

Time of Grace Ministry
Too Stressed to Feel Blessed: The Wise Men
Matthew 2:1-12
December 2, 2018

Pastor Michael Novotny

Sometimes our world seems like a dark and scary place where it's hard to find some really good news. Yet, you can still rejoice today like the wise men who met Jesus. Pastor Jeremy Mattek is going to tell us more next on Time of Grace.

Pastor Jeremy Mattek

Highway 151 is kind of a short, winding highway in northern California. And according to a man named Rick Dyer, that is where Big Foot died; Big Foot died. The reason he believes that is because he says that he is the man who actually found and killed Big Foot back in September of 2012. But there are a lot of folks, shortly after that, who are hoping that he wasn't right because just a little bit of time after he announced his big news, that Big Foot was dead, commercials for the first episode of a reality television series called, "\$10 Million Dollar Big Foot Bounty," started airing on television; a reality show on which nine teams of two were each competing for a \$10 million prize by going around the world and searching for the very same thing that Rick Dyer says is no longer living. And of course, if that's the case, if that's accurate, if that's true, if Big Foot really is real and also really dead, then there is no reason whatsoever that anyone should tune into that reality television series because we know exactly how it's going to turn out in the end. They're not going to find the big payoff, the big payout, for which they're hoping. And you probably know that you don't need to be a Big Foot hunter, you don't need to be a reality television star, to know that that can be kind of a disappointing feeling.

I recently read that three percent of married people in America, every Christmas season, find out that they have been cheated on. Merry Christmas, right? That every year, three percent of married people in America discover that something that they once believed in maybe was never real to begin with and now might not give them the big payout of joy and happiness for which they've been hoping. And of course, you don't have to be married to have hopes; whether you're married or not, you hope – you hope for a lot of things – and a lot of things that are kind of really important. You hope to hear some good news when you wake up in the morning. You hope that your new year is going to be a little bit better than the last one. You hope that your kids will be happy again. You know, you hope that your hard work is going to pay off. You hope that you're going to see the very good thing for which you're desperately searching. But the truth is, kind of like the search for Big Foot, that doesn't always happen. And if that's ever been the case for you, then you might have something in common with some guys that are commonly known as the wise men, the magi; some curious folks who were following the path of something that not everyone was able to see, apparently. They weren't looking for – they weren't looking for Big Foot, they weren't looking for treasure – they were carrying treasure with them, looking for a king as they followed a star. And eventually, they found him, and their search behind a star gives a lot of hope and a lot of encouragement to anyone who's ever been stressed out because they're looking for something really, really significant and having trouble finding it. They give

encouragement because they show us how to find the same joy and the same peace that they did at the end of their journey. And we read about this in Matthew 2, it's called the visit of the magi, and it goes like this:

“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea during the time of the King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, ‘Where is the one who’s been born king of the Jews? We saw his star in the east and have come to worship him.’ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed and all Jerusalem with him. When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Christ was to be born. ‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will be the shepherd of my people Israel.’ Then Herod called the magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and make a careful search for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me so that I too may go and worship him.’ After they had heard the king, they went on their way and the star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother, Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him and they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh. And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.” That’s the word of God.

We don’t know how much those gifts that the wise men gave to Jesus were worth; consensus seems to be that they were worth quite a bit. But we do know this: That Jesus, the Son of God, God in the flesh, he did not need them at all. He didn’t need them. In Psalm 50 in the Old Testament, back in the days when God’s people would give gifts to God, offerings in the form of animals like bulls and cattle and goats, God said very simply, he told the Israelites, “I really don’t need your goats. I don’t need the cattle,” and he gave them a reason why. He said, “Because it all belongs to me already.” Psalm 24:1 says, “The earth is the Lord’s.” It’s already the Lord’s and “everything in it.” So like when we give God gifts, when we give offerings at church, for example, we’re not adding to his net worth because he already owns everything. And if he needs anything in addition, he can get it just like that. In Matthew 17, Jesus needed some money to pay his taxes and do you know how he got that? He commanded a fish to jump up out of the water and spit money out of his mouth and Jesus had his money to pay his taxes. He doesn’t need our stuff; he doesn’t need us to give it to him.

And so, you might ask the question, well why did these wise men travel all this way and carry these very expensive gifts with them? And that’s easy to answer; because they believed that Jesus was worth it. They believed he was worth it. Do you know what that is? I mean, that’s what worship is. Worship is the way that we tell God that we think that he’s worth it and that’s why we give our offerings, too; that’s why we give, you know, donations to charities that we love and churches that do a good job of spreading the gospel and reaching the lost with everyone. We do that because we believe that he’s worth it. The Bible says, you know, that God loves a cheerful giver. And do you know why the Bible says that God loves a cheerful giver? Because in God’s kingdom, there is no other kind of giver than just a cheerful giver. Cain and Abel both gave offerings in the Old Testament, right? But God only accepted Abel’s offering because he actually wanted to give it. He actually wanted to. If you, you know, if you don’t want to give an

offering, you don't have to, you know, because God doesn't – if you give it reluctantly or because you think that you have to – then it doesn't really count anyway. We give offerings, we give worship to God, because we believe he's worth it and that's what the wise men were doing here and nobody had to twist their arm, nobody had to convince them that they should travel all those miles and find this little kid and carry all these expensive gifts. They just wanted to do it. We know that about the wise men.

And how much their gifts were worth is not the only thing that we don't know. You might know that there are some songs about the wise men and one of the more famous songs is, "We Three Kings of Orient Are." Do you know that one? We three kings of orient are, bearing gifts we traverse afar." You know that one? You know what's wrong with that song? Almost everything. Almost everything. The Bible never tells us that there were three of them; it doesn't tell us how many men came to see little Jesus. It could be three, it could be five, it could be 37; we don't know. And they weren't kings! They were magi. Do you know what magi are? Magi are astrologers; people who spend their time looking up at the stars, which explains how they knew that there was something different going on in the sky. And they probably weren't from the orient; more likely they were from Babylon. Babylon. And so, I mean, all this information is available to anyone and yet, mostly because of a song that was written all the way back in 1857, there are a lot of things about the magi, the wise men, that a lot of even lifelong Christians get wrong.

There are also some things about King Herod that not everyone knows, at the very least. You know, King Herod who attempts to end the life of this little baby didn't stop after this visit of the wise men. Most people think of King Herod as like this blood thirsty villain who just didn't like anybody but that's not really – that's not totally accurate; that's not the whole picture. Because King Herod actually did a lot for his people. In fact, he did something for his people that hadn't been done since the days of King Solomon hundreds and hundreds and hundreds of years before him. He built them a harbor; ever since the days of Solomon, the people have wanted a harbor and nobody had been able to figure out how to do it but Herod did. And he not only built a harbor, he built an entire city around it so that – for one reason – so that the families of the guys who were doing the construction work on the harbor wouldn't have to – you know, so they could move there and they wouldn't have to be separated from their dads and their husbands when they were doing all this important work.

King Herod also discovered that his people liked the arts and so he built them a theater and he built them an amphitheater so they could go and enjoy themselves. But maybe the most significant thing that Herod did, at least in the eyes of his people, is that he rebuilt the temple in Jerusalem and this – this was the most difficult thing of all. Because according to Old Testament law, only the priests and the Levites could actually do any kind of work or construction on the temple but the problem was the priests and the Levites in the time of King Herod, they weren't skilled in any of those trades; they didn't know how to do any of that. So Herod spent a lot of time, a lot of money, a lot of effort, training the priests and Levites how to do major, massive construction and because the priests said there couldn't be any noise distractions while worship was ongoing, Herod agrees to have the big, large stones quarried and shaped miles and miles away and then quietly moved into place while nobody was worshipping; probably in the middle of the night. That's a lot of effort but its effort that he was willing to put in because Herod really

just wanted to be loved by the people that he ruled. And so when some wise guys come into town and tell him that there's a new king that's been born, one that's not going to do all the political dancing that Herod had already spent so much effort in, someone who's not going to have to spend a dime out of his own pocket, somebody who would just get the throne because he was born to be a king – well, Herod saw it as a threat to his relationship with his people, to his legacy, and to his kingdom. It doesn't excuse his attempts to kill little baby Jesus but maybe it gives us a little bigger picture; it helps us understand it.

He did that because he wanted to be loved by someone and respected and he wanted to know that his hard work that he put in, that it was all going to be worth it. And you don't have to be a blood thirsty, immoral, wealthy king to feel that way. You just need to be somebody who hopes for something.

What do you hope for most these days and what is the one thing that occupies your thoughts and your prayers more than anything? And how do you feel if it never happened? What if the person who's sick never gets better? What if you never again feel loved in your marriage? What if your children never come back? What if you lose everything you spent your whole life building? What if you never see the good things for which you're desperately searching? I mean, do you ever wish God would do for you what he did for these wise men? I mean, God gave them a star, right? He gave a bright, shining light that guided them through the darkness that constantly surrounded them and that bright shining light successfully led them all the way to a king; just not the one that they were expecting. The star didn't lead them to Bethlehem; it led them to King Herod in Jerusalem. And if you're King Herod and these guys come into your temple and they say that a star in the sky led us to you. If you were Herod, what do you think you would do next? I think he'd say, "Wait a second." And he'd step down from his throne and he'd go look outside and he'd just – wouldn't you look for the star? I bet he did and I don't think he saw it. I don't think he saw it. I think the star disappeared when the magi walked into Jerusalem. At the very least, Herod didn't understand what was going on because he asked his own wise guys, his own smart guys, to figure out what the star – what the star would have meant and they didn't find anything until they opened up the word and they discovered that the star belonged to a king who was supposed to be born about six or seven miles away in the little town of Bethlehem. And that's when the magi packed up their stuff again, they started on their journey, the star reappeared, and the star led them directly to the home of the little king. Directly there. Amazing!

But the star didn't lead them to Bethlehem; the star led them to the word. The word led them to Bethlehem. The word led them to the peace and the joy for which they were so desperately searching and that is the only thing that God has ever promised would lead us to those things. "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path," it says in Psalm 119. You think of Job, who was desperately searching for all the happiness that he had lost in just a moment, do you know what God's remedy was for Job? Brace yourself like a man and listen to the words that I'm speaking. For Jesus, on the night that he was betrayed, the night before he was taken away in front of his disciples, he gave his disciples this instruction knowing that their lives were going to be filled with ups and downs; they were going to go all over the place. They were going to be stressed out of their mind and the one instruction that he gave them was, "Remember the words that I've spoken."

Do you? Do you first go to the word when you're looking for peace and looking for guidance? Or do you sometimes put your greatest hope in a star that might never be coming? I mean, when you're sad, when you're stressed, when you're depressed, you tell yourself it will all get better if what? Well, I'll be happy if I can just find some money to pay the bills. I'll be happy if somebody would just notice me and the situation that I'm in. I'll be happy if, man, if they would just show me a little respect. I'll be happy if I never have to say goodbye to anyone that I love. I'll be happy if things go exactly the way that I'm planning. But you know that despite our great hopes, sometimes they don't.

I read a story quite a while back about a man named Mr. Yang; Mr. Yang lives in China. And one day when he was 55 years old, he was doing one of his very favorite activities; he was doing a home improvement project. He was cutting some pieces of lumber and just having a great time with it. But after a while he started feeling kind of sick and started to get a real sharp headache. But he kept working because he really enjoyed the work and he kept going. But eventually, he started feeling so crummy that he had to stop and eventually he went to the doctor to get it checked out because the pain wouldn't stop. And the doctor gave him a quick look over and checked his vitals and everything and he said, "You look okay," but he suggested, "Well, if your head is hurting so much, maybe let's give you a CT scan and see what comes up." And then they discovered something; you know what they discovered? They discovered an eight centimeter long nail in his forehead! Apparently, one of the boards that he had been working with, the pieces of wood that he had been working with, had a nail inside it and he didn't know it. And when the nail hit the blade that was spinning – it shot the nail into his forehead just above his left eye. And he didn't notice that that happened! He just kept working and enjoying the work. I mean, can you imagine that? Can you imagine that you are enjoying what you're doing so much that you're so focused on what you're doing that you are pretty much oblivious to a nail basically in your brain? He ended up being okay.

I don't think these wise men had nails in their brains but I want you to think about all the reasons that their hearts may have been filled with stress or pain. They were hundreds of miles away from probably the only home they had ever known. And long before the days of airplanes and trains and Skype, Facetime and telephones, no doubt they had a lot of people telling them not to go. Like, what about your job? What about the people who are relying on you? What are your kids going to do? And then people asking, well, what's going to happen? What are you going to find when you go to this place that you've never seen before? I mean, like so many people who have hoped for something, you might find nothing.

Or they just might find the one thing for which every person on earth is searching; a king who is so determined to be close to us in our own moments of stress and uncertainty and pain that he leaves the comfortable throne of heaven and puts on human skin that he knew would one day be pierced, ripped, stabbed, and torn open. But unlike Mr. Yang, Jesus wasn't oblivious to the pain. He felt the piercing sting of each nail as it dug into his skin and rubbed against the bones that were inside of him. But he endured it because Jesus had hopes, too. He had hoped that we would be forgiven of every time we have placed our greatest hope in something other than him. He had hoped that no matter who you are or what you've done, no matter how stress filled your life is or ever has been, that you would successfully find your way to the one place where you are

completely oblivious to sickness, death, stress, and pain because it does not exist; not in the home of this king. Not in heaven. And that is what the wise men found in a little town called Bethlehem. And the Bible says when they found him, they were overjoyed. If you take just the Greek words that are there, if you just go word by word, it says – it literally says – “they rejoiced a great rejoicing exceedingly.” In other words, they were excessively happy. In the middle of the same dark world in which you and I live, they were happy because they found him. And remember that the first place that they did is the same place that you and I can find him whenever life is doing anything to us. They found him in the word and so when Jesus says to us, “Come to me all who are weary and burdened,” well, that’s your star and this is where it’s leading. It’s leading to the word that you are free to open every morning, every day, and every evening. The words that you have spoken to me, Jesus once prayed to his father. They are spirit and they are life. In other words, open up the word. Be reminded again of who Jesus is and what he did and all that he promises and find the peace-filled life for which every person on earth is searching. Amen.

Pastor Michael Novotny

Do you ever find it difficult to be away from home? I know sometimes when I travel and I don't sleep in my bed and I don't see my family, it's really difficult, which makes me think of this family Pastor Jeremy just told us about, the wise men. How long do you think they were away from their homes and their friends, their family, the bed they love to sleep in? And yet, we heard in this incredible story that they rejoiced and we saw the most important reason why: Because they saw Jesus and he was worth it.

Do you actually know that's what the English word "worship" means? To ascribe worth to something. When we worship God, we say that he is worth it. And the more that we focus our eyes on Jesus, that he is worthy of everything we have to give, the sacrifices we make for our faith will not seem like a burden but a joy because Jesus is just that good.

Would you join me and pray?

Dear Jesus, if we could see your face right now, we would believe what the wise men believe; that you are worthy of worship. We would give not just our gold but everything; we would offer our bodies as living sacrifices to you. And so I pray today for your Holy Spirit; that you would send him and he would open our eyes to realize that you are glorious and good and forgiving and kind and patient. You're God. Help us to love you more and more; that we would give up everything and yet feel like we're gaining everything. Thank you, Jesus, for what you did. You left the comfort of your home in heaven to be in this broken place that we call earth but you did it so that we could end up in a place that would never be broken again. So thank you for your work, your sacrifice, and your salvation. We pray these things today with confidence because we've learned who we are. Because of your grace, we are forgiven and loved. We are the children of God so we pray today Jesus, in your name, Amen.

With Time of Grace, I'm Pastor Mike Novotny and because of the love of Jesus Christ, your eternal joy starts now.



TIME OF GRACE®

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Too Stressed to Feel Blessed: The Wise Men

Matthew 2:1-12: ¹“After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem ²and asked, ‘Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.’ ³When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him. ⁴When he had called together all the people’s chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born. ⁵‘In Bethlehem in Judea,’ they replied, ‘for this is what the prophet has written: ⁶“But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.”’ ⁷Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. ⁸He sent them to Bethlehem and said, ‘Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.’ ⁹After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. ¹⁰When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. ¹¹On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. ¹²And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.”

Points to Ponder

1. Why did the wise men travel so far and bring such expensive gifts for Jesus? In what ways do you worship your Savior?
2. What was it that King Herod hoped for? How was that threatened by the news the wise men brought to him?

3. The star led the wise men to Jerusalem to find Jesus, but what was it that ultimately led them to Jesus and the peace and joy he brings?

4. Sometimes our world can be a dark place, but why can we always rejoice like the wise men?

5. Do you have a time for regular study of God's Word? Make a plan for searching it for God's promises of peace and forgiveness for you.

Just like God guided the wise men to the baby Jesus, he also guides us on our paths through life. By looking in God's Word, we find hope, peace, joy, and forgiveness in Jesus, and we too can worship him for such a glorious gift of salvation.

What else does God say?

Isaiah 30:21: Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, "This is the way; walk in it."

Philippians 2:10: At the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth.