

When You Follow A Star And Find A Stable

Matthew 2: 1-12

Think of the disappointment these men must have experienced who through the night had traveled many miles by camel to discover that star had come to rest over a stable. They had followed a star and found a stable. Surely they were expecting a palace ... or perhaps a stately mansion. Can you feel with me their vast disappointment as they looked down from some nearby Judean hill and came to the realization that their destination was a stable.

Following stars and finding stables is a common occurrence in human experience. Who among us has not at some time in our life fixed our gaze on some high and lofty star only to find it leads to a stable.

Hundreds of examples could be given. A young man graduates from high school full of great dreams and expectations about the future only to wake up one day and discover himself enmeshed in the very drudgery that he had promised himself he would avoid.

A person comes to retirement age. They think of all the good things they are going to be able to do. After a few weeks however, they begin to discover that retirement is not exactly what they thought it would be. The days start growing longer. The hours become more oppressive.

All of us at some time in our life follow a star and find a stable. The problem is to turn that stable into a moment of salvation. What is it that enables wise men of every age to turn the stables of life into victory?

For one thing, they look for God in that stable. He could not have blamed those three men of old if they had just dropped their heads sadly and turned back toward home when they saw that their journey was to end in a stable. Perhaps, though, the thought came to them that the wonder and majesty of God and his purpose could be just as potent in the stable as in the palace.

As one reads the Scripture, if you are sensitive, you will note that the Scriptures are quite realistic about the stables that come to even God's people. The difference between the Biblical person and other people is that the Biblical person never gave up on God.

Take the Old Testament figure, Joseph, for example. You'll remember Joseph, the young man with the coat of many colors, who was stolen from his home, betrayed by his brothers, dropped into a pit, sold to Midianite slave traders, made a man-servant in a household in Egypt, lied about by his master's wife and put in prison. Can one suppose that during all that humiliation and disgrace he could see where God was taking him? Of course not.

But later when his brothers stood before him in humiliation and fear, he calmed their hearts with these words: "You meant it for evil, but God meant it for good."

Can you do that with your life? Can you look at your own disappointments and see God's power and purpose?

A person was justifiably proud of their lawn until one year a heavy crop of dandelions appeared. He tried everything imaginable in an effort to get rid of them, but without success.

Finally in desperation, they wrote to an agricultural college, listing the remedies they had tried, and concluded with the appeal "What shall I do now?"

Several weeks later they received this reply: “We suggest that you learn to love them.” Maybe we can’t learn to love our disappointments, but at least we can ask whether some good may come from them. Look for God in that stable.

Here’s the next thing: Offer your best to God. The wise men knelt before the babe and offered him gold, frankincense, and myrrh. The central problem with our lives is not that we have experienced more than our share of disappointments, but that we have not done the best that we could with what we have.

Renoir, the French artist, was afflicted with acute rheumatism, and suffered most of his life with that incurable malady. For many years he was forced to paint while sitting in a chair. A friend noticed one day that the artist was forcing himself to paint, through almost blinding pain. “You have painted enough,” said the friend. “You are established as one of the top artists of France and Europe. Why must you go on, torturing yourself like this?” Renoir hardly looked up at him from his canvas. He said, “The pain passes, but the beauty remains.”

“Give of your best to the Master,” wrote the poet, “Give of the strength of your youth.” That’s not only a command from a sovereign God, but that’s also a secret of a successful living. What do you do when you follow a star and find a stable? First of all, you look for God and his purpose, then you give your best to God.

But the crowning experience comes when you make your way back from that stable, back into the pattern of everyday living.

Because of what’s happened in that stable, you mark out a new direction for your life. The wise men took a different direction home because they were warned that Herod was going to try to learn from them where the new King lay, but we might count it significant that this is always what happens when one encounters God and his purpose for life and attempts to give her/his best to God. You chart out a new direction for your life.

Disappointment can be the best thing that ever happened to you... if it helps you grow, to mature. The difference between mediocre people and great people is that great people learn from their experiences... they learn, and from their learning they gain new insights into their own needs and abilities. Thus, when they’ve picked themselves up, and dusted themselves off, they’re better people for their experiences.

In 1951 some doctors in an Ohio penitentiary wanted to make an experiment. They believed that an operation on a man’s brain would change him and rid him of criminal tendencies. A prisoner in that prison submitted to the operation. But the operation was a failure. The man was released from prison, but soon he was back in again for forgery. In order for a man to be changed, he must have a changed heart.

How about your own life today? Is it what you’re needing most – a new direction? That’s the glory of the Gospel. That’s why the story of the first Christmas is called Good News, because it has a way of transforming the coarse and commonplace into significant and sacred. Look for God’s hand in your life. Offer your best to God. Give yourself fully to him. For most of that will mean that we continually stake out our new directions for our lives – for we are learning and growing. These are the secrets of wise people of every age when they follow a star and find a stable.

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