

GIVE ME YOUR ATTENTION!

Luke 2:10

INTRODUCTION

Listen up!

That got your attention.

When you get people's attention, they are ready to listen to what you want to say.

On that first Christmas night, God got the attention of the shepherds in a spectacular way.

And in the same region there were shepherds out in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. ⁹ And an angel of the Lord appeared to them, and the glory of the Lord shone around them, and they were filled with great fear. ¹⁰ And the angel said to them, "Fear not, for behold, I bring you good news of great joy that will be for all the people. Luke 2:8-10 ^{ESV}

The first way God got their attention was by sending an angel with the glory of the Lord. The glory of the Lord referred to the brilliant aura that reflected God's majesty and glory. Imagine how it was on the eyes of the shepherds. In the darkness of the night, their pupils were fully dilated; you know what it's like when you are sleeping in the darkness and someone comes in your room and turns on the light.

The second way the angel got the shepherds' attention were the words. The angel said, "Fear not." That was necessary because the shepherds were terrified. They were probably confused and disoriented. What was going on?

Then the angel said, "Behold..." That was a call for attention. "Listen up!" It was used to introduce a statement or message that was new or vitally important.

You can imagine the shepherds thinking, "OK, all right! You've got our attention!" God got their attention.

Christmas gets people's attention. How can it not? The day after Thanksgiving, we have Black Friday with thousands of people lining up outside the stores in the Pheasant Lane Mall and the Merrimack Outlets for Christmas bargains. Last Monday we had cyber Monday so you can sit at home and buy all your Christmas presents online. I live in Hudson and on the day after Thanksgiving, the central common is lit up with colorful lights, giant wooden toy soldiers are positioned, even Snoopy is enveloped in lights as he lies on his doghouse. You would have to be blind to not see that Christmas is coming.

Christmas gets people's attention. But does God get people's attention at Christmas? Sadly, I would say that for many people, Christmas does not get people's attention with God or with Jesus.

We start Advent today. Advent means coming. It is a way for us to live in anticipation of celebrating the birth of Jesus. As if we need any other reminder. But, actually we do. Because it is too easy for us to not connect Christmas with Jesus in a meaningful way.

For our advent series, we are going to look at the message the angel gave to the shepherds on that first Christmas night. We are going to break it down into four parts over these four weeks of Advent.

This morning, I want us to focus on those opening words: “Fear not, for behold...” God wanted to get the attention of the shepherds. And he certainly did.

Does God have your attention? If God was trying to speak to you, would you be listening? I’m convinced that God is constantly wanting to get our attention. But are we listening?

The main point: **God wants our attention, but are we listening?**

Let’s first ask, why does God want our attention?

I. GOD WANTS OUR ATTENTION TO:

1. Reveal his plans to us

After that spectacular entrance, the angel went on to tell the shepherds this message: *Today in the town of David a Savior has been born to you; he is the Messiah, the Lord.* Luke 2:11 ^{NIV}

What must have really caught their attention were the words, *he is the Messiah*. The Jews had lived for over 1000 years with the promise that God was going to send his Son, the Messiah, to them. And now, after all these years, God was finally fulfilling his plan—the Messiah was coming.

God still has plans that he is unfolding. His big plans include Jesus coming back to earth to establish his kingdom.

But God also has plans for each of us. They may be plans that affect us in a big way, like the college to go to, or the person to marry, or a job to take. Or they may be smaller plans, like helping a neighbor or getting involved in a ministry in the city.

But if God is trying to get our attention to reveal his plans to us, we need to be able to hear him.

Along with revealing his plans to us, God wants to get our attention to:

2. Reveal himself to us

It is significant that when God had earlier appeared to Joseph to reveal his plans to him, he said:

“The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and they will call him Immanuel” (which means “God with us”). Matthew 1:23 ^{NIV}

This coming baby would be called Immanuel because he would be God in flesh, i.e. a human.

One of the problems people have today in believing in God is that we can’t see God. And because we can’t see God, people struggle with believing in God.

E.g. Yuri Gagarin going up in space and not finding God.

Imagine if God were to make a public appearance today. I'm sure CNN, ABC, Larry King, Oprah and all the rest of the world would want to be there to interview and film God. And their film would travel all over the world in a matter of minutes. People would, literally see God. I think most people would finally believe in God. If only God were to show up.

But that did happen. It happened 2000 years ago when Jesus was born because he was God in human form—Immanuel. For 33 years, Jesus lived and walked among the people of Israel. And especially for the 3 years of his ministry, thousands of people spoke with him, ate with him, and listened to him, and in so doing, they saw God.

Even though Jesus went back to heaven, he still wants to reveal himself to us. Although we can't see him, we can experience him.

One of the statements Jesus made to the people is:

I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 ^{NIV}

I came so they can have real and eternal life, more and better life than they ever dreamed of. John 10:10 ^{MES}

Jesus has come to reveal himself and give us life—a spiritual quality of life that can only come from him.

God wants our attention. But today:

II. HOW DOES GOD GET OUR ATTENTION?

If God sent an angel every time he wanted to get our attention, I'm sure he would get it. But he doesn't do that. There are two primary ways God gets our attention:

1. God gets our attention through the Bible

Today, we are fortunate to have lots of ways people can record messages. We can write them down, record them on tape or film, take a video on our smart phones. But up until recently, the only way to preserve someone's words was to have them written down. This is what God did. He wanted his words to be available for all people for all time, so he had them written down in the Bible.

When you read the Bible, you are reading the words of God. And they are not just dry, dusty old words. They are fresh and living. The writer of Hebrews reminds us:

For the word of God is alive and powerful. It is sharper than the sharpest two-edged sword, cutting between soul and spirit, between joint and marrow. It exposes our innermost thoughts and desires. Hebrews 4:12 ^{NLT}

When we read the Bible, it is like God himself is speaking. He wants to get our attention to communicate with us. And he can do this because he speaks through the Bible.

2. God gets our attention through the Holy Spirit

Probably everyone has had that sense of a still small voice in our heads. It often comes when we are about to do something wrong, and we hear that quiet voice saying, "Better

not do that,” or something like that. That may have been the Holy Spirit speaking to you through your conscience.

One of the primary roles of the Holy Spirit is to reveal God’s truth to us and to convince us of that truth. He speaks on behalf of God, not only through the Bible, but also directly into our thoughts and minds.

One day Jesus was speaking to people and telling many stories and parables. The disciples asked why Jesus didn’t speak more clearly. He replied by quoting Isaiah the prophet:

This is why I speak to them in parables:

*“Though seeing, they do not see;
though hearing, they do not hear or understand.*

14 In them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah:

*“‘You will be ever hearing but never understanding;
you will be ever seeing but never perceiving.*

Matthew 13:13-14 ^{NIV}

God has made it just a little difficult to make people find God. People can find God if they really want to. In one sense, it’s like finding Waldo. He’s there, in the picture, but you have to want to find him to do so.

E.g. We sing some wonderful Christmas carols that tell the story of Jesus. And I am constantly amazed that people can sing these songs without ever really understanding their message.

Hark! the herald angels sing,
"Glory to the new-born King!
Peace on earth, and mercy mild,
God and sinners reconciled."

God and sinners reconciled. Do people not understand that they need to be reconciled with God? Do people not see that through Jesus we can be reconciled with God? Stop to think about those words. People need to be reconciled with God. That should lead people who are truly seeking God to ask, “How can I be reconciled with God?”

The song goes on to say:

Veiled in flesh, the Godhead see;
Hail, th' incarnate Deity:

Jesus is God, the incarnate deity. God in human flesh. Jesus was not just a great prophet, he is God.

Through Jesus, God and sinners are reconciled. Incredible truths that people sing but they have no understanding.

God wants to get people’s attention, but are they listening?

3. God gets our attention when we truly listen to God

I think most of us, especially us men, have been guilty of hearing but not listening.

When the shepherds went to see the newborn baby, they told Mary what had happened and what the angel had said. Then it says that:

Mary treasured up all these things and pondered them in her heart. Luke 2:19 NIV

Mary responded in two ways that help us hear God when God is trying to get our attention:

First is to treasure up what God says.

This word, ‘*treasure*,’ means to store information in one’s mind for careful consideration; to treat the words as special and important and keep them in mind.

E.g. I have a file in my office of cards, notes, letters and emails people have sent me to encourage me or thank me. Those are very special to me and I treasure them. When I read them, I pay special attention to them.

That’s how Mary responded to the words of the shepherds. She treasured them.

Do you treasure the Bible? Is the Bible special to you? We should look at the Bible and treasure it because it is God speaking to us. I guarantee that when you treasure the Bible and seek God through it, God will get your attention and speak to you.

The other word is ‘*pondered*.’ It describes the thinking that seeks to put things together in an understandable whole. It’s a word that describes a person trying to figure out what it all means and how it applies to oneself. I imagine Mary thought about the words that the angel had earlier said to her, and the words that the angel had said to Joseph, and now, the words that the angel had said to the shepherds. She tried to put all of it together to make sense of what was happening and who this baby was.

To ponder refers especially to the application of God’s word to our lives. We ponder and think about what God is saying to us, and what it means to us. When God wants to get our attention, it’s also because he wants us to respond to him.

Now, what does that look like?

Let me start with those of you who are at the point in your spiritual journey where you are interested in God, but you have not yet made a commitment to totally believe in and follow Jesus. Maybe God is stirring your heart with his words, and you have a sense that what you are hearing is true. E.g. maybe in the words of the carol, Hark the Herald Angels, the phrase, God and sinners reconciled, caught your attention. Grab on to that and think about it. Maybe you have begun to understand that Jesus came and died not just for the sins of the world, but for **your** sins so you can be reconciled with God; that God will forgive your sins and wants to have a relationship with you.

What you need to do is to take that next step. Respond to God and make a commit to follow Jesus.

What about us who already have a relationship with God? God wants to speak to us about many things. He may want to direct our paths in a certain direction. He may want to

point out an area of our life that needs changing. He may just want to remind us of how special we are and how much he loves us.

We need to respond by obeying him.

God wants our attention, but are we listening?

Next Steps:

1. Put yourself in a position to hear God.

That primarily means to read the Bible. Although Christmas is a busy time, make sure you take time to read the Bible.

2. When you hear God, respond by obeying.

When the shepherds heard God's message, they went right away to see this new-born baby. When God gets your attention, respond to him by obeying.