

Wise Men Still Seek Him

As we come to this time of year, I'd like us to enjoy a somewhat deeper look at those famous 'wise men' that came to visit the Lord Jesus. From that, I'd like to point out that *Wise Men Still Seek Him*.

It's first interesting to note that the account of the wise men coming to visit Jesus is recorded only by Matthew. Why is that? Well, each Gospel had a different audience and a different emphasis. Mark was essentially written to Romans. It focuses on Jesus the servant, the Lord was a servant who came to give His life a ransom for many. Romans were practical, and Mark emphasised Jesus' deeds. Luke was really written to Greeks, and it emphasises Jesus as the Perfect Man. Greeks were interested in that Perfect Man, they loved philosophy, so Luke spent a lot more time recoding Jesus' teachings. John wrote his Gospel to essentially the whole world, with the explicit purpose of showing people that Jesus was God in the flesh, and that salvation is in Him. John's Gospel supplements the others, and chooses the signs, the discourses and the teachings that emphasise Jesus as the Son of God. Well, Matthew, the Gospel we're looking at, had a different audience and a different emphasis. Matthew was essentially written to Jews, with the purpose of proving that Jesus was the promised Messiah. Matthew was writing to show the Jews that Jesus was indeed their King, though many had misunderstood and rejected Him. Matthew frequently quotes from the prophetic writers and shows how Jesus fulfilled those prophecies. Well, it is not surprising then to find the account of the wise men coming to see Jesus being recorded in Matthew. The whole incident proves Jesus is King. He was worshipped even while still a baby.

Well, let's get a bit of background on these men. Who were they? Well, the Bible doesn't say exactly. People are fond of speaking about the 'Three Wise Men'. But the Bible doesn't say there were three; that is assumed because there were three gifts. There could have been two wise men, and there could have been two hundred. Historians tell us that a party like this, a group of astrologers travelling from a far country, would usually have been a large party. The Bible doesn't name them, nor does it say where they were from. We assume Babylon, because they were watching the stars, which was a specialty of Babylonians. All the Bible tells us is that they were wise. The Greek word for wise emphasises the fact that they were foreigners, whose occupation was that of wise men, teachers, priests, physicians, astrologers, seers, interpreters of dreams, augers, soothsayers. However, I'd like to suggest that they were wise in the usual sense of the word for a few reasons. They are the same reasons that a person can be called wise today.

I. They were wise because they were searching for the right thing

Listen to verse 2. They come to Herod and say, "Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him."

Fascinating. Read between the lines here. Here is a group of men that have traveled across the heat of the desert to find someone who has recently been born, so that they can *worship* Him. They are searching for a King. Now, if that doesn't strike you as unusual, ask yourself if you would travel a few months to find a baby born who will be the next

president. It was their profession to interpret the stars. Whatever the star of Bethlehem was, God placed it there to specifically attract these men's attention. They correctly interpreted the star as the signal that a great King had been born. Now consider how they could have reacted. They could have set up an army to come and kill this King before He grows up. They could have been rather casual and indifferent about the news. They could have sent their best wishes via a messenger. No, these men come looking for a King, to worship.

That's an extraordinary response. In the spiritual realm, it's a supernatural response. Do you know that these wise men in a sense represent a person that God is drawing to Himself? Consider that mankind is much like Herod and Jerusalem. Verse 3 "When Herod the king had heard *these things*, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him." When selfish man hears that God is the true King, he is troubled. In his heart, man wants to be the Lord of the universe. In his heart, man wants to receive worship, to control his own life, to be a subject of no one, a ruler of himself. Man essentially daily imitates the sin of Lucifer in Isaiah 14: we say, "I will". Not God's will, my will. I will live life my way. Man is a little Satan, trying to exalt his throne above the stars of God, saying, I will be like the most High. You may not think these things consciously, but every word, thought and deed you do outside of obedience to God is the rebel in you living as his own lord. And man of himself will not go seeking for a King. He wants to be King. He is a Herod, troubled at the news that Jesus is the true king, and that to live life apart from worshipping Him is disobedience. Man in this state will not seek God. God must take the initiative and draw people. John 6:44, "No man can come to me, except the Father which hath sent me draw him". Romans 3:11 "There is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God." Man, in his heart, is truly like Herod. He is threatened at the news that Jesus is Lord and demands obedience. What did Herod do? We know He sent a command to kill all the children in the area of Bethlehem. A perfect picture of man. What did man do when God came as a man? We killed him. The cross is the epitome of man's hatred for God. "We will not have this man to rule over us" is the cry of humanity. And though the cross was God's greatest triumph, it was also the perfect picture of what man thinks of God. Remember Christ's parable of the servants who kept killing the messengers that the lord sent to them, until finally he sent his son? The servants said, "Let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours". Well, that in a nutshell describes the human heart. We figure if we can ignore Jesus, discredit Him, kill Him, avoid Him, then his inheritance will be ours. The right to rule – to be a lord – will be ours. But it's a false hope. Every knee will bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father. So you can understand how seeking Jesus as a king is something that God must initiate in our hearts, or our rebellion will simply keep us regarding him as a threat. So wisdom is first in seeking the right thing: a King to worship. Wisdom is admitting that you need a Master, that you are a creature, created by a Creator, requiring His maintenance, care and leadership in your life. That's the beginning of wisdom, to seek a relationship with this King. Doesn't Proverbs say that? 9:10, "The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy *is* understanding." Has God initiated a desire in your heart for His Son as Your King? Don't resist Him. He will be King no matter what. The wise men did not resist; they

came to worship. Herod resisted, and hoped he could destroy Jesus. Herod was the fool, the wise men were true to their title.

II. They were wise because they searched in the right place

This is something that is often lost on us as we read the incident through quickly. These men see the star. However they do it, they interpret correctly that it has to do with the Jews. Well, they don't go looking in Babylon then. They head for the capital of Judea, Jerusalem. From there, they go straight to the one who can help them, the current king. It's quite bold, isn't it, to go to the current king and ask him where the king of the Jews has been born? They were looking in the right place. Now, Herod understood that they were not just talking about any king, they were looking for the Jewish Messiah. It says so in verse 4, "And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born." Herod gathers the religious rulers and asks them for the exact location where Messiah should be born. Well, Scripture did give the exact location. Micah 5:2 says, "But thou, Bethlehem Ephratah, *though* thou be little among the thousands of Judah, *yet* out of thee shall he come forth unto me *that is* to be ruler in Israel; whose goings forth *have been* from of old, from everlasting" That's what they quote for Herod, and now Herod pretends that he wants to worship Jesus and so sends them as a sort of spy, to avoid attracting too much attention. Of course, his intention is to kill the Messiah, so he can continue to rule, a proof that absolute power corrupts absolutely if ever you needed it. What I think is important here is how these wise men looked in the right place. God first directed them in a general sense, and then when they listened, He directed them specifically. God used a star in the east to attract their attention. They interpreted the sign which was tailor-made for them and their system. It was a general call to pay attention. When they heeded that call, the general revelation became more specific. The general call led them to the right place: Jerusalem. Well, there the direction became specific as the Scriptures were opened. As the Scriptures were opened they had specific direction as to where to find Christ. From there, God personally led them right to Christ, "When they had heard the king, they departed; and, lo, the star, which they saw in the east, went before them, till it came and stood over where the young child was." ¹⁰When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy." Wisdom starts when we look for the right thing: a King. But it continues by looking in the right place. Looking for a King amongst humans is foolish. Looking for a king inside yourself as the self-esteem proponents tell us to do is foolish. If you are truly interested in God as your king, God will direct you. Like the wise men, He will first direct you in a general sense. Romans chapter 1 tells us this in verse 20, "For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, *even* his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:" The created world tells the searching man that God exists. It tells him of God's great power, of His eternality and how as a creature he must be accountable to this God. God goes further. In Chapter 2:15, Paul tells us the following, "Which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and *their* thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another" Paul says that all people have an innate sense of right and wrong. This too, is God's general revelation of Himself to mankind. When man knows it's wrong to murder, he must ask, "But how do I know that?"

Who put that ‘law’ in my heart”? Through creation and conscience, God shows man that He is. Like the star in the east, it is enough for the man to say, “there is something in this. I need to investigate. God honours a heart searching for more. A missionary told me of a report from the field of how a man saved in a remote tribe had once looked up into the stars and said, “Whoever You are that made all this, if You are there, I would like to know You.” It was not too long after that, that missionaries arrived, with the Gospel of Jesus Christ, learned the language and the man was saved. By God’s grace, that man understood something of general revelation. By God’s grace, in responding to that, God gave Him more and opened his eyes.

That’s what the wise men did. They took the general revelation and followed it up, going to Jerusalem. There, being in the right place, God gave them special revelation. Special or specific revelation is found in the Bible. You will not find it anywhere else. There is revealed God’s plan for humanity. Many see the general revelation of God and go searching in the wrong place. They look inside, they look to false religion, they look to dead men and ideas that will not save. Wise men open the Bible. And like the wise men who believed Micah 5:9 and headed for Jerusalem, those who will believe the Bible are led straight to the Son of God, Jesus Christ. God led those men now specifically to the house where Jesus was. So then faith *cometh* by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.” Romans 10:17. Jesus is the wisdom of God; any wise human is looking for Him, and looking for Him in the Bible.

III. They were wise because they searched diligently

Consider how long and tough the journey must have been from their home country to Jerusalem. The dangers, the discomfort, the sacrifice. These were not casual passer-bys, they were earnest seekers. God says in Hebrews 11:5, “But without faith *it is* impossible to please *him*: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and *that* he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.” Diligently seeking Him. Many people today think that following Christ is a casual pray-a-prayer and carry on with your life thing. They think that they can add Christ to their lives without a bump to their way of doing things. He is Saviour, but not a Lord. No, just as these men earnestly sought Christ, so the wise man counts the cost in coming to Christ. He wants a King; He has looked in the right place, but now He does not handle this issue flippantly or casually. Jesus warned, “And whosoever doth not bear his cross, and come after me, cannot be my disciple.”²⁸For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have *sufficient* to finish *it*?²⁹Lest haply, after he hath laid the foundation, and is not able to finish *it*, all that behold *it* begin to mock him,³⁰Saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. So likewise, whosoever he be of you that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my disciple.” It’s not that salvation is an exchange, but salvation is the death of your old life. Self-death not the payment for salvation – it is the process of salvation. These wise men no doubt considered carefully the cost, dangers and sacrifices necessary to go and see the king. But they weighed it up and chose correctly. For as Jesus said, “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”(Matthew 16:25) Proverbs tells us that seeking diligently for wisdom is the key to finding it, “Yea, if thou criest after

knowledge, *and* liftest up thy voice for understanding; ⁴If thou seekest her as silver, and searchest for her as *for* hid treasures; ⁵Then shalt thou understand the fear of the LORD, and find the knowledge of God.” Proverbs 2:3-5

So, these men were wise in that they were searching for the right thing, a King, they were searching in the right place, the Bible, and they searched diligently. Finally.

IV. They were wise because they responded correctly

“And when they were come into the house, they saw the young child with Mary his mother, and fell down, and worshipped him: and when they had opened their treasures, they presented unto him gifts; gold, and frankincense, and myrrh..” They rejoice over God’s special revelation leading them right to Christ. They come to a house; it couldn’t have been a stable as they probably arrived a while after he was born. They come in and what do they do? They fall down and worship Him. Not Mary, not Joseph – Jesus. Like O.T saints they looked forward in anticipation as to what He would be. We look back as to what He was and did and presently look at what He is. Seeing a young child, these wise men respond in faith, knowing that this will indeed be the Messiah. Their faith is not a simple head-knowledge. Theirs is not a dead faith. Theirs is a faith that produces good works. They fall down in submission to Him. Imagine that: grown men, submitting to a child. That takes faith.

It is one thing to be seeking a King. It is one thing to look in the right place: the Bible. It is one thing to even seek diligently for Him and count the cost. You can do all that and still be a fool if your response is wrong. If you casually walk on. Or if you agree He is the King, but do not bow the knee. How foolish these men would have been if they had traveled all the way to the actual presence of Jesus, and upon seeing Him, simply turn back and walk out. But that is exactly what millions of people do. God’s general and special revelation lead them right to the Person of Christ, and they turn back without repenting and trusting in Him as Lord and Saviour. These men were wise: they opened up their treasures and brought out gold, frankincense and myrrh. Myrrh was used to preserve bodies when embalmed. It was a picture of Christ’s past ministry: His death on the cross. It was a picture of Christ as the true prophet that Moses predicted would be the Messiah. Frankincense was a sweet perfume used in incense. It pictures Christ as our High Priest now in heaven: interceding for us: His present ministry. Gold was given to Kings. It showed Christ’s Deity and predicted His future as the earth’s King. The three gifts perfectly picture the true nature of Christ: which is Greek for Maschiach or Messiah, the Prophet, Priest and King. The wise man comes to Jesus and believes He was truly God in the flesh: Christ the Prophet. He accepts Christ’s death and resurrection as His own for the remission of sins – Christ the Priest. He bows the knee to Christ as His new Lord – Christ the King. This is a wise response to Jesus Christ.

Well, the Bible says, “And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.” They didn’t act the same way they came. They obeyed God, not Herod, like a saved man who obeys God, not self.

Wise men still seek Him. They seek the right thing – a King to reign over us, to sort out our sin and self-imposed chaos. They seek in the right place – the Bible. God directs through general and special revelation. When they respond to general revelation, He gives more, in the form of special revelation in the Word. They seek diligently, counting the cost of following this King, Jesus Christ. But having decided to do so, they respond correctly: they receive Him as Prophet, Priest and King, as Saviour and Lord. They do not continue life as before; they are forever changed.

Are you wise? This day, “Wisdom crieth without; she uttereth her voice in the streets: ²She crieth in the chief place of concourse, in the openings of the gates: in the city she uttereth her words, *saying*, ²²How long, ye simple ones, will ye love simplicity? and the scorers delight in their scorning, and fools hate knowledge? ²³Turn you at my reproof: behold, I will pour out my spirit unto you, I will make known my words unto you.” Come to Christ: today is the day of salvation.