**Christmas Chaos: God the Glorious**

Luke 2:8-20

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[Play 2017 holiday rollbacks commercial]

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Please grab the Bible from the pew in front of you and open up to Luke 2. And as you are opening there let me ask you; “are you ready for Christmas?” And by ready I mean all your gifts bought, all the plans made, all the decorations up. If you could just raise your hands, if you are totally ready for Christmas… that will let me know who I need to be resentful towards. Isn’t the rollercoaster of this season intense?

On one hand there is this over-realized eschatology coursing through every source of media we are surrounded by. Eschatology means what is going to happen in the end. And right now everything from billboards to commercials are seeking to sell you a very specific eschatology. Everyone wants you to believe that if you buy the right things, this will be the year that everything finally works out.

Your boss is going to give you that promotion. Your crazy sister is going to say sorry for how she’s treated you. For the first time your kids and grandkids are going to be thankful not to mention polite. And that’s in spite of the fact they’ve eaten nothing but candy canes for breakfast and stayed up till midnight all week. This is the year everything will finally work out perfectly.

That’s the sales pitch, and as foolish as it sounds, the advertising world knows we will buy it. This year the average Canadian adult will spend $766 dollars on Christmas.[[1]](#footnote-1) That’s 21 billion dollars total. Canadians have bought the lie.

And we buy this in spite of that fact that all of us have all done Christmas before. And so we know that come December 26th the lights are going to start coming down, the tree will drop its needles, the turkey will be dry and the let down will begin. By the middle of January we are going to be right back where we were before we spent 21 billion dollars.

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Is that depressing? If it is then you need some good news – and here it is: While we are free to enjoy the best of the Christmas season; Jesus followers can do trees and tinsel and carols and kids like the best of them. But the good news is from the beginning our story wasn’t Christmas, it was Advent.

And Advent is about God’s eschatology. It’s not some over-realized cycle of hype and disappoint so that we can do it all again. God’s eschatology is linear. 2000 years ago, God put on flesh and became one of us in order to do something about the hopeless sin problem we had dug ourselves into. In His life and death He took on our brokenness, clothed us in His righteousness, and make it possible for us to be truly human.

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Did you know that being truly human means looking like Jesus? Any time we give in to living our lives in a way that doesn’t look like Jesus we aren’t enjoying our humanity and stealing a piece of forbidden treasure that God has been holding out on us, we are buying a lie that leads to more poverty and depravity than we had in the beginning.

To be the most human we can be is to image Jesus, and that’s because Jesus made us to look like Him. That’s what human means.

So speaking of the day Jesus would redeem us God told the prophet Ezekiel:

I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put My Spirit in you so that you will follow My decrees and be careful to obey My regulations. (Ezekiel 26:26-27)

God said “when My Saviour comes, He is going to make you human again, you are going to be able to live like I designed you to live.” And that’s what Jesus did.

But if that was all there was that wouldn’t be enough. And that’s because your world is still broken. Evil still prevails. The wicked triumph, and suffering is everywhere. And so if just having hearts able to image Jesus was all there was that wouldn’t be enough because God would not be good. It’s not okay for brokenness to reign.

But this is the good news of Advent. History is linear, not circular. The Messiah came 2000 years ago, and He left us with His Spirit, but the best news is that He is coming back. And when He does everything that is broken will be fixed. Everything suffering will be healed. And every wrong will be made right. That’s God’s eschatology. And His power to accomplish this is so much more glorious than 21 billion dollars.

You see the glory of Christmas is built on the shadow of Advent. So drinking eggnog won’t make you like your estranged sister. And Walmart won’t make your kids thankful. And colored lights won’t satisfy hungry souls. But there is real hope that these broken things will one day be healed. The glory of Advent is the glory of God. Jesus is coming back. And when God’s glory injects itself into our broken world it changes everything.

Look with me at Luke 2 starting in verse 8.

[Read Luke 2:8-20]

When it comes to the shepherds, if you’ve ever seen a nativity scene like the one we’ve got on stage or I’ve got here, then you’ve been programed to not understand Luke 2.

So scripturally there is nothing accurate about the traditional nativity scene. So the angels, wise men and shepherds were never in the same room at once. And no active barn on earth looks like Martha Stewart just came for dinner. And no mom who has just pumped out a baby looks like Mary does in any nativity I’ve ever seen. And no babies come with haloes. All mine were wrinkly and covered in greasy, cheese-like vernix.

And all this says nothing about that fact that the reason Jesus was in the barn in the fist place was because Joseph’s family who were all from Bethlehem wouldn’t take him and someone else’s baby in. The nativity in scripture is scandalously like real life, and we’ve made it into something Walmart can sell. But the power of the gospel is that the glory of God infuses joy and meaning into the scandals of real life.

Now a scandal happens when someone is exposed. So when Harvey Weinstein’s sexual assault was uncovered that’s a scandal. How could he treat women like that? And then it’s a scandal when #Metoo proves it wasn’t just Harvey, but everyone else who has been able to get away with sin has been doing it too. But what’s hilarious is how the rest of us, who haven’t been caught in our sin yet, sit back and judge while the reality is we are dirty too. That’s the scandal. We all look awesome on the outside, but everyone here needs a Saviour just as much as Harvey does.

And the power of the gospel speaks to this, as the glory of God redeems the lives of the scandalized and fills them with joy and meaning. Here it is with the shepherds.

Shepherds in the first century weren’t respected at all. They were the equivalent of pawn shop owners. Now, not all pawn shops are like this, but here’s the stereotype. When a thief breaks into your house just before Christmas and steals all the power tools you were going to get, they take them down to the pawn shop. And the guy there says, yeah, it doesn’t bother me at all that these things are still in boxes, I totally believe that you just overspent at Christmas and rather than taking these back to Canadian Tire even though the gift-receipt is taped to the box you are willing to sell them to me for 20% of their value. That makes total sense.

This is what shepherds were like in the first century. So shepherds were employees, not owners of their flocks. But this career choice had such a bad reputation that only the worst kinds of people took these jobs.

And as a result history tells us shepherds couldn’t hold public office. And their testimony wasn’t admissible in court. And they couldn’t even enter the temple to worship. And that’s because everyone knew shepherds were a bunch of lying, thieving scruffy-looking nerf herding scoundrels.[[2]](#footnote-2) In fact a philosopher in Alexandria said “There is no more disreputable an occupation than that of a shepherd.”[[3]](#footnote-3)

But the system was set up to reproduce this. So the owner of sheep would pay their shepherd with sheep. So here is a lamb, here is some wool, here is some milk. But at the same time the shepherd would be stealing sheep. So he would take the flock away to graze, and when the sheep would lamb there would be no branding on it so the shepherd would start saying “two for you, one for me.”

But everyone knew this was going on, and so pious people wouldn’t buy things from shepherds. But that meant shepherds had to steal even more. And the result was, no matter how good a shepherd was in the beginning, by a few years in they were just as sheep-dirty on the inside as they were on the outside.

And yet when God was looking for someone to receive the news that the Messiah was born His go to was a bunch of shepherds – God went to men who couldn’t go to Him.

And what God revealed to these shepherds was His glory. Now “glory” can also be translated “weight.” So someone is glorious if they have weight.

So when the boss walks into the room you take your feet off the desk and sit up a bit straighter because she has weight. Her thoughts about you matter. And so the secretary stands up ready to respond to what she says. And you pick up the report you have just finished and hand it to her. It’s almost like gravity. Everyone in the room revolves around the person with weight. That’s glory.

But God’s glory is infinitely more weighty than your boss’s. So when the glory of God shows up it reshapes and reorders everything. And God chooses to shine His glory into the darkest, most broken and scandalous lives He can find. Do you have any brokenness you need God to shine His glory into?

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And the change to these shepherds was dramatic. And so verse 9 tells us:

[Read Luke 2:9]

Terrified. No kidding! God has glory. He has weight. And His glory changes things when it pierces our scandal.

**1.)** And so the first thing God’s glory does when it shows up is cause fear. And we fear because our scandal has been exposed.

So one of the things humans do is think we are pretty good. And we do this because we are continually comparing ourselves with those we deem inferior. “I’m not perfect, but at least I’m better than… fill in the blank.

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So my kids love to wrestle. And I like it too. I like it because at 160 lbs I can take all four of them on with ease. Elliana is 6, our twins are 4 and Nathan is 2. So I throw them over my shoulder two at a time. I pin them all down. I drag them across the carpet. I’m a monster in my house. No one can come close to competing with me. I’ve got weight. I win every time. I’m an amazing wrestler. It’s awesome being dad.

But I’m only a glorious wrestler when I’m in a room with a bunch of pre-schoolers. If real glory were to show up my swagger would melt. I haven’t even wrestled against my brother since he passed 16 because I don’t like being beaten. So it would be just horror to enter the ring with a professional wrestler – they would mop the floor with me.

So our goodness is relative to who we are around. And when we are around God His glory exposes all our weakness. There is nothing we do, or are, or think that measures up to His standard. That’s why these shepherds were terrified.

You see these guys aren’t having a Torah study in that moment. They weren’t sitting around memorizing Deuteronomy 6 when the angel appeared. No. God hadn’t busted in on a bunch of nicely dressed, religious people having coffee after a morning service. These are crass thieves joking about whatever dirty minds talk about with their buddies in the dark. And then God shows up.

The other day I walked into youth group and there were a bunch of kids sitting around, and one was telling a story which included some less than flowery language. And then, oh no, the pastor just walked in. And so she starts saying “what I meant to say was…” She felt guilty next to me. And that’s with my glory being pathetically small.

But God’s glory is so great that when even righteous Isaiah the prophet encountered it he fell on his face and said:

Woe to me!... I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King. (Isaiah 6:5)

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The first thing that God’s glory does when it enters our brokenness is unravels us. You can not encounter God and not come away knowing you are dirty.

**2.)** But God doesn’t leave us there. The very first words the angel speaks, vs 10, are “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people.”

The second thing God’s glory does when it shows up is drive out our fear and replace it with joy. Yes, we are exposed. Yes, we fall short. But the good news is that God hasn’t unpacked our laundry to condemn us, but to show us what we are forgiven from.

So John 3:16 says:

For God so loved the world that He gave His one and only Son, that whoever believes in Him shall not perish but have eternal life. (John 3:16)

That’s an amazing verse, but the next one is just as good. It says:

For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through Him. (John 3:17)

Friend, God knows you are a broken sinner floating around in a sea of death and destruction. None of your scandal is a surprise to God. You aren’t worse than He imagined, you’re only worse than you imagined. So when God shines His glory on you, yes it shows you that you are exposed, but He doesn’t do that to condemn you for your depravity, but to show you what you are being saved from. And that’s good news because Jesus only saves people who know they are broken.

This is why God came to shepherds. The angels weren’t sent to those who appeared to have everything together, they came to shepherds who were so low down that there was no point in putting on airs. It’s like Jesus showing up at the bar on Saturday night at 3am. The only people who are still there are those with nothing left to lose.

And so because they knew exactly who they were talking to, the angels declared freedom from fear and joy. That’s good news. God knows how broken you are, and offers you joy. Could your brokenness use some Jesus joy this Advent?

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**3.)** The third thing that happens when the glory of God invades the scandal of our broken lives is that it changes our priorities. Look at verse 15.

[Read Luke 2:15]

I love this conversation. As exciting as the banter was around the fire moments before the appearance of the glory of God, all that is forgotten and the only thought is “we need to see what God has revealed.” Nothing else matters.

Now most of the time this scene gets painted some lonely shepherd, usually the youngest, getting left behind to guard the sheep while the rest head down to Bethlehem. The idea is that to lose a sheep to wandering off or being eaten would have been a big deal. The sheep are the paycheque.

But that is a grave misunderstanding of the glory of God. We all know weight changes priorities. So when a wealthy business man is told that his child has been kidnapped he doesn’t finish the deal he’s putting together before heading home, his schedule becomes irrelevant. In the moment of crisis our priorities get correctly aligned. Kids are infinitely more valuable, more weighty, more glorious, than money. So any deal lost while saving a child would be deemed inconsequential.

And so when we behold the glory of God the things we’ve centered our lives around –the things that often lead to our brokenness – get exposed for what they are. The glory of God reorients our priorities. And the result of this reorientation is our joy.

And so in the light of the glory of God there is no debate “Did that really just happen?” Or “Should we wait till tomorrow morning and see if we are still interested in following up on this?” There is just this childlike trust that takes what God says and acts. And doing what God says always leads to winning. This is how to have joy even as a shepherd.

And so I would argue all the shepherds headed for Bethlehem. I mean would you stay behind to watch over stolen sheep if a company of heavenly host obliterated the darkness of night and told you to go? I think that’s preposterous to imagine.

So even when the angel says you are going to find the Messiah in a barn wrapped in swaddling clothes, their response is belief and obedience. When the glory of God invades the scandal of our broken lives the result is a reorientation of priority.

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Now there is another side to this, and that is that the glory of God does not change the circumstances of our lives. So after running into Bethlehem, finding Jesus just like the angels said, and worshipping their new priority, we get verse 20.

[Read Luke 2:20]

The shepherds returned. To what? They returned to shepherding sheep. Get your minds around this. Their priorities had been realigned even though their situation was the same. It’s not like just because they had an encounter with God all of a sudden their testimony counted in court. They still couldn’t hold an office and weren’t trusted. None of that was fixed, and yet they left rejoicing.

This is what the glory of God does when it invades our brokenness. God injects gratitude into the worst of where we find ourselves. And gratitude leads to joyful living.

And so here I want to shift to our part in this story. You see none of us can make angels light up our night. But the scriptures are full of promises that God loves to reveal His glory to those who seek Him.

So Moses said:

But if… you seek the Lord your God, you will find Him if you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul. (Deuteronomy 4:29)

And James says:

Come near to God and He will come near to you. (James 4:8)

And Hebrews says:

Anyone who comes to [God] must believe that He exists and that He rewards those who earnestly seek Him. (Hebrews 11:6)

And Jesus said:

I will give of the fountain of the water of life freely to him who thirsts. (Revelation 21:6 NKJV)

So if you are desperately thirsty for more of the water of life; if you want the reward God wants to give you; if you need more of His presence in the midst of your brokenness, then seek Him. The promise – God’s promise – is that He will be found.

So broken brothers and sisters, stop letting your brokenness keep you from joy. God is in the business of filling the most scandalously broken situations with His glory. And the Bible tells us when this happens we get joy as we are transformed to look like Jesus.

Paul writes:

So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like Him as we are changed into His glorious image. (2 Corinthians 3:18 NLT)

Paul says broken people – even shepherds, even you – can encounter the grace of Jesus. And when you do His glory exposes you for who you really are, but then, shockingly, forgives you instead of condemning you, in order to reorient your priorities around what will lead you to joy in the midst of even the worst situations.

And, here’s the encouragement, for many of you Jesus is doing this right now. But maybe you say, come on, the dirt of my situation is all over me. I don’t look like glorious Jesus. And that’s true, but not because you aren’t changing. You just haven’t changed all at once. And that’s because we aren’t made like Jesus – past perfect tense – the Spirit makes us more and more like Him – present continuous tense.

Another translation says “we are being transformed into the same image from one degree of glory to another.”

So there is process here. Jesus is working in you, in the midst of your situation, to increase Christ-likeness. But it’s one degree at a time. How many of you would say I could use 10 degrees at a time. I need a whole lot more Christ-likeness right now!

But it doesn’t work like that. It’s a little by little, more and more transformation. And this is why we need to keep fixing our eyes on Jesus in the midst of the chaos of life. The very next verse in 2nd Corinthians tells us “Therefore… don’t lose heart.” When it comes to the glory of God invading our lives we have a role in the process, and our role is to keep our eyes on Jesus, and keep deciding to live our lives for His glory no matter what chaos swirls around us.

So yes, it is Christmas outside, and yes Walmart is lying to you, but Advent isn’t. So shift your eyes from the distractions that dissatisfy and fix them on the glory of God. Let Him expose you for what you are, and let Him forgive who you’ve become, and let Him reorient you around what will give life as He transforms you into His image for your joy.

1. <http://www.canadianliving.com/life-and-relationships/money-and-career/article/the-average-canadian-spends-how-much-on-christmas-gifts> [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. See Star Wars Episode V a more detailed account of this kind of person. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Quoted from Matt Chandler <https://www.tvcresources.net/resource-library/sermons/glorious> (Accessed December 14, 2017) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)