Grace to You :: *Unleashing God's Truth, One Verse at a Time*

Fools and Wise Men, Part 2
Scripture: Matthew 2:4-12
Code: 2184

Take your Bible and let's look at the second chapter of Matthew, Matthew chapter two. What a great time we're having in the Book of Matthew. The indication of your response by your being here with such anticipation is really a joy to my heart. This is just ... in fact this Book is goin' get better and better and better as we go because we'll build a deeper and deeper backlog of its understanding that'll enrich every passage, it's just a tremendous, tremendous Book. It's really the, the kickoff of the whole New Testament and aptly placed by the Holy Spirit at the very beginning of the New Testament.

The theme of the New Testament as you well know is Jesus Christ; He is the theme of the New Testament. Particularly, is He the object of these four Gospels as they are known, that begin the New Testament, Matthew, Mark, Luke and John. Each of these Gospels, each of these evangelist writers portrays Jesus Christ in a unique way. Although they all four cover His life, they cover it in very, very unique styles and from a very, very unique perspective.

In Matthew, He is the sovereign who comes to reign and rule. In Mark, He is the servant who comes to serve and to suffer. In Luke, He is the Son of man who comes to share and sympathize. In John, He is the Son of God who comes to reveal and redeem. And each one of the evangelists approaches the person of Jesus Christ in a very special way. And there's a wonderful blending as you note as I went through that, in Matthew He's the sovereign, in Mark He's the servant, notice the ultimate contrast, He is the sovereign, He is the servant, two extremes. And then you come to that same kind of extreme contrast in the last two, in Luke He is the Son of man, and in John the Son of God, two absolute opposites. Man and God, sovereign and servant. And so the dimensions of Jesus Christ fill in all the space between those two, in both cases. The sovereign God and the servant man, and everything in between that fills up all that He is. This is the principle behind the diversity in the four Gospels.

We know that Matthew presents Jesus Christ as King, as sovereign. Everything in Matthew focuses on His majesty, on His sovereignty, on His great personage, as the Ruler the one who has the right to reign, the Messiah, the anointed one, the promised King. In fact the opening sentence of Matthew gives you the key, remember it, in 1:1? "The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham." The book of the generation of Jesus Christ, son of David, son of Abraham. And naturally David was the great king, David was the one who fostered the royal line. And so Matthew at the very beginning emphasizes that Jesus Christ comes from David, He comes originating in

Abraham as it were in terms of the Jewish race, and coming through the line of David which is His right to reign and rule. And so the beginning of this Gospel is unique to Matthew, no other Gospel begins this way. Matthew begins this way because Matthew presents Him as King, and so Matthew traces the Lord's lineage from Abraham through the royal line of David.

Now I just told you that Mark presents Him as servant, and because Mark presents Him as servant Mark has no genealogy at all, because the lineage of a servant is irrelevant. So there is no genealogy at all in Mark. And Luke presents Him as the Son of man, and since Luke presents Him as the Son of man, Luke takes His genealogy all the way back and starts with Adam. Because Luke wants us to know that He is a man from the loins of the first man, Adam. And John, the fourth Gospel who presents Christ as the Son of God by-passes all human genealogy and simply says, "In the beginning was God, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." And so he goes immediately back to eternity past and establishes the eternal es-sence of Christ. And you see that each of the Gospels in line with its emphasis matches its genealogy. And so we see in Matthew, He is the Messiah King, He is the anointed sovereign, and thus He has come to us through the line of David.

Now we have traced chapter one and seen that the royal line comes through David and down through Joseph and Mary and Jesus is born, and He is born with the right to reign. If the Jews had been having a king in that day Jesus Christ would have been by birth King of Israel. He had that lineage and that is the emphasis of chapter one, Matthew establishing that He is King, and we pointed out every de-tail right down to the virgin birth, in every singledetail there is the thrust that He has the right to reign on the throne of David.

Now having established that He is a King by lineage, then in chapter two Matthew re-emphasizes that He is a King in terms of the fact that certain people paid Him homage as a King. If He's a King, Matthew is saying to us, it ought to be evident by His genealogy. He has to be the child of kings, if He is a King it ought to be evident by the way people respond to Him, and so in chapter two Matthew tells us the story of certain wise men who came to proclaim that Jesus was indeed a King, and to bow at His feet and worship Him as King. Now that again is part of Matthew's emphasis. He is King by virtue of His genealogy, He is King by virtue of the royal majesty that was displayed, and accepted and honored and revealed by the work and the effort of these wise men coming and bringing certain gifts.

Now what did we learn about the wise men? There are some fascinating things we need to know about them, and we've covered them, we're not going to go into it again I'll just very briefly remind you of some things. You'll notice that in verse 1 of chapter 2 it says, there were some wise men who came from the east. The word wise men is an untranslatable word, it's the word Magi, M-a-g-i. It is simply as a designation of a hereditary priesthood tribe from mog... among the people known as the Medes.

The Medes were a large group of people, among them there were various tribes and one of the tribes was the Magi tribe and it was a hereditary priesthood. These were very high ranking official priest

type people among the Medes, much as the Levites were the priests among the Jews. They rose by virtue of their wisdom, by virtue of some occultic powers, by virtue of some astrological and astronomical ability that they had, they rose to places of being the advisors to the kings and the courts of Babylon, Persia and Media. So they were high ranking, they became so high ranking in fact, that no king ever took the throne of the Persian or Parthian Empire that wasn't trained in their laws, known as the laws of the Medes and the Persians, and no king ever took place that was not approved by them.

So they were as we saw the official king makers of the great empire to the east of Israel. It was their business to recognize and to coronate kings. They had been in the courts of kings for years and years and years, even centuries. And they were the official king makers of the east. And how significant it is that these official eastern king makers find their way to Bethlehem, indeed to honor the one who is born, the Lord Jesus Christ and to honor Him as King. And so Matthew is making his point again, He is King by virtue of lineage, He is King by virtue of recognition. And interestingly enough it is recognition on the part of Gentiles rather than Jews, official king makers from the east.

And I might add this note, to remind you. You say, where did they get the information about Him? And I told you that 586 B.C. some 500 hundred plus years before Christ was born, Israel was taken into captivity in Babylon, remember? Israel was led away captive to Babylon, to this part of the world, and when they were there they told these people, these Babylonians and these Medes and these Persians who were all mixed into that area, they told them about the King that was going to be born.

And in fact there was one of those Jews who rose to a place of great prominence,who washe? Daniel. Daniel, it says in Daniel 5:11 became the chief of the Magi, and no doubt this great prophet of God told them about the coming King, so they were ready for this, they were looking and through the centuries waiting for this great individual to arrive on the scene, and they had passed down this information and when the time came they were ready to see Him as King, to recognize it.

Now we added another note that I just would remind you of. There were two great powers in the world at the time. The power in the east was this emerging Persian or as it was called then the Parthian Empire. That was kind of the emerging power in a sense, although at one time they were the great power in the world, they were sort of trying to reassert themselves, and the great power in the west was whom? Was Rome, and Rome for all intents and purposes really dominated everything. So in the west, west of the land of Israel all that great European continent and elsewhere even including Israel -- and eastern of that, the Romans dominated. But the east was always fomenting, always wanting to have rebellions, always starting little wars here and there, and so there was this great hostility between the west and the east. Consequently, the eastern empire was looking for a king, they had a king called Phraortes the Fourth who was deposed because he was inept, and they were looking for a king, they were searching for a king.

And these wise men then when they came were these Magi really felt maybe this is the monarch we've been looking for, maybe this is the one who can take the reins and be the invincible King we need and lead us against the Roman opposition, and we can gain back the world we once conquered. There was a time when the Babylonians and the Medo-Persians ruled the world. And so they were looking for a king.

And beyond that I believe these Magi also were looking for more than a king, I think that they were real God fearers, and Ithink they saw not just the politics of it, but I think they saw the religion in it, I think they were recognizing that this was an unusual act of God to bring about His anointed King, the one prophesied in the Old Testament. So I think as well as political ends I think they had spiritual ends in their minds as well. And so they came when they knew the King was going to be born, when God revealed it to them by the marvelous shining of the shekinah glory in the sky in the east, and they put that together obviously with the Scriptures they had been taught by Daniel and the other Jews, and they immediately packed up and they went to Jerusalem believing that here was perhaps the political king they'd awaited, and no doubt the spiritual ruler that Daniel and the other Jews had talked about for so many centuries.

And so they came to Jerusalem. A group of official Persian king makers looking for a new king. And that is really what Matthew wants you to see, Jesus Christ is King, and these Oriental king makers whose business it was to recognize kings knew it. And in a real sense these people were the first fruits of the Gentiles to come to Christ. And by the way, the Jewish world didn't seem to recognize what was go-ing on at all, and that fits the Scripture because it says, "He came unto his own andhis own (what?) received him not."

Now with that as the stage we look at the five acts in the drama played out in verses 1 to 12. Let's look at them. We saw first of all the arrival, and we'll review for a minute. We saw the arrival in verses 1 and 2, "Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod, the king, behold, there came Magi from the east to Jerusalem, Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? For we have seen his astr and you remember I told you that means His blazing forth, really His shekinah His glory, "in the east, and are come to worship him." Now they knew He was a King and they cameto worship Him as a King. That is Matthew's great testimony, here is the non Jewish world, the greatest officials in the Orient, the king makers of the world, and they see that He's a King. Can you imagine the devastation that Matthew's Gospel caused in the Jewish world when it was finally penned around A.D. 50, and they har...started reading this stuff? That the one that they had crucified was in fact recognized by the official king makers of the east as a King, as the King God had promised. Matthew really writes a devastating word to the remaining people who already have done away with Jesus Christ, by the time he writes this Gospel and says to them, and He was a King, He was the King.

And so historians tell us that when they arrived it wasn't just three fel-la's comin' into town on some old camels, like the Christmas cards, we don't know how many there were uh, some estimates as many as twelve and even more, but I wouldn't even bother a guess cause the Bible doesn't say, but there were a group of these official king makers who rode into town with their peaked con-ical ha ... hats stickin' way up in the air with the big flaps that came all the way down below their chin, and they had wild flowing robes and they were riding Persian steeds, and historians tell us they were accompanied by the crack troops of the Persian army, and when they arrived in the little town of Jerusalem they were news, believe me. They were news. It was a formidable group. They had seen the sign of the Son of man and they had come to worship Him.

To worship means...literally proskune means to stoop to kiss. It was a word that spoke about the way you paid homage to a monarch, you stooped down and you kissed hisfoot. The word proskune finally came to mean any internal attitude of adoration or worship to someone great-er than yourself. They came to worship. By the way, an interesting thing the word proskune, means to kiss the feet of or to stoop to kiss, or to kiss reverently. When the New Testament uses that word, it is always used of something truly or something supposedly divine, it is a word that is only fit for deity, it is only fit for deity. You remem-ber when John tried to worship the angel in Revelation and the angel said, get up don't proskune me, proskune God. He's the only one worthy of such worship.

Kittel, who has written such a, a marvelous series of word studies on the great incomparable work says, "the proskunasis is proskune of the wise men is truly an offering to the ruler of the universe." End quote. It was a word reserved for deity, and when they came I believe they not only saw Him in verse 2 as a King of the Jews politically but they saw Him as the ruler of the world, which means they saw more than humanity, they saw deity.

And there was a term, Matthew used it here, that is used in the Scripture only when it is to be offered to a god, whether wittingly or unwittingly it is in fact a god the word is reserved for gods. In fact Matthew reinforces the use of this word later on as we'll see in Matthew 4, in the expression of Satan because Satan asks Christ if Christ would please bow down and proskune him, and Christ refuses and says, that is for God and God alone. I believe the Magi recognized the King but beyond the politics it seems fair to me to say they probably recognized God and they came to worship more than a King, they came to worship the anointed one that God had sent, the one fulfilling the Old Testament prophecies, none other than the supernatural Lord Jesus Christ!

So the arrival. Then we saw the agitation in verse 3, "When Herod, the king, had heard these things, he was troubled," well, we understand that, "and all Jerusalem with him." He was the current king, and these guys arrive in town and say, where is the new King of the Jews? And his first reaction is huh!? What new King? And when they came with all of their regalia, and he knew they were official Persian king makers he could justsee them finding this individual, crowning this individual King, this individual rising to take the throne of the Parthian Empire, and then sweeping back across the west to

fight the war right on the territory of Israel and they becoming the victims.

And Herod who was an Edomite, an Idumean who had been given his job by the Roman government because he had clawed and scratched and plotted and killed and murdered and slaughtered to get his way to some political power was panicky because he felt he was going to loose his job, even though he was seventy years old and already nearly sick unto death. But he was afraid, his jealousy, his suspicion and his fear agitated him, he was troubled, the word means agitated he was really shaking. And all Jerusalem was with him, and I told you last time the reason Jerusalem was so shaken was because they knew if he was mad they were going to suffer. You remember I told you what he planned for his death? He said, nobody will mourn when I die so collect all the finest people in the land of Israel, all the finest people rather, in the city of Jerusalem, get them all together and the moment I die kill them all, so that there'll be mourning in this city when I die. That's the kind of man he was. And so they were panicky cause they knew if he was upset they would pay consequences, and indeed they did because it wasn't long after this that he got all the babies under two years of age in Bethlehem and the surrounding area and murdered all of them. They had a right to be troubled. So Herod was agitated.

Now let's pick it up where we left it off last time in verse 4, two weeks, three verses, we gotta get goin' there's 28 chapters in this Book. Verse 4, now Herod had to do something, so it says in verse 4, "When he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where the Christ should be born." Isn't that interesting? Most interesting. He demanded of them where who would be born? The Christ.

You know Herod knew that this was more than a human king, himself, he knew, this was the Messiah, the anointed one, he made the connection in his mind. He was living in a day when the hope of deliverance through the arrival and work of the promised Messiah was in the hearts and on the lips of many, and he knew the King of the Jews and the Messiah of Israel were one and the same, he knew it. He knew there was more than humanity here he knew there was deity here. He like the wise men knew it. Amazing that his reaction was so different, isn't it? One decides to worship the other decides to murder. He panics, and he's angry. He's true to his plotting mind, and he's too shrewd to kill the Magi and probably too impotent since there were a thousand Persian soldiers, likely, and his own army was away on some other skirmish. He had little choice and he didn't want to kill them anyway because if he killed the Magi he would kill the source of his information about the child. And the child who was the potential King would be undiscovered and unscathed and he didn't care about the Magi at all anyway, all he did was want to get rid of the child, so he hatches his plot in verse 4 and the first thing he does is to gather the chief priests and the scribes of the people together.

Now we've already spenttremendous amount of time talking about the Magi, a lot of time last time talking about Herod, and now I want you to meet some other folks. This chief priest and the I scribes, and you might as well get acquainted with them now cause their going to be popping in and out of the

scene all the way through Matthew.

First of all let's look at the chief priests. Now in the Gospels, and we'll have to back up a little bit and I'll give ya a lot of background so you'll get a good grip on who they are. In the Gospels the word priest or the term priest is restricted, listen now, to the Jewish cast who ministered in the temple.

Now the Jews did have a kind of a caste system in the sense of the Levites there was out of the people of Israel a tribe with special ranking, they were the Levites they constituted the priesthood. In fact if you weren't apart of that family, hereditary, if you weren't in the genealogy you didn't have any right to minister in the temple. They literally ran the country. Because politics and theology were one in the theocracy where God reigned. Theocracy means rule by God. As democracy means rule by the people. And so they had these priests and they really ran the country, but within the priests there were several groups and I want you to understand who they were.

First of all, there were the high priests, the high priests. This is number one. And by the way there was supposed to be only one at a time but there was often a whole bunch of 'em hangin' around. The high priest was the only priest who was allowed to do what? To go into the Holy of Holies, once a year on Yom Kippur, Jewish people still commemorate that, the day of atonement, the high priest would go in, into the Holy place, into the temple way back into the Holy of Holies and he would sprinkle the blood on the mercy seat to make atonement for the sins of the whole nation for that year, and only the high priest could do it, and only the high priest could do it once a year, and they put bells on his robe. Because they wanted to hear that he was still moving around in there, because if he ever went in there with sin in his life, what happened? He was dead on the spot, and when the bells stopped ringing you knew something was up. And so they put little bells on his robe, so they could hear him moving around in there till he came out, and he didn't stay long either and he only went in once. That was the high priest.

Now, he by virtue of that right was the muckymuck in Israel, I mean he was really up there. He served as the president of the Sanhedrin, and the Sanhedrin that, that means seventy, there were seventy ruling elders like a congress or a senate, better, like a senate, there were seventy of these ruling men and he was the president. This constituted the senate, this also constituted the Jewish supreme court, they made the laws, and they upheld the laws, they made all the court decisions as well as making all the laws, they had the judicial branch and ah, the senate in one unit, the Sanhedrin. And he was the leader. Tremendous political and religious power, the high priest had. He presided for example, over the trial of Jesus, he presided over the trials of the early apostles, Stephen and Paul. These men had tremendous power.

And by the way, it's most interesting, that sometimes high priests were removed from their offices for political reasons, okay? The thing had deteriorated. And the Romans might even want a different high priest. For whatever reasons historically high priests and sometimes, around the time of Christ got

shoved off the, the seat and another one was put on there. And that is true in Jesus' time, in Jesus' time you have two people in the New Testament referred to as the high priest, one is Annas and the other is Caiaphas, both of them were the high priest, Annas first, Caiaphas later. Annas was deposed, Caiaphas took his place but Annas is still around and still is called a high priest. And there may have been several of these around, in fact there may have been times in a lot of Israel's history when there were several running around, and there was a tremendous aristocracy of power and political prestige attached to this. So they were really top dog. And you're going to see the high priest, sometimes it's Caiaphas, sometimes Annas, Annas being behind the scenes, the power really behind Caiaphas.

Secondly, there was another kind of priest and he was called the captain of the temple, the captain of the temple. He was next in importance to the high priest, he was the chief of the temple police. Now Israel had its own police force, and they also were priests by the way, the priests were the people who carried out the orders and the direction for the country. So the captain of the temple was the chief of the temple police and he had the power to arrest people. And by the way, he was appointed by the high priest from the high priest's family. He or one of the leading families, in other words this guy was the puppet for the high priest. He had the power to arrest, so if the high priest wanted somebody arrested he just said, arrest him or you won't have your job. He really ran it.

Then the third kind of priest, we'll call the chief priests. Now listen, the chief priests is not an official title. The chief priest is composed of this, the high priest and all loose ex high priests, running around, okay? The captain of the temple and then some other priests, that you would call the aristocracy, these were the pr ... a select group of temple overseers, the treasurerof all the temple and there might have been many of them, the administrators of the temple and all the guys in the Sanhedrin, of whom there were seventy. These are the chief priests, the Sanhedrin, the treasurers, the guys who collected the money out of the thirteen bell shaped receptacles in the court of the women where people put all their money, the, the administrators as well as the high priests, and the captain of the temple. Now so what you really have in the chief priests is the aristocracy and the brain trust and the political power and the hotshots in terms of Israel, they're all there.

Now by the way, behind them we had a whole bunch of what you could call ordinary, run of the mill, everyday priests, just the priests. And by the way, they were other than the aristocracy, they didn't fit into the political schemes and everything else, by the...there were twenty-four ah, twenty-four courses, twenty-four groups of them, twenty-four groups of priests, and by virtue of that they only ministered, they only ministered at intervals during the year in the temple. They came to the temple for one week two times a year.

If you were a priest, normally one of the ordinary ones you lived out somewhere else or maybe you lived in Jerusalem, you had a job maybe you were a carpenter, maybe you were a mason, you did brick work, maybe you were a shepherd, maybe you ah, did something else, I don't know what, but,

but you had a job and then one week two times a year you went to the temple and functioned as a priest. That's the ordinary priests. By the way, historians estimate that there were probably eighteen thousand such at the time of Jesus. And they came behind the aristocracy. And ah, when it says in Acts chapter 6 in verse 7, I think it is, "And the word of God increased, and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith." I'm confident that it was out of that group of eighteen thousand ordinary, common priests that those people were saved. They're not called chief priests or anything else, just the priests. So in many ways out of the priesthood they were the good guys.

Now, at the bottom of the totem pole even under the ordinary priests were all the rest of the Levites, people who had their heritage from Levi, the bottom of the hierarchy, they had twenty-four courses of them too, only what they did was not officially minister in the temple, listen to this, their ministry was music, music and what was called service. What kind of service?

Here's a good llustration, the Jewish Mishnah which tells us a lot about Jewish history says they were the temple policemen, okay? So they didn't really function in a spiritual ministry, they, they were policemen, and yet they had a wonderful spiritual ministry in the area of music, but it was a, an adjunct to the actual priestly ministry of making sacrifices in the altars and all of that. So there ya are, there's the whole ball of wax about the priests. At the top of the totem pole is the high priest, then the captain of the temple, then the chief priests and the aristocracy, then the ordinary priests, and then at the bottom the Levites who helped around the temple, were the temple police and, and they are referred to as you well know, ah, several times in the New Testament in the Book of Acts as well as in the Gospel ah, we'll see it as we go. Now these people are the aristocracy and the ordinary, these are the officers of the whole Jewish country, and of course superimposed over this whole structure was the Roman government because the Romans had made a chattel state out of Israel.

But by the time you get to the time of Jesus, and this is what I want you to remember, by the time you get to the time of Jesus, the chief priests are nothing more than a pile of corrupt politicians, seeking their own gains, alright? The intrigues in the temple are incredible. They are corrupt politicians and from the very beginning, people listen, from the very beginning they are introduced in Matthew 2 in the New Testament, and from the very start they are in conflict with Jesus Christ, and they will be in conflict with Jesus Christ until finally He dies on the cross. A victim of their lies, and their plots, and their subterfuge, and their politics. In fact the first thing Jesus ever did was just ... when He became involved in His ministry He went right to Jerusalem, walked right in the temple, made a whip and cleaned the place out and that set the thing in motion. I mean He was hittin' at the very core of the thing that was going on in Israel that was a perversion of God's truth. He cleaned their filthy stuff out of the temple. But these guys, these chief priests were the decision makers for the country.

Now notice additionally in verse 4, "he gathered all the chief priests and the scribes." Now what are the scribes? The scribes were just folks from the other tribes, none in particular, who were scholars,

and authorities on the law. These people had spent their life studying the law, these were the Bible scholars, and by that mean Old Testament obviously they didn't have a New Testament. So they were the Old Testament scholars, they knew every little nit-pickin' deal about the Old Testament. You know Ezra was a scribe, and they said about Ezra that Ezra memorized the entire Old Testament, so that Ezra could sit down and write out a manuscript, a scroll of the Old Testament from Genesis to the very end from memory.

Now these guys were really into it, they were big on the letters learning the Old Testament. They were the scribes and the scholars, now note, some of them joined the Pharisees party because they were literalists, they were fundamentalists, they were legalists, they believed in everything that it was said the way it was said, on the other hand some of them joined the Sadducees because they were the liberals who wanted to throw away a lot of the Scripture they denied a certain things in the Scripture, such as resurrection, such as angels, so you had two theological parties, the fundamentalists and the liberals in that day but both of them had their scribes and their scholars. And whether the scribes of the Pharisees or the scribes of the Sadducees, they were forever and ever challenging Jesus, weren't they? Coming and trying to trap Him in His words. So here you have the political wheels and the brains of Israel. To begin with right here in Matthew 2 set at odds against Christ. By the way, the scribes later became known as rabbis, and that is the roots of what we know today as rabbis, they were the scholars of the law. A rabbi today is not somebo dy in the Levitical priesthood line, we don't evenknow who those people are. A rabbi is one who is a modern scribe.

So, Herod called the politicians and the theologians together. It must have been very disturbing to them, here the leading politicians had never heard of this new King, and here the leading theologians didn't know anything about Him either. Amazing, they weren't exactly up, in fact they were upstaged by a bunch of Persians who arrived from hundreds and hundreds of miles away, to come right in under their ignorant noses and announce to them that a King had been born who was none other than their Messiah. Got some news for you people who should well know this, they were upstaged by pagans. They were in on the event of the ages, and didn't even know it.

So Herod asks this aristocracy, this brain trust of theologians, he says, "now where is the Christ to be born." Where is he to be born? There's an interesting footnote here, andthis is really not in the text butI couldn't help but think about it. It's amazing to me that Herod asked this question not because he wanted to really know where Christ would be born in order that he might take the knowledge of that truth and apply it properly, but that he might know it to use it for his own ends. And I, I never cease to be amazed how many people seek certain information from the Bible to be used for their own ends rather than to be used in the manner that God has designed it. That is not right. Herod inquired of God's word to use it in a manner sinfully, against the will of God. The Bible is not to be thus approached, it is to be approached with a sense of sacredness, a sense of awe, and a response of obedience. But he wanted to know, but not for the right reasons.

Now he should have known without asking. Do you know that it was common knowledge where the Messiah would be born? Everybody knew that, there wasn't even any question about it. "Many of the people, therefore, (John 7:40 says) when they heard this saying, said, Of a truth this is the Prophet. Others said, This is the Christ. But some said, Shall Christ come out of Galilee? Hath not the Scripture said Christ comeswith the seed of David, out of the town of Bethlehem, where David was?" Now here's Jesus coming along, He says a few things in John 7, and the crowd starts yelling hey! Maybe this is the Christ, and somebody says, it can't be the Christ because we all know the Christ isn't coming from Galilee, He's coming from Bethlehem. It was common knowledge. Herod should have known it, and it's maybe that he ... maybe he did know it but he just wanted to be sure, he didn't want to waste any time. He wasn't really confident he wanted an official declaration from the brain trust.

And it's so incredible, it's, it's so incredible that they gave it to him, verse 5, "They said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea; for thus it is written by the prophet, and thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come a Governor that shall rule my people, Israel." They quote the Scripture to him. They quote Micah chapter 5 and verse 2. And they tell him, He'll be born in Bethlehem, that's the official word of the prophet Micah. Amazing. They knew that, and yet paid absolutely no attention to the events in Bethlehem, which by this time had occurred months ago and no doubt the shepherds had let it be known that such had occurred.

Who was Micah? Micah was a prophet. Read that little Book sometime, it's a fantastic Book. Micah, let me tell you about him, Micah was a prophet who thundered denunciations, Micah was a ... there was a torrent of stuff coming out of him. Micah was not one of those guys who just shows up to tell everybody how nice they are. Micah was not an affirmer, Micah was a denouncer. Micah thundered against the false rulers of his time, and after he had blistered the false rulers he looked down through the ages and he said, one of these days a true ruler is going to come, one of these days a great ruler, one of these days the King, the Messiah, and you'll know it because He'll be born in a little town, the town of Bethlehem once called Ephrathah the town where David puts his home. The voice of Micah is the voice of a prophet, the voice of a prophet who uttered the sob of a nation, a nation that wept and wailed for its King, and Micah said, He'll come, He'll come and all the false rulers will be put aside and He'll be the true ruler, and He'll come in Bethlehem. And Matthew says, that the chief priests and the scribes said, "In Bethlehem of Judaea; for thus it is written by the prophet." And they go on to quote it.

But I love what Matthew does. He adds a little touch at the end of verse 6, "And thou Bethlehem," and it may be well, and I'm not sure about this so I'm not going to be dogmatic but it may be that the scribes, the chief priests and the scribes just said verse 5, and maybe Matthew added verse 6. It may be Matthew who actually puts in Micah 5, and the reason I say that is because there is an addition at the end of the verse that is not in Micah 5, that certainly would not have come from the chief priests and the scribes, but would have come from Matthew. "And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, art

not the least among the princes of Judah; for out of thee shall come" and then Matthew throws in, "a" this is beautiful, "a governor that shall shepherd my people, Israel."

The word rule there is the word in the Greek, to shepherd. Now that is not in Micah. And you know what's so wonderful? New Testament writers, no listen to me, New Testament writers when they were quoting the Old Testament do not always quote the Old Testament exactly, you know why? Because New Testament writers were equally inspired by God, and they had a right to alter those things in conformity to that which the Spirit of God was newly revealing to them at the time. So that they would take a portion of that Old Testament truth and then they would add to that that special thing the Spirit of God wanted for the moment of the New Testament time, and there was a wonderful message in what Matthew said.

What Matthew was really implying was this, there is coming a ruler, a governor that will shepherd my people, Israel. What he was really saying was, how would you like to trade in a Herod for a shepherd? How would you like to trade in a demagogue, how would you like to trade in a, a murderer, how would you like to trade a plotter, how would you like to trade some man who was hateful and murdering for a shepherd? Who would love and care for His flock, see. Beautiful thing. They knew the difference. And so Matthew's quoting, I think it's Matthew in verse 6. I think the chief priests and the scribessaid, "In Bethlehem of Judaea; for thus it's written by the prophet." And then Matthew adds the next one. This is fabulous, this is fabulous.

You say, what do you mean? Listen, every, every Hebrew in the world, every Jew in the world, and let me get it straight at the very beginning, I have a great love for Israel, believe me, I've been there a couple times and there's something about that place that draws my heart even when I'm not there. And I have a great love for Jewish people, do you know that all the best friends I have in the world are Jewish people? That's true. Jesus, Paul, Peter, David, Moses, man, all of them, all of them. I spend more time with Jewish people than any other kind. I go in my office six hours a day and I just read these Jewish people over and over again. Matthew, Jewish, oh, I'm getting to love him too. You see, I don't have any problem with that, I'm just trying to tell you what the Word of God says. And every Jew in history is faced with Micah 5:2. Hey, the prophet said, He would be born in Bethlehem, Jesus was born in Bethlehem, what are you going to do with it? Wanna hear something else? **Even the** chief priests and the scribes, the leading politicians and the leading theologians said, He would be born in Bethlehem as Micah said.

Now listen to me, when some Jewish people come along today and say, well, the Messiah is not a person, it's an attitude. I say to you well, they didn't think so in Jesus' time. The ancient rabbis didn't think so, they said it was a person because an attitude can't be born in Bethlehem. But a person can. Or they say, that th... the idea of Messiah is the idea of the perfection of a Jewish kingdom. You can't have the perfection of a Jewish kingdom born one day in Bethlehem -- either. The Messiah is a person, an individual, not a nation, and not an attitude, and His birth must occur in Bethlehem.

And listen, if Jesus is not that Messiah then what is Micah talking about, what are the scribes and chief priests talking about, and what is Matthew talking about, who was a devout Jew? The Sanhedrin said it was Bethlehem, the prophet Micah said it was Bethlehem, Matthew said it was Bethlehem. It was Bethlehem, and all history comes together to agree the Messiah will be born in Bethlehem. Just where Jesus was born, and interestingly enough God had to get the Romans to make a decree to get Joseph and Mary down there so He could be born there. He's got everybody working out His will.

It's amazing, these orthodox literalists with perfect head knowledge were never touched in their souls. Oh, man if I could tell you, the deathblow of legalism. So they're indifferent, the chief priests and scribes. By the way, they didn't stay indifferent long later they became hateful, venomous, plotting murderers. And the whole time from the indifference of Matthew 2 to the plots and the murders at the end of the Gospel of Matthew, all the while they had full knowledge of all the prophecies being fulfilled by Jesus Christ. And they rejected with full information.

And Jesus even reminded them that all they had to do was check the Scriptures they were supposed to be so expert in. In John 5:39 He says, "Search the Scriptures; for they are they which speak of me." You're experts.

So, we see immediately, now watch this, we see immediately they're divided into three groups. Group number one, in response to Jesus Christ is the group that could be characterized as hatred and hostility. Hatred and hostility, Herod was afraid this little baby would interfere with his life. He was jealous, fearful, he didn't want this little baby intruding in his life, upsetting his apple cart, changing things, and he sought to eliminate Him. And some people still felt that way thirty three years later and they did it, and you want to know something? Some people feel that way today, Jesus is interference in their life. He bothers them, He upsets their plans, and if they had their choice they would eliminate Him. And Jesus in John 15 said to His disciples, if the world hates you don't be surprised, they hated me, and when you go out they'll hate you and they'll put you in prison and they'll kill you and think they're serving God, in doing it. So there's the hatred and the hostility. The second category...and the hatred and the hostility is exemplified by Herod.

The second category is what I call, the indifferent, the indifferent and the indifferent is characterized by the chief priests and the scribes. They were so engrossed in their bandy about theology, they were so engrossed in their political intrigues and their games to get power, they were so engrossed in making money in the temple and turnin' a buck as fast as they could at the expense of the people, they were so lost in all of their religion that it didn't even matter to them that He was born, they were just indifferent. And there are many like that today, and I always think of Lamentations where Jeremiah, bless his heart cries out to Israel and he says, "Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by?" I mean can you hav... can you possibly be indifferent? Maybe this is the worst.

I always think of Studdart Kennedy's Poem, it says, "When Jesus came to Golgotha they hanged Him on a tree, they drove great nails through hands and feet and made a Calvary. They crowned Him with a crown of thorns, red were His wounds and deep, for those were crude and cruel days and human flesh was cheap. When Jesus came to Birmingham, they simply passed Him by, they never hurt a hair of Him they only let Him die. For men have grown more tender they wouldn't give Him pain, they only just passed down the street and leave Him in the rain. Still Jesus cried, forgive them for they know not what they do and still it rained the winter rain that drenched Him through and through. The crowds went home and left the streets with- out a soul to see and Jesus crouched against a wall and cried for Cal-vary. Studdart Kennedy is saying he'd rather have the hatred than the indifference.

And thirdly, there was adoring worship. Characterized by whom? The Magi. And it's always that way with Jesus. Some are hostile, some are indifferent, some are adoring, and they worshipped. So the arrival and the agitation.

Let's look at the acting. Verse 7, "Then Herod, when he had privately called the wise men," this time he thought he ought to have a private meeting, if he had another public meeting with these guys everybody would really know something was up, so he had a private one. And he, "inquired of them diligently what time the star appeared." Here folks, I call this acting because this has got to be one of the biggest acts of hypocrisy in all the Bible. This guy is so phony and the wise men don't know it, they're from the east they don't know what's goin, on.

The first meeting was public, but this meeting's goin' be secret because Herod has a rouse on his mind. A sly plan, the big lie, and the chief priests and the scribes would know it, the wise men won't know and it'll be real subtle. He didn't say, how old is the child? But he said, when did the blazing forth appear and I think he did that to play up to their astrology and their astronomy interest. Tell me about that star, you guys are big on stars, tell me about that, when did that appear? As if it was astronomy that was his interest. His real interest was to kill the little baby. And by the way, it's interesting that the star is not now visible at all, they saw it in the east it disappeared and they left and came to Jerusalem they haven't seen it since.

What time did the star appear? It says he inquired of them diligently, and the word in the Greek is exactly, I mean give me the day guys will ya? I wanta know when that baby was born. And we don't know what their answer was. But obviously Herod figured if he killed everybody two yearsand younger he'd get Him for sure. Maybe he... maybe they told him it was a six-month period and he figured well just to be safe I'll get everybody two years and under in case that the star was a little late. And over in chapter 2 verse 16 it says that he slew them all. How... on what basis? "From two years old and under, (verse 16) according to the time which he had diligently inquired of the Magi." He wanted to know, what a hypocrite. Verse 8, "And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said," now after he'd gotten the information, "Go, and search diligently for the young child; and when you have found

him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also." It's very ugly, isn't it? Here was the blessed glorious, majestic Son of God, here is the, here is the fool of fools. Instead of falling at His feet desires to take His life, what a fool, he would kill the Savior, the only Savior. And so the Magi became unwitting tools for the destruction of the Messiah thinking they were being helpful.

I love the subtlety of Matthew, I just thought of this. The subtlety of Matthew. He is again emphasizing that Christ is a King, not only by His lineage, not only by His homage but by His rejection. If He wasn't a King do you think this king would be upset about His birth? No. He's a King, and Matthew hits it every way he can.

So the arrival, the agitation, the acting, and now the adoration. The journey is complete for the Magi in verse 9 and this we'll see very quickly, you remember this, so beautiful. "And 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." There's their old friend the star. What a day ... what a day of rejoicing, lo, the star, verse 10, "When they saw the star, they (what?) rejoiced with exceedingly great joy." They had seen that thing in the east, it had gone away, they'd come all the way to Jerusalem and they didn't know specifically where to go or what to do next and there was the shekinah of God again, and they knew they were on the track.

An interesting note by the way in verse 9, the star which they, saw in the east literally in the Greek says, the star which they saw in its rising, the star which they saw in its rising. In other words, the star, I think, which had never before existed and they saw it come into existence. It means way more than just appearing in an area. The star which appeared in its rising, and now the shekinah appears again.

And now they really got it together, they got a sign revelation from God, and they gotthe Word of God Micah 5:2 and those two things converge on Bethlehem and go right over a house. That's why I say it wouldn't be a real star cause it'd be pretty tough for a real star to get down on top of a house, without burning up the whole earth. The shekinah of God is a descendent in the Old Testament many times, just descended right down on top of that house, they were so happy.

Verse 11, "And when they were come into the house," and by this time they're in a house, not a stable anymore, the baby's a few months old now and they found a place to stay until they can gain the strength to go wherever God is going to tell them to go, because they know it's a new life for them, they have the Son of God now, they can't just go back to doing what they do unless God tells them and they're waiting, so they were in the house. "And when they were come to the house, they saw the young child with Mary," by the way, whenever Mary and the baby are mentioned, in verse 11, verse 13, verse 14, verse 20, and verse 21, the baby is always mentioned first. The concern is with the child.

Charles Wesley put it this way, "Veiled in flesh the Godhead see, hail the incarnate deity." And that's right. So they came in, "they saw the young child with Mary, his mother, fell down and worshiped" nother, notice that please, not them, but what? "him;" they worshiped Him, they honored Him as a King. They did what you do only to gods. They fell on their knees and worshiped Him. And worship, beloved belongs only to Jesus Christ, only to God, to none other, for none other is worthy.

Those people remember, tried to worship the apostles? No, don't worship me, Paul said. They tried to worship Peter in Caesarea, no, don't worship me. John tried to worship an angel in Revelation, NO, he said, don't do it. They worshiped right here and there was no rebuke, none at all. You're doing what you ought to do, nobody said, stand up, stand up, oh no, this was God, this was the King, they did right.

Oh, I tell ya, somewhere along the line I, I think maybe we've, we've lost the art of worship, in the American church. You know those pastors I introduced to you this morning from South Africa? It was interesting, they made several interesting comments about the American church, they... this is the first time they've ever been here, and one of ... we were eating lunch one day and they said to me, you know John, they said it seems to us that there are two problems in the American church as we see it. And I said, what...that's, that's before they had even been to our services, and they were just sharing their heart, and I, I said, what are they? They said, number one, they don't seem to have a theology, they don't know what they believe. They do things, they have programs, and feelings and emotional, they don't know what they believe. Secondly, they don't know the meaning of worship. I thought that was a very interesting observation. You know, we're, we're such a busy bunch, you know we get a guy saved and immediately boy! Gotta get him goin' in the ministry. You know we hear the little, saved to serve. I, I hate that, saved to serve you know, and you, you go to a pastor seminar and they get, they get ya in the deal and they say, now we want to tell you once you get that guy saved, get him in to join the church and when he joins the church give him a job...you're workin' for the Lord. Now that's, that's really ridiculous, the only reason to serve the Lord is out of the overflow of your worship.

You know, I'll tell ya honest ... I don't ... I...it bothers me, that's why you're not goin' hear it and come to Grace, and you come here along time and nobody's goin' come up to you and say, have you joined the church yet? And if you have, have you got a job? You say, wait a minute, uh, I, you know where I'm at uh, I'm just tryin' to worship the Lord, see? I don't ... you know someth...I don't even look at my ministry as, "save to serve." I don't ... I'm saved to worship, and out of the overflow of my worship I trust I'll be blessing to somebody else. I'll be a... I don't even... you know something? This might shock ya, I don't even prepare sermons for you, I don't do that. I don't go, now I've got this text, I think I'll make a sermon, no. I take the text and I approach this, what can I learn about the glory of God from this? And after I've spent a whole week studying that and seeing God there, and I hope falling at His feet and bowing in praise, and bowing in worship out of the overflow of that a sermon comes real

easy. We're saved to worship first of all. If we've lost the ar ... you know they made the comment that in some churches where they really teach the Bible it seemed to them that they worshiped the teaching rather than Christ. That's kind of sad.

Well, I gotta hurry here. Have I been talkin' an hour, gu-, this is good. Anyway, I'm goin' be done in just a minute. So they worshiped. You know I ... doesn't it bother you, you know, God doesn't want famous singers and famous workers and famous everything's, He just wants worshipers, who praise Him and adore Him. I remember Fred Barshaw I think saying, he, he wrote it in our little manuel that we dishonor God by attempting ... I don't know who said... originally said it, maybe it was him ... we dishonor God by attempting to serve Him without really knowing Him. Because you knowwhat happens? Our service gets all fouled up. But as we serve out of the overflow of worship He is in control of the service, for His glory.

So they worshiped. And they worshiped in giving, and that's a great way to worship. You'll say, ohh now, we're goin' break the spirit of worship to take the offering. That does not break the spirit of worship. I used to think like that a long time ago, I'd think now how could we get the offering out of the service, because it's so kind of crass and mundane... I realize it's ... they came to worship, how did they worship? They didn't bring a big organ and go hum-hum-hum, you know they did this ... you know, they didn't draw a... drag in a stained glass window, look at it. They didn't climb up on a hill and do this.

How do you worship? One very tangible way, they worshiped by what? Giving, giving. The expression of praise, and what did they give? Well, they gave some pretty good stuff, gold, frankincense and myrrh. Fascinating gifts, gold I don't have to talk about, you know what gold is. Gold was a super, super valuablething, still is. By the way, gold was used for only the best things, it was used extensively in the construction of the temple, and all of its contents, read First Kings 5 to 7, Second Chronicles 2 to 5, gold was used. It was worn as jewelry, and if you happened to be real rich you could use it as utensils, valuable.

What about frankincense? Pure incense.And incidentally an incision was made in the bark of a certain tree growing in Arabia, and the resulting juice came out and the re... and the... this juice was white, this was incense. In fact, I think the original Old Testament Hebrew word is the idea of this white juice. And it had various uses, it was used...obviously it was to be fragrant, it send off a fragrant scent. It was used in the meal offerings Leviticus 2, as the scent was symbolically rising to God, it was used in Song of Solomon in a wedding, I mean when you got ready for your wedding you put on that stuff and you smell real good, see. Perfumes old stuff folks. Frankincense.

And then there was myrrh. A, a little tree in Arabia, little tiny tree, also gave forth a beautiful perfume, that was myrrh. They used it in Proverbs to perfume the bed, to put on your clothes, it was -...it was the primitive uh, "Ban, Ban Basic." This was myrrh basic, five daymyrrh. Anyway, according to Esther

chapter 2, when Esther was gettin' all dolled up to come in to the king, she put on myrrh to smell good. And also myrrh was used in the same bridal procession where frankincense is used. Mixed with wine in Mark 15 it served as an anesthetic, and it was used in John 19, a preparation of Jesus' body for burial. And so there was gold, very precious, there was frankincense a beautiful smelling incense, and there was myrrh a lovelyointment and perfume.

Now the significance went way beyond the natural use of each gift, they were just lovely gifts, very, very valuable. In fact I personally believe that this poor family, Joseph and Mary who had nothing, and Joseph was now removed from his job. They're a little while later sent into Egypt, remember, by God? They had no way to support themselves in Egypt, he would have had a difficult time in a foreign culture establishing himself, and I'm very confident that the gold and the frankincense and myrrh were the resources, the bank account that was used to support the little family as they first began before they made their way finally back to Nazareth and he picked up his old trade. This was their livelihood, this was their support, valuable thing.

But, let me go a step further just in closing. Gold is a gift for a king, gold is associated with a king. Joseph, when he was in Egypt who was the vice-regent next to the king it says, was given a gold neck chain. Daniel, the same, was given gold as he stood next to the king. Kings in the Bible had crowns of gold, scepters of gold. Solomon had gold all over the place. And a description of Solomon in First Kings 10 gold is mentioned ten times. Gold was the gift for a king, and what is Matthew telling us? Jesus is what? King, He's a King, He's a King. And we meet Jesus in terms of His Kingship.

When you come to Jesus, listen to me people, when you come to Jesus like I said last week, you are a lordship salvationist, remember that ph... ? You come as a subject to a King, to a Lord. Nelson the great admiral always treated his vanquished opponents with great kindness and courtesy. After one of his naval victories the defeated admiral was brought aboard Nelson's ship and onto Nelson's quarter deck, and knowing Nelson's reputation for courtesy this defeated admiral wanted to really kind of trade on his courtesy and so he advanced across the quarter deck with his han d outstressed to shake his hands as with an equal and Nelson's hand it says remaine d by his side, and he said your sword first sir, and then your hand. And so it is before we must be friends with Christ we must be subjects of His Lordship. And so they came and said, He's a King, they said it with a gift.

And then there was myrrh, what was myrrh? Myrrh is the gift for a mortal. It's a perfume, to make life a little less odorous, to make burial a little less repulsive. Myrrh was the gift for a mortal man, and He was a man. In fact myrrh was especially the gift for one who would die, He was a man and He would die, from the very beginning it was clear He would die. Have you ever seen that picture by Holman Hunt, who's painted some beautiful pictures of Jesus? He has a picture of Jesus as a little boy in the carpenter shop, and the sun is setting in the west, and the house is facing west, and the little boy Jesus stands at the door, and as the sun shines through the door He's stretching His arms as a little boy will, after a hard day of helping his father, and the sun casts on the back wall of the house a big

cross. And that was Holman Hunt's way of saying He was born to die, He was mortal, it was clear from the beginning. And so a gift for a King and a gift for a man, He was both.

And there was frankincense. The great old scholar, early church father whose name was Origen said, "this is a gift to God." Frankincense speaks of deity. Incense was always offered to God, it was a fragrance that rose to God. In the Old Testament it was stored in the front of the temple, up in a special chamber and it was taken and added to the offerings, it was sprinkled so that the sweet savor would rise to God. And in Exodus 30 it says, "the incense is for God, not the people." In fact, and I love it, Ezekiel 16:18 God says, it's my incense. It's my incense. It was used even in the Holy of Holies.

And so they come, and by the gold they say He's a King, and by the myrrh they say He's a man, and by the incense they say He's God. Now maybe they didn't know they said all that, but that's the beautiful symbolism of it.

So the arrival, and the agitation and the acting and the adoration and finally, verse 12, the avoidance, and God took over. These wonderful Magi, He wanted them to take the message of the King back to Persia, the message of the new one, the Messiah, the anointed one, and so they were, "warned of God in a dream that they should not return to Herod," to tell him about the baby, "and they departed to their own country another way." And so God cares for the Magi, and God cares for the Savior. And we'll see next time how God cares for the little family as they go into Egypt.

Let me close with this, listen would ya? I don't know which group you're in tonight, you do. Are you in the Herod group? Antagonistic and bitter and hating against Christ. Are you in the chief priests and the scribes group? Uncommitted, indifferent. Or are you in the group with the Magi? Are ya lined up, to get in to worship? Do you have in your hands the gold fit for a king, and the myrrh fit for a mortal man and the incense fit for God? Do you see Him as the God-man, the King? Let's pray.

Father we thank You tonight we've gone along time and yet it's gone so fast, because of the fascination of the majesty of Jesus Christ. Oh, Father to just have a couple of hours on the Lord's Day to dive deeply into the richness of Your Word is so refreshing. In the midst of all of our mundane thoughts. I would pray Lord for any who would hear ... who would be here who ah, be in the group with Herod, hating and hostile. I grieve for those who are in the place of indifference, maybe even more, because they're not even considering it, they're not even thinking about it, and maybe that's the worst of all. And I rejoice so much for those among us who are the wise men, the wise women, the wise young people, who are bowed low at those feet, no longer infant feet but pierced feet, and in their hands they bring their gifts, the recognition that He is the God-man, the King, and they submit to Him. Father may it be that we worship You most of all and out of that flows our service. In Christ's name, Amen.

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