

12/31/2017 - Luke 2:8-20 "Just as They Had Been Told"

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.

All the things they had heard and seen, which were just as they had been told.

How rare that is!

Case in point, which of the following statements: true?

- 1) Everything we see on the Internet is true.
- 2) Everything we read in the newspapers is true.
- 3) We can believe everything we hear.

Are all false. None are true. True?

Often human beings believe that we can and should believe what we want to believe. But believing does not make a belief true. Belief may be a choice, but we can believe what is false, even if we believe it is true. True?

Therefore, Jesus, who is The Truth, has belief as the main subject of his preaching & actions of his ministry. Thru word & deed he repeatedly encourages people to believe that what God says is true IS always true. We may believe otherwise, but belief is the main topic of Jesus' preaching & actions, exhorting humans to trust in him & in the Father. Try testing the premise. Go into the word & see. Look at the sum total of all the words & actions of Jesus to see if it is true, that most of all, Jesus seeks to illicit belief.

And no wonder Jesus focuses mostly on belief, because the main issue for us and other willful creatures is mistrust. We are skeptical. We doubt God and his word.

This has been the prideful cause of our fall from the beginning.

Therefore, when in questioning God's word the willful serpent in Genesis 3 asks the willful woman, "Did God really say?" She doubts what God said. She doubts that God meant what he said. And she doubts what God said MEANT what God said!

What a mess, which we are still in.

Mistrust of God was demonstrated and has been a human flaw ever since the start. So, we, too, can fall in the "mortal" habit of mistrusting God and his word. Not taking his word as true. Not believing God.

v. 12 No wonder the angel provides a visible "sign" to indicate that the word spoken is true: "You will find a baby wrapped in cloths and lying in a manger."

That is specific. After all, how many human babies have we seen lying in a manger! No wonder God chose such an unusual means of birth, to make the event of the Messiah's birth apparent!

Yet what is even more unusual than the sign is the response of the shepherds, who are so trusting, so believing. V. 15 ... 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." Can we hear and believe it? They did not say, "Let's go to Bethlehem and see IF this thing has happened." They omitted that little, big word of doubt: IF.

Furthermore, they trust and believe that the Lord has told them about it! The shepherds have great trust, great faith, completely believing without a doubt the word of God. v. 16 So they hurried off and found Mary and Joseph, and the baby, who was lying in the manger. And after they did... v. 17 When they had seen him, they spread the word concerning what had been told them about this child.

They encouraged belief in Bethlehem, to people who may have been better able to receive, because for though the people likely heard the sound of the multitude of angels, they did not see them. Respectable people, in their homes after dark, could not see the angels. By the time they peeked outside, the “sudden” angels were gone. The people may have heard noise outside, but could not hear clearly what the angels said. Yet, they did hear the whole of the message from the shepherds, who were not normally welcome or trusted among the town’s people.

So, after instilling belief among the people... v. 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. Hope we see that God does not lie. He only tells the truth. He does not ask us to believe in lies, but only in his truth, which is the one and only truth.

Asking again with a caveat: Can we believe everything we hear... from God? Our modern world says no, telling us that we cannot trust the single worldview of the Bible. That we cannot believe in Bible “stories,” because they are just stories, fables, tales, legends, & myths. They are not scientifically verifiable. In fact, some even go against scientific theory.

Furthermore, visions of angels are delusions of the insane. Even the insane may find us crazy, if we see angels. Once a highly intelligent soldier in the mental hospital of the VA said to me, “You seem smart, so how can you believe in the virgin birth and other miracles.” I answered, “Not with proof, but only with faith.” With belief.

Let’s admit it. With this kind of pressure from our culture, we are hesitant to share what we believe. We are afraid to share spectacular stories of faith from the Bible and our own lives, afraid of what people may think of us. But what about what God thinks of our not sharing? At the end of his time on earth, Jesus exhorts us to do as the shepherds do, to lead people to faith. In Matthew 28:19-20, he tells his followers to “Go and make disciples of every nation, baptizing in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit, and teach them to obey all that I command you.” Yet we hesitate. We stay silent. Why? Maybe because we lack trust, because we doubt that God will equip and enable us for the task. Yet his word is clear. How can we not believe? Therefore, I pray that we cast aside mistrust, doubt, and unbelief. That we do as he commands. That, like the shepherds, we return to our work, schools, homes, and communities, “glorifying and praising God for all the things we have heard and seen, which are just as we have been told.” For the Word of the Lord has told us to do so. True?