**Joy**

Matthew 2:1-12

We are studying **the thirteen perfections of Jesus** in a series on CHARACTER. We are looking up at the glorious perfection of the Lord Jesus, stepping into the light of His majesty. Then we are looking down at ourselves, seeing the truth of who we are more clearly in the light of Christ.

**Growing up in Christ**

1. Look up at His perfection
2. Look down at your sin
3. Experience His grace
4. Extend that grace to others

We don’t stop there - we go on to ***experience the gospel*** applied directly to where we fall short - seeing that the grace of Jesus fills that gap between our sinfulness and His perfection, helping us grow to become more like Him. And as we experience and are transformed by the gospel, we will increasingly be able to share the life-changing grace of Jesus with others!

So far we’ve looked at **Love and Hope**, as two examples of Jesus’ perfection.

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|  | **Love** |
| **↑** | Jesus came, suffered and died for us |
| **↓** | We remain indifferent to the needs of others |
| **🕆** | Jesus paid for our adoption |
| **→** | So we can love and serve others as we have been served by Jesus |

***Looking up*** at Jesus’ perfect LOVE we see that when God saw our need He sent His only Son to enter our world, sacrificially serve us and ultimately to die for us. That’s what real love looks like! Then we look down at ourselves by contrast. We tend to be cold, callous and indifferent to the needs of others. But inspite of our lack of love, Jesus paid the price to forgive our sins and adopt us into His family so we could be loved forever, in relationship with God the Father, Son and Holy Spirit. And this Gospel reality, if we experience it, will enable us to truly love others and sacrificially serve them as we have been served.

Now, here is a snapshot of **JOY** - which is what we are studying today:

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|  | **Joy** |
| **↑** | Jesus was completely satisfied in God |
| **↓** | We delight in ourselves and this world (not God) |
| **🕆** | Jesus endured the wrath of God for our idolatry |
| **→** | So we should praise and thank God,  rejoicing in Him and His abundant grace |

First, ***we look up to see the perfection of Jesus’ joy***. From eternity past to eternity future, Jesus was and is and always will be in perfect, joyful harmony with God the Father and God the Spirit. Looking down at ourselves in light of Jesus’ joy we see that we do not delight ourselves completely in the Lord, but instead find our joy in ourselves and the things of this world - which is what the Bible calls idolatry. But seeing our rebellion and selfishness and worldliness Jesus did not come to condemn us for our sin, but rather came to bear our sin on his own body on the cross - enduring the wrath we should have experienced. And as we experience this amazing grace we should ***respond in joyful worship*** to the Lord, overflowing with gratitude.

We will come back to this at the end. Now we turn to Matthew 2 and follow the wise men from the east on their journey to joy. We will see **three steps on this journey**.

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Seeking**

“Wise men from the east came to Jerusalem saying, ‘Where is he who was born king of the Jews?’” Matt. 2:1-2

Stargazers from the middle east saw a **unique heavenly body** - and they rightly interpreted that celestial sign as an announcement from God that ***a new and powerful king had been born***. They even knew that this ruler was king of the Jews, so they came to Jerusalem. Surprisingly, there was no word of this in the capital city of Israel!

Instead of finding the king in the royal palace, the wise men set off a chain reaction of research.

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Seeking**

“When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled… he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born.” Matthew 2:3-4

The wise men were seeking a king. King Herod set out to seek a rival. There’s an intentional **contrast here** - and Herod is deliberately named with his royal title to highlight the contrast. Everyone knows there can only be one king. If two rulers both claim sovereignty in an area it will mean war until one gains the upper hand.

As we look at the mile markers on the journey to joy it’s important to notice that ***not all SEEKING is created equal***. Motives matter. The wise men were seeking Jesus to worship him. Herod was seeking Jesus to kill him. The journey of the wise men ends in joy when they find the one true king. Herod’s journey ends in rage because the King of Judah has to realize that he isn’t the one true king after all.

I’ve known a few people who were intrigued by Jesus and happy to talk and talk about him, but who ***never actually committed to him as their king***. One guy in particular I spent 3 years reaching out to and, looking back, realized he never took a single step closer to Jesus. He stayed in the same place of curiosity without commitment.

There is no end to the philosophical, historical and **theological questions you can ask** about God and Jesus and the Bible. Many times, people have sincere questions that we can help them work through regarding the goodness of God, the problem of evil and suffering, the nature of the Bible and the plan of salvation. But sometimes questions are nothing but smokescreens that enable people to avoid the main point - of coming to Jesus as king.

Look at verse 8.

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Seeking**

“Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him, bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.” Matthew 2:8

King Herod worked hard to appear sincere and interested. He even claimed that his motive was - like the wise men - a desire to worship this newborn king. But the reality was exactly the opposite. “That I too may come and worship him… and by worship, I mean murder.”

**A helpful filter as we reach out to people is the Bible**. If you’re connecting with a non-believing friend and they are interested to read the Bible on their own and to discuss the Bible with you, that’s a good sign. If they just want to debate philosophy or ancient history like the age of the earth or new age spiritualism, I suggest letting those topics slide and praying and waiting until they are ready to seriously talk about Jesus in particular.

***Because there is a joy in seeking JESUS as king***. If people are chasing anything else, they are working hard to remain king themselves. And that path will not lead to joy - it will lead to frustration and fear.

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Seeking** King Jesus

“When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy.” Matthew 2:10

The wise men knew they had found what they were looking for - not just historically in the curiosity of a new Jewish king, but ***PERSONALLY - they had found THEIR new king***.

And they rejoiced EXCEEDINGLY. ***There is no greater joy than what you experience when you find King Jesus.*** I knew Jesus as my Savior at a young age, but it wasn’t until I found Jesus to be THE one true king and made him MY one true king that I really unlocked the joy of knowing Him. Until you fully surrender to King Jesus you will always wrestle with insecurity. That was my challenge for years - struggling to know that I was really saved, battling with guilt and fear.

But as a young teenager coming face to face with the darkness of my selfishness and sin, I knew I needed something more than I had. It set me on a quest to find answers. And thankfully I had a youth leader who walked with me to find those answers - who brought me on the journey to joy in discovering that Jesus was the answer I truly needed.

The wise men saw this unique star when it rose. There was a moment for me when I was about 12 years old **when I saw the star of King Jesus rise** - when I realized that I needed Him not just as my Savior but as my Lord and King, and the joy of that discovery set me on the path of life and ministry I’ve been walking for 30 years.

Many of you can think of that moment ***when you saw the star of King Jesus rise***. For some of you that star is just rising on the horizon of your life right now. And you can sense the joy that awaits you in that search. Don’t give up! The wise men had a long way to go to find their answers. But the same God who led them every step of the way will do so for you. Just keep taking that next step! The first step on the journey to joy is seeking King Jesus. The second:

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Surrender** to King Jesus

“They saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him.” Matt. 2:11

Herod said he wanted to worship Jesus the King, but he actually wanted to kill Jesus and remain King himself. All of us start out that way - as the sovereign ruler of our own domain. Just spend some time with a **2 or 3 year old** and you’ll see. That child wants to be King. One little boy once looked me in the eye and with hands on his hips boldly said, ***“I do what I want.”*** This was a relative, not one of my boys. “I do what I want.” I was like, “Well, we have identified the problem.”

***But there is no joy in being king of your own life.*** Studies have actually proven that children don’t want to be in charge. They are happier and healthier when parents exercise firm, loving control and make it clear that Mom and Dad are in charge. There is a wonderful security in knowing that someone is there who knows what to do and will tell you to do it. All kids actually do want that even if their lips are saying, “I do what I want.”

They are **torn between their selfish, sinful nature and their desire for protective leadership**. And the same is true for every one of us. On the one hand, we all know that there would be great security and joy in surrendering everything to King Jesus. But a part of us stands there defiantly and says, “I do what I want.” We all have that toddler still living inside of us, we just don’t let people see him very often.

We can only wonder ***what the story was for the wise men***. Each one of them must have come to a turning point in their understanding of heavenly signs and Jewish history in order to reach the conclusion that this Jewish child was the One True King. No doubt in their land there were other gods and other traditions and certainly other earthly kings. For them to come back home and continue to worship King Jesus would have been tremendously costly.

***But the joy of belonging to Jesus overshadows all of that.***

I’ve been listening to the **Maverick Podcast** - which recently released season two. The first season of Maverick documented the story of one Muslim who joyfully embraced Jesus as King. Season two, documents movements in different parts of Africa and Asia over the last decade or so. Many of these movements are in almost entirely Muslim areas - and the stories are remarkable, inspiring and creative. For example, when a Muslim converts, they have to decide what to call themselves. In one part of India the Bible was first translated for Hindus, using the Hindu word for God instead of the Muslim word. So for over a hundred years Muslims rejected the Bible as a book that wasn’t for them, didn’t relate to them. And even when a new translation came out and many began to embrace Jesus as King, these Muslim background believers didn’t want to use the term “Christian” to identify themselves because that term had been used by Hindu converts for a long time and they didn’t feel it fit them.

So instead, they used the term **“true Muslim.”** When asked what this means they respond, “Islam is about submission to God and the only way to truly submit to God is to follow Jesus as your King. So we are true Muslims who submit to God by making Jesus our King.” Listen to Maverick for more inspring details. So encouraging!

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Surrender** to King Jesus

“Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.” Matthew 2:11

These high-ranking officials from a distant land brought tribute to the child king. They presented him with valuable gifts as a sign of their devotion to him. In ancient times that is what you did with a neighboring king with whom you wanted to curry favor - **you brought TRIBUTE**. By giving something of value - whether cash or in kind, as in this case - you hoped to win the favor of that king so he wouldn’t attack your land or subjugate your people. It was a public, official way of acknowledging that king’s supremacy over you and your kingdom.

***Have you experienced this joy of surrendering to King Jesus?***

**As long as YOU hold on to control of your life**, you will not feel true peace. As long as you insist on doing your own thing, having your own way, you will not experience the true, deep and lasting joy that only Jesus can give you.

Because **JESUS IS JOY**. In His very being, Jesus is the heartbeat of joy. The eternal Son of God lives in joyful union with the Father in the bond of the Holy Spirit, forever giving and receiving love. “If you want to get warm, you must go by the fire. If you want to get wet, you must get in the water. If you want peace, joy, love, life - you must get close to, even into the thing that has them.” That’s how C.S. Lewis concludes Mere Christianity - with an invitation to DIVE IN to the overflowing LIFE of God. God alone has all of these realities - including JOY - and the only way to truly experience them is to become One with God, which can only happen when you surrender your life to Jesus.

Think of what happens **at the moment you bow the knee to Jesus as your king**. Everything changes in that single moment in time!

* Your heart changes from a selfish, dead heart of stone to a living, beating heart of flesh.
* Your selfish sinful nature is dethroned and Jesus moves in as King of your life.
* The Holy Spirit comes to dwell in your heart forever, to speak to you, to comfort you, to guide your every step.
* Your citizenship changes from being a slave in the kingdom of darkness to being a child in the kingdom of God!
* Your eternal destiny changes from being under God’s wrath to being the object of God’s eternal delight.

***This happens when you surrender.*** Not before. Not apart from that. That’s what FAITH means - it means trusting Jesus to forgive you and committing to Jesus as King. And that’s where security comes from.

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Security** in King Jesus

“And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.” Matthew 2:12

Interesting at this point in the story how Herod lost his title as king. Now he is just Herod. Just a guy. But notice the kindness of God to the wise men - protecting them from this evil human ruler and protecting Jesus, Mary and Joseph as well. Herod’s quest for control was bound to fail. He was fighting against the sovereign plan of God.

***The quest of the wise men was bound to succeed*** - they were seeking the one true king and Jesus promises that if you seek, you will find; if you knock the door will be opened; if you ask it will be given to you.

And once you surrender to King Jesus, ***He promises to protect you forever***. There is an **unshakeable security** that can only be found in a covenant relationship with Jesus. In fact, Jesus is the only one who can truly protect you from the greatest danger, which is the wrath of God.

Jesus is the only one who can give you **PEACE with God**. That is the true security we all need and long for. But it can only be found in total surrender. Again C.S. Lewis:

“Fallen man is not simply an imperfect creature who needs improvement: he is a rebel who must lay down his arms.” C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*

When the **Allied Armies** rumbled across France on their way to Berlin in WW2 there were many Germans who willingly surrendered. Seeing the overwhelming force of arms coming at them, in small groups and individually, the Germans would lay down their weapons and raise up their hands in token of surrender. As the American and British closed in on Berlin from the west and the Russians from the east, 100s of thousands of Germans increasingly surrendered.

There was no negotiation. ***It was total surrender***. The two sides had been at war for years with brutal fighting and countless casualties.

We get all proud and noble with stories like this because we relate to the Allies. But in the true story of our lives, **we were all Nazis**. ***We were enemies of God***, in overt rebellion against Him. We were at war with God and His kingdom, aligned with the devil and serving the darkness. And the only way to find peace was by surrendering to the King with whom we were at war. Here is how Paul says it in Romans 5:

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Security** in King Jesus

“While we were enemies we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son.” Romans 5:10

It’s not that we were wayward school children, a little turned around in the neighborhood. We were armed assailants in active rebellion against the king. We were living for ourselves and our own kingdom in open war with God. ***We were his ENEMIES.***

But it was in that condition of open rebellion that Jesus came to us, **offering terms of peace**. While we were still sinners, while we were his enemies, Christ died for us. That is how amazing His amazing grace really is.

When they were trying to figure out where the Jewish king was born, the religious advisors to King Herod turned to **Micah chapter 5**. According to Old Testament prophecy, the king of the Jews was to be born in Bethlehem, of all places - an out of the way, small town well outside of Jerusalem.

“But you, O Bethlehem Ephrathah, who are too little to be among the clans of Judah, from you shall come forth for me one who is to be ruler in Israel.” Micah 5:2

**Micah was a prophet** at the same time as Isaiah, Amos and Hosea - around 700 years before Jesus was born. He prophesied the downfall of Samaria, the capital of the northern kingdom and was there when Assyria came and conquered the northern kingdom of Israel in fulfillment of that prophecy. Just read Micah chapter 1.

But even as Micah foretold judgment upon Israel, God also gave him a word of HOPE! A remnant would be preserved and the Messiah would come to gather them back together and rule over them.

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Security** in King Jesus

“And he shall stand and shepherd his flock in the strength of the Lord, in the majesty of the name of the Lord.” Micah 5:4

Unlike most of Israel’s kings, the coming Messiah would rule in righteousness and power, as **a GOOD SHEPHERD**. Kings in the northern kingdom of Israel were almost universally evil kings - abusing the people, worshiping foreign gods, living in shameless immorality and leading all the people into the same. ***They were bad shepherds***, leading the people astray and exposing them to dangerous wolves. But in the Messiah, the good shepherd, there would be security!

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Security** in King Jesus

“And they shall dwell secure, for now he shall be great to the ends of the earth. And he shall be their peace.” Micah 5:4-5

***What a beautiful promise!*** Not only will God’s people have peace - the Messiah will BE our peace. **Shalom**. That beautiful Jewish word that means so much more than the absence of hostility, but includes the presence of health, prosperity, harmony and blessing. Jesus alone can give that kind of SHALOM. He IS PEACE.

**Only in Christ** can we escape the wrath of God. Only in Christ can we be rescued from our hostility with God and be reconciled to Him. Only in Christ can we dwell secure, knowing we are in a right relationship with God forever. Only in Christ can we have peace - because He IS peace.

So here are the three steps on the journey to joy that the wise men show us:

**The Journey to Joy:**

1. The Joy of **Seeking** King Jesus
2. The Joy of **Surrender** to King Jesus
3. The Joy of **Security** in King Jesus

Observing a unique sign in the night sky, ***the wise men from the east set out*** on a journey that led them to Jerusalem and eventually to Bethlehem. They knew they were seeking a special king, they did not know they would find the King of Kings. When they did find Jesus, they bowed down before him to worship him, bringing precious gifts in tribute to him - making him THEIR king in personal surrender and commitment.

And in that act of becoming some of the very first followers of Jesus - the very first committed to His Kingdom by embracing Jesus as THEIR KING, ***the wise men experienced the joy and peace of having Jesus as King.*** They found in Jesus not only the Jewish king they were seeking, but the Ultimate King their own hearts longed for.

The same is true for all of us - and for our friends and family. There is a joy that can only be found in seeking Jesus - surrendering to him and finding security in Him as your King. All of this rests on **a relationship with Jesus** - because if you have Jesus, you have joy; if you have Jesus you have peace; if you have Jesus you have life - now and forever. If you don’t have Jesus, then you have none of those things because your sin remains on you.

***Is Jesus YOUR KING?*** Have you made the vows that bring you into His Kingdom?

You don’t just become an American citizen by showing up in this country. That makes you an illegal immigrant - which, at the moment is sort of fine, but that just confuses the matter. **In order to become an official American citizen** you have to submit your papers, be interviewed and make promises by which you are formally pronounced a citizen of this great country. In this country it’s complicated and usually takes many years.

But with King Jesus it happens in a single moment in time - as soon as you bow down before Him and profess Him as your king.

**Entering the Kingdom of Jesus:**

“If you confess with your mouth, ‘Jesus is Lord,’ and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved. For it is with the heart that you believe and are justified and with the mouth that you confess and are saved.” Romans 10:9-10

It’s as simple and profound as that. There are three words to say and one truth to believe. Together ***the profession and the faith*** capture what is necessary for salvation. You have to believe that Jesus died for you and rose again. But you also have to say the words, “Jesus is Lord.” You have to believe He IS king and confess that He is YOUR King. Here is the result in Colossians 1:

**Entering the Kingdom of Jesus:**

“He has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son,in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins.” Colossians 1:13-14

At the moment you commit to Jesus as your king, your citizenship changes from the domain of darkness, ruled by satan, to the kingdom of God, ruled by Jesus. At the moment you trust Christ your sins are forgiven, the price of redemption is applied to your account and you are set free from sin and death forever. **God TRANSFERRED YOU from darkness into light**, from death to life, from wrath to peace, ***from despair to JOY***.

From that moment on, you are no longer IN SIN, but are IN CHRIST - one with Him. That is the joy the wise men found. I hope your joy in the Lord is rekindled today! Look up at the joy of our Lord Jesus:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
|  | **Joy** |
| **↑** | Jesus was completely satisfied in God |
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The eternal Son of God was completely satisfied in His relationship with the Father, in the bond of the Spirit. Jesus lacked nothing for He was and is bound together with the overflowing, never ending source of all life, love, power, peace and joy.

**God did not create the world out of LACK** - as if He needed something. God created out of a super-abundance of JOY, an overflowing movement of LIFE.

And Jesus didn’t come to die for us out of begrudging duty - Hebrews tells us Jesus went to the cross “for the JOY set before Him.” That joy was US. It is Jesus’ delight to forgive our sins and bring us into eternal relationship with the Father.

**Jesus IS JOY**. There is not a speck of discouragement or despair in Christ - only a radiating, abounding celebration of truth, goodness, righteousness and light. Look up at the Lord Jesus and be amazed at this glorious perfection.

But then, at some point, we have to ***look back down at ourselves*** and realize our own lack of joy - how often we do fall into discouragement and despair. We are commanded to “rejoice in the Lord always,” but we tend to fix our joy in the WORLD instead of in the LORD, and that will always steal our joy.

***Instead of rejoicing in the LORD*** and making Him our delight we love, trust and serve all kinds of other gods, primarily ourselves. And we wonder why these things constantly let us down and fail to bring us the happiness they seem to promise.

**Jeremiah the prophet confronted God’s people for digging wells in the desert**, “broken cisterns that cannot hold water,” while they have forsaken the Lord, the fountain of living water!

That is what we do. We have access to the overflowing fountain of all life and peace and joy but instead we go and ***dig holes in the yard*** - and it’s Florida so they are just filled with sand and swamp water. The Bible calls this IDOLATRY. Instead of worshiping King Jesus like the wise men, we worship and serve other gods.

We looked up at the perfect joy of Jesus. We looked down at our own selfishness and idolatry. Now we see how **much we need the gospel** - and we need to experience again how the grace of Jesus applies to us exactly at the point of our need.

The punishment for idolatry is death and judgment. Just read Micah; read Isaiah; read Jeremiah. “The wages of sin is death.” Those who worship gods other than the Lord bring the just wrath of God upon themselves. But it was precisely at this point and for this reason that Jesus died for us - “While we were still sinners, Christ died for us… while we were his enemies we were RECONCILED to God by the death of his Son.”

Jesus gave his life to protect us from God’s wrath. He endured the full judgment for our sin and idolatry. **The cross of Jesus is the ultimate umbrella of protection** from the coming fiery judgment of God. If you cling to the cross, Jesus will shelter you from that wrath. In Christ there is security and protection forever.

When you lack joy, look to the cross. When you struggle with discouragement, look up at King Jesus and remember all He suffered for you and for me. Experience again the joy of seeking Jesus, the joy of surrendering to Him and the joy of security in His arms.

As we experience this amazing, overflowing grace, we will **respond with JOYFUL WORSHIP**. God’s kindness will lead us to repentance for our idolatry and to true worship and devotion to Jesus as our one and only King.

Let’s pray as we prepare our hearts to come to the Lord’s table to celebrate what our King has done for us - that we might have everlasting JOY in Him.