

THE TRUE JOY
of
CHRISTMAS

MATTHEW 2:1-12

THE **ONE** GIFT
THAT **CAN** CHANGE EVERYTHING

by

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It's around this time of year when the hearts of children become set upon that one gift that they hope, more than anything else, will be under the tree Christmas morning. That one gift that they believe if they had it, then life would be worth living. When I was in 6th grade, I recall one particular Christmas season, believing ... "if I only had a 'Starter Jacket,' then ... I would be somebody. All the 'cool' kids were wearing these jackets with their favorite team logo on them. My hope and joy was in getting that jacket. Christmas morning came and there it was. I was as happy as I could be, for a time. Then the years went by. Where is the jacket now? It's in my parents attic collecting dust. It didn't bring true joy. It brought temporary happiness.

Now, we grin because we think we've grown out of this. We convince ourselves that we've stopped thinking and living this way, but have we? How many of us still live like children who set their joy on that one thing in life, we believe will change everything?

"If only I had ... then things would be different."

"If only I had ... then everything would change."

"If only I hadthen I would be somebody."

"If only I had ... then my life would hold value."

"If only I had ... then I would finally find joy."

Everyone is on a journey to find that one gift, to find that one thing, to find that something or someone that we believe can change everything, that we believe will satisfy our souls and bring us true joy. In the second chapter of the gospel of Matthew we encounter three types of people. Three types of people on three different paths, but only one of the journeys ends in joy, but not just joy, great joy. True joy. And the question to answer is ... which one are we?

THE FALSE GOD OF POWER

I. The first type of person we see believes that joy is found in pursuing power and obtaining control over every aspect of his or her life. This person believes that true freedom and fulfillment is in being his or her own master and breaking free of any limits to power and authority. Joy for them is always trying to be in control. This type of person is seen in the character of King Herod.

When Herod heard that a child had been “born” King of the Jews, it caused him great fear. It says, “He was troubled.” Matt. 2:3. The Greek word is “tarasso.” It means to strike someone’s spirit with anxiety or fear. This is how the idols in our hearts reveal themselves, by our anxieties and fears. Behind everything we worship, behind everything we give our lives to, is the fear that, without it, life would no longer be worth living. We serve the things we ascribe ultimate worth to. The things we believe will bring us joy.

For Herod, it was political power and control. But it’s the same in other areas. If our god is being popular, then we’ll become fearful of losing friends and angry if we do. If our god is money, then we’ll become fearful of losing our good-paying job and angry if we do. If our god is prestige and appearance, then we’ll become fearful of not looking good in front of others and angry if we don’t. Irrational anxiety and fear - this is the picture we see of King Herod. Here is a man so obsessed with power and being in control that history tells us he even had several of his sons killed under suspicion that they were trying to over throw him. And Matthew records,

“When Herod saw that he had been tricked by the wise men, he became furious, and he sent and killed all the male children in Bethlehem and in all that region who were two years old or younger.” Matt. 2:16

Fearful and Furious. Those are the two characteristics of someone who pursues the false god of power. He or she believes that joy is to be found on the path to power and control, but the road only ends in fear and fury. A heart of anger that is full of fear.

THE FALSE GOD OF MORALISM

II. The second type of person we see believes that joy is found in pursuing the moral lifestyle and always having the right answers. This person believes that true joy and contentment is in knowing that they’re living the right way and answering the right way. Joy for them is always being right in the eyes of others. This type of person is seen in the character of the chief priests and scribes. In Herod’s panic to maintain control, it says,

“... assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, ‘In Bethlehem of Judea, for so it is written ...’”

And what was the response of the chief priests and scribes to the news that their long-awaited Messiah had been born? Surely, they, out of all people, would have been rushing to get to Bethlehem to worship Jesus, right? Wrong. Sadly, we find no response. Unlike Herod, whose response was anger to the news of Christ. The chief priests and scribes responded in apathy. They thought, 'we don't need to respond to Christ. After all, we had the right answer.' In pride, the moralist always justifies his apathy by his seemingly right behavior and right answers.

Arrogance and apathy. These are the two characteristics of people who pursue the false god of moralism. All they are concerned about is having the right answer when called upon. They believe that joy is found in not needing any help from others. But instead of joy, their hearts are full of pride and personal apathy.

THE TRUE GOD IN CHRIST

III. The third type of person we see believes that joy is found in pursuing the true God in Christ. This person believes that true joy is in seeking the true Jesus. Joy for this person is in surrendering their rights to the authority of Christ and the vain attempts at always being right to the perfect work of Christ. This person understands that freedom and fulfillment is not in being your own master but in serving the right master. This type of person is seen in the character of the wise men.

The wise men traveled a great distance and a hard road in pursuit of one thing. And what was on their "Christmas To-do list?" Worship the true Jesus. It says, "We have come to worship him." Matt. 2:2. The sovereign hand of God guided the wise men by a miraculous star to the place where Jesus was. And when they came to Jesus, what was their response? It says,

"They rejoiced exceedingly with great joy ... and they fell down and worshipped Him. Then opening their treasures, they offered Him gifts, gold, frankincense, and myrrh." Matt. 2:10-11.

The wise men's gifts represented that they were adoring the true Jesus. Gold because Jesus is King. Frankincense because Jesus is God. And myrrh because Jesus is Savior. Joy and Adoration. These are the two characteristics of people who pursue the true God in Christ. The King who came to rule *over* us. The God who came to be *with* us. And the Savior who came to die *for* us. But why did He need to die? Because our two greatest problems are sin and death and the only remedy is the work of God in Christ.

All of us have sinned. We've all pursued false gods. We've committed crimes against God in our thoughts, words and deeds and the punishment for our sin is death - eternal separation from God and all that is good. No amount of right answers or right behavior can make us right with God, but God in His love came to save us. How? Not by slipping down a chimney in a red velvet suit with a naughty and nice list in hand, granting the gift of forgiveness and eternal life to only those were nice. After all, none of us have been "nice" or "right" enough.

God came to save us by taking a human body in the person of Jesus Christ. Jesus lived a sinless and perfect life and gave His life upon a cross. While hanging on the cross, God the Father knowing every sin I ever have committed or will commit, He put those sins upon Jesus and He was punished in our place. Christ died and after paying the penalty for every sin, He rose again from the dead, ascended into heaven and is alive today.

He is King. He is God the Son, and He can be your Savior today. When we come in humility before the true Jesus, with nothing but a plea for mercy, a plea to forgive us and change us, to be our King, our God, and our Savior, He promises to forgive all our sins and give us the gift of eternal life. The gift that does change everything. The gift of knowing God now and forever. Knowing the true Jesus is the only gift that will bring us true joy. Because, as Tim Keller has said, "Christ is the only God that when you fail Him, will forgive you, and when you find Him, will fulfill you."

A NEW START AND A NEW HEART

In 1948, a young, 25-year-old business man by the name of Charles Lazarus launched a toy business that is now a world-wide company. Charles learned early on that toys continually break and fall out of fashion with children, prompting parents to return to the store again and again to buy the latest toy. Charles Lazarus, the man who purposely named his company with a backwards "R," was the brains behind "Toys R Us" — established because toys would fade and so would the children's "joy," and so the parents would come back again and again to buy the latest toy.

And that's the world's message, especially during the Christmas season. The world says to us, "Come back to me, and keep coming back to me because ... we've got a new version out. We've got a new upgrade available. We've got a new model on the floor." But if we buy into that lie, our joy will always be just out of reach.

Our joy will always be just ...

One toy away.

One drink away.

One paycheck away.

One promotion away.

One mouse click away.

One business deal away.

One team championship away.

But there's another message. It's God's message. And He says to us,

"You don't need a new starter jacket. You need a new start. You don't need a new toy. You need a new heart. And I alone, can give it to you. I can change your heart of anger that's full of fear. I can change your heart of apathy that's full of pride. And I can change it into a heart of adoration, that's full of joy."

Wise men still seek the true Jesus, and it's in finding Him that we find true joy. The gift of knowing God in Christ. The gift not wrapped under a tree, but wrought in our hearts. You don't have to pack your joy away with the decorations this Christmas, because true joy is in seeking the true Jesus. The question is ... will you?

"For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Romans 6:23

For God's glory and your joy,

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