

To Just the Right People

Merry Christmas! What a good day to celebrate all God has done for us by bringing his Son into this world. This Son who came on a rescue mission. The Son who is the Messiah. The Son who was born to die all out of love for us. Well because we are in the gift giving season, and I wanted to draw you back to your childhood where you had many presents under the tree. And maybe at one point or another you were given a choice with which present you wanted to open first. Let's say all of those were yours which one would you choose? If you're anything like me. You chose the biggest, the brightest, the best. I'm always drawn to the biggest and best.

And if it isn't presents isn't it true *if we are given a choice we as people tend to choose the best available*. And it applies to so many things. Does anyone remember picking teams in grade school for recess. I remember kickball - being the captain on the playground. And who do I want the big guy. The one I know who can kick homeruns - that's my guy. This is why I played the Tuba. Because in 4th grade when I had my choice it was the biggest and brightest. I found out unless you're playing polka music it's not the best. But this is what we use to decide who I want to work with or have as a boss. Who I want to date or marry. What puppy we're going to pick out, what car I'm going to drive. I could go on and on.

I'm a bit of a baseball fan, and I couldn't help but see the news with the Yankees. The Yankees always get their pick of the litter so to speak, because they have the most money. So if you were watching this week they picked up arguably one of the best players in baseball, and another great homerun hitter from the Marlins - Giancarlo Stanton. Now they are paying to make that happen \$265 million over the next 10 years. But they prove my point that when given the choice we choose the biggest, the brightest, the shiniest and the best. And because there is some truth in this.

It's what makes God's pick of people such a head scratcher. So God can choose anyone to be on his team, he's captain. He could choose the Giancarlo Stantons, Aron Judge, and every a-list celebrity. But who did he choose? I was reading from the book of Mark, and he found a tax collector named Matthew. Not even close to the brightest and the best. More like the lowest. He was a thief. And fishermen - they weren't much higher in pedigree, maybe a half-step up. And then who God announced the birth of Jesus to. If you were going to send not a text message, an email, or Facebook post - but a host of angels to announce your birth where would you send them? Maybe to Caesar Augustus, and while we are at gather up the all the world leaders so that all the important prominent people know what is going on. I would tell the big shots that this Jesus is a pretty big deal.

But who does he send the angel announcement to? Luke 2, "And there were *shepherds* living out in the fields nearby, keeping watch over their flocks at night. An angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them." (8-9) Shepherds are low things. Not the best. It says they are living in the fields. You know there is still a connotation of status when your home is outside. If that's the case you're usually tryin to find a place inside.

Living in the fields. I was thinking about when Joseph's family was going to Egypt because Joseph became 2nd in command. And this is what he instructed his own family, "When Pharaoh calls you in and asks, 'What is your occupation?' 34 you should answer, 'Your servants have tended livestock from our boyhood on, just as our fathers did.' Then you will be allowed to settle in the region of Goshen, for *all shepherds are detestable to the Egyptians*. (Genesis 46:33-34) Like whatever you do - don't tell them you are shepherds.

But while we may question God's choice, what I want to discuss with you this morning is that he came to just the right people. And there is something we can learn together in his choice for the shepherds. Some clues for our own lives and souls. And before we get into our lesson I just wanted to welcome everyone, especially guests and visitors. And we'll talk about qualities of people but to say something over all I just want to recognize we all have the same status as imperfect people in need of God's grace. Here there is no better or worse, just beggars looking for the what the King offers. I also want to remind you his desire is for all people to come. But maybe we'll learn something that makes it easier for us to come and easier for us to stay close to this Savior Jesus. So we are going to read from 1 Corinthians 1. I invite you to follow along. Could you turn to the person next to you and say, "It's ok to be a fool."

There is a Tv show called the Big Bang Theory. Anyone know this show? I was a slow adopter to the show, as a Christian didn't get past the opening theme song. But as it gained popularity and wasn't going away and reruns were on TBS, I got into it. And there is nothing like the character Sheldon Cooper. Sheldon who needs his special spot on the couch, the perfect place. Reminds me of church people in their chairs. But as I watch the show and understand the character I come to this conclusion. Sheldon Cooper may not make the best disciple of God. Why you ask? Because he is always focused on himself, and more than that he never admits to being wrong. He is always right, always better, always on top of anyone else even if they've been to outer space and he has not.

Then I look at the first verse of our lesson and it. And who God chooses - it isn't the Sheldons, "But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise." Now this verse made me crack up completely as I was translating. Because the Greek word for foolish is moros. Which is where we get our english word moron. So basically the Word is saying here, "God chose the morons." And the reason I'm not sure Sheldon Cooper or those types would make the best disciples is because of this first point and takeaway for this morning. *You need to be a fool or willing to be considered a fool in order to follow God.*

You know why the shepherds were just the right people? Because in their low position, their foolish position they would be willing to submit to what they saw. Where the Caesar's the and Sheldon's may have dismissed it. Ceasar could have said, well, that must have been a vision or aberration. And I've seen great an incredible things before -this must have just been another show. And the Sheldon's could have said, "No, that just cannot be. Angels don't appear in the sky - that's not possible."

In your walk with God are you more like Sheldon or a shepherd? Are you willing to become a fool - toss out your experiences, your notions, even worldly knowledge to listen to God's voice? Or are you more apt to let your voice and the worldly voices crowd out the announcement of the angels. Jesus - the Savior. No it can't be. Jesus was just a teacher, a good man, a historical character. If I'm honest I've had my Sheldon moments. God that cannot be. A

virgin birth, a resurrection, a God who is with me and for me all the time. And for the times I've wanted to stand above the simple statements of God I need to repent. What about you. Where are telling God you know better, and you won't accept the simple revelation he gave in His Word. Where do you need to listen to his voice and just trust his revealed ways. Maybe someone along the way convinced you the Bible isn't reliable, and so you have a hard time hearing anything. If we are not willing to become a fool to trust what we couldn't imagine according to our way of thinking, we may miss it all.

So friends be willing to become a fool this Christmas, and simply trust, become a shepherd with me, and listen to what the angels said, "Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord." (11) And what his birth means is that he came for me and you to forgive us. One of the most prideful moments we can have is this idea I could somehow save myself. But this mocks his simple truth of the angels announcement. If we could save ourselves, be enough, be wise enough - why is he here? If all go to heaven anyway regardless of what they do or believe which is the wise notion of our time - why did he come? No he is here to save us. He is here to live, to die, and to rise again. He is here to pay the price of freedom and salvation. To become a fool in everyone's eyes as he bore the cross, so we the foolish could have forgiveness. And that is what we have.

But maybe we should discuss the benefits of being a fool or a moron for the sake of Christ. It's not just so we can hear his voice, not crowded out by our Sheldon superiority. But there's another reason.

You know it's a wonderful time of the year, but for many people it is also the busiest time of year. Not only do you have the normal things of school and work, but add on top of that work parties, family gatherings, special outings, Christmas gift buying. I always think from Thanksgiving to the New Year is just a flurried whirlwind of activity - have you been busy lately. It's so busy with ugly sweater parties, white elephant gifts, and going to Grandma's it's easy to miss the point of it all.

Reminds me of this parable Jesus told. Have you heard this one. A king through a banquet and invited certain people to come, but they all made excuses of why they were too busy - I'm not sure if it was Christmas time. No one said an ugly sweater party. No they had other excuses. One said romance, I just got married and we're off to the honeymoon. One said home, I just bought a field and am on the way to check it out. See what I can do with that. One said work, I just bought a pair of oxen and am on my way to try them out. And they all missed the banquet. Jesus point is they missed him and they missed heaven. Contrast all the busyness of this time of year with the Shepherds.

What are they doing? Watching sheep. That's it. I'm bored thinking about it. Chew that grass. Falling asleep. Oh don't go to far away. They didn't really have a packed social agenda, or much else to do. So when the angels gave them this invitation, I don't think there was much question or objection. It's not like they had a lot else going on. So what did they do, "15 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." (15-16)

So this year become a fool like the shepherds. *Become a fool by slowing down enough to go see the Savior.* It's ok if you don't see the Nutcracker, or Wicked, or the Christmas Story Live on TV. It's ok if the Christmas decorations aren't put up this year, or the presents aren't wrapped just so. I give you permission to say no to things that just don't matter. But don't miss the message. Make sure you take the time to talk about it with the kids, and to make worship the most significant part of the season.

I was reading this book called the Imperfect Pastor and embracing our limitations. Because pastors have a habit of thinking they can know it all, and do it all, and be everywhere for everyone. Pastors know busy. But I came across a quote that really resonated with me. "Have the ambition for a quiet life." It's ok if there's not much going on. It's ok if you're not the most significant pastor in the world. And I like this idea, because sometimes life in the extreme is so rushed and skewed we can miss the significant. When people know us and we achieve earthly success and our social calendars get filled - our lives get loud. So loud by being busy we can miss the important things. Watch out that you don't get so successful that your perspective gets skewed and you miss the truly significant. But if they're quiet maybe we can hear a little clearer and see a little better the importance of our Savior Jesus.

But there's more in the benefit of being fools. I think one of my favorite fools has to be ELF at Christmas. This is my favorite Christmas movie, and if you've seen it do you remember what happens when Santa is announced? "Santa!!" He's so excited he doesn't care how loud he says it, he doesn't care what other people think. His foolishness leads him to a proud proclamation over who this is.

The Shepherds not only go and see the baby, but what else do they do? "When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child." (Luke 2:17) And they could have been thinking - we'll the people who live in houses are going to think we lowly shepherds are crazy. And I was thinking about this, this week. Why doesn't Scripture record more than just the shepherds and wise men going to see the child. If the shepherds told the townspeople why didn't they go? They may not have received the word. When it says v.18 and all who heard it were *amazed* at what the shepherds said to them." Amazed is the same word that can mean wonder. And maybe they did wonder but in the wrong way. Maybe there were some Sheldon's telling the shepherds - "That cannot be. Angels don't appear in the sky, and start singing." But it didn't matter there response. See the shepherds were foolish enough to passionately proclaim. And we learn from them.

Become a fool that passionately proclaims. We just sang, "Go tell it on a mountain." Let's not let that be lip service, no let's go and tell it. Be a fool this Christmas in how many people you go out and invite to church. Be a fool by saying Merry Christmas instead of Happy Holidays, and strike up a conversation about Jesus. Tell them do you know why our family celebrates Christmas? Ask your co-workers if they know what Christmas is all about.

But the Shepherds also help me to understand things a bit about God's people here. I live in the church world, and sometimes I am shocked at how weak the church seems to be. We the people of the church are referred to as the Bride, and the Bride seems to be a weak, frail thing at times. Not to be depressing but the church on earth is an imperfect thing right, because it's filled with imperfect people. You look at the church world and most major denominations are in decline, and if you've been around the church world you may have your own reasons as to why.

There are times when I wonder what God is up to in his churches where some close, others have just a few. See I have this hope of what the church on earth should look like and what it does at times. But the same is true with me if I'm honest. I know where I want to be, what I want to look like and where I am. Does this resonate with you? Do you see not only the weakness of the Bride the church, the people God chose, but then also in yourself. A difference from where you want to be and where you are? I find this those willing to be considered fools are real with their weaknesses.

I consider the story of the Shepherds and if you were a townspeople, what would you remember. The names of the Shepherds who told the story - Bob, Sam, or Billy - or would you remember not them, but the story they shared. I think you'd remember the story. You'd wonder about the Messiah who was announced by the angels, you'd wonder about if the angels really appeared. Their low position helped to highlight the truly significant thing Christ was born.

And then my mind goes why did God chose morons to be proclaimers. Why fishermen, why Paul, why me? I'm drawn to the reaction of the people to Jesus disciples in the early church look here. "13 When they saw the courage of Peter and John and realized that they were unschooled, ordinary men, they were astonished and they took note that these men had been with Jesus." (Acts 4:13) So what did they recognize? Ordinary men, who had been with Jesus. Their foolishness helped to highlight Jesus' greatness! This applies to me, I'm not that great, you see me limp and know my weakness, but as you hear the Word - it highlights the greatness of Jesus - of God giving you time and time again the Word that you need! So I say with John, I must decrease and he must increase. Yes, *He chooses weak fools so people don't miss the highlight, which is him.*

But a final note. When he uses us because he chose us, he also changes us. We are no longer weak, foolish, morons. No, in Him and through him we are wise. No, in Him and through him we are strong. In Him and through him we are perfect things. How do I know, v. 30, "It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption." He makes us bright and shiny. He blesses our lives. Yes what I find is that *He chooses weak fools and then gives them His wisdom and strength*. That's the fun of being chosen by him of what he makes us to be. More wise, beautiful, and powerful than we could ever be by ourselves. May he grant you the spirit of foolishness to ever recognize his greatness. And the fun of the ability to use his wisdom and his strength as part of his team. Amen.