

2-24-2008 Matthew 2

Rick Miller: Matthew chapter 2

Well, let's pray. Lord, as we open your word, we pray that your spirit would make clear to us what you want to say to us today. Give us ears to hear and hearts to receive. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Matthew chapter 2.

1 Now after Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men from the East came to Jerusalem, 2 saying, "Where is He who has been born King of the Jews? For we have seen His star in the East and have come to worship Him."

3 When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. 4 And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.

5 So they said to him, "In Bethlehem of Judea, for thus it is written by the prophet:

6 'But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah,

Are not the least among the rulers of Judah;

For out of you shall come a Ruler

Who will shepherd My people Israel.' "

So here we have these wise men coming from a faraway country coming into Jerusalem, looking for the King of the Jews, looking for the Messiah. Now we kind of have these ideas of the manger scene and the three kings and all. Well, we pretty much got that wrong. These guys weren't kings and there weren't just three of them.

Well, we're not really sure. The Bible doesn't say they were wise men, more like, astrologers or scientists who apparently had some knowledge of scripture possibly from Daniel. It was possible that these men were from the area of Babylon and had read the prophecies that Daniel had written about the coming Messiah.

So, they somehow saw this star. The Bible doesn't give us a lot of detail about what this is, but I believe it was a supernatural occurrence. I mean, clearly when they got to Jerusalem this star reappeared and went directly over where the child was. So you read some things about this and people try to make it some sort of natural phenomenon, like it was a meteor or something.

Well, that really wouldn't make sense that it would stay over where Jesus was as a small child. It possibly could have been like the Shekinah glory where we read in the Old Testament, the pillar of fire by night. And so it's definitely a supernatural occurrence here.

But, really what I want to point out in this passage today is really the contrast between the wise men who were so diligently seeking after Christ and the religious leadership that were in Jerusalem at this time, that seemed to really be indifferent to all that was going on. And it's sort of surprising.

Here you have these wise men who possibly may have traveled up to a year to get to Jerusalem; it could have even been longer. Yeah, so they have really sacrificed, put their life aside. I mean, they are diligently, seriously seeking Jesus Christ. There's nothing casual about their commitment to Jesus Christ or their seeking after Jesus Christ.

I mean, I'm amazed how casual we can be. How apathetic we can be in our love for the Lord, in our passion for the Lord. I really believe as I was preparing this study, that the Lord wants to challenge us this morning to look at our hearts and say, how passionate are we for Jesus Christ?

I asked John to sing a song this morning, which I normally don't do. That last song he sang was about light the fire again. That's really a song taken from the book of Revelation where Jesus is speaking to one of the seven churches and challenging this church of becoming lukewarm in their relationship toward him.

You probably know the scripture. He says, I would rather have you be hot or cold, but if you're lukewarm, I'm just going to vomit you out of my mouth. Now that's a pretty strong statement from Jesus Christ. I mean, I don't want to stand before Jesus Christ and hear him say, you make me sick.

I died on a cross for you. I did all this and you were so casual about your love for me. You let so many things crowd me out. And where was the diligence? Where was the passion? I'm just challenged in my own heart this week to say, Lord, I gotta examine my heart. I gotta say, Lord, am I easily discouraged?

Am I distracted from the passion of seeking Jesus Christ for who he is, just for loving Him, for who he is. And I see these wise men invest a year of their life. Can you imagine all the difficulties they faced? I mean, you didn't get an airplane back then or a nice air conditioned car.

I mean, you were on the road, right? I mean, you're sleeping by the side of the road. It's a tough journey. And yet how often are we distracted from going to a Bible study or church because something difficult happens and the first obstacle the enemy throws in our way, we're like, oh, well I guess it's not God's will for me to go to Bible study.

Whatever, we're kind of wimpy sometimes, and am I getting up early to seek the Lord and pray? Well, God understands, I'm tired. I really wonder if the Lord is saying, man, where's the passion? Where's the desire? Where's the longing? Where's the drive?

Now, I'm not saying you can produce this drive within yourself. You guys know me. I'm all about grace. These are things that cannot be produced by making some kind of commitment to God. But there's definitely like a repentance involved here where you have to examine your heart and you have to, on purpose, turn your heart to God and turn away from a bunch of other stuff, because there's all kinds of distractions that come our way.

So let's go over to Revelation and read that. I think it's so important that we hear what the Lord is saying and that we look at our lives and say, gosh, do we even have the kind of passion that these kings or these wise men had with the limited revelation they had?

They were somehow driven and excited about the Messiah. Oftentimes we're way too casual about our relationship with the Lord. So Revelation 3, verse 14 *“And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write,*

‘These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness

Now, this is Jesus talking. You know that if it's red letters right in your Bible, this is Jesus Christ talking, the risen Lord. Speaking to his church, speaking to his people in the first century. 15 “I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, ‘I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing’—and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked—

Well, Lord, you're being kind of rude. That's not nice to talk to your people like that. This is Jesus Christ talking to his people, his church. You are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked. Then I turn that on myself, I say, Am I self-sufficient?

Am I saying I have everything I need. I'm okay. Verse 18.

“I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed; and anoint your eyes with eye salve, that you may see. 19As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent. 20Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me. 21To him who overcomes I will grant to sit with Me on My throne, as I also overcame and sat down with My Father on His throne.

22*“He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches. ”*

So verse 19 is a key verse because it's highlighting what our responsibility is, what God is calling us to do, and he's saying, Therefore be zealous and repent. That's our part. God can't repent for you. Did you know that? He can't repent for us if we've become casual and different about our relationship with Jesus Christ, he can't change your heart. You have to, on purpose, say, I want to be zealous for God and I want to repent of my indifference, of my casualness and people-pleasing attitude of letting other things distract me from seeking first the kingdom of God in his righteousness.

So I see the wise men with this tremendous passion. And here they show up in Jerusalem naively thinking that everybody there is going to be so excited about the Messiah.

And they show up and everybody's in the dark. Everybody's like, what? What are you talking about, the king of the Jews. Where is he? Who's been born King of the Jews? Where can you see him going around to people? You know what, so where is he? You guys are nuts. What are you talking about? King of the Jews. We don't know anything about a king.

Well, we saw a star in the east. We came to Jerusalem. This is the capital of Israel, of God's chosen people. And you don't know about the king? You're that out of touch? You're in the dark. Yeah, they're in the dark. The religious leadership scares me, man. I tell you, leaders, you can become puffed up. You

can become proud. You can become, well, say, I know the word of God, so I'm okay.

See, Herod went to the scribes, the chief priest, the PhDs. Where is the Christ to be born? Herod wants to know, and they know - Bethlehem of Judea, and they take them right to the scripture, but you don't see them getting up and traveling six miles south of Jerusalem to check out where Jesus Christ is now.

Why? Why? Isn't that really strange? I mean, you get these men who've traveled over a year, they come and stand before you and they say, we believe the Messiah has been born. We saw his star. And these were important men. They were dignitaries; they were people that you would listen to. And the chief priest describes the people who knew, supposedly knew the word of God, knew the scriptures.

They're like, we don't know what you're talking about. There's no Messiah been born, and I bet you they were thinking, well, surely, if the Messiah was born, God would've told us first. We're the religious elite, we're the educated. We have the degrees on the walls. Of course, God would come and tell us the Messiah has come, but God didn't do that, did he?

He didn't come to the proud. He used the humble. The Bible says God is opposed to the proud, but he gives grace to the humble in James 4.

He'll just pass by the proud, not even bother to tell him. See, we don't want to have proud hearts. We don't want to have apathetic hearts. We want to have humble hearts. We want to be repentant and humble before the Lord in our lives and you wonder, why aren't I seeing God move in my life? Why aren't I experiencing exciting, powerful things? I wonder, are we proud? Are we not repentant? Are we not zealous about seeking the Lord like these men were? Have we become self-absorbed and self-sufficient?

So it's really shocking that these scribes, these chief priests didn't feel the need to go seek out Jesus Christ, six miles, and yet these wise men had come probably hundreds of miles over a year. It shows you the danger of pride and apathy that can really creep into our hearts. Our Bible says our hearts are desperately wicked.

You know who can know it? That's why repentance really has to be a daily thing. We have to examine our hearts because we're like sheep. We, so easily go astray. We're on track. We're doing fine and then the devil brings temptation. He

brings it, and we just start to drift and all of a sudden we find ourselves over here like, ah, church, it seems kind of boring.

The Word doesn't seem interesting or prayer, and something's wrong. There's supposed to be a love for God, a passion for God, and these wise men had it. The scribes were apathetic. Now Herod, he's on the other end of the spectrum. He's hostile. He's not apathetic, he's hostile, and he's threatened.

We run into people like that don't we? That are resistant, are hostile toward the gospel. Well, he ends up dead by the end of the chapter. So that's how God deals with those kinds of people. So you don't want to be hostile or resistant toward the things of God. You don't, we don't want to be apathetic.

We want to be pressing in and seeking the Lord. So let's go on to verse 7 then.

7Then Herod, when he had secretly called the wise men, determined from them what time the star appeared. 8And he sent them to Bethlehem and said, "Go and search carefully for the young Child, and when you have found Him, bring back word to me, that I may come and worship Him also."

9When they heard the king, they departed; and behold, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came and stood over where the young Child was. 10When they saw the star, they rejoiced with exceedingly great joy.

You see that passion there? You see the passion of these wise men?

That's why the Bible calls them wise men. They had their eye on the star. They had their eye on Jesus Christ. That's where our eyes should be, and we should be excited. We should be rejoicing in our relationship with Christ, with exceeding great joy. Verse 11, "when they had come into the house they saw the young child with Mary, his mother, and fell down and worshiped him.

Imagine that, falling down before Jesus who was probably like a toddler at this time. Could have been up to one or two years of age, and they're falling down and worshiping him even with the limited revelation they had. They recognized this was the one, this was the Messiah, this was the Savior, and they fell down and worshiped him again, just passionate men opening their treasures.

They presented gifts to him, gold, incense, and myrrh and being divinely warned in a dream that they should not return to Herod, they departed for their own country another way. So these are men who are hearing from God. God's

warning them in a dream; they're following his direction. And isn't that a great advantage of being passionate toward the Lord?

You are going to hear him, so you're going to hear what's going on. You're going to hear what God is saying. And again, sometimes we say, well, I don't ever hear from God. I would suggest you repent, turn toward the Lord and say, Lord, I am not leaving you till you stir that passion within my heart.

Back in Revelation, Jesus said, buy from me gold. So you have to come to Jesus to get this passion, this purity, this inward drive. It only comes from him. Remember when John the Baptist was calling the nation of Israel to repentance? We're going to get to that in chapter 3 here pretty soon in the coming weeks. But what did he say? He says, guys, I baptize you with water.

I can only cleanse the outward, but he who is coming after me, you know what? I'm not even worthy to untie his sandal. He will baptize you in the Holy Spirit and with fire. See, that's what we need guys. We need to be baptized in the Holy Spirit and fire. He's not interested in just an outward cleansing or looking good on the outside.

He wants to go deep in our hearts, but you gotta go to Jesus Christ. You gotta have your eyes on that star. We have to focus on him, be repentant and say, Lord, baptized me in your spirit and baptized me in fire. There's a burning away of junk in our lives, of chaff or stuff that is not pleasing to God, but it only comes through Jesus Christ.

I can't give that to you. Your parents can't give that to you. A preacher can't give that; only Jesus Christ. So each of us has to do business with him. Because you know the Lord's coming back soon, guys. Don't you? And I don't want any of you guys to be embarrassed or ashamed when he comes back. I want you to be able to say thank you, Lord, that I did business with you, that I repented, that you purged me with the fire.

You burned away that inward junk and you did that precious work in my heart God, where I was only seeking you first in my life. Nothing else mattered and I had this passion to go on with you Lord, to let nothing stop me from seeking you.

And when obstacles were thrown in my way, I just jumped over, I pushed them aside. I was passionate, I wasn't proud. And again, that heart, that kind of heart hears from God, that kind of heart worships. See when all the junk gets burned away, you can see the Lord. And what's the response? You just want to worship

him. You fall down, you worship him. You present to him things that are pleasing to him - gold.

That's the pure work that the Lord does in our heart, that's precious to him. Your worship is precious too; he's jealous. He's jealous that you are focused on other things, that I am focused on other things. Many times in our lives, we have to examine ourselves. God is a jealous God.

He wants our full attention. Do you know that? And so he wants us to present to him gold and frankincense; that's incense. We're a fragrance to the Lord. He loves people who are passionate toward him. He loves your worship. It's like incense to him. And then myrrh, that myrrh was something used in burying people.

So it represents death when we come before the Lord. We're allowing him to do that inward work in us. And our prayers are incense to him. And yet there's a death, isn't there? There's a death to self, daily. Jesus said you take up your cross. Your flesh will not cooperate. Just when you think you're on track and you're passionate, I'm telling you, you wake up the next morning and the flesh is alive and well and kicking and resisting God, at enmity against God, you gotta go to the cross daily.

So every day we gotta get up and say, Lord, take me to the cross. Let this old man that is at enmity and resisting you die. And Lord, I want to renew my passion for you this day, fresh. Doesn't matter what happened yesterday; that's what that myrrh represents. So we're going to close in prayer and let's just have a moment before the Lord where we can cry out to him and say, Lord, work this in our hearts.

God, forgive us for our apathy. Forgive us for our pride. Forgive us for being self-sufficient. Lord, I know you're doing a work in our hearts by your Holy Spirit. You're calling many back to you, some who've really been far from you Lord. And they're miserable and they know it and you're calling them to return today.

Today is a day of salvation. It's not tomorrow. It's not later, it's today. So, Lord, would you touch them and speak to them powerfully? And yet many of us, Lord who do love you, who are seeking you, you're calling us to a deeper place, Lord. You're calling us to a more passionate, a more zealous place of seeking you, Lord.

We're putting aside things that are just chaff. They're empty. God, we're repenting right now.

Lord, you deserve our full attention. You deserve our full love. And when you come back, Lord, we can stand before you and say, oh, I'm so glad.

On that Sunday morning at Botanical Gardens I turned my heart in a full way toward the Lord. I'm so glad I responded to that message. I don't have to be ashamed.

You said, Lord, if we're ashamed of you and your words, you'd be ashamed of us when you return. Lord, we don't want to be ashamed around people who aren't following you and we're sort of shy and apologetic about following Jesus. We repent of that. Lord, we put it all behind us. We want to be zealous for you, focused on you, spending many hours in prayer with you in your word, saying, God, speak to me for my life.

Nothing else matters anymore. I'm throwing aside the distractions. Lord, work that powerful baptism in the Holy Spirit, burn away the chaff, Lord. Even now, Lord Jesus, come in power. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Well, let's sing a song and then we'll be dismissed.