

Sermon Series: The Full Picture of Christmas

To be used with: The wise men's worship

Sermon Title Possibilities: What kind of worship do you bring?; What do you bring to the King?

Scripture: John 19:1-6; Matt. 27:29

Connection with Unit Theme: To complement the small group study *The Full Picture of Christmas*, this sermon will explore the issue of worship. At the beginning of Jesus' life, the wise men brought true worship even as Herod feigned a desire to worship but inwardly wanted to destroy Him. His actions were a precursor for the similar actions of the soldiers just before Jesus' death. They too brought him false worship.

Introduction: Visitors from the East stood in front of him. They brought gifts, but they were for another recipient. They sought the King of the Jews, but they didn't have Herod in mind. Herod was distraught. Here was a man so devoted to his own position and power that he sought and destroyed anyone whom he perceived to be a threat even if it was a family member. His spies had failed to inform him of the One these naive wise men were seeking. He knew he had to destroy the object of their worship.

Rather than make his true intentions known, Herod feigned a desire to worship the Child. He asked the wise men to bring back news of Jesus so that Herod could offer his worship too. They did not understand the wicked heart that offered false worship to gain a selfish end.

Jesus later stood before another ruler. Jesus looked no more like a king this time than He had when the wise men presented their gifts. Pilate's advantage was that he had heard about Jesus, yet he was unconvinced. So his soldiers mocked Jesus with false worship.

1. **The soldiers brought him weak symbols of royalty.**

a. They placed a painful crown on His head. "crown of thorns"

Crowns were never meant to be comfortable. Heavy. Hot. Hat hair. But kings endured the irritation because crowns carried significance. They were a symbol of power. When one person placed a crown on another's head, it communicated the willingness of the people to submit to the authority of the one crowned. But not this time.

This time, it was a mockery. This time, it was more than an annoyance. It was torture. The Romans despised the Jews, and now, the Jews' impotent king stood before them. The soldiers could not give up this chance to show the depth of disdain they had for Jesus and His people.

b. They draped His back with a discarded robe. "purple robe"

Where did they get the robe? Have you ever questioned that? Herod, the descendant of the one who had originally offered a false desire to worship Jesus, was the first to place the robe on his shoulders (Luke 23:11). But he wouldn't have easily given away his robe, and he certainly wouldn't want it stained with Jewish blood. *Unless it was a robe he had discarded, a robe he no longer wanted.* Jesus wore a borrowed worn out robe, originally meant to display luxury, beauty, and pleasure. But now it was ugly, retrieved from a

heap of refuse for one final display, placed on the back already shredded by Pilate's soldiers.

Jesus' royal shoulders rightfully bore the universe. On the cross, Jesus was covered with our sin. Our sin. Our rebellion against the true King. Our attempt to rule. How many times have I "worshipfully" placed a stained robe on Jesus' shoulders only to rip it off when I am ready to crucify His authority in my life once again?

c. They brought a flexible staff for His hand. *"reed in his right hand"*

The staff or scepter was the measure of the king's rule. With it, he could bestow his authority on another or pass judgment when someone did not satisfy his expectations. The king could extend grace (Esther 5:2), but the scepter did not. Its requirements were the same for everyone regardless of circumstances. It did not bend.

The scepter in Jesus' hand on that day was made from a poorly chosen material. It was a reed staff. Reeds bend with each gust of wind (Luke 7:24). But for those who "worship" Jesus, something flexible seems to be the material of choice. We want His standards to change based on what is comfortable and requires no sacrifice. The staff Jesus will one day hold is made of iron (Rev. 2:27) – it will not bend.

2. The soldiers brought him false expressions of worship.

a. They lowered themselves in His sight. *"bowed the knee before Him"*

Whenever people truly worship, they lower themselves and elevate that which is being worshiped (John 3:3). The wise men of Jesus' childhood showed their worship not only by physically bowing but through the sacrifices they made. They bowed their knees *and* their hearts.

Those before Jesus on this day came before Him with hard hearts. They presented a show, but that's all it was. Their normal lives continued once the show was over. True worship will always produce a change in direction once the knee has lowered before Jesus (Matt. 2:12). Worshipers rise changed.

b. They spoke words of praise in His hearing. *"Hail! King of the Jews"*

Praise services can get loud. Anyone observing would think the worshipers truly feel and mean what they shout. The soldiers used these words to mock Jesus. Not until later did the soldiers realize the gravity of what they have said and done (Matt. 27:54).

Jesus used His words to teach and to heal (Mark 7:23; John 9:6). Jesus' enemies used their words to destroy Him. You could argue that the soldiers did it out of ignorance. That same claim cannot justify the attack from the religious leaders (Matt. 26:66-67). How can those who are spiritual pretend to serve God and yet attack Jesus?

c. They impacted His body with their touch. *"smote Him with their hands"*

Touch was an integral part of Jesus' ministry. Jesus endured criticism from one of His eventual judges because He allowed a "sinful" woman to touch Him (Luke 7:37-39). She sought and found spiritual healing. Some touched Him in their desire for physical healing (Matt. 9:20; 14:36). Usually though it was Jesus who reached out to touch (Matt. 9:29; Mark 5:27).

Worship can be an extremely physical experience. We lift our arms toward Heaven. We connect our hands with the hands of someone near us. We place

our hands around the shoulders or on the back of the person who has come in repentance to support and encourage the decision. True worship calls us to embrace one another not to push them away or inflict pain on them.

Blood flowed down Jesus' face because of the crown of thorns on His head. When the soldiers hit Jesus, they would have transferred some of Jesus' blood to their hands. They like Pilate might have tried to wash away their guilt with water. But it was only Jesus' spilled blood that could cleanse the shame of their actions. The One they pretended to worship was at the moment of their sin paying the penalty their actions incurred.

Conclusion: Pilate's soldiers blatantly mocked Jesus by false worship and then did everything in their power to rid Jesus from their lives. I wonder if that kind of worship happens today? Worship that changes nothing, worship that is only show, worship that is a mockery to the King of kings and Lord of lords; are we guilty of pretending to worship God? Do we proclaim Him as our King, and then live as if we want nothing to do with Him? Is our worship torturous to Jesus?

The wise men knew that following Jesus requires true worship. They left their land, brought Him costly gifts, and went home changed. True worship requires real sacrifice and results in permanent change. Which kind of worship do you bring to the King today?

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