

THE SONG OF THE HEAVENLY HOST

Luke 2:13-14

Intro: Just as suddenly as the angel of the Lord appeared (v. 9), so did the heavenly host appear after the angel of the Lord had delivered his message. And it must have been almost as startling to the shepherds as the appearance of the angel had been. This had to be a host of angels, and their number is given as “a multitude,” which would mean that there were more than the shepherds or anyone else (except God) could have counted. The term “host” is a word used for a band of soldiers, but these were angels not announcing war, but peace.

And just as “the angel of the Lord” was a messenger sent by God to the shepherds, so we must say the same thing about this angelic chorus. They had been sent by God to back up the message of the angel of the Lord that this indeed was “good tidings of great joy . . . to all the people.”

They sang, but their song was short, making it that more impressive. There is no evidence that it was repeated like some of the parts of Handel’s *Messiah*, but it clearly was an indication that the shepherds should do as the angels were doing. In fact, when we get down to verse 20, after the shepherds had seen the baby Jesus, this is exactly what they did.

Now it is important for us to notice:

I. THE ORDER OF THE PHRASES IN THEIR SONG (Luke 1:14).

It was praise to God first, and then the chief benefit that the coming of this Child would bring to the people of God.

“Glory to God in the highest” would mean that from earth to the highest heaven, which is the dwelling place of God, God is to be praised. He never has received such praise, but He will some day. However, the angels had come from heaven to bring the message to the shepherds, and it was a call for them to join with the angels in ascribing all glory to God for that which had taken place in Bethlehem.

“And on earth peace, good will toward men.” These words have given translators and expositors a real problem as to the exact meaning of what the angelic host was saying. The NASB probably comes the closest to the

real meaning in the light of what had been said by the angel of the Lord. It was not a message of world peace that the angels were singing about, but a message of personal peace. And so this is the rendering of the verse in the NASB: “and peace on earth among men with whom He is pleased.” There will be world peace some day, and that may be in view here, but it seems that the angels were seeking to correct the idea expressed in Isaiah’s prophecy God is quoted as saying, “There is no peace . . . to the wicked” (Isa. 57:21). Twice in Jeremiah’s prophecy he referred to the fact that there were those who were saying, “Peace, peace, when there is no peace” (Jer. 6:14; 8:11). For many, many years some governmental leaders have been working for world peace, or to fight a war that will end all wars. But peace is not going to come that way, and the reason was stated right here in the angels message: because men are not paying any attention to what is pleasing to God, and they are not interested in finding out how to please God. And I am afraid that it continues to be that way in our own country.

But this message of the angels promised that which would bring glory to God and peace to men (generic) who were pleasing to God.

Now let us take the two parts of the message, and seek to understand what each of them means.

II. THE MESSAGE IN THE ANGELS’ SONG (Luke 2:14).

The angel of the Lord had a message, which is in verses 10 through 12. But the angelic chorus had a message also, and we have this in verse 14.

Before we get into the message of the angelic chorus, let me point out that all of the recorded songs in the Bible are important in teaching us about music today. This morning we had a song (Deut. 32) which Moses taught the children of Israel, and which they were to teach their children. And it wasn’t the first song that Moses had the people sing. The first one is recorded for us in Exodus 15. The Psalms are important as far as music among the Lord’s people is concerned.

This song in Luke 2 was especially designed to praise God, to glorify Him. It was not directed toward men, not even toward angels, but to God alone. He is the One Who is to be praised for what had taken place in Bethlehem on that very day, and He was the only One Who was to be praised. That is because what had happened was a work of God, and the

results which were to follow would be the work of God also. The angels began by praising God, and then by showing what the benefits were which men would experience because of what God had done.

And so first we have:

A. “Glory to God in the highest” (Luke 2:14a).

Christmas is the time of the year when we especially remember the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. But for those of us who know the Lord there should not be any day in the year that we do not remember the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ. And if we are remembering it the right way we will do it by thanking God for the Gift of His Son.

Man in his sin really has no realization of how dreadful any sin is, nor the terrible effect that sin has had on us, nor what the ultimate consequences will be. And so man would never have sought God to find out how to deal with sin. But God took the initiative. He ordained salvation before the world was created. And He is the One Who sent His Son on His mission into this world. Jesus Christ died for sinners because there was no other way of finding acceptance with God. He did it not because we deserved it. In fact, we deserved nothing but judgment. But Christ died for us because God loved us, and because Christ Himself loved us, and wanted to save us from our sins. And what glory it brings to God, how it rejoices His heart when we recognize what He has done, and thank Him either in prayer or in song!

We know how we respond when we do something for someone and they say, “Thank you,” – whether it is opening a door for someone, or slowing our car down to let someone into our line of traffic. A wave of the hand means a great deal to us.

Well, the Lord has done more for us than we will fully realize until we get to heaven. So let our singing of the carols tonight be a time when we pay close attention to the words, and make these carols an expression of our gratitude to the Lord for the gift of His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ. Would you ever want to go back to the time when you didn’t know Him? Of course not. And that is why we pray that our children and grandchildren will be brought to the Lord before they make a lot of mistakes that they will make unless the Lord saved them. “In everything give thanks . . .” That is the message of the angels. We could never pay the Lord back for

saving us. But He doesn't want any pay. He does want our praise, our thanksgiving, our love.

When we understand how much praise means to the Lord, we will understand why the Psalmist in Psalm 107 said over and over again, "O that men would praise the Lord for His goodness, and for His wonderful works to the children of men." On one occasion the Lord healed ten lepers. Only one of them came back to thank the Lord, and he was a Samaritan. And you remember that the Lord asked Him, "Where are the nine?" (Luke 17:17). The Lord said,

23 Whoso offereth praise glorifieth me: and to him that ordereth his conversation aright will I shew the salvation of God (Psa. 50:23).

But let us go on to the second part of the verse. I am going to use the translation found in the NASB.

B. "And on earth peace among men with whom He is pleased"(Luke 2:14b).

Doesn't this verse tell us that one of the greatest gifts of salvation is peace? We have peace with God. We have peace in our hearts. And we have peace with one another. Doesn't this help us to understand why the Lord prayed so strongly in John 17 that we would be one with each other. And isn't it a contradiction of terms for believers not to love each other.

The moment man sinned, it made a horrible difference between Adam and Eve and God. And it turned Adam and Eve against each other. And the sin in their oldest son's heart made him a murderer of his brother.

How wonderful it is to have peace with God! But what did it take? Romans 5:1 tells us. (Quote.) And how can sinners be justified before a holy God? How can they be declared righteous? It is only possible through the death of Jesus Christ on the Cross. Our sins stood between us and God, and placed us at enmity with God. But Jesus Christ died to put away our sins. God declares His case against us closed. We are forgiven, not because God was willing to overlook our sins. A holy God cannot do that. But it was because Jesus Christ died in our place, and took our penalty upon Himself, paying our debt in full.

If there were all that there is to salvation, that would be wonderful

enough. But that is not all. We continue to live on in this fallen world, and we ourselves are compassed about with weakness, and we have our fears and troubles. Oh, this is where the word “peace” has special meaning for us. Two verses we all love are found in Phil. 4:6-7. Let me quote them for you, and notice especially the word “peace.” (Quote.)

“Peace” is a part of our inheritance, personal peace, freedom from fear and freedom from anxiety. It is God’s peace the verse tells us. It comes also through the Word. It comes as we obey the Word.

But let me say just a word about peace among ourselves. I was raised in a family of six boys. We had just one sister. And we didn’t always get along with each other. More than once we made our mother cry because we weren’t getting along with each other. Those are memories I wish that I didn’t have. There was nothing that please my dear mother more than for us to love each other.

You know, our heavenly Father is the same way. Let me remind you of what He told His disciples when He was together with them in that famous Upper Room. I am referring to John 13:34 and 35:

34 A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another.

35 By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another (John 13:34-35).

Loving each other means peace, peace which only God can give us. Is it any wonder that the Psalmist said,

1 Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!

2 It is like the precious ointment upon the head, that ran down upon the beard, even Aaron's beard: that went down to the skirts of his garments;

3 As the dew of Hermon, and as the dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion: for there the LORD commanded the blessing, even life for evermore (Psa. 133:1-3).

This is peace.

Concl: So we can say that the message of the angels was a message of salvation through a Savior Who enables us to praise Him, and who rewards us with peace when we do. And it is always a peace which goes beyond our understanding, and yet it is real, and lasting, a peace which glories God, and brings blessing to us.

Luke 2:13-14 (6)

So let us praise God for our Savior, and for the peace that we have with Him, peace that we have in our hearts living in a very non-peaceful world, and peace that we have we each other because we have been called together into fellowship with God through His dear Son the Lord Jesus Christ.

So let us remember that the coming of Christ as our Savior means praise to God from us, and peace from God to us and for us. How thankful we should be for our precious Savior.