

Reading: **Jeremiah 9:23-24**

INTRO. In our reading today, from **Jer. 9:23-24**, God tells us about the wisdom that matters most. He says, "Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom, let not the mighty man glory in his might, nor let the rich man glory in his riches; But let him who glories glory in this, that he understands & knows Me. That I am the Lord exercising lovingkindness, judgment, & righteousness in the earth. For in these I delight." The only kind of wisdom that matters is the wisdom that understands & knows God! James tells us there's a wisdom that's "earthly, sensual, demonic," (**Jas. 3:15**). Any wisdom that leaves God & Christ out is like this ~ it's earthly, sensual & devilish. But if you have an understanding of God... if you know Him, & you're striving to live by His will... that's the wisdom that matters most; & that's the wisdom in which God delights.

In our study today, I want us to look at some "wise men" who had this kind of wisdom. I'm referring to the wise men from the East who we read about in gospels of **Matthew & Luke**. We're all familiar with these wise men because at this time of year, images & depictions of them appear in many places, in malls, church yards, & in the front yards of many homes. And often, they're shown hovering around the manger scene of the baby Jesus.

Of course, also at this time of year many churches conduct special religious services to celebrate the birth of Jesus. And sometimes new members, & visitors are curious as to why we don't do this. Why don't we have a play, a dramatic presentation or maybe a cantata a choral presentation on the theme of Christ's birth? It's a fair question, so let me take a moment to explain. The Bible says, "And whatever you do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God the Father through Him," (**Col. 3:17**). So, everything we teach & practice must be by the authority of Christ. That's why we eat the Lord's Supper every Sunday; it's why we sing without instruments of music. Because we have the authority & backing of the NT! However, when it comes to celebrating the birth of Jesus in a special commemorative service, the Bible is silent! In fact, the Bible is so silent, it doesn't even tell us when that glorious event occurred! God chose not to reveal it to us, & He said nothing about remembering Jesus' birth in a special way.

However, He did tell us to commemorate His death in a special way, which is what we do each Sunday in taking the Lord's Supper.

Now, having said that, church, let me say it's not wrong to enjoy this holiday season, as a family & nation, as we do other holidays, even if we don't see it as a religious holy day. Nor is it wrong to talk about the birth of Jesus, or to sing songs about His coming into the world, as we do throughout the year! There's no day on our calendar on which it's inappropriate to praise God for sending His Son into the world. Just because the rest of the religious world has mistakenly made Dec. 25 a holy day doesn't mean we can't rejoice over the Lord's coming... now or anytime! *And what better time to talk about something & TEACH the truth about it than when everybody's thinking about it?* The birth of Jesus is a historical fact; it's given considerable prominence in the NT. Other than His resurrection, there's no greater testimony to the deity of Jesus than His birth, because it was miraculous!

One of the most unusual & thrilling stories surrounding Jesus birth has to do with these **wise men**, as told in **Matthew, chapter 2**. There are some great lessons we can learn from these men, & that's what I want to talk about. But first, there are some discrepancies tied to this story that have been promoted through the years & we need to clear these up. Here's three that have no Biblical basis whatsoever:

1st ...The idea that there were three wise men. This no doubt comes from the fact that there were three gifts given: gold, frankincense & myrrh. But this doesn't mean there were three wise men; the Bible just says they were "wise men" & they gave three gifts. But two could've given 3 gifts, or a dozen could've given 3 gifts! We really don't know how many there were, only that there was more than one. ~ Another myth perpetuated over the years is...

2nd ...These wise men were Kings. I'm not sure where that came from, but they've even been given names, **Caspar, Melchior & Balthasar**. And they're said to represent three different races of people. But, this theory isn't supported by the Bible; it's really nothing more than speculation & tradition. ~ Still another popular idea is...

3^d...The wise men were with Mary, Joseph & Jesus on the day of His birth. This idea is constantly reflected in the nativity scenes we see at Christmas. The truth, however, is these men could not have seen Jesus on the night of his birth because of what we read in **Matt. 2:11**. **And when they had come into the house, they saw the young Child with Mary His mother...** In other words, by the time these wise men got to Bethlehem, Mary & Joseph had already moved into a house! Now, it's true the shepherds saw Jesus in the manger, but not the wise men, for Jesus was no longer in the manger when they arrived.

Also, if you'll look in **Luke 2:24**, you'll see that Joseph & Mary offered a sacrifice of two birds, which was the sacrifice of those who couldn't afford a lamb. But think about it... if the wise men had been with Jesus on the day of His birth, the expensive gifts they gave (which included gold) would've made it easy for them to purchase a lamb for the required sacrifice! But since they gave the cheapest sacrifice, two birds, it suggests the wise men didn't come until much later. How much later? We don't know! But since Herod wanted to kill all the male babies 2 years old & under, it suggests that Herod, by his own calculations, believed Jesus would be several months old before the wise men found Him, & got back to Herod. The bottom line is these wise men couldn't have seen Jesus on the day of His birth, as many people assume. ~ But, these are 3 misconceptions & distortions of this great story that are popularized every year at this time.

Now, what can we learn from these wise men? We know they were wise men because that's what the Bible calls them. The words "wise men" comes from the Greek word "magoi" where we get the word "**Magi**", & that's the name that was given to priests & wise men among the Medes, Persians & Babylonians. You remember Daniel & his three Hebrew friends were examined by the king of Babylon & found to be ten times better than his magicians & astrologers, **(Dan. 1:20)**. And that's the background of these wise men. We may not know exactly why these men were called "wise" before we meet them, **Matt. 2**, but we can see why they're wise men afterwards. For these men had a

wisdom that set them apart from the world, then & now; they had a wisdom that matters most. **How so?** Let me give you three reasons.

1st...They were wise because they had an interest in Jesus.

Many people of that time had heard the promises of Christ's coming, but they weren't interested in Him. **Why?** Because they didn't believe what they'd heard. Yet, these wise men were interested; they did believe what they'd heard.

Here's some of the things the prophets had said about Jesus: "I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth...His seed also will I make to endure forever, & his throne as the days of heaven," (Ps. 89:27, 29). "The government shall be upon His shoulder; & His name shall be called Wonderful, Counselor, The mighty God, the everlasting Father, the Prince of Peace," (Isa. 9:6). And in Jer. 23:5-6, "'Behold, the days are coming,' says the Lord, 'That I will raise to David a Branch of righteousness; A king shall reign & prosper, & execute judgment & righteousness in the earth. In His days Judah will be saved, & Israel will dwell safely; Now this is His name by which He will be called: THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS.'"

Why wouldn't people be interested in the coming of someone like that? Someone who's going to be greater than all other kings, who'll bring peace & salvation? The wise men were interested, but not everybody else. Because not everybody believed what the prophets said.

You & I have every reason to be interested in Jesus because of what He says about Himself. For example, Jesus says, "For the Son of man has come to save that which was lost," (Matt. 18:11). "Just as the Son of man did not come to be served, but to serve, & to give His life a ransom for many," (Matt. 20:28). "Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one's life for his friends. You are My friends if you do whatever I command you," (Jn. 15:13-14). Jesus is our only hope for salvation. "Nor is there salvation in any other, for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved," (Acts 4:12).

We also have every reason to be interested in Jesus because of what others have said. The Hebrew writer, for example, said, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, & forever," (Heb. 13:8). Since everything in this world changes, it should interest us to know that Jesus never changes & that He gives us something solid on which to build

our lives. You can trust Him. Paul said, "For there is one God, & one mediator between God & men, the man Christ Jesus," (1st Tim. 2:5). It's only through Jesus that we can go to God in prayer; He's our mediator. That should evoke some interest! Furthermore, He will be our Judge! "For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ, that each one may receive the things done in the body, according to what he has done, whether good or bad," (2nd Cor. 5:10). Since Jesus is going to judge us for all eternity, wouldn't it be wise to show some interest in Him for that reason? The wise men were interested in Jesus because they believed what the prophets said. Are you as wise as they were?

2nd...Those wise men were eager to search for Christ. That's a mark of wisdom, isn't it? Some who claim to be interested in Jesus, aren't interested enough to search for Him. But these men searched until they found Jesus. Do you have their wisdom?

Some who would search for Jesus are confused. They don't know where to turn because there's so much division & controversy among those who claim to be His followers. What's the truth? How does anyone know? Where does one begin to search for Jesus & the truth? In **Isaiah 34:16**, the prophet said, "Search from the book of the Lord, & read..." That's it! That's where we find the truth about Jesus & His will for our lives... from the book, the Bible! We have to search the Scriptures!

In **Matt. 13:45-46**, Jesus said, "...the kingdom of heaven is like a merchant seeking beautiful pearls, who, when he had found one pearl of great price, went & sold all that he had & bought it." The pearl is the only gem that can't be improved by man. All others have to be cut & polished to have value, but not the pearl; it's perfect, which makes it a perfect symbol for Jesus & His kingdom! You can't improve upon them! But finding the pearl came at a great cost; a man might gather 1,000 oysters before finding one pearl! And since pearls are found deep in the ocean, that poses a danger getting to them. A cost is involved.

The merchant wouldn't have found the pearl had he not searched for it! And the wise men wouldn't have found Jesus had they not

searched for Him. To learn the truth about Jesus, we must do some searching! It's interesting that Herod didn't do any searching; he sent the wise men, saying, "Go & search carefully for the young Child, & when you have found Him, bring back word to me," (Matt. 2:8). He wanted someone else to do his searching for him.

Many are like that today. They let their husband, wife, or parents do their spiritual searching for them & then accept what's handed down to them... often from one generation to the next! But this isn't wise! Too much is at stake. Don't risk your eternal salvation on what others have found. Do you own searching! Like the Bereans! Acts 17:11 says, "...they received the word with all readiness, & searched the Scriptures daily to find out whether these things were so." They did their own searching & we need to do the same!

3rd...The wise men were 'wise' also because they recognized the light God gave them, & they followed it. What was the "star" that appeared in the sky to guide these men? Some say it was an explosion of a distant star that gave off enormous light for several weeks or months. Others say it was an unusual alignment of some planets like Jupiter & Saturn; & still others say Haley's Comet, which appeared in 12 BC caused this heavenly light. But the problem with these explanations is how could a light in outer space have guided these men to the very city & house where Jesus was?

No, I believe God provided this light, just like He provided the fire & cloud to guide the Israelites in the wilderness wanderings. If you believe God, it's not hard to accept that He could speak this special star into existence for this occasion! {And the story in Matt. 2 seems to suggest that the star appeared first in the East, disappeared when they came before Herod in Jerusalem, then appeared again as they went out of the city. So, it wasn't constantly before them, it seems.}

Another curiosity is, "Were these wise men the only ones to see the star?" Well, we don't know; the Bible doesn't say. What's important is, they recognized the star to be from God, & they followed it to the Savior. What about us? Do we have the wisdom to recognize God's light & to follow it? God has always provided 'light' for man's need. David said, "Your word

is a lamp to my feet, & a light to my path,”(Ps. 119: 105). Paul spoke of the “light of the gospel”(2nd Cor. 4:4), & that’s the light that will lead us to the Savior.

Do you have the wisdom that matters most? These wise men from the East did. They were wise because they were interested in Jesus... they were willing to search for Him...& because they recognized the light God gave them & followed it to Jesus! How does your wisdom compare to them? Today, if you’re not a Christian, I encourage you to turn from your sins in repentance, come confess your faith in Jesus, & obey Him in baptism for remission of your sins. If you’ve been unfaithful as a Christian, I urge you to come home. While we stand & sing, won’t you come!