

# A Genuine Desire to Worship Jesus

Matthew 2:1-12

*Halifax: 13 July 2003*

## **Introduction**

Last week we considered Psalm 95.

- In that Psalm, there is a call to come and worship God!
- In true worship, you meet with God—you come before His face.
  - It is a great privilege to come before Him and behold His glory.

But there are many who have no desire to come before God's face.

- It is certainly understandable!
  - God is a holy judge and we have sinned against Him!
    - Who would want to come before Him and face His wrath and displeasure?
    - The Bible tells us that:
      - “the kings of the earth, the great men, the rich men, the commanders, the mighty men, every slave and every free man, hid themselves in the caves and in the rocks of the mountains, and said to the mountains and rocks, ‘Fall on us and hide us from the face of Him who sits on the throne and from the wrath of the Lamb! For the great day of His wrath has come, and who is able to stand?’”

No one wants to meet God face to face like that!

- But Jesus Christ has come into the world, and He invites us to come to Him as Saviour.
  - The worship God calls you too is the worship that beholds the glory of God in face of Jesus Christ as Redeemer!
  - To come and behold Him not as an angry judge, but as the lamb that was slain...
    - As the One who left the glories of heaven to come and die on the cross to take away our sin.
    - Christian, when you come to worship, it is to meet God through His Son, Jesus Christ!
      - God speaks to you through His word that reveals the gospel of Christ!
        - It is the message of grace and mercy, or forgiveness and restoration!
      - And you speak to Him with songs of joyful praise and thanksgiving, and with prayer.

But all of this is of no avail to you unless you have a genuine desire to worship Jesus as the Messiah!

- There are many who have no such desire!
- And what is worse, there are many who go to church and who name the name of Jesus that have no real and genuine desire to worship Him.
  - They may have some heart-felt religious desires.
  - They may have some social desires to gather with their friends or feel accepted and loved—the church may be fine social club to them...
  - They may have some ethical desires to be a better person in some way.
  - They may have a desire to please other people...
  - They may just want to be entertained...
    - but if you have no desire to meet with Jesus and to worship Him, your worship is all empty and useless.

Matthew's account about the wise men is written to stir up God's covenant people to worship Jesus.

- He shows how the magi, who were gentiles from the east, came seeking Jesus at His birth when Jerusalem languished!
  - And brethren, what Matthew says here ought to wake you up if you have been sleeping!
  - The earnest desire of the Magi for Jesus is presented here to make you earnest for Him also!

Today I want to show you what a genuine desire to worship Jesus Christ looks like...

- I want to stir you up to have such a desire for Him...
- And if you already have a desire, I want to stir you up to have a greater desire.
  - I want each of you to have a genuine desire to worship Jesus and not something else that is only a cheap substitute.
    - Your place in eternity depends on it!

TRANS> So consider first of all...

## **I. A Genuine desire to worship Jesus is a God-given desire**

- A. If you have such a desire today, it because God reached out to you with His word to bring you into contact with Jesus.
  - What I mean is, God somehow taught you about Him.
    1. You see, nobody learns about Jesus Christ in a vacuum.
      - a. It not like you are sitting there on a deserted island and suddenly you understand that God has provided redemption for sinners through Jesus Christ.

- You might come to grips with that on a deserted island if you had heard about Jesus before you got to the island...
  - Or if you had a Bible, or even a book about the Bible that told you about Jesus...
  - But it is not something you could just figure out unless the gospel was somehow brought to you.
- b. The reason this is so is because it's not something that you would expect!
- On your own, you might come to see that there is a Creator and that you have not worshipped Him as you should...
    - And you might come to understand that you are in trouble with Him because of your sin, and because of the troubles you face in the world.
    - Most people don't even get that far, but if you did...
  - How could you ever even dream that God would send His own Son to redeem those sinners with whom He is justly offended?
    - How could you imagine that He would come to die on the cross for your sins?
    - The only way you could have access to that information would be for God to tell you it.
2. But God is very gracious, and He always finds a way to bring the gospel to His elect people.
- a. Just look at how He brought it to the Magi.
- 1) Somehow or another, he revealed a star to them...
    - a star that they call "His Star" when they say "we have seen His star in the east and have come to worship Him."
    - From what we learn about this star, it seems to be something like the pillar of fire that led the children of Israel out of Egypt.
      - In verse 9, we are told that it went before them and led them right to very house where the child Jesus was staying.

TRANS> But there is something more here—

- Somehow, the wise men associated this star with "He who has been born king of the Jews!"—that is, the Messiah!
    - How did they know that?
- 2) They knew because God told them—somehow, and I think we can do more than conjecture about how.
    - God brought His word to them.

- a) We aren't told much about these men—
- how many there were,
    - or exactly where they were from—
    - only that they were magi from the east.
  - But we do know that there were Magi throughout the east who served as advisors to kings—
    - They were experts in science and dream interpretation and philosophy.
    - And most of them were mono-theistic and taught justice and morality.
  - We also know that the Jews had been taken captive and dispersed throughout the east—
    - In Babylon and Persia and Arabia...
    - Daniel is a great example...
      - He was even made the head over the Magi at Babylon, and greatly earned their respect as an interpreter of dreams.
- b) Now if you put all this together, you can see that God had graciously sent His word to Magi for over half a millennia!
- Through Daniel and other faithful Jews that had been dispersed to their land...
    - The hope of the Messiah had been proclaimed to them, as it had all over the world in that day.
  - Tacitus, a secular historian states: “A persuasion existed in the minds of many that some ancient writing of the priests contained a prediction that about that time an eastern power would prevail, and that persons proceeding from Judea would obtain dominion.
  - Seutonius also speaks of it: “There had spread all over the Orient an old and established belief that it was fated at that time for men coming from Judea to rule the world.”
- c) Do you see brethren?
- God had prepared these wise men to see that star and to associate it with the Messiah in Israel!
  - Moreover, they knew that His blessing would be for them also because they had heard Israel's prophets and believed.

- God graciously brings His word to stir up a desire for Jesus in His elect...
  - He never fails to do it!
  - Somehow, they always hear so that they might believe!
  
- b. No one deserves such a wonderful privilege!
  - There are many who live and die without ever hearing this message.
  - They will be punished according to their sins...
    - There is no injustice about this.
    - Such persons will simply be judged according to their deeds.
      - And because they do not have the added sin of hearing about Jesus and rejecting Him, their punishment will be less...
      - Jesus says that those who have heard and rejected will be beaten with many stripes, but that those who have not heard will be beaten with few stripes.
      - The more you have heard, and the more clearly you have heard, the worse it will be for you if you have rejected.
  
- c. But how good God has been to you to bring you the glorious message of the gospel!
  - If you look back, you can see how at various times in your life, He brought people into your life to tell you about Jesus.
  - You may have been in a family and a church where He was not known as He is revealed in the gospel,
    - but in His kindness, God found a way to bring the message into your life...
    - Somehow, He broke in with the glad tidings of the Saviour, crucified for sinners!
    - You could have no desire for Him if you had not first heard about Him.

TRANS> But causing you to hear the gospel is not all that God does...

- In our fallen, rebellious condition, that is not enough to give you a desire to worship Jesus.
  - It ought to be enough...
    - For guilty hell bound sinners to be told that there is redemption in God's Son ought to be enough to send them all running to Him!

B. But when you see such a desire for Jesus, it is always because God has changed the darkened, rebellious heart to an enlightened, submissive heart!

1. It is not natural for men to do what these Magi did...

- to leave their comfortable and prosperous lives to come and worship Jesus!
- a. These men, if Persians, were not under Roman domination at this time, and as Magi, they were of a highly respected, powerful, wealthy class of men.
  - What need did they have of Israel's Messiah?
  - You would rather have expected them to respond to Him the way Herod did...
    - To see Him as a threat to the good life that they were enjoying for themselves!

b. Herod shows us what the natural response of man would be:

- Herod was an Edomite—a descendant of Esau.
  - You will remember that Esau despised Jacob for stealing his birthright.
    - Esau is a type of the flesh which is at enmity with God.
  - And there was one thing that Esau absolutely refused to do!
    - Esau absolutely refused to receive God's blessing by submitting to his brother Jacob—
      - He wanted a blessing independently of Jacob, not through Jacob.
      - This is shown all the more clearly when Esau gains worldly prosperity and ceases to despise Jacob.
- You see the same kind of opposition in Herod
  - Instead of rejoicing when the wise men told him that the Messiah had been born...
    - Herod saw it as a threat to his throne and did all he could to destroy Him.
    - By submitting to Messiah, He could have enjoyed much greater blessing,
      - but instead He tried to gain blessing independently of Christ.

c. And that is the way every man, woman and child naturally responds to Jesus!

- 1) We may tolerate him well enough for a while, but if He appears to be a threat to our way of life, we will try to destroy Him.
  - And never ever would we *think* of obtaining blessing by submitting to Him as our Saviour and Lord!

- Anything but that!
- The flesh is at enmity with God and cannot submit to Him.

2) But this account in Matthew shows us something even worse—

- That it is not just Edom, but also the covenant people who show this coldness to Christ.
  - All Jerusalem was troubled with Herod when the wise men came announcing that Messiah was born!
  - The chief priests and scribes who know the scriptures do not take one step toward Bethlehem to see Him!
- They had all this light, and all the things that pointed to the Messiah in their whole system of worship—
  - They should have been worshipping Him already in that system and been prepared to rejoice when He came...
  - But you see that even their hearts were hard toward Him.

TRANS> So what was it that made these Magi, these gentiles who had a comfortable life—to come seeking after Israel’s Messiah that they might worship Him?

- What made them so different from everyone else?
- Well I will tell you...

2. It was the work of God’s Spirit.

a. He breaks into sinful human hearts with His powerful influence to make them genuine seekers for Jesus Christ!

1) I have heard some people say that there is no such thing as seekers because Romans 3 says that there is none that seeks after God.

2) But there are seekers, and these wise men prove it.

- Romans 3 is talking about what we are by nature, before God’s Spirit has begun the work of calling us to Christ.
- The good news is that He does a work like that in some people,
  - and when He works He makes true seekers out of us.

b. How does He do it?

1) First of all, He causes you to see how much you need to be saved from your sin.

- He causes you see things the way they really are.
- He causes you to see the danger that you are in as one who has offended God by your sin...

- And He causes you to see how shameful and odious your sin is so that you will want to be saved.
- 2) Secondly, He begins to show you God's wonderful promise to forgive sins through Jesus Christ—
- He makes you see how suitable and perfect a Saviour Jesus is...
  - Christ is so attractive, there are so many reasons to desire Him...
    - And the Spirit takes away your blindness to see that—
      - with the result that you are drawn to Him!
- 3) Thirdly, the Spirit begins to change your will so that you begin to take steps toward Jesus and stop all the stubborn resistance...
- He brings you to the place that you are actually ready to let go of your own life and your own way and all your pride and come to Jesus.
  - When His work is effectual calling, He brings you to receive Jesus Christ.
    - He persuades you and enables you to embrace Him as Lord and Saviour—
      - To become a worshipper of Him!
      - He brings you all the way!
3. How thankful you should be if God has done this for you!
- a. It is not natural!
- Natural is like Herod.
  - To be at enmity with Christ.
- b. It is precious!
- There are so few that truly do become seekers!
  - God could have passed you by and left you to go your own way as so many are left!
  - Nothing is more precious than a heart that wants to worship Christ!

TRANS> And so you see then that a genuine desire to worship Christ is a God-given desire.

- Not only does He bring His word to you to point out that way—
- But He also brings His Spirit to you to cause you see how desirable this way is so that you will pursue it!
- And that leads to the next characteristic of a genuine desire to worship Jesus, namely:



## II. A genuine desire to worship Jesus is an earnest desire

### A. It must be an earnest desire if it is a genuine desire!

- Because it is about a matter of such great importance!
- 1. When you see that you are headed for an eternity Hell apart from Christ—
  - How it makes you desire Him!
  - What could be more important than where you spend eternity?
- 2. And when you see that sin is a shameful reprehensible thing, and you see the sweet love of Christ who promises to deliver you from it...
  - How it makes you desire Him!
- 3. It would be much better to have some terrible loathsome painful terminal disease and have no physician to heal you than to have no remedy for sin.
  - How earnest is your desire when God wakes you up to see your need and your Saviour!
  - It can't be anything but earnest because it is about a matter so important.

### B. The magi illustrate for us this **earnest** desire to worship Jesus.

1. It was earnest because it caused them to drop everything in order that they might go and find Jesus.
  - a. Finding Jesus was their ultimate priority!
    - They were busy, important men with high positions in their land...
    - But they left everything to take what was probably a thousand-mile journey to go and worship the One who was born king of the Jews!
    - Contrast their earnestness with the Jews themselves who could not be bothered to take the 5 mile journey to Bethlehem.
  - b. They were earnest because they believed what God had revealed about Jesus.
    - They did not have as much light as the Jews, but what light they had, they followed with great earnestness because they believed.
  - c. If you believe, if you really believe what God has shown you about Jesus, you will be earnest also.
    - Jesus says that you will leave all that you have to follow Him.
      - That's right—your whole life will become centred around Him.

- The earnest seeker of Jesus always asks—
  - Does this help me to draw near to Jesus?
  - And if it in the way, it has to go.
- Does this relationship help me to draw near to Jesus? Or perhaps, the way I am living in this relationship?
  - Does this job help me to draw near to Jesus? Am I doing my work as unto Him? Am I knowing Him in my work and service for others?
  - Does this money help me to draw near to Jesus? Am I using it in ways that honour Him and lead me to Him?
  - Does this use of my time help me to draw near to Jesus? to watch TV instead of having family worship?
  - Does this selfish attitude help me to draw near to Jesus? this attitude where I am always looking to see if people love me instead of concentrating on loving them.
  - Does this whining and complaining help me to draw near to Jesus?

TRANS> So you see that if you have a genuine desire for Jesus, you will be so earnest that you leave many things behind that get in the way of following Him.

- You will leave them as easily as a salesman leaves his goods with a paying customer—
    - You leave it for something better, something you need more, something you desire more.
    - But that is not all you will do if you have a genuine desire for Jesus...
2. You will be so earnest to worship Him that you will greatly rejoice in being led to Him.
- a. Do you see how the Magi responded when they realised that God was once again leading them to Jesus?
    - Look at verse 10.
      - “When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy!”
    - This is one of those statements that is so emphatic, it sounds funny to translate it literally into English:
      - “they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy!” because they knew that God was leading them to Jesus.
  - b. You can tell where your heart is by the things you rejoice in!
    - 1) Would you rejoice if you got a promotion at work?
      - Would you rejoice if you won a million dollars?

- Would you rejoice if you were terminally ill and you were healed?
- I will never forget the time I went to an NSA meeting—they were selling water and air purifiers, and at the meeting, they were telling everyone how rich they could get!
  - You should have seen the glazed over eyes of the people in that meeting!
  - They were rejoicing with exceeding great joy because they believed they were being led to something wonderful!

2) Well what about when God is speaking to you about Jesus...

- What I mean is, when He is showing you something that will enable you to worship Jesus better—or to know Him better—
  - Do you rejoice?
  - Do you get excited and eager to learn more?
  - Or do you try to avoid the truth the way the leaders at Jerusalem did.
    - Do you say, “Oh no, now God is going to expect me to follow this star—and I have so many other things to do...”
- Brethren, don’t you see?
  - There is reason to rejoice when God guides you into His truth...
  - When you know that He is speaking to you from His word!

TRANS> There is a third way that Magi show that they were earnest seekers...

3. They show it by their desire to give themselves wholly to Jesus.

a. What do the Magi do when they get to the house?

- They actually bow down and worship Him—
  - This is the outward expression of placing themselves under Him
  - Unlike Herod, they believe this is the place to find blessing—under Christ, depending on Him.
- In offering their gifts,
  - They show that all they have is for Him—
  - In placing themselves under Him,
    - they will use it all for Him...
    - All they have is to be used in ways that please Him.

b. It is quite remarkable to see the Magi bowing before Him in this setting!

- Here are these men of high rank and position bowing down to a little child living in relative poverty with no attendant but his mother!
  - They are not ashamed of Him because they know who He is!
- c. Do you know that it is the same for us?
  - Matthew Henry says: The humble inquirer after Christ will not be stumbled at finding him and his disciples in obscure cottages, after having in vain sought them in palaces and populous cities.
  - Paul says that there are not many wise according to the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble...
    - for God has chosen the foolish, the weak, and the base things of this world so that no flesh will glory in His presence.
    - The gospel is about admitting that we can't save ourselves—
      - and it is rare for the wise and the mighty and the rich to admit that.
      - That is why it is so rare to find a satisfaction with the simple worship of Christ that He has commanded...
        - There is always a desire to dress it up in some way.
        - The gospel is about earnestly worshipping the one who was brought to shame in this world, but was raised as the first-fruits of the world to come!
        - To receive the gospel, you must bear the reproach of Christ.
          - You must identify with the one who is largely despised and was crucified in shame and disgrace.
          - The Magi did not care—
            - They were delighted to worship Him because they knew that He was the king of the Jews, the Saviour of the world.

TRANS> All who genuinely desire to worship Christ are earnest in worshipping Him.

- But how tormented you would be if you had such a desire
  - a desire so earnest that you were willing to forsake all for Him, that you rejoiced at with exceedingly great joy in being led to Him, and that you were ready to give yourself wholly to Him—
  - how tormented you would be if you could not attain your desire!
  - If you saw the need for Jesus and had the desire for Him, but could not find Him!
    - What torment that would be to your seeking soul!

But I want to tell you that...

**I. A genuine desire to worship Jesus is always a fruitful desire... it always leads to blessing!**

A. This is certain because God promises it:

1. Through the prophet Jeremiah He says:

- Jer 29:13: And you will seek Me and find *Me*, when you search for Me with all your heart.
- If you have a true genuine desire to worship Jesus, God will bring your desire to fulfilment!
  - You will never search for Him in vain.
  - Isn't that a wonderful promise?

2. You can see how the Lord gives further light to those who truly seek Him by looking at the wise men...

a. First, He brought the star and caused them to see it in such a way that it would direct them.

- Next, He led them to the church to receive prophecy.
  - Even though they met unbelievers there who were not seeking Jesus, it was there that they found the answer that He was to be born in Bethlehem.
- Then He led them directly to the house by means of the star.

b. God brings all earnest seekers to Jesus.

- He brought them face to face with Jesus.
- There has never been a soul who truly wanted to come to Christ that was not able to find Him.
  - He will bring you in such a way that you will know that you have found the truth!

3. But how do you come face to face with Jesus now?

- You cannot be led to His house anymore and walk in where His mother is caring for Him.
- No, but God brings you face to face with Jesus by bringing His word to you.
  - This is even better than what the wise men had!
  - Christ Himself speaks to you and tells you His gospel when you read His word and especially when you hear the word preached.

- And when God speaks to you in Christ, you know that God has spoken.
  - When He says that your sins are forgiven through faith in Him, you know that it is so!
  - Each Lord's Day, you ought to come and meet with Him in the public assembly...
  - Each day, you ought to gather your family to meet with Him for family worship—to hear His voice and respond to Him in prayer.
  - And all day long, you ought to hold communion with Him.

TRANS> If you seek Him you will find Him!

B. What fruitfulness this is! Compare the fruitfulness of the Magi with Herod!

1. The magi leave all to find Christ—
  - Herod tries to protect all to keep his position and his life—
    - a. Herod does all He can to avoid coming under His dominion—
      - The Magi do all they can to put themselves under His dominion.
    - b. Herod is greatly troubled by Christ,
      - The Magi greatly rejoice in Christ.
2. And I tell you that Herod's trouble and the Magi's rejoicing will not stop—it will only intensify at the last day!
  - a. The Magi, and all of you who seek Christ now will be delighted to see Jesus.
    - Herod, and all those who try to avoid Him will be troubled—
  - b. How great that trouble will be!
    - Nothing in all the universe can compare with the tragedy and the horror of coming to that day with no desire to worship Jesus!
    - You will have no place to go, no place to hide; and there will be nothing you will want to do more.
      - Herod had some comfort so long as he was able to keep up his scheming and plotting against Jesus...
      - But there will be no room for that on the judgement day!
    - Let me urge you—do not come to that day without Jesus!
      - It will be too late then for you to wake up and start seeking Him.
      - The most awful word in that day will be the word forever!

- c. But how great will that joy be for you that desire to worship Him now.
- You know your heart—either you are trying to avoid Him or you are seeking Him.
  - To desire Jesus is to desire blessing!
    - Your desire for Him will be a desire that will grow up into everlasting life and everlasting joy.
    - What fruitfulness there is in a genuine, God-given, earnest desire for Jesus Christ.
    - Seek Him with all your heart and you will not be disappointed!