



Go the Extra Mile

Pastor Mike Fabarez

Well, were you here yesterday? Did you see that piece of prime ribs I put up on the screen? Well, I went home last night. I didn't have any prime rib. But I must admit that I was inspired to put that picture of prime rib up on the screen because I ate some prime rib last week. And again, I don't mean to suggest anything here by this, but some wonderful CBCer bought me a gift card to a high-end steakhouse that I happen to use the gift card last week. A fancy place in Newport Beach, actually in Corona Del Mar, right off of PCH there. And so I went to go get some of their famous prime ribs. And as I pull up Carlynn, my wife, says, as I've heard many times throughout my marriage, she says, "Oh, yeah, my dad used to take me here when I was a kid."

Of course I'd never been there. I heard that a lot because though we grew up together in the same place, we ran in two different circles. I like to remind her, her family was white-collar, mine was blue-collar. And that means when she says things like, "Oh, we've stayed in that hotel," or "We went there on our vacation," or you know, those are..." I'm like I've never been there. I had a great family, great home, wouldn't trade it for anything. But I'll tell you what, she went to places I never went and ate at places I've never been to. And so she says that, we walk in and we have some prime rib, which, of course, she'd had before, but...

I recognized as I was thinking through that kind of clash of worlds that have come together, that it's a bit like the nativity scenes that I see when I go, you know, to your homes and I see you have the nativity scene. I think we have one at our house. I'm not sure. Little figurines there and not the microscopic ones I was talking about the other week, but full-sized ones, the figurines sitting there on your mantel or whatever. And usually you've got the baby Jesus, you've got Joseph, you've got Mary, and then you've got flanked on both sides. Oftentimes, it's three on one side and three on the other. And the three on one side, of course, are the Magi. And then they're dressed royally. And sometimes the facts are all wrong. Number one, they wouldn't have visited them at the Bethlehem manger. I won't get into all that.

But anyway, they show them they're depicting, they've got crowns on, their dressed fancy. And then across on the other side you usually have like two or three shepherds who are there and what we don't normally recognize, particularly because they paint the shepherds as nice as they paint the, you know, the Magi and they're clean and they look good. But the reality is these are two worlds colliding, at least in the nativity scene, because the Magi would come later. But the point is, I think to myself, these people would never be, you know, vacationing at the same place. I mean, one, it's the Ritz-Carlton and the other it's, you know, KOA, if you know what that is. If you don't know what that is then you ran in my wife's circle, but vacation was KOA. (audience laughter) Did you know that? Some of you know that. Okay, good. Thank you. Yeah, some normal people here. That's good. (audience laughter)

So I just want you to realize what a strange thing it was for you to buy a set that you've set up and you really have people from two different worlds. Talk about white-collar and blue-collar. You've got that going on in the traditional nativity set. And maybe that comes to mind when



you read that jarring sentence in Genesis 46, as you read through the Bible every year with us, and you get to that passage and it's just a strange passage. Remember, Joseph is there. He's, you know, he's reconciling with his brothers and family, trying to situate them somewhere in Egypt and they have to go sequester them down in Goshen. Do you remember the story? And there's this weird little sentence there that says because "all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians."

And I know it's hard for us as Bible readers here, as Christians, to read that because I'm thinking, wait a minute, you know, shepherd to us is not a bad thing. Shepherds. You think about, you know, Moses was out there shepherding. Abraham was shepherding. David, of course, a famous shepherd who becomes the king. Now we have the shepherds in our nativities. We don't think of shepherds as detestable. But it wasn't just Egypt. I mean, a lot of cultures saw them as detestable. Even in Jewish culture in the first century, you were considered ceremonially unclean if you were a shepherd. It doesn't mean you were like an outcast of society necessarily. But it did mean you're not going to come into the temple complex. I mean, you work with animals, there's blood, there's, you know, feces. There's all the stuff you got to do. It's considered a ceremonially unclean occupation. Even the philosophers like Aristotle talked about the shepherds. It's a notoriously lazy occupation. It just was not seen as the respectable white-collar occupation to have.

Well, the reason the shepherds play so prominently in the nativity scene, of course, is because they play so prominently in the birth of Christ narrative. And I'd like you to look at a passage where we see the shepherds and maybe as we read it with that little background in mind, something that said here will jump off the page this time when we read it. So let's go to Luke Chapter 2 and let's see where the shepherds here are "out there keeping watch over their flocks by night." Very, very, very familiar passage at Christmas time. But let me read it for you, starting in verse 8,

Luke Chapter 2 verse 8. "In the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flocks by night. And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with fear. And the angel said, 'Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy.'" Now, here's the part that should jump off the page if you understand a little bit about the view of the shepherds, shepherds who weren't even allowed to be called into court to testify. I mean, they were not seen as part of the in-crowd.

What does it say? "That will be for all the people?" All the people, including you, you shepherds. Right? Everyone is going to have the benefit of the coming of the Messiah, which he goes on to say, in such hugely poetic and theological words. Look what it says in verse 11. "For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior who is Christ," the Messiah, "the Lord." And that's just filled with references to the idea of the concept of the Lord coming to save, about the Messiah being the crowned King of the Son of David and the government resting on his shoulders. "Being born in the city of David," which is not the reference as often was the case to one of the hills in Jerusalem, but the place where he was born that Micah 5:2 said that the Messiah would come from. This is just a rich sentence.



"This will be a sign for you: you'll find the baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of heavenly host praising God and saying," here it comes, "Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased," which is the accurate reading of that text, by the way. And I'm thinking here he's coming and bringing news to even shepherds. And you even have these Magi coming from the east, as we talked about a couple of weeks back. And here they come. And God is allowing them the favor of seeing the young Christ at that point.

Now what I want to focus on just for a couple of minutes this morning on Christmas morning is this, verse 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.' And they went with haste and they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger." Now you read that, it's so common, it's so familiar. Well, OK, and of course that's what happened. But I just want to make a few observations about this. This is such an important reality that you have angels coming to speak to shepherds and the shepherds being included in the good news, and them then responding by saying, "Well, let's go see this thing that has happened." He said, they're going to see a sign, this baby wrapped in swaddling cloths and lying in a manger" of all places. "Let's go and see this thing."

What I think is interesting about their immediate response as it says there in verse 16 that "they went in haste" as they hurried along, is that they saw this message as one coming from, look at the bottom of verse 15, well, it's coming from the Lord, "which the Lord has made known to us." Now God is communicating where to go to see the young, you know, toddler Jesus. Right? Because by that time he's a year pushing two years old by directing the Magi through, you know, the stars. And yet here you have the shepherds, the common folks, the blue-collar guys, and they're getting a direct message from angels, which they're now attributing, as they ought to, from God. Just like the Magi should say, "Well, Daniel's prophecy about the coming of the Messiah." And however God did that we talked about a couple of weeks ago, he directs them, and surely they're crediting God and God's prophetic word and God's direction to bring them to Bethlehem to see the child Jesus. But here we have something that seems even more direct because they're messengers from heaven.

Angelos. We've talked about that recently. The word "Angelos," transliterated "angel." It just means a messenger. In this case, we're talking about heavenly messengers who come from God's throne room. They're dispatched to bring the message about the coming of the birth of the Messiah. And they're just saying, "Listen, this is what the Lord has said." But I want to ask you, if you're sitting there and you said, "Now, who did you hear this from?" Say you didn't hear this. And they said, "Well, we heard it from the Lord." And you said, "Wait a minute, you heard it from the Lord?" They'd have to clarify, "Well, we didn't hear it from the Lord. We did hear it from the Lord, but we heard it from the angels. We heard it from a messenger." There was an intermediary who came and gave them the information, and yet they rightly attributed the information to God.



That's a very important thing for us to do, is to recognize that the things that God communicates to us, he communicates to us with the full authority of heaven, but you've got to figure out now, how does he speak to us? Because if I said this, "Have you heard from the Lord this week?" I know a lot of people in our very touchy-feely culture that we have would have to think, "Wow, did I ever sit, you know, quietly and contemplatively? Maybe I was sitting on the beach or I don't know, I took a nap, I had a feeling, you know, I burned incense. I was sitting crisscross applesauce. Is there a time, I don't know, where I felt like I heard from the Lord." And you're going to think about feelings.

I just want you to know God has spoken and he speaks in this case to us, the Bible is very clear, in his written word. As a matter of fact, the passage I want you to turn to real quick and this wasn't meant to be a deep Bible study this morning, but I want to take you to Second Timothy. This is such an important text. We've got to see it. We should see it, you know, every month or so just to remind ourselves what we're messing with here. Second Timothy Chapter 3. Second Timothy Chapter 3. Paul, an apostle, writing to Timothy, a pastor, pastoring a very important church in Ephesus. And as he's talking to him about what's important, he's going to bring them back to one of the most important texts about the Bible in the Bible, which is a text about the nature of Scripture.

But he starts this way in verse 14. He says, "But as for you, continue in what you've learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you learn it." Now do you have an ESV, an English standard version? Do you see a little tiny number next to that word "whom"? Do you see that "whom"? What does it say in the margin there if you have your readers on? Plural. So we're not talking here about you know you've learned it from God. It's like angels in this case were plural in Luke 2, a bunch of angels, "a multitude of the heavenly host" showed up and they all confirmed this message. These voices brought a message. But when they turn around and say, "Hey, we've heard this from the Lord, singular, the God of the universe, we know it came through the intermediary messengers of angelic beings.

Now, he's already talked about Timothy having this great heritage in his life of Lois and Eunice. He's got a mom and a grandma who have been teaching him biblical truths from his childhood. As a matter of fact, he goes on to say it here. "But as for you, continue what you've learned and have firmly believed, knowing from whom you've learned it and how from childhood," verse 15, "you've been acquainted with the sacred," Scriptures or, "writings which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Jesus Christ." Now, here are many people teaching him this, and he's got the writings of Scripture, and he's been hearing these things through people, just like we saw in Second Timothy 2:2 when he says, "You're going to entrust what's been entrusted to you, to faithful people who'll be able to entrust them to other people." Right?

And that chain of discipleship, it's very important that we understand that oftentimes the teaching of God's word is coming through agency, coming through teachers, coming through people who relay it to you. Like if you've become a Christian, I assume certainly in your adult life, if you became a Christian, you had probably people who weren't your mom or your dad sharing the message with you. They didn't just hand you a Bible and say, "Here, go read this."



But they were giving to you biblical truth. They were relaying to you biblical information. And you can say, well, I've had some good, reliable evangelists or disciples in my life, but what's really all behind that?

Look at verse 16 now. What's behind it is the writings themselves. "All Scripture," the writings, the Bible, "is..." Now, this is interesting and is very important. If you got an English Standard Version, or New International Version, the different translations, will say this just the way it literally is, which is as wooden as you can get it: "breathed out by God" or some translations "God-breathed." Now, the reason a lot of translations don't translate it that way... You may have a translation in your lap. "Well, it doesn't say that. It says 'is given by inspiration of God,'" and you think, "Well, that sounds different." Well, it sounds different because what you're reading in those translations really is a word that was lifted from Latin, and it's the Latin word "Inspiro." And from inspiro they transliterated that into English when they looked at the Greek word here, which is a compound Greek word, and they picked the word inspiro and then they transliterated into English and they said, well, "inspiration."

Now, the problem with using that word is, sadly, that we don't use the word "inspiration" in common English the way they did in the 15th, 16th, 17th century. Because when you use the English word "inspiration," you were thinking of the Latin word inspiro and inspiro means exactly what we see here in our English text, which translates to Greek text... Is this getting too complicated? Which is "Thea," or "Theo," right? "Theos" is the Greek word, it's compound and "Pneo," right? "Theopneustos." That's the Greek word. "Theo" means "God" or "Theos" the full word, right? "Pneo" you might remember words like pneumonia or I can even go in and get my pneumatic drill. Pneo means to breathe, breath, wind. pneumatology, if you've studied theology. That's the study of the Spirit. Spirit means wind or breath, right? We obviously are identifying the Holy Spirit who doesn't have flesh and bones.

But the point is you have this word, "God-breathed" and then if you think given by inspiration of God, the problem is you think about the Bible being something that was, I don't know, given because people were moved by God to have an inspiring thought or they had some stroke of genius, or they thought of something very interesting and they had a really good thought about God as they sat on a cliffside overlooking the Mediterranean Sea. Or they were sitting, you know, with their legs crossed, you know, contemplating and meditating on the reality of the universe. And they had this great thought about God and they wrote it down. And we'd say, "Oh, it's like a piece of art. And an artist was inspired to write this."

It doesn't say the authors are inspired. Inspired? We use that word to talk about a stroke of genius, to have some act of creativity kind of well up within us. Or some people will think, well, when you talk about the inspiration of the Bible or the Bible and inspiration as a word, sometimes people think, well, what you mean by that is when you read it you're inspired to do good things. I want to do good works. I want to follow God. I want to live a virtuous life, and I'm inspired by the Bible. It doesn't say that WE are inspired by the Bible. It says that the Bible itself is God-breathed. It is breathed out by God, "Divinitus inspirata" if you want to quote the Latin. That's the Latin translation of theopneustos. Theopneustos is God-breathed. Divinitus



inspirata, it is God-breathed. And now in our English text, thankfully a lot of English texts now say breathed-out by God.

So here's the point. "You got people in your life, Eunice, Lois, me," Paul would say to Timothy, "and we've all taught you something, and it's accurately like a messenger coming from God's authoritative word. We're bringing you that information. We're teaching you, we're preaching to you. We're disciplining you. We're training you in the truth of God." But the thing that has all the authority are the very words of God, and the very words of God are what the Scriptures actually are. They're breathed-out by God. It's as though God said these things. And what the Bible is codifying or I like to say "inscripturating" for us, putting into black and white in sentences are God's words. God's got things to say. And he uses New Testament authors and Old Testament authors to put those things down in writing. And when they're in writing, God says, "These are breathed out by me." God-breathed.

All Scripture is breathed-out by God, and because it's God-breathed, it's profitable for people picking it up and teaching other people. It's profitable for teaching. It's profitable for you reproving someone which means you point out their fault. It's profitable for correcting someone who's going down the wrong path. It's profitable for training them up in doing righteous things so that when people hear that information, the man of God can be equipped and complete for every good work. He's ready to go. So I just need you to see that even in a normal course of action, there is a person affected by the authoritative word of God. But there's an intermediary in between so often.

Even if you were to pick up the Bible yourself and read it, the photons bouncing off of the page going into your brain, you've got a document there that has got to be lifted up. Your brain has to function to get that into your head. Or if you're listening to someone read it, they're reading it to you. Or if someone's preaching it and explaining it to you. Or you're reading a good Christian book that's about biblical truth, you have someone giving that to you. And I just want you to know that sometimes when I say, "Have you heard from God this week," you think, "Well, of course not. God hasn't spoken to me," but he probably has in many ways. And all you have to do is look back to, "Did I read the Bible? Did anybody read the Bible to me? Did anybody talk accurately about the Bible? Did anybody explain the Bible verse to you? Did anybody in a book that you read, some Christian, described or discussed some biblical principle and made it clear to you and accurately reflects the God-breathed words of God? Well, if so, you've heard from God. And that's a big deal.

And I don't know if you'll take notes on Christmas morning, but if you want to write something down besides who you write thank you notes to, write this down. "Reconsider the Importance of God's Words." God has spoken. And here's the deal. He's using people. He's using the printed page. He's using Christian books. He's using Christian podcasts, Christian radio, to get that information into your life. And you need to know it comes with the authority of heaven, right? Not bad teaching. Not people who twist and distort the Scripture, but any time it's accurately presented to you. If I said to you, Jesus is the bread of life. He is the answer to the human craving of the soul. I said that last time. If I've said that to you, that's exactly what the Bible teaches us. That's exactly what those verses mean. God spoke to you in that. If I said



something simple, "God so loved the world he gave his only Son. Whoever believes in him shall not perish but have everlasting life." I read that, I quote that, you've just heard from God. Those are God's God-breathed words.

So the shepherds hear angels. And those words from angels they rightly attribute God has spoken, even though it's not God who is speaking directly. God is speaking through an intermediary, and that's so important for us to catch. I want you to start feeling that sense of like sobriety and profundity when someone says to you, here's a biblical truth. If it's rightly presented, you should be good Bereans. Make sure it is rightly presented and it's not being twisted or distorted or in some way you're not being lied to with, you know, Bible references here and there, but you really have good biblical truth being presented to you. Those are God's words. And when God speaks, you know what? You ought to listen. When God has something to say, you ought to make sure that you're paying attentive attention to it.

Three quick commitments to this. Number one, read the Bible directly. That's the most important thing you can do. We're coming up on the last week here. We are in the last week of the year. Every year we read through the Bible. Here we have a schedule. It's printed everywhere. It's on our website. It's on the back of the worksheet when we have one, which is every week besides this one. You're always talking about, we're talking about all the time at Compass Bible Church, our Daily Bible Reading. We love acronyms around here, the DBR. And if you're not reading the DBR with us, I just encourage you to make a commitment, right now, I'm just going to read the Bible. To read the Bible is one of those fundamentally important things you can do. If I said, "Have you been reading the Bible this week?" You should say, "Yes, I've been reading. Of course I've been reading the Bible. It's the God-breathed information from God." And I'm just saying that's the most important thing you can do is to read the Bible.

The other thing you can do is make a commitment to come to church. If you come to a church like this one, guess what we're all about? Teaching the Bible. And sometimes, as Peter said about Paul's writings, some things in them are hard to understand. That's why God has given the church teachers. Ephesians 4 said teachers have been given to the church, and they help us understand the truth of Scripture. And I'm saying, come to church, and hear the teachers teach. They're not infallible, right? Will they make mistakes? Sometimes, you know, they say something or they misquote something. But here's the deal. If they're rightly presenting the basic truth of Scripture to you in any passage, you need to say the Lord has spoken. Right?

And that's so important for us to catch. But you've got to be in the firing line of good preaching. And that's why you should come to church more than once a week. You should come to sub-congregations where we preach the word. You should come to men's Bible study or women's Bible study or come to the youth programs here because you need to hear the word of God taught. And it's so important that you engage in that. Commitments: read the Bible, come to church. These are basic things, but this is where you get to hear the authoritative word of God.



Another thing would be there are people who really have spent so much time mastering certain areas of the Bible and they are offering to teach you those things in Christian books and in classrooms. And thankfully, our commitment to you understanding the truth of God and having experts help explain that is reflected in two pieces of real estate here on our campus. One is a bookstore over here in the corner of our building. And we do that not to make money, because that's funny. Bookstores don't make money and our bookstore doesn't make any money. It's in the red every single year. And we don't care because we're interested in getting good books in your hands. And the point is that particular resource there is hand-selected books that we know are theologically sound and handing those to you so that you can surround yourself with good biblical books that explain the Bible.

The other piece of real estate is across the street here. It's called Campus Bible Institute. And when we pull in guys like J. Warner Wallace to come and teach apologetics, we should be looking for bigger classrooms to put that in. You should sign up for things like that and say, I am going to apply and I'm going to register so that I can hear experts talking through biblical truth. Very important. And I know it involves reading and involves papers and tests. That's how we learn. And we get to hear from people who have spent more time in these topics than we have been able to teach us the word of God and you should say, I know from whom I've learned these things and just a variety of people, right? I can get into more details, but just those three should start us. I want to read the Bible. I want to go to church and I would take advantage of experts, whether that's in print or in lectures. I want to do what I can to ground myself in the truth of God's word, because God is speaking and if God is speaking you ought to be listening.

Back to our passage here. They heard from angels, and then they turned around and said in the bottom of verse 15, "The Lord has made it known to us." Oh, he did it through angels, but he made it known to us. This is God's truth. So what did they do? Middle of verse 15, "the shepherds said to one another, 'Hey, you know what? Maybe if I have some time down the road, I don't know if I'm not busy one night, maybe I'll go over to Bethlehem and see if they're still there.'" No. "The shepherd said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing which has happened.'" Beginning of verse 16, "And they went with haste." They ran. They went fast. That's what it means, right? So off they go. What did they do? They immediately responded by doing something about the truth that they just heard.

You're telling me the Messiah's laying in a manger in Bethlehem? We're going to put our flocks at risk and we're going to go see this. We're going to interrupt our night when we were about to just bed down and relax and go to sleep or take a nap. We're going to put all that on hold and we are going to immediately respond. We're not going to delay. That'd be a good pattern for us in our Christian life, particularly when we think about the patterns of a new year getting out of the holiday season. Number two, let's put it this way, "Never Delay in a Determined Response." Truth always demands a response. God's truth always demands a response. And you should ask yourself, what is the response that I should have to the truth that I just learned? Whether you read a Bible passage or whether or not you're hearing a sermon or whether or not you're reading a Christian book or taking a Christian class, the question should be, "So what? What difference does that make?"



And here's the thing God never gives us knowledge just to fill our brains with knowledge. Truth always demands a response. And there should be a response. You can't even read the Bible without reading an indicative statement of an objective truth like, "Great is the Lord," right? You can learn that truth and immediately the Bible can't help but immediately drive you to application "and greatly to be praised." Right? Now, "Jesus is Lord," right? These are simple, the most basic truths. You say, well, what do you do in response to that? "And at his name every knee should bow, and every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord." I mean, there are things that should happen in response to everything that God says. God doesn't say things so you can sit back and say, "Oh, that's good. I'm glad I learned that. If I ever do a Bible trivia game with my family, I'll have that fact stored away in my mind."

The point is, if God gives us information, we need to be in the regular pattern of saying what should we do about it? "Hey, we just heard that the Messiah was born." They said, "We know what we need to do. We need to put our plans on hold and we need to respond. We're going to go in haste. We're not going to delay in a determined response." It is so important that we do that because I find that most people who don't do that right? Well, be careful with this. And I don't mean... let me just make an observation. The observation is in the Scripture I find a lot of people who are quick to respond to God's truth. And those who are slow to respond to God's truth are often those, and this isn't always the case, who are new Christians or young people as opposed to older people or mature Christians.

Mature Christians like to analyze what they've heard. Mature Christians like to spend time kind of mulling over what they've heard. Think about last night. If you were here yesterday, you've got the leaders of the Jews grumbling about what Christ said and saying, "We're not interested in this. Too complicated for us." Peter says, "I don't understand it all either, but where else are we going to go?" John 6, right? "You alone have the words of eternal life. So we're here. We're not leaving." Right? That's John 6:67 and 68. That's what happened. And all I'm saying is look for that pattern in the Scripture. You'll see it all over the place. An angel comes miraculously and describes truth to Zechariah. He's a priest, and he balks at it. An angel shows up and talks to Mary, and Mary says, "Let it be done according to your word. Fine, I'll do it. I'm going to bear the Christ. Okay."

I mean, you see, Eli, the head honcho in Israel back in First Samuel and God's giving him all kinds of information and he's not responsive. And you got Samuel, just a little boy, and he's hearing from God and of course, you're right, "Speak, your servant listens." You've got people like kings, like King Zedekiah in the Old Testament at the end of the period of Judah's kingship there in Israel, and they're not interested in doing what God says. The prophets are speaking, but they're being rebellious. They're bowing down to idols. Well, here's a bunch of teenagers. They get taken captive during that period of time, taken over to Babylon. And they say things like this, "We're not going to defile ourselves with the king's food. We don't care what that costs us." Or Hananiah, Mishael and Azariah, right? A.K.A. Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego, say, "Hey, Nebuchadnezzar, we're not going to bow down to your idol. God can save us but even if he doesn't, just let it be known to you, O King, we're not going to bow down to your idols." Think about that.



The old guys in Jerusalem felt like, "Well, you know, there's a lot of pressure for us because of our political alliances and because it would be expedient. And I wonder what people think if we didn't." And so they weren't interested in being responsive to God's truth. Now, that's not always the case. I get it. Some old godly people here who are really quick to respond to any passage they read, any sermon they hear that's biblically grounded. And a lot of young people who will just say, "I'm not interested." But all I'm saying is that note so often in Scripture the pattern is those who find themselves entrenched in patterns or they feel like they have more to lose, they are less oftentimes responsive to doing something immediately when God says, now's the time. Young Peter, he's probably a teenager, Jesus says, "Follow me, I'll make you fishers of men." They drop their nets and they follow Christ.

I'm just saying how good it would be not to lose that youthful responsiveness to the authoritative call of God in whatever it is. If God says, you know what, you ought to be giving. Think about a young couple putting together a budget for their giving. Yeah, we're Christians, of course we're going to do that. Lead someone to Christ later in life, "You know, I don't know. It really messes my budget up. I don't want to be giving. I'm not interested in supporting missionaries or giving to the church." All I'm telling you is you've got to get back to that nimble place in your heart to say whatever it is that God would have me do, I'm going to do it.

Here's a good passage that may be helpful. There are so many passages of Scripture that remind us of the resolution of doing what's right. Psalm 119:106. Psalm 119:106. The psalmist says, which I think is David in this case, though it's not explicitly stated, he says, "I have sworn an oath and confirmed it, I will keep your righteous rules." I like the fact that I swear that I will do this. I just wonder how many of you, maybe when you're a brand-new Christian, read the Bible some Tuesday morning and you see something in it that clearly is applicable to what Christian should be doing and you get up from that and say, "I swear to you, God, I will do this." I mean, I just don't know after 15 years of walking with Christ if that's your response to reading the Bible every morning. But how good it would be for us to have that kind of resolution to do what the Lord says.

I like also in our passage, it says that they did this together, which that's helpful. They heard it together, and then together they responded. Right? "The shepherd said to one another, 'Let us go over to Bethlehem and see this thing.' And they went," verse 16, "in haste." And I don't want to stretch this too far, but the plurality of this is something I do see. It certainly comports with what the Bible says is often the case for groups of Christians together choosing to respond to do what God says. Put it this way: in Hebrews Chapter 10, we're supposed to stir one another on to love and good deeds." Here's the author of Hebrews writing for people to do things. And then he says, you guys together should help each other do these things. And that's very important.

And let me just add, it's not a lengthy, you know, expanded announcement time, but if you're not in a home fellowship group, our home fellowship groups are designed not just to hang out and have cookies together and drink coffee and say, "how are you doing and how's work, Sam?" Right? That's not what they're for. I mean, some of that happens. But what it's for is for



us reading the questions on the back of the worksheet every week when we hear the word taught and those five questions always ask us, what are we going to do about this sermon, getting together in someone's living room and saying, okay, how are we going to do this? And I just like that here is a passage showing groups responding with resolution to obey the word of God. And I'd say not a bad idea for you. I can't say it with the authority that I can the other things I've said in this sermon, but I can tell you it is a really good idea for you to be in a group where you're being spurred on to love and good deeds.

We ought to be we, ought to be assembling together in that kind of context that's all about application. What are we going to do with the word of God here? "Well, you know, I haven't been real faithful in doing those things." Well, it doesn't matter, it really doesn't matter. Jonah wasn't faithful in doing what God told him to do. He paid a price for it. And I love the fact that God is so gracious in Chapter 3 verse 1, to say, okay, you want to try now? "The word of the Lord came to Jonah a second time." I think of Gedaliah, Gedaliah was put in charge of the people there at the Babylonian captivity, and Jeremiah, who was a minister, overarching both the fall of Jerusalem and into the captivity, he's got these Jewish people who knew that they had sinned and they've become idolaters. And here's Gedaliah and the team saying, "Hey, Jeremiah, I'm just going to tell you this. We blew it, but now we are committed."

I should read it for you. This is a great text. I was going to try to quote it. Jeremiah 42:5. Jeremiah Chapter 42 verse 5. "And they said to Jeremiah," Gedaliah and the team. "May the Lord be true and a faithful witness against us if we do not act according to all the word with which the Lord God sends us." Right? We're going to do it. You've told us these things. We're going to do it. "Whether it's good or bad, we will obey the voice of our God to whom we are sending, that it may be well with us as we obey the voice of the Lord our God." Just a great line. And I'm just saying, no matter what you've failed to do, it's time today to say I'm going to be resolute about responding and it's good to write it down. Again that's not a biblical command, but how good it is to keep a journal, to sit there and respond to what you're hearing in a sermon, what you're responding in your morning Bible study, in your Bible reading. When you read a good Christian book, you ought to take some notes on it and say what would it have me do in response to what I'm learning here? Write it out.

It's getting heavier than I thought it would be. But back to our passage. We're almost done. No applause. Luke 2 verse 16. You get soft and sweet here. So you ready for that part? Verse 16. "They went in haste and they found Mary and Joseph, and the baby lying in a manger." Ahhh... Right? But you know what? That's a pretty privileged thing for those blue-collar shepherds. I mean, that's pretty amazing. Matter of fact, all of the depictions of these shepherds for 2,000 years now in painting, in art, in mosaics. On the bathroom sink at your house. Right? There they are. I just wonder what those guys would think about all the things that they've seen depicted. I'm just thinking they know. I mean, imagine what kind of corrective they might bring to whatever it is that they've been imagined to have experienced in that manger.

I mean, and even if we were right with a lot of it, I just think to myself, those are the guys you're going to stand in line at some point to talk to in the Kingdom and say, "Tell me what it



was like to see the freshly incarnate Christ in a manger in Bethlehem." I mean, it's just it'll be an amazing thing. I mean, they're the guys who say we saw it and why did they see it? Because they went in haste and did what God told them to do. They saw truth, which wasn't even "go." It's like if you went, here's what you'd see, this is a sign. You'd find a baby here lying in a manger. And they said, we're going to respond to that. We're going to go, we're going to see this. And they went and they got to experience something that I think you'd like to go back in a time machine and see the birth of Christ, wouldn't you? And here they have that experience. They have that pleasure, that value, that favor that God gives them to watch this scene that everyone since, in Christianity has been trying to recreate and imagine. They got to experience it firsthand.

Number three, if you are taking notes you need to "See the Value in Obedience." See the value in obedience. Obedience, always value in that. It may be hard to deny ourselves. It may be hard to forsake something and do the right thing. But when you do, it is always worth it. God says it is always worth it. It is always a good thing. Deuteronomy Chapter 4 verses 39 and 40. I just quote verse 39 because it reminds us of the first point of the sermon. "Know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the Lord is God in heaven above and on earth beneath; there is no other." OK. It starts with a statement of authority. And then the response. "Therefore, you're going to keep the statutes and his commandments," Moses says, "which I'm commanding you today," here it is, here's the blessing, "that it may go well with you," and not just with you, "with your children after you and that you may prolong your days in the land that the larger God is giving you for all time."

See, there's always a blessing attached to obedience. Always. And I love this passage because it's not just you and it's not just your family and the immediate, like you and your wife. It is your children. And I can quote other passages, "and your children's children." I'm just saying, the blessing of you choosing to respond immediately, resolutely, without delay, determining to do whatever it is you see as a biblical response to a biblical truth is always going to come with the blessing of God, and it's going to spill over into your kids' lives and your grandkids' lives. And it will be a blessing. The Bible promises it. You sow to the flesh, you'll reap from the flesh corruption. You sow to the Spirit. You do the right thing. And in that passage, the Bible is talking about a war that goes on inside of us, and you choose to say, I'm going to resolutely respond to Christ. I will do what he says. The Bible says, that's going to be so good. There's always going to be blessed. Always good to please God because he is the most powerful person who exists.

That God, by the way, speaking of breaking the mold of what people thought of shepherds, he presents himself as shepherd. And you may say, if you don't believe in the authority of Scripture, "Well, that was just David. He projected that the Lord is my shepherd because he was a shepherd and if he was a plumber it would be the Lord is my plumber. No, no, listen. Jesus comes on the scene and affirms it. The God-man shows up in John 10 and he says, "I am the good shepherd." And he says, here's the thing that divides the room in half right here in this room right now. "My sheep hear my voice and follow me."



The difference really between those who just know stuff about Christ and people who are following the shepherd who, by the way, leads us into good places. Sometimes beside still waters, sometimes into green pastures and even if we have to go as sovereignly is always the case through some dark crevice, the "valley of the shadow of death," people who walk with the shepherd and they don't stray and do their own thing, "They fear no evil because God is with them," right? "His rod, his staff, they comfort him."

Matter of fact, "he'll prepare a table," even in the worst times of your life, "and you'll be surrounded by enemies but he will "Prepare a table before you in the presence of your enemies." He'll anoint "your head with oil," whatever the wounds are, whatever the problems are, he will bring salve to that. "Surely goodness and mercy will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." There's no downside to obeying.

Even if you think I might be thrown in the fiery furnace. I mean, take a lesson from Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego. It doesn't matter. Even if we don't get out of this jam right now, we'd rather go down obeying Christ because we know the one who is in charge of the world, the Great Shepherd, is the one who is in charge of everything, not just in this life, but in the next. Obedience is always worth it. We ought to recognize that. You ought to understand if the shepherd is good, it's good to follow him and it's good to be in his flock. He will care for you and he will make sure that you're following him is always going to be not only for his glory, but for your benefit.

Let's pray. God, at Christmas time we think of your coming. And so often we marvel at the theology of it all. But God, really what it comes down to tomorrow and next week and next month is what difference does that make in our lives today? To say that we know that you are the bread of life, that you bring fulfillment, or that you are the God for whom we are made and our hearts are going to be restless till we find rest in you, all that's just theoretical until we say I'm going to follow him. I'll put my trust in him, I will come to him and then I will be a faithful lamb, who, when the shepherd calls us down this path we'll go, even if it's a narrow path, even though it's a small gate we'll obey you. And God, I know for many of us we become too analytical about your truth, even though we need to be discerning and we need to be good Bereans, we need to be more responsive. So help us in this new year as we look forward to a new year and a fresh start to be more faithful in our Bible reading, our church attendance, our Bible study. That we'd respond in our journals, we'd respond in our prayers to say we'll do, we'll swear an oath to keep your righteous commands.

God, we know there's always blessing in that. And we pray you would bless us and bless this church as the children of God here represented in this room are faithful to follow you into this new year. God, thanks for our time together this morning on Christmas Day. We're grateful for this reminder from the shepherds in Luke 2.

In Jesus name, amen.