

When You Follow A Star and Find A Stable

from Pastor Daniel Randall

By now many have put away all the Christmas decorations, if you even put any up. You are now easing into a new year and learning to write 2015. However, in the Christian calendar we are celebrating Epiphany. Epiphany is the time we remember the Magi arriving after the birth of Jesus and bringing their gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. Think of the disappointment these men must have experienced who through the night had traveled many miles by camel to discover that the 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. Think how they must have felt. Their vast disappointment as they look 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 man comes to retirement age. He thinks of all the good things he's going to be able to do. After a few weeks, however, he begins to discover that retirement is not exactly what he thought it would be. The day starts growing longer. The hours become more oppressive.

All of us at some time in our life follow a star only to discover a stable. The problem is how 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? The answer to this question is also good advice for the new year.

First, We Must Look For God In The Stable. We 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 he is sensitive, he will note that the holy scriptures are quite realistic about the stables that come to even God's people. The difference between the Biblical man and other men is that the Biblical man 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 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? 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.

Second, Offer Your Best To God. These wise men offered their best to God. They 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 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.

Third, Let the Stable Experience Mark 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 him best to God: he charts out a new direction for his life.

Disappointment can be the best thing that ever happened to you if it helps you to grow and mature. The difference between mediocre people and great people is that great people learn from their experiences. Great people 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 experience.

How about your own life? Are you needing 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 something significant and sacred. So, I ask you: have you followed a star only to come in the end to a stable? If you have, then, look for God there. You may be surprised at what you find. Then, offer your best gift to God. He will use it in his Kingdom. And when you leave, go home by another way. Don't do what the Herod's in this world ask you to do. These are the secrets of wise men of every age when they follow a star and find a stable.