the page, Sovereign election.

How does that work!?!?! I have no idea. But I love it that I have a God big enough that what makes my brain hurt is child's play to Him.

To us, it seems a contradiction at best, but to God, both truths are possible. And it's all over your bibles that way.

And the free-will Arminians hold to their free-will Arminian verses, and the sovereign election people hold onto their sovereign election verses.

But God's up in heaven going, this is easy peasy. Impossible for you. Easy for me. That's my God. That's the God I'm in love with.

Good news for all people. Some of you will have peace. Who-so-ever will may come. Chosen from the foundation of the world. According to His good pleasure.

I'll let you in on a little secret. This language about the pleasure of God, appears another time, strikingly similar.

When John the baptizer who has just been born 6 months previously and also miraculously, who we'll meet in chapter 3, meets Jesus at the Jordan river and baptizes Him, the heavens open and a voice comes out of the heavens and says; This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased.

Peace for men with whom God is well pleased. There is one man, one sinless man that God is well pleased with. Sin is the problem so one man, pleases God. His beloved Son.

And Paul says, *For your life is hidden with Christ in God.* We are safely hidden inside the person who God looked down at and said, this is my son, in whom I am well pleased.

No matter what this world concocts to do, my life is hidden with Christ in God, and He has given me a peace that passes all understanding. No one from this world can touch that peace.

Well, after that mountain, the rest is all downhill.

15 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." 16 So they came in a hurry and found their way to Mary and Joseph, and the baby as He lay in the manger. 17 When they had seen this, they made known the statement which had been told them about this Child. 18 And all who heard it wondered at the things which were told them by the shepherds. 19 But Mary treasured all these things, pondering them in her heart. 20 The shepherds went back, glorifying and praising God for all that they had heard and seen, just as had been told them.

