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WHERE IS HE? Part Two

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I don't know if you heard about this news story or not, but last month there was a story about an astronomy professor who was discriminated against because he had offered an opinion that perhaps God exists. I'll read you a tiny bit of the story:

LOUISVILLE, Ky. – An astronomer argues that his Christian faith and his peers' belief that he is an evolution skeptic kept him from getting a prestigious job as the director of a new student observatory at the University of Kentucky.

Martin Gaskell quickly rose to the top of a list of applicants being considered by the university's search committee. One member said he was "breathhtakingly above the other applicants."

Others openly worried his Christian faith could conflict with his duties as a scientist, calling him "something close to a creationist" and "potentially evangelical."

Even though Gaskell says he is not a creationist, he claims he was passed over for the job at UK's MacAdam Student Observatory three years ago because of his religion and statements that were perceived to be critical of the theory of evolution.¹

There's much more to the story, including many harsh statements from people at the university not even connected with the hiring process or the astronomy department. Here's a scientist who believes in evolution, but believes that God has a hand in it. He's not a creationist. Because he allows for the possibility of God, other professors demanded that he not get the job. The man in question made this statement, and I agree with him: "*I think that if I had a document like this and I was advocating atheism ... I don't think it would be an issue.*"² Apparently belief in the possibility that God has something to do with our world constitutes such a threat to these other professors that they are compelled to shut this man down. What happened to academic freedom? What happened to scientific inquiry? I'll tell you what happened: a rigid dogma of atheistic belief has eroded our academic system.

I bring this up today because it parallels the reaction we see to the question of the wise men in Matthew 2. Let's turn there today as we consider the question ourselves: "*Where is he that is born the king of the Jews?*"

1 Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judaea in the days of Herod the king, behold, there came wise men from the east to Jerusalem,

2 Saying, Where is he that is born King of the Jews? for we have seen his star in the east, and are come to worship him.

3 When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him.

1 Dylan Lovan, "Scientist Alleges Religious Discrimination in Kentucky." AP, 17 December 2010. Available at http://news.yahoo.com/s/ap/20101217/ap_on_re/us_rel_astronomer_religious_suit

2 Ibid.

4 *And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born.*

5 *And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet,*

6 *And thou Bethlehem, in the land of Juda, art not the least among the princes of Juda: for out of thee shall come a Governor, that shall rule my people Israel.*

7 *Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared.*

8 *And he sent them to Bethlehem, and said, Go and search diligently for the young child; and when ye have found him, bring me word again, that I may come and worship him also.*

The first people in this passage to consider are the wise men themselves. They came to Jerusalem asking the question, “Where is he that is born the King of the Jews?” It is evident that they believed the King had been born. They had made a pilgrimage from their homeland for the express purpose of worshipping this King; they simply did not know His precise location.

In other words, they followed the light that they had received. They followed the path as far as they knew up to that point. They did everything possible to put themselves in accordance with God’s will as revealed to them thus far. *Because of their attitude, they viewed the infant King as a blessing and worthy of worship.*

There is a powerful lesson here for us. David wrote in Psalm 11:19, “Thy word is a lamp unto my feet; a light unto my path.” You know, a lamp isn’t very bright. The glow of an oil lamp shows enough to take the next step clearly, but what about the steps after that?

That is exactly how it is with us. We can’t see ten steps ahead or a hundred steps ahead; we simply have to take the very next step that God has shown us. If we will commit to taking one step at a time within the light we have, God will provide the light for the next step at just the right time.

The wise men apparently had knowledge of certain prophecies surrounding the birth of the Messiah, as we discussed last week. Because they believed and accepted the light of that revelation, they were prepared for the next revelation in that they saw an actual light. Yes, the very night Jesus was born, the wise men saw an actual light in the heavens, which from their vantage point appeared to be a star; yet as we also discussed, this was no normal star, but was very likely an appearance of God’s shekinah glory--perhaps the same glory that shone as the angels sang to the shepherds. Whatever the case may be, they followed what they knew until they came to a place of uncertainty. They knew the King had been born. Perhaps they expected people in Jerusalem to be full of news about it; but the people of Jerusalem were unaware of the divine presence just five miles to their south.

I mean, can you imagine? What if, while she were alive, Princess Diana had made an appearance in Waverly Hall? Do you suppose the traffic would have been backed up more than five miles? Yet here is the King of Glory, the Lord of Creation, nestled in the arms of a woman just five miles from Jerusalem, and no one knows about Him.

But the wise men did not give up. They continued to ask, “Where is he that is born the King of the Jews?” They did not stop after asking one person or two people; they persisted. They knew the King

had been born. They kept asking until they got answers.

Now, you or I might have doubted ourselves in that situation. Perhaps the wise men did as well. In hindsight, though, we can understand that God had a divine reason for allowing their question to go unanswered by so many people for so long: God wanted them to talk to Herod.

Herod, then, is the next person we must consider. When confronted with the question, “Where is He that is born the King of the Jews?” Herod’s response was arrogant: “The Jews already have a king. I’m the only king they need!” *Because of his attitude, Herod viewed the infant King as a threat, deserving of death.*

Herod would not tolerate anything or anyone who conflicted with his own self-interest. No one, not even the Christ (as Herod himself called the child), dared to interfere with Herod’s right to rule. His narcissism was the only narcissism that mattered.

Here clearly we have a picture of God in his mercy giving a gracious message to King Herod through the wise men. Yes, God intended for their paths to cross. Yes, God intended for the wise men to inform Herod of the unfolding plan of salvation. Herod, however, hardened his heart. He smugly pretended to love God and love God’s Word while at the same time he planned to murder God’s Son. Herod shunned God’s light and chose to serve himself rather than serve God.

The same light, the same knowledge, that was available to the wise men was available to Herod; the difference was a matter of heart.

This is the reaction of those who have decided that they need no other king but themselves. These are the ones who attack Christmas and post hateful messages about Christ and Christianity. These are the professors who attempt to insure the doctrine of atheistic evolution is permanently enshrined in our public institutions and who vigorously persecute those who even entertain the idea that God might have a hand in this universe. No, God must be expelled, because to admit the possibility of God opens the possibility that He might have something to say about the way we live. The spirit of Herod is alive and well.

But Herod was not alone. Just as it was God’s plan to send the wise men to Herod with a message, so it was God’s plan to use Herod to deliver that message to the scribes and priests. The scribes and priests are the next to be confronted with the question, although it comes from Herod’s mouth a little differently than it had from the wise men’s: “*he demanded of them where Christ should be born.*” These men possessed knowledge of God’s written Word. They knew the exact answer, and even quoted Scripture to Herod.

They had the light of God’s Word, but in the end, it appears that it just wasn’t that important to them. There was no urgency about the matter. There was no curiosity. *Because of their attitude, the scribes and priests viewed the infant as unimportant, demanding no urgency.*

Did they rejoice at the news? No. Did they follow the wise men? No. Apparently they simply shrugged their shoulders and adopted a “wait and see” attitude.

Perhaps they felt that such an important matter would have been revealed to them directly. Maybe they

felt that God should have given *them* a sign. After all, they were good people. They lived the way they were supposed to live. They were doing just fine without a Savior. Sure, it was interesting news, but they just weren't ready to act on it right now. Maybe later.

Again, this is the case with so many of us today. We tend to think we're pretty good people. We live right. We try not to hurt anybody. We never do anything seriously bad or wicked. Other people may be sinners, but certainly not us. After all, we may have our moments, but on the whole we're just good, decent folk. In the end, God will of course take us on to heaven because our good outweighs our bad. Why would we need to be worried about a Savior?

Others of us might think, "Well, I'd be more open to the message if God revealed it to me directly. Show me a sign and I'll believe!"

Yet others think to themselves, "Well, sure, I know I've done some bad stuff, but I'm just not ready to be saved and give up what I enjoy. I'll get saved later. I'm just not interested right now."

Oh, friends, how we deceive ourselves! God sent a Savior for one reason only: to save us because we cannot save ourselves. If we could save ourselves, Jesus would not have needed to be born at all. We simply would just have to live absolutely perfectly, with no mistakes and no excuses. But we can't do that. We must accept that we are sinners in need of a Savior—the very Savior who is so close to us even now.

Let's review one short statement about each of these responders:

Because of their attitude, the wise men viewed the infant King as a blessing and worthy of worship.

Because of his attitude, Herod viewed the infant King as a threat, deserving of death.

Because of their attitude, the scribes and priests viewed the infant King as unimportant, demanding no urgency.

Herod and the religious men of Jerusalem missed the Savior by a mere five miles that night. I tell you this morning that He is even closer to you than that! Where is He this morning? He is at the door of your heart, knocking, asking to have fellowship with you today.

Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me (Revelation 3:20).