

WORSHIP

The Christian's Highest Occupation

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CHAPTER THREE

THE MEANING OF WORSHIP: THE WISE MEN

B. Our next instance of worship as giving to God is that of the wise men (Matthew 2:1-12).

“Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem, 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. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

“And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.

“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. When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceeding great joy. 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. And being warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed into their own country another way.”

Of the purpose of their long journey from the east, there is no doubt, for they inquired:

“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” (v. 2).

As we concentrate our attention on these men whose mission was the worship of the Son of God, several things impress us:

(1) *That worship is an act of those who are wise*

As to the number of these men, we do not know, for Scripture does not inform us; but as to their description, we are left in no doubt. They were “wise” men. Though the worldly-wise may sneer and dub the Christian a fool, yet God views him as being wise in Christ. It has been well said that “nine-tenths of wisdom consists of being wise in time!”

God’s complaint regarding Israel was: **“O that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would consider their latter end!”** (Deuteronomy 32:29).

The first glimmerings of spiritual sanity are seen in a person when he is made to realize his true condition as a lost and guilty sinner, and turns to the Lord in true repentance and faith. This is what is implied by being **“made wise unto salvation”** (II Timothy 3:15).

Modern education makes no provision for the acquisition of spiritual wisdom. In most of the institutions devoted to so-called “higher learning,” the fact of God’s reality and His revelation through His word is scarcely ever mentioned, except perhaps in ridicule. In this respect they have filled the description of those mentioned in Romans 1:22: **“Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools”**

No man is truly wise, however great his stock of worldly wisdom may be, or however many his degrees of learning;

- Until he has put God first in his consciousness,
- Made the word of God the supreme authority of his life,
- Come to know Christ as his own personal Saviour and Lord.

Only then, like these wise men, will he be in the position and condition to worship. God’s estimation of the wisdom of this world, divorced from a knowledge of Himself, has been thoroughly gone into, and should be carefully and prayerfully pondered by every child of God.

“For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent. Where is the wise? where is the scribe? where is the disputer of this world? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world? For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom: But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness; But unto them which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called: But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; And base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are: That no flesh should glory in his presence.

“But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption: That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord” (I Corinthians 1:18-31).

(2) That worship calls for Divine guidance

These men were led by a star in the heavens, until they were brought into the presence of the Son of God, to present their gifts in worship. The application of this to the present day is surely obvious.

If we would worship God as we should, then we must not only be **“made wise unto salvation;”** but we must have a heavenly, authoritative and infallible guide in the matter of our worship. Needless to say, this guide is the Bible, the Divinely inspired word of God.

It is this book which the indwelling Holy Spirit uses to lead the believer into a knowledge and appreciation of all truth: **“Howbeit when he, the Spirit of truth, is come, he will guide you into all truth: for he shall not speak of himself; but whatsoever he shall hear, that shall he speak: and he will show you things to come. He shall glorify me: for he shall receive of mine, and shall show it unto you. All things that the Father hath are mine: therefore said I, that he shall take of mine, and shall show it unto you” (John 16:13-15).**

Wise indeed is that believer who, like the magi of old, is not content to be guided by the traditions of his fathers, however hoary with antiquity; or even “the dictates of his own conscience;” but who rests not until he has a **“thus saith the Lord,”** for both the assurance of his salvation and the manner of his worship.

(3) That worship necessitates both separation and renunciation

These men, at God’s call to worship, and led by the star, left their country, homes and loved ones and became strangers and pilgrims. Between them and the place to which God was leading them were many weary miles of desert travel. For the sake of the One whom they wished to worship, they turned their backs on the comforts of civilization. They counted the price well worth while when, at long last, they were ushered into the presence of Deity clothed with humanity and prostrated themselves in adoration before Him.

Likewise, he who would worship God in accordance with those principles laid down in His word, must be prepared to suffer for his whole-hearted obedience to Divine guidance.

He may, and probably will, find himself opposed, at every turn, by his nearest friends and relatives. Some have had to face the prejudiced opposition and even persecution of highly organized religious systems; while others have had to cut across the long established customs of their particular society circle.

The path of wholehearted obedience to God’s word has never been cheap, or easy to the flesh; but the compensating joy of obedience more than makes up for the sacrifice involved.

(4) That worship calls for both concentration of mind and determination of will

These wise men, after their long and arduous journey, finally arrived in Jerusalem, **“the city of the great King.”**

Instead of finding themselves in the congenial atmosphere of glad expectation of their coming Messiah and King, they discovered, to their astonishment and chagrin, that the very people whose King they had come to worship were not only unaware of His arrival, but manifested the twin evils of apathy and antipathy to their mission!

“Beautiful for situation, the joy of the whole earth, is mount Zion, on the sides of the north, the city of the great King” (Psalm 48:2).

Blank stares greeted their query: **“Where is he that is born King of the Jews?”**

Apparently the star, which had attracted and led these wise men, possessed no significance to the leaders of Israel. We are told that both Herod the King and **“all Jerusalem with him,”** were **“troubled”** at this question.

What should have been **“the Hope of Israel,”** became an annoyance, for it disturbed their smug complacency.

These religious leaders of Israel could turn to the holy Scriptures at Herod’s command, and quote the prophecy of Micah regarding the place of Christ’s birth; but we do not hear of one of them accompanying the wise men to Bethlehem, or joining with them in their worship of the Messiah!

Such was the apathy of the nation which God had selected for this very purpose! **“Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises; Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen”** (Romans 9:4-5).

Not only were the magi faced by indifference but, in the case of Herod, by opposition veiled by hypocrisy. This arch fiend, well named “the bloody,” plotted the destruction of this child, whom he feared would occupy the throne he had gained by usurpation.

How good it is to note that neither the apathy of Israel nor the antipathy of Herod affected these wise men. They had concentrated their minds on their mission of finding and worshipping Christ. This, coupled with their determination of will to allow nothing to hinder them, finally resulted in the realization of their quest. The believer, who seeks to worship God in a manner well pleasing to Him, will also discover his need of these two virtues. This concentration of mind is not easy, but it must be rigidly practiced, lest distracting, wayward and unlawful thoughts are allowed to rob God of the worship due to His name.

Determination of will is also essential if the opposition of that triumvirate of evil: the Devil, the world and the flesh, is to be overcome.

- The Devil, with his host of wicked spirits, will do his best to hinder.
- The world, with its pleasures, riches and cares, will combine to stifle the Heaven-born desire to worship.
- The flesh, with its love of ease, self-esteem and self-indulgence, will seek to erect a barrier that will hinder the believer from “**entering into the holiest**” to pour out his heart in worship to God.

(5) That worship is accompanied by joy

We are told that after they had been sent on their way to Bethlehem, the star again became their guide until it “**stood over the place where the young child was.**”

This further token of Divine leading and approval caused them to “**rejoice with exceeding great joy**” (v. 10).

From this we may surely learn that occupation with the Son of God not only leads to worship, but fills the worshipper with a holy, indescribably joy, that almost amounts to rapture.

David sensed this long ago and said:

“**In thy presence is fulness of joy, and at thy right hand are pleasures for evermore**” (Psalm 16:11).

In Psalm 43:4 he says: “**I will go unto the altar of God, unto God, my exceeding joy: yea upon the harp will I praise thee, O God my God.**”

When the Lord appeared to His disciples, after His resurrection, we are informed, in a triumph of understatement: “**Then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord**” (John 20:20).

The humanly-conceived religious systems of earth are characterized largely by the element of fear and dread of the false deity, whom its devotees seek to propitiate by their prayers, works and offerings. Christianity, on the contrary, is characterized by joy.

The believer, assured of his eternal blessedness and “**acceptance in the Beloved,**” is enabled to “**joy in God through the Lord Jesus Christ**” (Romans 5:11). This “**joy of the Lord, which is our strength,**” must not be confused with that hilarity of spirit which the careless and Godless world exhibits on those occasions when he is able to banish God from his thoughts, and shut his eyes to the fact of his sinfulness and the dread consequences of dying in that condition.

(6) That worship is conditioned upon seeing the Son of God

It was when they saw the Lord Jesus that they fell down in adoration before Him.

It is only when, by faith, the believer sees and is occupied with the One, through Whom the Father has been pleased to reveal Himself in all the glory of His Divine attributes, that he is enabled to worship as he should.

It was said of Christ: **“No man hath seen God at any time; the only begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared Him”** (John 1:18).

It was the Son that “told Him out.” All that can be seen of the Father is through the Son, and all that can be experienced of the Father is through the Holy Spirit.

Thus the glorious tri-unity of the eternal Godhead: Father, Son and Holy Spirit, is revealed before the wondering and worshipping hearts of His redeemed people.

It is sadly possible for the Christian to have his spiritual vision beclouded, either through carelessness of walk, worldliness of life, or unjudged and unconfessed sin. In such a case, no worship ascends from the altar of his soul.

Spurgeon had this in mind when he wrote his beautiful communion hymn:

“If now, with eyes defiled and dim,
We see the signs, but see not Him;
O may His love the scales displace,
And bid us see Him face to face!”

How often, like the two doubtful and discouraged disciples on their way to Emmaus, the eyes of our hearts are veiled, so that we do not realize the presence of the Lord: **“But their eyes were holden that they should not know him”** (Luke 24:16).

Paul prayed for the believers in Ephesus that: **“the eyes of their understanding might be enlightened”** (Ephesians 1:18).

As the presence of Christ is sensed, and His beauties and glories apprehended by the soul, it will not be long before the believer is lost in wonder and worship.

The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks of this glorious sight, and says: **“But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honor”** (Hebrews 2:9).

Miss Thompson’s beautiful hymn summarizes this thought:

“Gazing on the Lord in glory,
While our hearts in worship bow;
There we read the wondrous story
Of the cross, its shame and woe.

Gazing on it we adore Thee,
Blessed, precious, holy Lord!
Thou, the Lamb, alone are worthy --
This be earth’s and heaven’s accord!”

(7) That worship is a presentation of our gifts to God

We read that these wise men “**presented unto Him gifts, gold, frankincense and myrrh.**”

The typical significance of these gifts is beautiful.

- Gold speaks of Deity, as a study of the Tabernacle makes plain.
- Frankincense gives forth its perfume only as it is brought into contact with fire.
- Myrrh speaks of suffering, and is associated with the death and burial of our Lord.

Thus these wise men, by the gifts they presented to Him, typically expressed:

First, their faith in His essential and eternal Deity;

Second, their appreciation of the fragrance of His sinless life which should ascend, as a sweet perfume, to His Father;

Third, their estimation of the virtue and value of His vicarious sufferings, by which the redemption of humanity should be accomplished.

Every believer may well profit by their example as he comes to God in worship.

Nothing delights the Father more than to receive, from His people, the gifts of their appreciation of His Son as they must upon Him.

- They may think of Him in the aspect of His official glories, as possessing full Deity, equal and eternal with the Father, and the Holy Spirit.
- They may meditate on His moral glories, as the perfect Man on earth, who fully and perfectly translated all the will of His Father into the terms of actual life, thus glorifying Him on earth.
- They may be occupied with His redemptive glories, which He acquired by the substitutionary sacrifice of Himself upon the cross, and concerning which God has signified His full acceptance, by raising Him from the dead, and glorifying Him at His own right hand.

In whatever aspect Christ is contemplated, it always results in worship to God.

May it be ours to follow the example of these wise men in their quest, and allow nothing and no one to turn us aside, until, led by the Spirit of God through the Word, we are brought consciously into the presence of the Son of God and present the gift of our worship to the Son and to the Father, who “**seeketh worshippers to worship him in Spirit and in truth**” (John 4:23-24).

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