

Hope for the Nations, Part 2

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[0 : 0 0] Well, we're back to our passage. I said I would give the final point this morning, and we're going to do that. Matthew chapter 2, we're in that section where the wise men show up!

and what happens there. So, once more, Father, in Jesus' name, as we reflect once more on this passage, Lord, may we see Christ and his glory and his majesty and may we be in wonder and awe and may we, like the Magi, worship him.

Use your unworthy servant to make this clear. In Jesus' name. Now, after Jesus was in Bethlehem in Judea in the days of Herod and the king, behold, wise men from the east came to Jerusalem, saying, Where is he who has been born king of the Jews?

For he saw his star when it rose and hath come to worship him. When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him. And assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them when the Christ was to be born.

They told him, In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written by the prophet, And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah, from you, for from you shall come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.

[1 : 3 1] And Herod, some of the wise men secretly, notice that, secretly, and ascertained from them what time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem, saying, Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word that I too may come and worship him.

After listening to the king, they went on their way, and behold, the star that they had seen when it rose went before them until it came to rest over the place where the child was.

When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy. And going into the house, they saw the child with Mary, his mother, and they fell down and worshipped him.

Then opening their treasures, they offered him gifts of gold, frankincense, and myrrh. But being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

That is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. Please be seated. Last time we were here with the Magi, we saw them as men seeking hope.

[2 : 5 4] That's what kept them going all that time throughout the desert to find the Christ was hope. Hope must be sought, and the hope sought must be able to sustain the seeker, or it is a false hope.

Hope for life and death is only found in Jesus. I'm reminded of the Heidelberg Catechism, that first question, what is your only comfort in life and in death, it says.

And they answer briefly, just part of it, that I am not my own, but belong body and soul in life and in death to my faithful Savior, Jesus Christ.

That is hope. Jesus is the hope of the nations in life and in death. So our first two points from last time, if you remember, we saw that hope seeks Christ, and then hope in Christ is opposed.

Today, the final point, hope in Christ is always rewarded. that's what we see when the wise men show up in verse 9, beginning of verse 9 down in verse 12, they go, the star returns, and it goes before them, and it came to rest over the place where the child was.

[4 : 1 6] And when they saw it, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy and went in the house to see this marvel. Now again, the star, people speculate about the star.

I've heard so many scientific theories about the star. It's Jupiter and another planet in conjunction. Who cares? Really, don't get stuck on what the star is.

It probably wasn't even a true star. It seemed to move. That's what it seemed to. I believe it was the glory of God, like the pillar of fire that guided Israel in the wilderness.

The Bible says he dwells in unapproachable light. Then it says Jesus is the light of the world. God is light. In him there's no darkness.

So I'm convinced that it was just the glory of God. As the apostle John said of the word in John chapter 1, verse 9, he is the true light which gives light to everyone was coming into the world and the star heralded by whatever it was.

[5 : 23] God rewarded their seeking. They entered the house. Again, we see some of our songs, we sung one today, and traditions have taken poetic license.

His family is not at the manger anymore. They got upgraded. They're now in a house. How long they were in that house, we don't know, but they're in the house by the time the Magi show up. It could be up to two years. They were in that house. Evidently, Jesus was probably not an infant anymore. But they stand before their king, the hope of the nations.

God rewards the seekers. Listen, he rewards the seekers with hope in himself. He is what they were seeking.

He is the hope in personified. Remember what Jeremiah 29 said? For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.

[6 : 33] Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will hear you. You will seek me and find me. When you seek me with all your heart, I will be found by you, declares the Lord.

The wise men, the magi, exemplify this. Here are men seeking Christ, seeking hope in the king with all their heart, and God keeps his word.

He rewards them with himself. He is found, he is always found by true seekers. Because he is the one who seeks the seeker first.

Remember, as our Lord said, or will say, to the woman of Samaria in John chapter 4, verse 23, the hour is coming and is now here when the true worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth, for the Father is seeking such people to worship him.

The Father is always seeking worshipers, and when he seeks worshipers, when he seeks you, you come a-seeking. and he says, I'll be right here.

[7 : 47] You will find me, and you will find him in his son. And worship, worship is what the magi give. This is the only proper response in the presence of the living God.

I think this is also proof they believe they were in the presence of deity. Though that word worship can be applied to earthly dignitaries, I do believe that it is sincerely worship that we know of.

And joy-filled worship in the visible presence of God is the greatest reward and honor any sinner could hope to experience.

There's nothing better than this, brothers and sisters, except in the new heavens and new earth when we'll see him fully as he is. Family, this is the reward.

God himself is our reward in his presence to fall before him on our face. That's what Christmas is about, falling before God, before on our face, before Jesus, acknowledging that he has come.

[8 : 59] They opened three gifts, which has led, like I said last time, to the unsubstantiated belief that there were three magi. No proof of that. But the gifts do display their knowledge of the one they worship.

This mic sounds really loud to me. Does it sound really loud to you? It sounds, can we just, just a little bit down? It's just, I'm hearing boom and I'm boom enough. Now listen, many have suggested the symbolism in these various gifts, right?

Gold was the medal of the kings, beautiful, rare, and expensive. Frankincense, a perfume used in worship, symbolizing the Lord's deity. Myrrh, used as perfume, embalming, and an anesthetic.

Jesus was giving myrrh on the cross, by the way, as an anesthetic. He refused it, emphasizing our Lord's humanity and death. That's what people say, but whether they're symbolic or not is besides the point.

I think R.C. Sproul was right. The Magi brought lavish gifts to Christ because they believed he was worthy of their sacrifice and honor.

[10 : 12] They brought the best. They didn't bring trinkets. They didn't bring little, they didn't bring fake jewelry, fake metal.

They brought the most precious they could have. And how much they brought, we don't know, but it wasn't just a little bit. Let me ask you a question. I'm going to leave it with you though.

What gift do you believe the Lord is worthy of from you? Let that settle. But even more so, the giving of these gifts fulfills scripture.

We read part of it this morning. Isaiah chapter 60, 1 through 3, but I'm going to read verse 6 too, but remember these verses. Arise, shine, for your light has come.

Wow. And the glory of the Lord has risen upon you. Sounds like that star or whatever. For behold, darkness shall cover the earth and thick darkness the peoples, but the Lord will arise upon you and his glory will be seen upon you and nations shall come to your light.

[11:17] The magi, the nations shall come to your light and kings to the brightness of your rising. Now listen to verse 6. A multitude of camels shall cover you.

They came on camels, y'all. The young camels of Midian and Ephah, all those from Sheba shall come. Listen, they shall bring gold and frankincense and shall bring good news, gospel, the praises of the Lord.

I wonder if Matthew is thinking about Isaiah. I wonder if this is once again a fulfilling of what the prophets saw centuries before.

They gave very expensive gifts in worship. The nations have come. They gave gifts worthy of the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.

You see, here's the thing. God's grace to them made them generous. Grace is what brought them. God's undeserved favor, God's unearned kindness.

[12:20] They were pagans worshiping the stars and what not. But yet, remember, I believe by the prophet Daniel prophet influencing them from centuries before, yet they knew something was about to happen.

Some greater king was coming and now they come. The grace of God draws them and the grace of God should make us generous with our time.

They took time to get there. With our talent, they had to plan this trip, y'all. They didn't just jump on their camel, let's go. They had to plan this thing out. And of course, generous with our treasures.

They exemplify this. And David understood this. David too understood this. Here's one of my favorite scenes in 1 Chronicles 21. David realized he had sinned against the Lord by numbering the people.

Remember that story? He numbers the people and then God says, oh no you don't. You're putting your faith in your numbers. And so God began to discipline the whole nation because of David.

[13:20] And David humbles himself and God says, okay, go make an altar and offer sacrifice. So David goes to find this land to make sacrifice to the Lord. But the man owning the property and David wanted to buy the property from this guy.

Here's 1 Chronicles. David says, the guy wants to give the property to David. Save us, man. Here, you can have it. David says this, no, but I will buy them for the full price.

I will not take for the Lord what is yours, nor offer burnt offerings that cost me nothing. Oh my goodness.

What a, what a picture of true worship. I'm not going to take what you, I'm not going to take, I'm not going to offer what you have, I'm going to offer what I got. That's one thing.

But the most important thing, I will not offer to the Lord trinkets, that which costs me nothing. Sacrificial.

[14:25] Sacrificial. How easy it is for us to offer service or offerings to the Lord that cost us nothing. As long as it's easy to worship, as long as it's easy to serve, as long as it's easy to follow Jesus, we're all down.

I know I am. I'll be honest, I'm down with that too. But when it costs me, when I've got to give up my time in a way that, you know, I could be watching my favorite TV program, I could be doing something, I could be on a disc golf course, and now, Lord, you want me to go seize who?

That's inconvenient. That service is going to cost me something. Oh, Lord, yeah, yeah, yeah, offering time comes by, yeah, I got a few dollars. Oh, you want me to what?

Tithe. Or give generously? but Lord, but, but, you know, the butts come out at that point.

We show our butts too. You know, no, if it costs me nothing, it's not worthy of him. A little of my time, a little of my talent, a little of my treasure.

[15:48] Isn't he worth more than that? I don't know, I don't know. I only got one amen, and I saw Sherry move her mouth. Thank you so much. I'm just asking, who is in the manger?

Who is in the house now? Who is it that we come on Christmas Day, and all throughout the year even, to declare that we love and worship?

We feel like we've done something magnanimous when we give a little of our time, our talent, our treasure. And sometimes, subtly, I have to watch myself here, subtly I'm saying, God, you should be grateful too.

They should be grateful. And Lord, just honestly, you know, aren't you happy? Shouldn't you be grateful for me? I did it, Lord. I didn't have to do it, Lord. Oh, really? But God's gift of mercy to us in Jesus leads us to generous worship.

It reminds me of the woman who poured the very expensive oil on our Lord and wiped his feet with her hair. Remember her? In Luke chapter 7, verse 47, Jesus says to her, therefore I tell you, her sins which are many are forgiven, for she loved much, but the one who is forgiven little, loves little. [17:11] And since love is giving, if we love little, we will give little. The Magi, I don't know what they knew about Christ's sacrifice on the cross.

I don't think they even knew, I don't think they knew anything about that. But we do, don't we? I know, I know what the baby's going to do. I know what he came to do, and he did it for me, and I know he did.

He snatched me up, I know he did. Do I have any excuse for not giving everything? Do I have any excuse for not being generous with my time, my talent, my treasure?

Do I have any excuse? I can't find one. Well, here's the thing. The gift the Lord wants is you this Christmas.

Not just your time, your talent, and your treasure. He wants you. That's really the gift. That's what the Magi truly gave by making this long trek to find Jesus. This is what the woman, what the oil gave as she fought through the stairs and the disgust of the people at that dinner.

[18:20] They looked at her and they scorned her, but she didn't care. She came for Jesus. And what she gives is her dignity. She gives herself to the Lord, no matter what the people think.

She gives herself. She is Romans 12, 1. I appeal to you brothers, by the mercies, because of the mercies, plural, of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship.

What is our spiritual worship? Singing? Okay, that helps, amen. But what is our spiritual worship? Giving our bodies. I think that's important.

Giving our bodies. That's what, see, worship without giving of your body isn't worship. If I'm holding, what are we holding back? I gotta ask myself that question all the time.

What am I telling God thus far and no far? No further. Thus far and no, what am I holding back? What area in your life, what areas?

[19:28] Sometimes we don't know what they are, but when God puts his finger on it, then he wants you to do something with it. What are you telling God no?

Where in you is a no? Is it a person that you're saying no to God with? Is it where you live, your job? What is it? Is it some plans you have for your life, your wonderful life that you have a plan for? We all got plans, amen. Never wrong with plans, just they need to be held up to the Lord.

What are you holding on to? And you're saying, God, you can't have it. I hate to tell you this, I hate to tell you this, but if you love Jesus, if you are his child, the very thing you're saying no to is the very thing he wants.

Because it's killing you. It's an idol. It's saying, Lord, I'm keeping my frankincense. I'm keeping my myrrh. I'm keeping my gold.

[20:35] You're not getting it. No. And that's the very thing God says, that's what I want. Because it's killing you. It's putting a wedge between you and him. He won't leave you nor forsake you.

Amen. But listen, you won't enjoy him. You won't enjoy him very well because you got something in your heart that you think is more important than pleasing him and knowing him and being with him and worshipping him.

So, think about it. How about this Christmas? Why don't you go home this afternoon and put yourself under God's tree. I'm the present I'm giving to you, Lord.

And if there's anything in me that's not right, you show me and you deal with it, but I'm giving me. Lavish, self-sacrificial giving, exuberantly joyful, humble worship is the response of hearts who've seen Christ and what he has done for them and for the world.

Have you seen it? Do you know it? No matter how dark it gets, the light of the world is shining, the star is shining.

[21:54] Can you see its star? Look for the star. Keep your eyes on the star. Christ, the star, the day star, who rises in our hearts.

Keep your eyes on that star. Forget about what's in the heavens. Keep your eye on that star who is Jesus. Timothy George is a man I greatly admire.

He's the retired founding dean of Deason Divinity School, which is in Samford University in Birmingham. I had a chance to go there and hang out some time ago and do some things, but it was great.

He studied preaching under one of the greatest preachers of the 20th century. His name was Gardner C. Taylor, Dr. Taylor. Pastored in New York for many years.

In one class, he tells us Dr. Taylor was lecturing on preaching and he told this story that he had been preaching in Louisiana during the Depression. Electricity was just coming into that part of that county.

[22 : 58] and he was out in a rural black church. This is Dr. Taylor now, and they had just one light bulb hanging down from the ceiling for the whole sanctuary.

Can you imagine one light bulb? It wasn't as big as this, I'm sure. He was preaching away and in the middle of the sermon, the electricity went out. The building went pitch dark and Dr.

Taylor didn't know what to say. Being a young preacher, he had never experienced anything that distracted him like this. He stumbled around for a little while trying to figure out what to do, and one of the elder deacons, I love deacons, said, sit way in the back of the church.

Black deacons don't play, y'all, I'm telling you. He said, preach on preacher, we can still see Jesus in the dark. Sometimes that's the only time we can see him, is in the dark.

And the good news of the gospel is that whether or not we can see him in the dark, he can see us in the dark. Woo! This is your hope, family, that you can trust for your life and for your death.

[24 : 06] Jesus can see you in the dark, and by his grace, he'll let you see him too. Father, may your word go down deep and make us true worshipers, true worshipers, who give everything, even ourselves, to you this Christmas and every day.

For Jesus' sake, amen. Amen. Amen. Thank you.