

**Joke:** A shepherd looks over at his flock of sheep in the pasture.

The day is ending soon, and he has to herd the sheep into their pen for the night. The shepherd calls for his sheepdog which is very good at herding the sheep together and also this dog can talk. So, the shepherd asks him to go out and herd the sheep together.

"Right away, sir," says the sheepdog.

10 minutes later, the shepherd glances out his window to see the sheep safely in their pen. The sheepdog bounds in through the door to report the completion of its task.

"Excellent work, did you get all of them?" asks the shepherd.

"Yes, all 40 of them."

The shepherd stares confused at the sheepdog. "Hang on, I thought I only had 37 sheep?"

The sheepdog replies, "Well, I rounded them up."

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When God Calls – A Shepherd's Faith

## **Show Video**

The shepherds in the video were shown as people who were questioning what they had seen that night. What had they experienced? Let's refresh our memories on the story as we read from the 2nd chapter of Luke. . .

Luke 2:8–14 (NIV): And there were shepherds living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. 9 An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were terrified.

10 But the angel said to them, “Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people. 11 Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord. 12 This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.” 13 Suddenly a great company of the heavenly host appeared with the angel, praising God and saying, 14 “Glory to God in the highest heaven, and on earth peace to those on whom his favor rests.”

That night the shepherds were simply doing what shepherds do. Living among their sheep. Watching out for those in their care. Then something changed everything. An angel of the Lord appeared with an announcement.

Think about it: AN ANGEL OF THE LORD APPEARED FOR HEAVEN’S SAKE! Can you even imagine? This news that the angel brings must have seemed unbelievable. Except, of course, here’s an angel of the Lord appearing from nowhere, so. . .maybe, just maybe we should listen.

And Luke continues:

Luke 2:15–20 (NIV): When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them. 19 But Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. 20 The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

The sign? You’ll find a baby wrapped in clothes in a manger.

I’m not sure if you ever noticed this or not but they are not told to immediately go. They’re told simply that they will find the child. And, the Angel host leaves.

Now, sure they could have waited till daybreak or until their next planned journey to town. Yet, they can't wait. Fear or no fear, off they run to Bethlehem to "see this thing." And what they find is exactly as the Angel foretold.

What was their reaction to what they found in that manger? To help with the diapers? To rest? To sit in awe? No. We see them act as the faithful shepherds they were. They leap into action. They began to spread the word about baby Jesus and did so with such enthusiasm that those who heard are amazed!

Afterwards, they returned to their responsibilities, back to their flock. And once there they couldn't stop talking about what they had heard and seen. . .all the while glorifying God for including them in this magnificent moment.

So, that's their story. But what might we take away from all this? Well, I'm glad you asked!

First take away is this. . .When God Calls, Listen Up!

Verse 10 told us. . .the angel said to them, "Do not be afraid. I bring you good news that will cause great joy for all the people." Luke 2:10

In your youth or maybe even some of you married guys, have you ever diagnosed with. . .now if you have know you aren't the first it's actually a pretty common disorder, what do they call it, oh right. . .It's called "selective hearing?" Every been diagnosed with that? Truth is I often had trouble hearing my dad when he'd say, "Take out the trash." But if I'm being honest I never missed a single, "Dinner's ready!"

"Hearing" is simply perceiving sound. "Listening" is paying attention to the message in order to not only hear it, but to also understand it and respond to

it. These faithful shepherds did just that. They heard, they understood as best they could anyway, and they responded. No selective hearing from them.

We see other examples in the New Testament of ones who “listened” heard, understood, and responded to Jesus. Matthew was one:

Matthew 9:9 (NIV): As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector’s booth. “Follow me,” he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.

A tax collector. A traitor. Likely an outcast within his own community . Matthew listened to the voice of Jesus and made a choice. He, like the shepherds before him, got up and went. Not to a stable. He went to follow the one born in the stable. Matthew not only heard the voice of Jesus, he listened to the voice of Jesus. And it changed the course of his life.

And if you are a follower of Jesus he calls out to you as well. Waiting for you maybe not fully understanding what or why, but just trusting enough to listen, hear, and respond.

John 10:27 (NIV): My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me.

Whatever your situation today, with whatever challenges you face, let me ask you to do this. Listen for the voice of God. Not to simply hear. But to also respond and follow as he leads.

Second take away from our story is when God calls, Saddle Up!

“Saddle Up!” It sounds like something you might have heard in a Western movie long ago. Or something your parent shouted when it was time for a road trip. The imagery is simple, “It’s time to GO!” And that’s exactly what the shepherds did following that angelic choir concert! They “saddled up.”

Luke 2:15–16 (NIV): When the angels had left them and gone into heaven, the shepherds said to one another, “Let’s go to Bethlehem and see this thing that has happened, which the Lord has told us about.” 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger.

Look again at the instruction they were given:

Luke 2:12 (NIV): This will be a sign to you: You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger.”

Nowhere were they told to go “now.” Or “tonight.” Or to “hurry.” They took it upon themselves to go, unwilling to wait for daybreak. Or breakfast. Or an Uber. The angel told them what they would find. And in the spirit of the old western, they saddled up.

There’s another story in the New Testament where God spoke and a person was faced with a “saddle up” decision.

It’s found in the book of Acts chapter 9. . .

Acts 9:10–11 (NIV): 10 In Damascus there was a disciple named Ananias. The Lord called to him in a vision, “Ananias!” “Yes, Lord,” he answered. 11 The Lord told him, “Go to the house of Judas on Straight Street and ask for a man from Tarsus named Saul, for he is praying.

And then verse 17 tells us. . .

Acts 9:17 (NIV): Then Ananias went to the house and entered it. Placing his hands on Saul, he said, “Brother Saul, the Lord—Jesus, who appeared to you on the road as you were coming here—has sent me so that you may see again and be filled with the Holy Spirit.”

I love this account at the onset of Saul’s, who will later be called Paul, and his lifelong relationship with Jesus. However, I left out an important part of this

story, yes I did so on purpose, but between verses 11 and 17, in between there we see that Ananias wanted nothing to do with Saul. He tells God in no uncertain terms that this Saul is a bad guy, doing harm to Jesus followers.

Then we read:

Acts 9:15 (NIV): But the Lord said to Ananias, “Go! This man is my chosen instrument to proclaim my name to the Gentiles and their kings and to the people of Israel.

As we saw earlier, despite Ananias reservations, he did go. And the ministry of the one later named Paul was set in motion. A ministry that would change the world.

The shepherds teach us there is no need to hesitate when God calls. Ananias shows us that even if we do hesitate, if we'll trust God, amazing things await. Possibly a world changed, a life changed, I know my life changed, I trust your life has changed as well. So, if your waiting it's time to Saddle Up!

The last take away from our story is when God calls, Speak Up

Luke 2:17–18 (NIV): When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child, 18 and all who heard it were amazed at what the shepherds said to them.

These faithful shepherds didn't stop at simply “hurrying to see this thing that had happened.” Having seen, they were compelled to speak up. To tell the story of a baby Messiah. A story seemingly unbelievable, yet those hearing it “were amazed!”

In Acts, chapters 6 and 7, there's the account of another who was faithful to tell the story of this Messiah. Not of a baby but of a recently crucified and resurrected adult Jesus.

This faithful follower's name? Stephen. And instead of his hearers being "amazed," they chose a different reaction. Here are Stephen's last recorded words:

Acts 7:59–60 (NIV): While they were stoning him, Stephen prayed, "Lord Jesus, receive my spirit." 60 Then he fell on his knees and cried out, "Lord, do not hold this sin against them." When he had said this, he fell asleep.

Stephen would "speak up"- even with his last breath – in order to ask forgiveness for those seeking to take his life. Speaking up even as his Lord spoke up on the cross: "Father, forgive them."

When God calls, the faithful speak up. Not to cast verbal stones. Not to condemn. Not to point fingers of judgment. The faithful speak up to share the love of Jesus.

When you and I have tasted and seen that the Lord is good is us imperative that we share the good news with those around us so that they to can taste and see.

Luke 2:20 (NIV): The shepherds returned, glorifying and praising God for all the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

Notice the response of the shepherds at the end of their journey. They were glorifying and praising God for what they heard. What they saw. And what they had been told.

These shepherds, as far as we know, never changed vocations. But they had become something else. They were now evangelists. That word comes from a Greek word that simply means, "to tell the good news." And that's what they had done after meeting Jesus.

It's what we're all to do having met Jesus. Tell our story. Tell his story. To join with those faithful shepherds from a long ago starry night and share the good news that the Messiah is alive.

May we listen to his voice. Go where he leads. And speak of the good news of our Messiah, Jesus.

Do you remember earlier in the message we mentioned the faithfulness of Stephen who was stoned by religious people for his faith in Jesus? There's an interesting side note. Scripture tells us that standing nearby was a young man named Saul. The "witnesses" (stone throwers) laid there cloaks at his feet, I assume for better throwing leverage. Three verses later we read, "And Saul approved of their killing him (Stephen)."

This is the Saul that Ananias feared to confront in Damascus, with good reason! Yet, because of the grace of the Good Shepherd (Jesus), and the obedience of one of his disciples (Ananias), we see that the life of any one, no matter their past, can be made new by the grace of God!

So, let's go tell all to come. Jesus came so that we might come into right relationship with the Father. I think that's good news, let's go share the good news.