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Visions and Revelations

Message 5: The Shepherds in the Field

Note: This is a lightly edited transcript meant to aid saints in personal and small group fellowship and pursuing.

Praise the Lord, brothers and sisters. Now, together, we can cover another message. This message does not have a real high name or title. The first message was about Joseph. The second one was about Zechariah. The third one was about Mary. Now, we come to a group of shepherds. Here, the Lord unveiled Himself and gave visions to a group of people. Who are they? They are the shepherds in the field. From every angle, you would have to say that this really shouldn't mean that much. Why? Because these shepherds are uneducated, have very little spiritual understanding, even very little desire to be developed in the Jewish religion. They are just common shepherds.

However, these shepherds have two things that mark them as quite special. First, they are shepherding at night. Second, they are shepherding in the wilderness. You know, brothers, if you put these three things together—I'm a shepherd, I shepherd my flock at night, I shepherd my flock in the wilderness—it surely shows the virtue of faithfulness. This group of people is not as common as we think. Their human faithfulness to the flock seemingly encouraged the Lord to give them visions, to show them something marvelous. This is a short story, but it is full of practical secrets. Let's come to the story.

“Near the time when Mary would give birth.” This means she is about due, right? “Caesar Augustus sent out a decree for a worldwide census.” This is like a census we are doing now in the United States, but he wants to do one worldwide. This thing is different than today. Today, we just fill in boxes on a website. At that time, you had to go back to your hometown, to where you belong. So this says, “requiring all to be registered in their own city.” So you can see that with this regulation, the whole Roman Empire, with all the different kings and high officials carrying things, all the people had to travel around, trying to go back to their own cities. The same was with Joseph and Mary. So “Joseph and Mary traveled to Bethlehem.” Why? Because Joseph was from there. He's David's descendant. So they travelled to Bethlehem. “Along the way, Mary gave birth to Jesus, and because there was no room for them in the inn, they wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in a manger.”

You know, this is interesting if you consider the picture. Here is the real God, conceived in a girl, right? Of course, she is married now. Mary was very clear: “What I have is God.” I don't know what kind of psychology she has. She may have the feeling, “If I give birth to the One, the One who is from God, who will be the Holy One, the Son of God, the Son of the Most High, there's

got to be something prepared by God for His own sake in that place.” But surprisingly, they got to Bethlehem, or nearby Bethlehem, and the time came for her to give birth. So the baby was delivered. Where? On the roadside. Then, here, the Bible says there was no room for them in the inn. There’s a few possibilities, right? One possibility is that when He was born, there was no room because there was no inn. They were just like in a wilderness. Another possibility is that when the baby was delivered, there was an inn but no room in it. Another possibility is that there was an inn and room, but Joseph couldn’t afford it. Things should have been very expensive in those days, because of all the people coming back to Bethlehem. So all the inns must have been extremely busy. Whatever the reason was, the fact is the baby had no place to stay. So eventually, they found a manger, and they wrapped the baby up and laid Him in the manger. We’ll come back to that later. I think it must have been a highly frustrating experience, as Joseph was trying to help and Mary was delivering the baby. But at the same time, the Lord appeared to shepherds who were out in the field during the night, telling them, “Do not be afraid, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy.”

I like this. I bring you good news. I bring you joy. But no, the Lord said, “I bring you good news of great joy which will be to all people!” No longer just to the Jews. To *all* the people. Even, if you develop it, to all the generations and all the peoples. But anyways, “to all people. For there is born to you this day in the city of David a Savior.” The city of David is Bethlehem. In Bethlehem, this day, a Savior was born to you. A Savior is coming.

I think the word Savior then was not as today. Today, we understand, “Jesus, You’re my Savior.” At that time, “Savior” could have been quite a unique word. I don’t know how many people used that kind of word, “Savior.” But I’m happy the shepherds understood it. “There’s someone coming to save us. He is the Savior.” Who is this Savior? Who is Messiah? “Who is Christ the Lord.” “Messiah” is from the Old Testament, “Christ” is from the New Testament, but they mean the same thing. They are the same One. “Who is Christ (the Messiah) the Lord.” Remember, we keep using His name: Jesus. All of a sudden, Christ was unveiled. Unveiled to whom? Not to those in the temple, nor to those reading the Bible all the time. Not to the scribes, not to the Pharisees, not to the priests, but rather, unveiled to a group of shepherds who only knew three things: “I have a flock, I will tend them whether day or night, and I will tend them even in the wilderness. I will still tend them, because I’d like to be faithful to whatever I’m committed with.” This virtue becomes a virtue even for the children of God. God likes to unveil Christ to such ones, to those who can say, “I still want to serve, even in the night. I still want to serve, even in the wilderness. I do have a flock.” God appeared to such as these. Brothers, this is very precious to everyone.

Let me ask you, do you have a flock? Then, are you in the day or the night? Maybe with the virus, we are somewhat in the night. Then, are you in the wilderness or the city, a tower, a high-rise apartment? Here, these three shepherds have these three virtues. So eventually, the angel told

them, “Born to you this day in the city of David a Savior, who is Christ the Lord.” Savior. Christ. Christ. Savior. “Christ” means “anointed one.” The Christ is the anointed one to carry out the economy of God, to fulfill God’s purpose, to bring in the realization, the mature substance of God’s eternal purpose. Marvelous!

Brothers and sisters, this is marvelous. This declaration is marvelous. Now a Son, a Savior, was given to you. He’s related to all the people. He is Christ the Lord. “And this will be the sign to you.” What is the sign? Why don’t you go look at it? If you go, “you will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” Just wrapped. In what? In cloths. Lying in a manger. Remember, previously it said He was laid in a manger. Joseph and Mary just wrapped Him in cloths and laid Him in a manger. Here, the shepherds hear, “wrapped in swaddling cloths, lying in a manger.” We’ll come to this later.

So the shepherds responded by going together in haste to Bethlehem, to see what the Lord has made known to them. There, they found Mary and Joseph and the baby laying in the manger. After seeing Him, they made it widely known what had been told to them concerning Him.

This is a story, even a very simple story. If I could add a word, a sort of discouraging word: after the shepherds had told others concerning Jesus, nobody cared. Isn’t that right? Nobody cared? Over the next thirty years, all the way until Jesus began to preach the gospel, who cared? All the things they had seen, all the things they had heard, all the things they knew...who cared? The problem today, brothers, is not whether you see something. My question is, “You see something, do you care?” If you care, things will happen, things will be real to you.

According to this story, I’ll give you six or seven points. It is worthwhile for us to focus on and study these points.

The first point: “born on the side of the road.” Jesus was not born in the manger. Jesus was born on the side of the road. Then they wrapped Him up and put Him, laid Him, in the manger, because there was no room in the inn for Him. So you see how Christianity treats the Lord much better than His real experience. Many Christians say “born in a manger.” No, He was not born in a manger. He was not even qualified that highly. He was born on the roadside. Then they wrapped Him and put Him in the manger. Then, remember, the Lord even testified that He was not just born there. The foxes have holes, the birds have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay His head. What is this? What is His life? Roadside. The Lord testified, “I don’t have a residence. I don’t have a place I can shelter and say, ‘That’s good enough.’ No, I want to let you know, I want to let you know, I was born on the roadside and My *life* is a roadside experience.”

What is the good part? “Roadside” means that you cannot become settled. Nobody is settled on the roadside. So this is very good. Brothers, are you settled? If you are settled, you are not on the

roadside. I have a nice house. Now I live in a nice house beside the lake. I really enjoy it. But I'm very clear—I cannot be “settled” here. I belong to the roadside. I really enjoy this house; it could be an “inn” for me for some days for my particular needs. But, still, I am a person of the roadside.

Roadside first means “I am not settled.” Second, it means “I can go in all directions.” I can go this way or that way. I could go East or West, South or North. I could go because I'm in the road. What does this mean? The Lord's commitment was clear even from His birth. He is not for Jerusalem. He is not for Bethlehem. He is not for Galilee. He is not for Jews. That roadside shows that He is for the whole globe. He is not for this generation. He's for all the previous and all the coming generations.

Oh, this roadside is very meaningful. You know, brothers, let me ask you this simple but very interesting question: are you on the roadside? Where are you today? You have a house, are you happy? There is nothing wrong about this. But psychologically, within you, you can still have a decision: “I am on the roadside.” Houses in Cleveland are cheap, so many full-timers come to Cleveland and buy a house. You appreciate this, right? At the same time, I always ask myself, “Does this take away the right of this brother from being on the roadside? Are you from now on in Cleveland, for Cleveland? Or are you still for the Lord's testimony? Are you still able to go eastward, westward, northward, or southward? Are you still able to say, ‘Lord, wherever You tell me to go, I will *go!* Because I am on the roadside.’” What a life is this.

The second point: “Bethlehem and the manger.” From an existence status, He belongs to Bethlehem. Then, in reality, He belongs to a manger. This is very interesting. What does Bethlehem mean? “Bethlehem” means “house of food, a house of supply, a food supply.” Bethlehem means that there, there is a warehouse of all the riches to supply all your need. Bethlehem is a city as a house, a warehouse, of food supply. We say, “Wow, that's marvelous! The Lord Jesus is from Bethlehem!” So the Lord Jesus is ready to be our supply with all the riches of all kinds of food.

What the Lord would say, “Wait a minute, how do you get it? You get it from a manger.” What is a manger for? It is not for a warehouse. The place a horse or a cow eats is a manger. So sometimes, we picture a horse manger or a cow manger, but it makes no difference. Why? Because God says we're worse than that. God would say, “Hey, wait a minute, listen! A donkey knows the Lord, right? And a cow knows the Lord's manger. But you Israelites, My people, you don't even care! You're much worse than cows, than donkeys, than horses.” We say, “Wow, a manger is for animals.” No, you are worse than animals! But the Lord says, “You know, when I was born, I was put in a manger, just for you to know that I am coming here for you to enjoy. Who are you? Terrible. Who are you? Degraded. Who are you? Apart from God. Who are you? Selfish. Who are you? Self-centered. Who are you? Struggling for the interest of yourself. Now,

come. Come. Come. I am in the manger. I am the real food supply. According to location, I am in the warehouse. According to practical place, I am in the place you can eat all the spiritual food.” Brothers, aren’t you impressed by Bethlehem and the manger? Shouldn’t you be so happy? “Lord Jesus, thank You. When I come to You, I come to a rich store, a warehouse of food supply. But when I enjoy You, bite by bite, bit by bit, I find out You are just in the manger. As a fallen and degraded man, I am still able to come to enjoy You as all the riches for my satisfaction.”

The first point is the roadside. I tell you, if you are sober before the Lord, you have to say, “Lord, my fate is decided. I don’t want to build a house and say it is my residence, that I will die here. No, I am on the roadside.” More than that, what is my living? What is my existence? “I am in Bethlehem, and I enjoy the manger.” So eventually, what? “I can also become part of Bethlehem. I can also become a life supply to many brothers and sisters in the church life.”

You know what the church life needs? We are short of mangers. We have a lot of talk about what is right or wrong. One person, a brother who was not even that much in the church, got sick, then that sickness passed to another person. So the church informed everyone that this certain brother was in the meeting and that he was sick. So everyone had to take care of the quarantine. However, the church didn’t tell those who were not at the meeting. So one person who wasn’t at that particular meeting, he is a very zealous brother, wanted to invite someone to stay at his home. Then that saint, who is very simple, told him, “You know, I was in the meeting, we were what what...” Oh, that particular dear brother got so mad. All over, “The elders are wrong, the leading ones are wrong, the church life is wrong...” Nobody wants to be a real manger. You don’t want to be in a manger, you don’t want to be the manger. All you care about is whether you can do something good for God. No, God does not want you to do something good for Him. God wants you to enjoy Christ as in the manger. God wants you to eventually become a life supply. You are not just a good man. You are a life-giving man. You are not just a zealous man, a do-gooder. You are one who says, “I want to enjoy Christ that much, and in turn, I can dispense Christ to others.”

Then, the third point: who God appeared to, “the shepherds in the field during the night.” I already shared this a little bit. These shepherds are faithful men. This is an uneducated group of people. I don’t know how many of them can read, or even have a thought to read. I believe they are very, very common people. But do you realize, because they are so common they can be very simple. Because they are so simple, they become very faithful. You know, brothers, many times we are not good shepherds. When night comes, we find our “ways.” When we find we’re in the wilderness, we go to another spot. We do not realize that the time we shepherd the sheep is at night. Why is it night? The Lord has not come yet. If the Lord has not come back, we are still in the night. We have to wait until the morning star appears.

You know, brothers, who we are? It's too easy for us to forget that it is night. We fight for so many things that belong to the day. We don't say, "I fellowship with the sufferings of Christ. Christ went through death, I will go through night. Christ had a hard life, I will have a hard life too. Christ had no place to stay, if I do have a house, it is not my eternal resting place or even my life-long resting place. At any time, I'm ready to go with the Lord, even though it's during the night. I'm ready to go to the Lord, even though the place may be to me as the wilderness. I'd like to go to Africa. I'd like to go to South America. I'd like to go to a country where people don't know me. I'd like to go to some country to preach the gospel. I know it's night. I know it's a wilderness. But there is a flock I want to shepherd. I want to tend the flock." What a group of faithful men! This kind of faithfulness will cause the Lord to give you visions upon visions. You'll see Christ more and more. How marvelous is that!

Then, the fourth point: the baby was what? "Wrapped in cloths." I tell you, this part always bothers me. Why does the Bible talk about this? Let me ask you, what newborn baby wasn't wrapped in cloth? These cloths could have been prepared pieces to wrap the coming baby in. Even if the baby came unexpectedly, maybe they considered buying a piece of cloth after arriving in Bethlehem. Joseph could take off a piece of his garment to wrap the baby in. Yet this fact is repeated and repeated—first in the birth story of Jesus, it was very clear when He was wrapped. Then, to the shepherds, the angel was very clear, "You will find a Babe wrapped in swaddling cloths."

Now I tell you, brothers, you have to somewhat know how to read the Bible. This is something I would not have put in the Bible. I would have just said they had the baby and put Him in the manger. That's it! Why was He "wrapped in swaddling cloths"? These cloths were mentioned once with Joseph, then again with the shepherds. If the Bible uses a word once, twice, even a third time, there has got to be some meaning. I was considering this, and we could look at it in this way: the Lord was once on this earth. He said He is the new wine. Then, He produced the new wine skin. In the same part, He also spoke about new cloth. He said no one sews new cloth onto an old garment, because then you'll ruin the whole thing. The new cloth typifies what the Lord was coming for; He was coming to produce something *new*. No longer the old garment, but the new cloth. And with the new cloth, He made it clear that through His death and resurrection, it would become a new garment.

This new garment is mentioned in the New Jerusalem, in the feast. Someone came in without this new garment (Matt. 22:1–14). What is this new garment? It is Christ becoming our righteousness, Christ becoming our salvation, Christ having a reality within our being. We're covered with the new garment, a new garment dispensing a new element into us, causing our being to be a new person. A new person with a new garment. This is why, when Jesus was born, He was wrapped with a piece of cloth. That cloth typifies you. Christ came, He would be the new cloth. The new cloth would produce a new garment. This new garment would be the

righteousness of all the believers! If you are a believer, you're wrapped with a cloth that will eventually become a new garment. I'm sinful, terrible, but there is a new garment. Hallelujah!

We come to the fifth point: "Set and laid." This is not good, it should read, "Laid and lying." First, Mary and Joseph wrapped Jesus and laid Him in the manger. Then, the angel told the shepherds they would find the Babe, 'lying in a manger.'" It's interesting: laid and lying. Laid means what? I'm under someone's hand. He laid me there. Lying means what? I'm very comfortable with that hand. Wherever he laid me, I'm lying there comfortably and enjoying it.

You know, brothers, what your Christian life is? We Clevelanders, we're a poor people, right? Maybe I'd say that, using the apostle Paul's word to the whole church, if you're in the church life, not many are wise, not many are noble, not one has "what what" status. We're common people. But what makes us special? We can still live a life fully in the government of God. God *laid* us. Wherever God laid us, we don't protest. Jesus could have, right? He's God! So when the parents tried to wrap Him, the baby could have begun to talk: "Don't you know I'm the Son of God?! What kind of manger is this that you laid Me in? You put me *where?* In a *manger?*!" No. Of course there is an interesting story. Eventually, we understand now, Jesus knew who He was by His growth manifested when He was twelve years old. But anyway, I still appreciate, "I was laid and I am lying."

If today you asked me, "Do you do this?" I'd say, "Was that 'laid' by God?" I may be challenged. I'd say, "No, no, that's my choice." Then if I do have something I can say, "Laid by God. God has given me this," can we say, "I am lying here. I'm so restful. I'm so happy. Hallelujah, God has laid me here. I'm happy and comfortable!" Brothers, what a life is this. In your whole life, there will be instance upon instance, situation upon situation, leadings upon leadings. You can begin to say, "Lord, I'm constantly being laid and I'd like to be lying there. I don't fight with God. Whatever God has arranged in His government, I would like to say 'Amen, amen.'" Oh, "laid and lying." Brothers, if I can tell you, "Lord Jesus, have mercy on me. In my life, could I take Your laying, and can I lie there. You do all the arrangements. I do all the trust and enjoyment, being peaceful in Your government hand and in Your governmental leading." What a blessing to your Christian life.

More than that, the sixth point: "A Savior, who is Christ the Lord." He is a Savior, who is Christ the Lord. We shared that in the beginning of the messages. "Christ" means "Messiah." "Christ" means "the Anointed One." Christ means He is the One who carries out God's economy according to God's desire, because He is one with God. How did He do it? He's a Savior. A Savior saves you from sin, saves you from self, saves you from interests, saves you from your own living, saves you from everything that is not according to God's desire. He's the Savior. So He is Christ the Lord. How marvelous.

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With this, it led into the most “Hallelujah, glorious!” You know the angels, the army of angels, was there praising. The praise of the angels and the heavenly hosts: “Glory to God in the highest!” And then, what? “On earth, peace and good will toward man.” If we can say this, tell the Lord, “Lord, glory to You in the highest, and peace and good will unto me.”

What an existence is this! What a life is this. Comes from what? Comes from wayside. Comes from Bethlehem’s manger. Comes from a shepherds’ faithfulness. Comes from “wrapped in cloth.” Comes from “laid and lying.” May the Lord have grace to us. May Christ be our Savior on all our lives and on everything in our lives. The Lord bless us, the Lord be with you. Amen.