



## **Selah: Stop. Look, Listen: December 24, 2023**

The Lord be with you.

Wow. Can you believe it? It's Christmas Eve. I just love this day. From the time I was a little boy, the trajectory of my whole year was headed towards this day. And on this Christmas Eve, there was so many verses of scripture. I wish I had time to share with you so many wonderful Christmas Eve stories that, that I hardly know where to begin.

But I do want to tell you a Christmas Eve story that the great radio personality, Paul Harvey told and a lot of Paul Harvey's life was shaped by the fact that it was on a Christmas Eve when he was only three years old, that his father who was a policeman was murdered by a gunman's bullet. And one of the great moments of my life was in the year 2009 when I was a chaplain at the Mayo Hospital here in the Phoenix area that I was called to come and to pray with Paul Harvey shortly before he died.

Paul Harvey told of the time that there was an emptiness in his life. There was an incompleteness that well, he just couldn't explain because outwardly everything was going great for Paul Harvey. But then he was vacationing in Cave Creek Arizona. And he and his wife, Angel went to this little church. He said there were only about a dozen or so people there seated on wooden folding chairs and Paul Larry said that it was then and there that he rededicated his life to Jesus Christ. And from that moment of rededicating his life to Jesus Christ, he said that he had a peace that passes all understanding and heaven too.

Ok. That was Paul Harvey. Now, Paul Harvey's Christmas Eve story that he titled Simply the Birds, the man to whom I'm going to introduce you was not a Scrooge. He was a kind decent, mostly good man, generous to his family, upright in his dealings with other people. But he just didn't believe all that incarnation stuff that churches talk about at Christmas time. And it just didn't make any sense to him and he was too honest to pretend otherwise, he just couldn't swallow the Jesus story about God coming to earth as a man. I'm sorry to upset you. He told his wife, but I'm not gonna go with you and the Children to church this Christmas Eve. He told her that he would feel like a hypocrite. So it would be better if he just stayed home, but that he would wait up for them. And so he stayed and his wife and Children went to the midnight Christmas Eve service.



### water from rock

Well, shortly after the family drove away in the car, snow began to fall and he went to the window to watch the flurries getting heavier and heavier. And then he went back to his fireside chair and began to read. Well, minutes later he was startled by a thudding sound and then another and then another sort of thump or thud. And, well, at first he thought someone must be throwing snowballs against his living room window. But when he went to the front door to investigate, he found a flock of birds huddled miserably in the snow. They'd been caught in a storm and a desperate search for shelter had tried to fly through his large landscape window.

Well, they couldn't just let the poor creatures lie there and freeze. And, and so he remembered the barn where his Children stapled their pony. Well, that would provide warm shelter if he could just direct the birds into the barn. So quickly the man puts on a coat and galoshes and he tramped through the deepening snow to the barn and he opened wide the doors and turned on a light, but the birds did not come in.

So I figured that well, food would entice them into the barn. So the man hurries back to the house, fetched bread, crumbs, sprinkled them on the snow, making a, a trail to the lighted wide open doorway of the stable. But to his dismay, the birds ignored the breadcrumbs and they continued to flap around helplessly in the snow. So I tried catching them that didn't work. He tried showing them into the barn by walking around them, waving his arms and, and instead they scattered in every direction except into the well lighted barn. And then he realized that they were afraid of him to them. The reason I'm a strange and terrifying creature, if only I could think of some way to let them know that they can trust me that I'm not trying to hurt them but to help them.

But how, how because any move he made just frightened them, confused them. They would not follow him. It would not be led or showed the way because they feared him. Hm. He thought if only I could be a bird, if only I could mingle with them and speak their language and then I could tell them do not be afraid, then I could show them the way to the safe, safe warm barn. But I, I, I'd have to become one of them so they could see and hear and understand.

Now, at that moment, the church bells began to ring and the sound of the bells reached his ears above the sounds of the wind and the man stood there listening to the bells. Oh, come, let us adore him. Oh, come, let us adore him Christ the Lord. And listening to the bells peeling the glad tidings of Christmas. The man sank to his knees in the snow and today we sink to our knees and we adore Jesus Christ, the Lord. Oh, come, let a Adoum. I'll be with you again on the other side of Christmas.

I am Tim Smith, a fellow traveler. Thank you for listening. Until next time.