

Angels' Song

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 18 December 2022

Preacher: Jon Watson

- [0 : 0 0] In several hours there will be a ragtag family of believers in Nashville at Christ Church praying for you and praising God, the same God that we're worshipping here.
- And I find it striking, moving, encouraging that no matter where you go in this world, you can find people who've been deeply transformed by the Spirit of God to love and follow Jesus.
- It's wonderful to be here this morning. When Derek asked me to preach part of this Advent series, he said it would be a sermon series on songs, these sort of Christmas or Advent songs.
- So you'll have studied Mary's song a couple weeks ago and Zechariah's song last week, was it? And now this week we're going to look at the angels song that we read about from Luke chapter two.
- And I thought, songs of Christmas, that's a clever sermon series. I wonder how Derek came up with that idea. And then it hit me. It hit me last night. Derek and Corey must have watched Elf together because it was Buddy the Elf and all his wisdom that wisely said the best way to spread Christmas cheer is singing loud for all to hear.
- [1 : 1 2] I actually think that's true. It really is. When we are overcome with awe, when we're delighted beyond just what a smile can convey, when we're swallowed up with joy, when mere words fail us, then it's only natural.
- In fact, it's divine to put our words to meter and melody. So if you've been here the last couple of Sundays, you'll have heard about the song of Mary, a young Jewish maiden overcome with quiet awe.
- You'll have heard about the song of Zechariah, an older priest who put on the mantle of prophet in sang a song of the Christ.
- But this song that we're going to look at today, the angel song in Luke 2, it's quite different. Because to sing this song, God didn't send a maiden or a priest.
- He sent an army. And with all the efficiency and precision of the military, they delivered a short, sweet song to celebrate news that could not be contained with mere words.
- [2 : 2 4] So here's another Christmas song, but it's a song for a battlefield. Now I'm sure you'll know all of you, the stories of the brave bagpipers in the battle of Kaladin.
- Am I allowed to talk about Kaladin as an American? Is that okay? All right. I'll take that as a yes. The sound we're told of the bagpipes through perhaps the mist of the battlefield was meant to terrify the enemy.
- It was meant to strike fear into their hearts. It was meant to say to the opposing army, we're mighty. Fear us. Run.
- This is a battle you don't want to fight. And that's what battle songs are generally meant to do. It rallies your troops and puts fear in the heart of enemies.
- But this heavenly host, this army of angels, they came to sing a better battle song. The angel song was meant to do two things.

[3 : 31] Instead of pointing to the power and might of the army, this song pointed to the humility of the king.

And instead of causing enemies' hearts to tremble with fear, this song was meant to cause their hearts to swell with hope. So look with me again at Luke 2, 13, and 14 if you have your Bibles with you.

And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host or army praising God and saying glory to God in the highest and on earth peace among those with whom he is pleased.

So the message of this heavenly battle song is that heaven has come onto this battlefield of this war-torn world and our weary hearts with the humility of the king and the promise of peace.

So we're going to look at those two things in that order today, two points, the humility of the king and the promise of peace. Let me pray for the Lord's help. Lord as we examine your word together, may you preach this good news to our hearts just as clearly and vividly and precisely as you did to those shepherds through your army of angels all those years ago.

[5 : 04] We ask it for the glory of Christ and for our joy and peace. Amen. All right so point number one is the humility of the king.

Because this is all about the birth of the king. For many centuries the Jewish people had longed for, anticipated, someone called the Christ and the Christ is just the sort of Greek word for the Messiah which was the Hebrew word for what we would call the anointed one.

It's the anointed one of God, the divinely appointed king that God said would come and reign forever, deliver them from their enemies, usher in a permanent era of peace.

That's the king that they were longing for, for thousands of years. The first book of the Bible, Genesis chapter three verse 15 speaks of him as the offspring of the woman who would crush the serpent, the serpent who started all this mess in the first place.

Deuteronomy speaks of him as a prophet greater than Moses if you can imagine that. John Samuel speaks of him as David's son, David's offspring who would inherit David's throne and rule not for a lifetime but forever and would bring total peace to the kingdom.

[6 : 36] Later the prophet Isaiah speaks of him as the Holy One of Israel, a chute from the stump of Jesse, David's father, who would stand as a signal not just to the Jews but to all peoples which is very good news for all of us for the most part, most of us being Gentiles, that all nations would come to this longed for and anointed king, that his kingdom would encompass us all.

And now this anciently anticipated king is here. But instead of riding in on a warhorse as a king in the first century would be likely to do, instead of being born in a gilded palace, the Christ was born in absolute humility.

In our passage that we're looking at today there's two clues to the humility of the king. The first clue is who the message is delivered to, who the song is sung to.

Shepherds, I don't know very well from first hand experience how you all look on shepherds in your culture where it's not that far outside of the city limits.

But in the first century shepherds were second class citizens or worse. Thought to be smelly, probably thieves, they were looked down on.

[8 : 01] And so the first announcement of the arrival of the most anticipated figure in all of history wasn't to influencers or the aristocracy or the bourgeoisie or anything like that.

It was to really the dregs of society back then, the people who were lowly. The Lord of glory was announced to the lowliest people because he came to save the lowliest people.

That's very good news for us. The prophet Isaiah puts it this way, Isaiah 57, 15, for thus says the one who is high and lifted up. And I love this, it's hard to think of grander language than this.

The one who is high and lifted up who inhabits eternity, whose name is holy. This is what that one says, quote, I dwell in the high and holy place and also with him who is of a contrite and lowly spirit to revive the spirit of the lowly and to revive the heart of the contrite.

In other words, Christianity, people of the Christ, followers of Jesus, it's not a club for people who have their act together.

[9 : 25] Jesus is not a savior for people who don't need saving. So if your life is a mess and maybe it looks good but inside you know I'm a mess, good.

You're exactly who Christ came to save. That's the first clue of the humility of the king. The second is the sign of the message. Remember the angel came with a message and a sign.

Message, the Christ is born. What's the sign? He says this is verse 12 of chapter 2. This will be a sign to you. You will find a baby wrapped in cloths.

Okay, good, this is normal, right? Swaddling clothes for a baby. This is normal even of royal babies. You will find a baby wrapped in swaddling clothes and lying in a manger.

The king of the universe, the one by whom and for whom all things exist, was put in a feeding trough.

[10 : 31] Now I find it utterly striking that Jesus was not actually undignified by laying in this manger. It's the way that we naturally tend to think is that when we put ourselves in undignified places it kind of gets on us.

It kind of brings us down. But to the contrary, go anywhere in the English speaking world where the gospel of Jesus Christ has come and you say the word manger, we're to play a word association game.

You're not going to think feeding trough, you're going to think nativity. You're going to think of Jesus. After the word manger itself is actually dignified and lifted up because it came into contact with the Christ.

I think that's very important because when the king of glory comes into contact with that which is lowly, he remains glorious and the lowly are lifted.

The undignified is given dignity. When we come to this Christ with our sin, our shame, our failures, our guilt, those things that feel dirty, we don't get him dirty.

[11 : 48] And he doesn't flinch away from us as if his clothes are nice and clean and he doesn't want to get a spot on him. He actually makes us clean. See we're not contagious with sin.

He's contagious with holiness. He's contagious with purity and power and glory. Like the woman who bled for 12 years and was ritually unclean.

The way they thought of it, the way they were taught is that when unclean things come in contact with clean things, they both get unclean. This makes sense if you have a muddy t-shirt and you touch it to another t-shirt that's clean now they're both muddy, right?

That's not true of Christ. It's exactly the opposite. When she touched him, instead of him getting unclean, she got clean.

Christ is contagious with holiness, which means you can trust him with whatever you've got way deep down that you don't think you can trust to anybody.

[12 : 50] You can give it to Jesus and he'll clean you. Not only was Jesus' birth into this world humble, that same humility and meekness, it marked his earthly ministry and it marks his heart still to this day.

We're not talking about an historical figure. We're talking about a man with a heartbeat sitting at the right hand of the Father in heaven who will come back. And here is what he said, this is in Matthew 11.

He said, this is what I'm like. Now there's not many times Jesus says that, but here we have it in scripture. Jesus says, here's what I'm like and this is still true of him today.

He said, come to me, all you who are weary and burdened and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me for I am gentle and humble in heart and you will find rest for your souls.

That's what Jesus is like right now. Nothing is too low, the King of glory. No one is beneath his notice.

[14 : 10] There is no sin that you can commit that's so vile that it would make Jesus turn his nose up at you. He's safe.

He's safe because he's humble. Why else would he be born in a manger? Why else would he send his heavenly fanfare to shepherds if not to say, blessed are the poor in spirit.

But theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Now I know you have a new king, so this isn't a political statement. It's an historical statement.

A prideful king is a dangerous king. But a humble king? What couldn't you confess to him?

What couldn't you trust him with if he's really that humble and gentle? The last thing I want to say to you about the humility of Jesus is that godly humility is a powerful thing.

[15 : 22] Jared Tolkien got it. That's why he made a story about little hobbits who turned Middle Earth upside down. The apostle Paul got it. That's why when he was afflicted with a thorn in the flesh and asked God three times to remove it, God said, my grace is sufficient for you and my power is made perfect in weakness.

Jesus lived it. That's why if you read Philippians chapter 2 verses 5 through 11, this is the gospel presentation in Philippians.

It's about a Jesus who had all majesty and power and glory equal with God the Father himself and he let go of it all.

He didn't count it something to be grasped, to be clung onto. But he humbled himself, taking on the form of a servant. That wasn't enough.

He went lower still and he humbled himself into death. And death itself was defeated by humility.

[16 : 25] Godly humility is a powerful thing. Satan in all his pride and pomp was laid low by the king who came to be conquered.

That power of humility, it explains how a feeding trough could hold the creator of the universe and how a Roman execution rack 33 years later could become a throne that we revere still to this day.

Therefore, there is tremendous hope for prideful souls like me and like you.

But our hope is not in self-help. Our hope is not in political victories, social agendas, institutional reform, therapy. Our hope is in this humble savior.

And in receiving him in the humility of faith. This sort of invasion of heaven onto the battlefield of earth, it began with humility.

[17 : 30] This world was conquered by a boy born to be conquered. And his power was in his weakness. His glory was in his humility.

Why would it be any different for me and you? To receive Jesus, to be transformed by Jesus, to be saved by this king, we have to let go of our pride.

Faith is just another sort of aspect on humility. We let go, we open our hands instead of clinging to what we have and we receive instead of trying to earn or take.

We just need to receive the work of Christ. That's point number one, the humility of the king. Point number two, slightly briefer, the promise of peace.

So ever since Adam in Genesis three bit into that fruit and sinned against God, we've been at war. At war with God and then at war with each other as well.

[18 : 37] We've set up a little kingdom of our world in rebellion against our rightful king. And we make ourselves little kings and we orient our whole lives around our comfort, my comfort, around my good, around my desires.

It's pride and it's war. So the angels, this army shows up in Luke two to announce that the king is here, sort of dropped behind enemy lines as it were, like an invasion.

And his kingdom was being established. Now that could be really good news or really bad news when a terrifying army of angels shows up.

It'd be reasonable to think I'm in trouble. But he's making a promise which shows that this is the best news in the world. Because every king, every emperor who conquers a new territory, they make promises to the people.

It's sort of, they set up expectations of what things are going to be like. And then they're at the end of their term, if it's an elected office, they're held up against the promises they made, aren't they?

[19 : 49] Did they fulfill what they said they would? Caesar Augustus promised the Pax Romana, the peace of Rome. A peace achieved by oppression and violence.

And it lasted for some time, two centuries. In 1928, US presidential candidate Herbert Hoover, when he was running for office, promised a chicken in every pot and two cars in every garage.

That one didn't hold up. Boris Johnson promised what, NHS funding, tougher sentencing on criminals, more police.

I don't know, you tell me. I don't know. And I don't know who your current PM is anymore, so I can't go on from there. But this conquering king, Jesus, the Christ, makes a better promise and kept it by his own blood.

He didn't keep his promise off the backs of other people. He did it himself, and he paid for it dearly. Here's the promise.

[20 : 59] Peace on earth, among those with whom his favor rests. Peace, not the absence of conflict.

That's not peace. That's false peace. Real peace, biblical peace, is a wholeness, a sort of surging vitality of being a real, complete, whole, healthy, vibrant person.

That kind of peace. We don't know that kind of peace at all, this world. We may get along with our neighbors, okay, surface level, but we know little of peace with God, the peace that counts more than anything.

When Adam and Eve committed the sin, the first thing they did was they hid from each other and they hid from God. We haven't stopped hiding ever since then, from each other and from God.

We think the worst thing that could possibly happen is to be seen for who we really are. This is a promise of a king who can see you for you, the real you, and actually love you, actually love me, who to thought.

[22 : 29] But since that first time hiding from God, we've avoided his gaze ever since. And that hasn't changed for any of us, unless Jesus has conquered your heart with faith, humility, and peace.

So imagine the Lord descending today, Jesus coming down in all his glory, no manger this time. When he comes back, it's going to be all trumpets in glory.

Imagine he comes down and you're standing before him, like you, me standing before Jesus himself, seen way deep down.

I wonder, could you look him in the eye? Could you meet his gaze? Because what the angels are singing about, what the military of heaven has come to announce is the kind of peace that would allow lingering eye contact with the creator of the universe.

Can you even imagine? The peace of intimacy and reconciliation and wholeness. If you could feel absolutely at peace with God, nothing between you, you and the eternal God, what couldn't you face into on this earth?

[23 : 51] What suffering couldn't you handle? What temptation couldn't you overcome? If you had the smile of God Almighty, I bet you'd sleep really well at nights.

The good news of Christmas is the promise of that kind of peace. The caveat, however, because there is a caveat, it comes in the final words of verse 14, peace on earth among those with whom he is pleased.

So the real question is, who is God pleased with? Or rather, how can I get the pleasure of God on me? How can I please God?

Well, we might try legalism, right? A work better, try harder, pull yourself up by the bootstraps kind of moralism, where it's all about rules and earning God's favor.

And then maybe if we're good enough, if we just avoid sin enough, maybe God will be happy with us. Or we could try a sort of optimistic ambivalence, where I just sort of stuff down my conscience and compartmentalize the guilt, you know, that feeling, and then I'll just hope for the best.

[25 : 16] I'm sure it'll all be fine in the end. I'll just sweep that under the rug. Or we could try the gospel third way, the better way.

The thing is, God's favor rests unflinchingly on one man. Only one man is perfectly righteous.

Only one man obeys the Father's will perfectly. But this man, thankfully, he's kind of like Noah's Ark, that you can climb into and be saved.

Jesus is this unique person that you can be in. I don't have illustrations for it because it's too weird.

There's nothing else like it in the universe. But over a hundred times, Paul says in the New Testament, that if you have put your faith in Christ, if you've leaned on Him with all your weight, you are in Christ.

[26 : 26] None of you are in the King. I am not in President Biden. That's not how governmental relationships on earth work, but it's how this relationship with the King of the universe works.

You believe on Him and you get in Him. And God's smile, the favor of God rests on Him.

So if you're part of His body, the body of Christ, then you too have the favor of God. Paul put it this way in one of the best verses of the Bible, Romans 8.1.

There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ. That's the only place in the universe where there is no condemnation, because all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

John put it a different way. He thought more about children and adoption. John said, to all who did receive Him, to those who believed in His name, He gave the right to become children of God, to be a part of the family of the King.

[27 : 34] In other words, the peace of God and peace with God, it can only come through faith in Jesus. You cannot earn this peace and you can't ignore the conflict long enough for it to go away.

Only faith in Jesus will get you peace, the sleep of the righteous who has nothing to fear, the kind of eye contact that only integrity can bring, the pleasant rich joy that no sin or sorrow can touch.

That kind of peace is the promise that Jesus came to bring to you and to me. So if you feel broken, dirty, riddled with shame, exhausted by hiding, sort of beaten down by the suffering of this world, by rubbing shoulders with all this sadness and tired of the death, all of those things, there is one person you can turn to for help.

For deliverance, for saving, because heaven has invaded this war-torn world in our weary hearts with the humility of the King and the promise of peace.

The kingdom of heaven colliding with the darkness of this world to bring it into the light and make it whole. So it's sort of a cosmic invasion, but it's not just abstract and cosmic and out there.

[29 : 11] It's also, it's personal. It's actually for you, so I urge you now. If you have not yet been conquered by the King of Peace, what else are you trusting in?

We all trust in something or someone to save us, to make us okay. You all trust in something for your wholeness.

Is it safer than humble Jesus? Is it more powerful and able to save you than mighty Jesus?

And will it keep its promises? All you have to do for the kind of peace we've been talking about is lay down your arms.

Stop fighting. Stop resisting Him. He's too good to resist. He wins you with love.

[30 : 18] What could be better? He died for you to prove it. And He wants to give you His peace. Jesus Himself said, John 14.27, Peace, I leave with you.

My peace I give to you. What a profound statement. The Son of God has perfect peace with the Father, and He says, my peace I give to you.

Not as the world gives, do I give. Let not your hearts be troubled. Neither let them be afraid. Don't you want that?

I'd like to end with the words that we often use to open our service at Christ Church. To all who are weary and need rest.

To all who fail and desire strength. And to all who sin and need a Savior. Jesus, the humble King of peace, opens wide His arms with a blood-bought welcome.

[31 : 30] He's the friend of sinners, and He's gentle and humble. Welcome. Let me pray.

Lord Jesus, we praise you for what you're like. You're amazing. You're so kind and mighty.

If you were kind and weak, we would have no salvation. And if you were mighty and unkind, we'd be terrified all the time. But you're good and powerful.

You're glorious, and we praise you, and we love you. Help us to love you more and to follow you and to trust you. And when we have trusted you, would you give us that spiritual wisdom to look back and say, God did that, not me?

I've been reborn by the Spirit. Would you do that in our hearts today? For your glory and for our joy.

[32 : 34] Amen.