

## ***HOW FAR WILL YOU GO?***

Like many good stories, it is a tale that was old long before it becomes new again in the hearts of listeners. The old story starts in the second chapter of Matthew and begins like this. "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, 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. When Herod the king had heard these things, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him. And when he had gathered all the chief priests and scribes of the people together, he demanded of them where Christ should be born. And they said unto him, In Bethlehem of Judaea: for thus it is written by the prophet, 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. Then Herod, when he had privily called the wise men, enquired of them diligently what time the star appeared. 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."

There are a number of interesting things about this old story. The most fascinating thing is that one reference book tells us that it is only five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem. Five miles! By a conservative estimate, the wise men had been traveling for over one year in order to come into the presence of God and worship Him. But it was only five miles from Bethlehem to Jerusalem. The wise men counted the final step of their journey as nothing, for they knew where God on earth was waiting. Five short miles. The priests and the scribes also knew where God would come to earth. They knew the time was right. The prophecies were understood. The evidence was there. And it was only five miles from Jerusalem to the presence of God incarnate. Those five miles would be traveled by the wise men, and them alone.

It is not that the religious leaders of the Jews did not believe the prophecies. They had been praying for their fulfillment for thousands of years. For the last few years, they were desperately yearning for the Messiah who would come to free them from the rule of the hated Romans. They knew the stars had signaled the birth of a king. They knew he was to be born in the city of David. Just to remove any doubts, travelers from across the world came to tell them the time was right. But not one of these leaders whose life was supposedly devoted to the service of God, nor Herod, the leader of this oppressed nation, would make the trip. After all, it was five miles from Jerusalem to Bethlehem.

Think of a town that is about five miles from where you live. Most people can walk that distance in two hours or less. By car, the trip would take around ten minutes. By donkey, it would take about an hour. What if God, in all of his glory, was sitting in a park in that town? Moreover, what if He were healing every disease, forgiving every sin, and filling every need brought to Him? How many would honestly say that you would walk the five miles to bring your needs to His divine attention? Would you walk five miles for a genuine miracle?

Think of a distance of around sixty feet from where you are sitting and reading? Maybe your healing or your salvation is not worth the effort of walking five miles, but would you walk sixty feet to get into the presence of God? I mention that distance because that is just about the furthest distance that a pew is located from the altars of most churches. Of course, pride can make that distance seem pretty formidable.

If sixty feet is too far, maybe you would be willing to move four feet to get into His presence. I mention that distance because that is about how far a hand moves when changed from hanging by the waist to being held above shoulder level. That is the distance between the hands positioned in

a hopeless shrug and that of hands raised in praise to God. The scriptures assure us that He inhabits the praises of His people and that through praise we enter His presence. Really then, a movement of about four feet, if you are willing to worship Him, can bring you into the presence of a God who can meet any need.

Still if four feet is too far to move, maybe you would be willing to move eighteen inches. That is about the distance from your knees to the floor. He said that if His people, called by His name, would humble themselves and pray, then He would hear them, deliver them, and heal their land. That eighteen inches is an easy distance to move. Gravity actually helps in the transition. Of course, you have to start the process by unbending just a bit. It is a small price to come into the presence of your Savior to worship Him or be healed by Him.

Unfortunately, those who are wise will still make the journey relatively alone. You claim that your life is dedicated to the service of God. You know where and when He can be found. You know how to come into His presence. But your life is full. Time is precious. Eternity is far away, or so you believe. And you are rich, increased with goods, and need nothing. Why go to the effort? If you wait long enough, someone will bring you second hand news of His appearing. You can be thrilled by His power on the behalf of others, and it will have cost you nothing in the way of effort. There is just too much distance between the place where man is king and the place where God rules. After all, it is five miles, sixty feet, four feet, or eighteen inches to Bethlehem from Jerusalem.

### ***STUDY QUESTIONS***

1. Why do you think Herod asked the wise men to bring him word instead of going to Jerusalem himself?
2. Given the fact that almost two years had elapsed between the time the wise men saw the star and their appearance in Jerusalem, how far do you think they traveled to worship God?
3. By the slowest method of travel you have available, how long would it take you to travel five miles?
4. How many times a year are you given opportunities to come into the presence of God, but opt not to do so?
5. How many needs are there in your life that you feel God could meet if you could ask Him face to face?
6. How often have you actively sought or struggled to enter the presence of God in order to worship or to bring a petition before Him?
7. When you have needs, but do not seek God's assistance with them, why not? Is the issue one of privacy? A desire to be self reliant?
8. Do you think it is possible that you do not ask God for help because you do not want to be in His debt?
9. How desperate would your need have to be before you would be willing to take it before God in a public setting?
10. Is a public confession of need effective in gaining God's help? Are there Biblical examples of public confession followed by miracles?
11. Would you ask publicly for God to help someone else in need, especially someone you were hurting for? Is that easier than asking for your own needs? What is being risked in each case?
12. Would you walk five miles to spend time with someone you were in love with? What if you were engaged to be married to them?

13. Having professed a love for God and a desire to be part of His bride, would you walk five miles to spend time with God?
14. What is the maximum effort you would be willing to expend in order to come into the presence of God? How far would you walk? How much time would you spend trying? What would you be willing to give up?