

“Go Tell It On the Mountain” // Isaiah 52:7 // Carols

Intro

A bunch of y’all gave me a hard time because came out and sang the first Carol. Are you going to do that, J.D.? So, here goes (Brandon...)

DPAC

Why DPAC? 2 reasons...

- A) It's good for us a church to have times where people from all of our campuses can be together in a service; and
- B) A special event can provide the perfect catalyst for inviting someone to something different from church. Surveys consistently show that Christmas and Easter are the two times of year that the majority of unchurched people are willing to go to church, and we want to capitalize on that.

Tickets are gone to some services. Exchange via the website?

- If tickets for the service you want to go to are gone, you can check back at summitrdu.com and see people who took too many tickets and are turning them back in, particularly as we get closer to the date.
- Don’t take tons of tickets. I admire your faith, but don’t mess up someone else’s opportunity.
- And, though you DO have to have a ticket to get in, we've done this for 4 years and we haven't had to turn a person away yet because we were out of tickets.

We don’t know exactly who wrote *Go Tell It On the Mountain*. We do know it was a slave song, most likely composed in the South sometime between 1840 and 1860.

The text of the song goes like this:

*While shepherds kept their watching, Over silent flocks by night,
Behold throughout the heavens, There shone a holy light:*

*Go, Tell It On The Mountain, Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, Tell It On The Mountain, That Jesus Christ is born.*

*The shepherds feared and trembled, When lo! above the earth, Rang
out the angel chorus, That hailed our Savior's birth:*

*Down in a lowly manger, the humble Christ was born, and God sent us
salvation, that blessed Christmas morn –*

*He made me a watchman, upon the city wall; and if I am a Christian, I
am the least of all –*

*Go, Tell It On The Mountain, Over the hills and everywhere;
Go, Tell It On The Mountain, That Jesus Christ is born*

The song appears to be based on **two primary passages** of Scripture: First, (obviously), the story of the shepherds in Luke 2; and second, Isa 52:7, where the prophet Isaiah foretells a day when the good news of the Messiah will be announced throughout the whole earth. **Isaiah says,**

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” Isa 52:7

So, the writer of the carol says, ‘*Go to the mountains and tell this good news about Jesus being born!*’ I’ll explain the **importance of the mountain imagery** in a minute, but first know that Paul uses that **same text in Isaiah** as his primary text in establishing the **primary Christian mission**; what Christians call “the Great Commission.”

In Romans 10:14, Paul explains the urgency the gospel—that Jesus had come to save people from every tribe and tongue on earth, but they have to receive his offer to be saved—and concludes:

“How then will they call on him in whom they have not believed? And how are they to believe in him of whom they have never heard? And how are they to hear without someone preaching? ¹⁵ And how are they to preach unless they are sent? As it is written, “How beautiful are the feet of those who preach the good news!” Romans 10:14–5

So, this is a song connects the Christmas story to the Great Commission, and it highlights 3 surprising things about the good news: 1. To whom the good news comes; 2. What the good news brings; and 3. Where the good news sends.

1. To whom the good news comes

The song notes that the message came first to the shepherds: “*While shepherds kept their watching, over silent flocks by night, behold throughout the heavens, there shone a holy light.*”

That the slave who wrote this song felt drawn to the story of the shepherds is not surprising, since shepherds were considered to be the lowest class of people in Jewish society:

- We have the **romanticized version of the nativity**: good looking, strapping young men in cool outfits, with sashes and bandanas, which we assume were cool in a 1st century kind of way, glowing, reverent, clean-shaven faces, humbly looking at the Christ child.
- **Shepherds were basically homeless people**. Shepherding was the least desirable job; the ultimate unskilled labor—the proof of that is they often gave this job to children. “Shepherd boy.”
 - *So when you were a grown man being a shepherd that meant a **total life-fail***. At a party when someone asked you, “*What does your son do?*” No one wanted to answer, “He’s a shepherd!” The next question would be, “*What went wrong?*” It’s like saying, “He plays video games in the basement.”

- Plus, they were **always dirty**. I mean, they stayed outside with animals for weeks at a time. They were the kind of people you could smell before you see.
- And they weren’t considered respectable citizens, since they had to work 7 days a week and therefore couldn’t take the Sabbath off to go to Temple like everyone else.
- Shepherds were **so low in society that their testimony** was not even accepted in court.
- So, needless to say they are not the typical candidates to receive the 1st announcement about the birth of the King of Kings.
 - **I have a friend who is a CEO** of a really successful company here in the Triangle. In 2008 Then-Presidential-Candidate Obama asked if he could announce his candidacy from their office doorstep. Not hard to understand why... big, booming company... looks like an endorsement. That makes sense.
- Why choose to the shepherds to receive this message first?
- *It was to demonstrate from its inception on earth, the nature of the gospel.*
 - In coming to the shepherds, God reached to those everybody considered to be on the bottom; showing that there was no one too broken, too poor, or too insignificant for his kingdom.
- In fact, he prefers the poor and the broken. Why? Because they are in a better position to receive the good news.
 - The essence of sin, you see, is pride—the idea that we don’t really need God. That we are sufficient w/o him.
 - Those who are **rich in money** feel like they have enough money to guarantee tomorrow, so they don’t think much about needing to stay right with God has their security for tomorrow;
 - Those who are **rich in talent or good looks** feel like they have everyone else’s approval, so they don’t think much about God’s.

- Those who are **rich in moral goodness**—respectable—assume that if God is going to accept anyone, he’s going to accept them.

- But this sense of self-sufficiency or respectability is **all an illusion**.
 - One small, microscopic bacteria entering your body could change everything about your life.
 - One of the most famous generals of the Civil War died from a tick bite. Armies could not stop this guy, but one little insect brings him down.
 - One phone call telling you there has been a wreck could destroy everything you cherish most.
 - One unexpected summons into your boss’s office on a Friday afternoon could ruin all your financial prospects.
 - And if you think of yourself as a basically decent person, one honest look into the mirror of God’s word will rid you of that illusion.
 - Sometimes I catch myself comparing myself to others and thinking of myself as pretty good.
 - Jesus said that I had to be so surrendered to him that if he told me to sell everything and give it to the poor I would without a second thought;
 - He told me that my heart had to be so full of love that when someone stole from me my jacket my compassion for them compelled me to offer them my shirt also.
 - He told me my heart had to be so pure that I never even thought lustfully about someone who was not my spouse.
 - Underneath all the religious makeup, I know that I am a dark hearted sinner. Throughout my life, I have been one of the most self-willed, rebellious, deceitful people I’ve known. And maybe that’s just because I see it all up close, but I’ve always thought I knew best and always wanted to do things my own way. The person who has lied to and broken

the most promises to me is me. I am a dark-hearted sinner, and I have no hope of earning God’s favor.

- **So the question is not “How good do you have to be to earn God’s favor.”** (That’s a non-starter.) The only question is, “Do you realize you are so bad that you can never do it?” And shepherds, and slaves, get that better than so-called respectable people.
- **God’s favor has to be received as a gift.** It’s the only way it can be received. It can’t be merited or earned.
 - **Luke 18**... Two men went into the Temple... Which was no righteousness at all.
 - Shepherds, who are forced to stand at the back, get that.
 - **Kharis: always noticing the planes.** Always looking up
 - That’s why the Bible says it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than a rich man to enter heaven...
 - Shepherds and slaves are in a more natural position to know they need grace because they are always looking up.
 - **You don’t have to be a shepherd or a slave to be saved,** but you have to have the heart of one.

2. What the good news brings

Like many Negro spirituals, this song focuses on God’s promise of relief from suffering.

As slaves, they lived in a terrible world, and they knew the birth of Jesus Christ was bringing about a new world in which sin and suffering and slave-masters would no longer reign over them.

“How beautiful upon the mountains are the feet of him who brings good news, who publishes peace, who brings good news of happiness, who publishes salvation, who says to Zion, “Your God reigns.” *Isa 52:7*

Last week Pastor Raudel showed us that **Christmas declares that sin and death and the curse** do not have the last word. He showed us that the most famous Christmas Carol in the world—Joy to the World—was written by a man in the midst of intense suffering, **as a declaration** that sin and suffering would not have the last word!

“Joy to the earth, the Savior reigns! He comes to make his blessings flow *far as the curse is found!*”

The Savior came to reverse the curse wherever it was found. Think about all the places that was for a slave:

- The curse was felt in the shame of their subjugation.
- In the injustice and abuse they endured at the hands of others.
- In the thankless toil.
- In broken families.

The good news declares that all this is temporary, and Jesus would reverse it in establishing a new world.

IMO, we **don't talk about this aspect of the gospel enough.**

- We talk about salvation as God's forgiveness of our sins, his wiping the slate clean. And that it is.
- But it's also healing, and reversal of the curse.

Many people envision heaven as this bodiless, colorless existence where we float around on clouds and play harps.

- A recent study shows that 2/3 of evangelical believers don't think we'll have a body in heaven.¹ But heaven is not a spiritual, body-less experience.

The name for heaven is “the new heavens and new earth” which means it is like the old heavens and old earth, only *new*. Whatever down here is cursed, we have a healed version of up there.

- I love imagining what that is... What does a glorified ribeye taste like? If that's a cursed one, what's the healed one taste like? “I don't think we'll eat meat in heaven.” False. Jesus ate fish after his resurrection. Boom roasted.
- What does the heavenly Grand Canyon. Heavenly Hawaii. I think, “If this is the cursed Hawaii, imagine what the real thing looks like!”
- There is a Heavenly Dean Dome where the Tarheels win every single game. (You say, “Why you always gotta use UNC? Why not use Duke?” Not trying to be biased. Just, by definition, there can be no devils in heaven. You're going to have to check that mascot at the door.”)

Where has the curse touched you? I have been reading Isaiah... This is what the Sovereign LORD says: “(In that day), I will give the signal and they will carry your little sons back to you in their arms; they will bring your daughters on their shoulders.” (Isa 49:22, NLT)

- What does that mean? To the slave, that meant that that family torn apart by injustice would one day be restored.
- It means that the parent who has lost a child to an untimely death will see that son brought back by the angels in their arms or their lost daughters being carried back to them on their shoulders.
- What a day that will be!
- That's good news for shepherds; and slaves, like us.

3. Where the good news sends

- So, this Christian brother of ours, this slave, says, “Go tell this everywhere!”
 - LISTEN: If the good news really means that there is no one too lowly for God to pursue; no one so insignificant for God to overlook; no one so guilty that God will forsake; no one so broken God cannot heal; no one so lost that God cannot find, that he is able to save to the uttermost, then go tell it everywhere!
- Let me explain **the mountain imagery**. In those days, most cities in the Middle East were settled between mountains... When they

¹ Randy Alcorn, talk at TGC 2015.

were waiting for good news, they would look toward the hills because that's the first place you could see the messenger coming. And **if the messenger was carrying some kind of flag** it meant they had won the battle.

- And the **first ones to see the messenger** of good news would be the city watchmen, who were stationed in towers on the wall... **Which is why the writer of *Go Tell It On the Mountain* uses that imagery** in the 5th verse... "He made me a watchman, upon the city wall." We are the ones who announce. I see him! Victory has come!

You see, Isaiah imagines groups of people scattered all over the world, different cities, situations, classes, waiting—overwhelmed and oppressed by the curse, scared of death, without hope... And here comes the messenger to announce, "The battle is over and the Kingdom is restored."

- It reminds me of the scene from the 2nd book of the *Lord of the Rings* (nerd alert!), *The Two Towers*... Aragorn, Theoden, and Legolas (the good guys and their small armies) are trapped by the huge armies of Sauron and about to be destroyed when Aragorn remembers the promise of Gandalf, the good wizard: "*At first light, on the fifth day, look to the East for my coming.*"
- And he looks up to the mountain where the sun is first shining through and there, is Gandalf and the armies of the Rohirrim coming over the crest of the hill bringing rescue and salvation...

There is no group anywhere—no matter how broken or lost—surrounded by whatever mountains of oppression, for whom Jesus has not won the victory. So we go tell it on those mountains, over whatever hills, and *everywhere* to all groups of all peoples in all places!

I know of a pastor up in Newark who a couple of Christmases ago was preaching about the angels appearing to the Shepherds, and he wanted to get out of the cute little nativity scene mindset and find

some way to make it real... So he asked, "Who would Jesus come to today if he came?"

He figured the closest equivalent to the Shepherds in our day would be the homeless, so he decided that week, in preparation for his sermon, rather than just poring through commentaries to live on the streets for a couple of days as a homeless man.² Here's how he shared it with his congregation that Sunday:

- "**On Wednesday of this week** I decided to be homeless on the streets for a day.
- First I realized **I did not have anything to wear.** I could not where my three layer alpine ski jacket... so I went to the thrift store and bought homeless looking clothes."

He said went to **Penn Station** because that's where he most often encountered the homeless he said. He **noticed that the homeless migrated** toward benches and public restrooms. So I slept there.

- "But you can only sleep for about 10–15 minutes at a time because the police will come by and bang on the bench, and make you get up and walk around.
- "Some of the homeless are old; some mentally disabled, a lot of addicts; many had good jobs but some tragedy set them on a tailspin... alcohol and drugs
- **At 3PM, he said, the shelters in Newark** close their doors, so if you're not in by 3 then you're on the streets for the night.

He said that at 11, Penn Station closes its doors. He asked another homeless woman named Milagro what he should do next, and she graciously offered him a nice place by a bridge truss near her to sleep.

"I learned that the first spots to go on the city street are the benches. They are like VIP seating for homeless. Or if you can find a spot next

² Tim Lucas, "Go Tell It On the Mountain," Luke 2:8. Liquid Church, Newark, New Jersey.

to the storm drain, where hot air was blowing out, that was great too.”

She showed me how to sleep. Put down your card board, then your blanket and then lay on it.

- I was pretty uncomfortable with that and so she said sleep on the stairs or against the wall. That way, she explained, no one can attack you from behind.

At 1:00 AM I finally fell asleep, and then someone kicked my boots. It was the guy who goes around cleaning up cigarette butts. He said **OUT! OUT! OUT!**

- At 2:30 AM I saw my first drug deal. All these teenage kids showed up with cash to buy a hit... “They offered it to me,” he said, “and I said, ‘Nah... I mean I gotta preach in 3 days.’”
- The police drove by and paid no attention to us. It was just a normal night in Newark.

“The homeless, it turns out, really never rest.”

I went to offer a woman I saw on the ground a pair of socks. She freaked out, and recoiled. She thought I was going to rape or attack her.”

The next morning, he said, I decided to ask passersby for a buck for coffee. It was like I was invisible. It was like the Red Sea parting around me.

- **“And then I realized at that moment that I am normally on the other side of this equation:** I am the one coming out of the concerts, the games, etc., telling the kids not to pay any mind to these people.
- It was **devastating to be on this side. To be invisible.** Imagine taking this day after day, month after month, maybe even year after year.

- What is it like to live this way for years, and never get to go home like I was able to do? ***What if your only hope is to get the good bench?***”

“The poverty of being unwanted, unloved, and uncared for,” says Mother Theresa, **“is the greatest poverty of them all.”** **Mother Theresa**

These were the ones to **whom** Jesus first came. The **writer of the Carol** says: Don’t they deserve to know? ***Shouldn’t we be scaling the mountains of homelessness to tell them?***

Over Thanksgiving, my oldest two daughters and I took a mission trip to the D.R. When my daughters turn 10, I take them on a mission trip... We go with Compassion, a group that our church partners closely with. Go and visit our sponsored children. In home visit. 3 translators...

- Contrast: My SPONSOR told me I was loved.
- Who shows up on the mountain with beautiful feet to tell them that they are worth something?

Amy Carmichael, missionary to India, ORPHANAGE: *“Does it not stir up our hearts, to go forth and help them, does it not make us long to leave our luxury, our exceeding abundant light, and go to them that sit in darkness?”*

If the good news really means that there is no one too lowly for God to pursue; no one so insignificant for God to overlook; no one so guilty that God will forsake; no one so broken God cannot heal; no one so lost that God cannot find, that he is able to save to the uttermost, then go tell it everywhere!

It was said that **Hudson Taylor could barely stand to be in a church** in England where he as from and hear the sound of 1000 Englishmen singing the praises of God when there were untold numbers of Chinese he knew were in bondage... leave worship services.

We're still sitting around talking about not being called, waiting on some special, Damascus Road experience to tell us to get engaged. William Booth, who founded of the Salvation Army, that ministered to the homeless, used to say,

'Not called!' did you say? 'Refuse to hear the call,' I think you should say. Just put your ear down to the Bible, and hear him bid you go and pull sinners out of the fire of sin. Put your ear down to the burdened, agonized heart of humanity, and listen to its pitiful wail for help. Go stand by the gates of hell, and hear the damned entreat you to go back to their father's house and warn their brothers and sisters not to come there. And then look Christ in the face, whose mercy you have professed to obey, and tell him whether you will join heart and soul and body and circumstances in the march to publish his mercy to the world.'

Not a question of calling, but obedience. *Go tell it on the mountain.*

Whom have you told? Who are you telling?

As your pastor, this is on my mind. The sin of SODOM AND GOMORRAH. I want to know that each of you has done your part in scaling these mountains to tell them.

- Not all of you are called specifically to the homeless; not all to go to China; but all of you are called to something. The question is no longer if you are called, only where and how.
- For some, the 1st mountain to scale is just walking across the street and having the conversation.
- **You see, the spiritual condition of your neighbors is the same as the physical condition of the homeless.**

Who are you telling? I want us to pray and ask God that together this morning...

You see, **I was like the homeless, spiritually speaking...** I was restless; I saw the solace of a park bench in the city of sin as VIP seating... That was where I was and **Jesus found me!**

And now I owe it to them to go and tell them. Whom are you telling?

