

PRINCIPLES TO PONDER IN PREPARATION OF A NEW YEAR

So here we are—the beginning of the year 2022! So how do **you approach** a new year? I won't ask for a show of hands, but my guess is that each of you has 1 of the 3 following attitudes:

1) It's just another day! We see that in **Romans 14:5** "One man esteemeth one day above another: **another esteemeth every day alike**. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind."

Not entirely sure of the context here, but I don't believe you can tell someone **they're wrong** if they don't make a big deal about the beginning of a new year!

2) A second attitude would be that it is a good time **to remember—and reflect on—the past year**. In the seven letters to the churches in Revelation 2 and 3, Jesus says to **every church**—and consequently the individuals within those churches—"I know thy works..." Why do you suppose He said that? Because reminding them that **He remembered** their works would cause **them to remember** their works, too!

3) And there is yet a third attitude or mindset that we can have in the beginning of a new year, and it is this—it is a good time to **make plans and prepare for things** you **hope to do—or not do**—in the year ahead.

"If you aim at nothing, that is what you are going to hit," right?

As mentioned in passing last week, this morning we are going to go back to Matthew 2 and again look at the wise men...and Mary and Joseph and the young Christ. We've already looked at how the wise men sought Christ...and found Him...and worshipped Him. Today, we are going to look at **what happened** to them—and Mary and Joseph and Jesus—**after** the wise men worshipped Jesus. And as we do, we will see some principles regarding God's care **for them** that we should "ponder" because they also **apply to us!**

1. Principle #1: God provides for His children

We know from vs 11, that the wise men gave gold, frankincense, and myrrh to the young Christ. These were gifts fit for a king—not a 6 to 18-month-old child! **Why** these three gifts? There are some interesting **theological suggestions** as to why—some of which we looked at on Wednesday evening—but a **practical reason** is that they **needed travel money!**

Notice vss 13-14. Pretty safe to say that Mary and Joseph did not keep these gifts until Jesus was "of age," then gave them to Him! They used what was given to Jesus to **take care of themselves**—and Him!

Underneath it all is this principle: **God provides for His children!** It was true for Mary, Joseph, and Jesus—and it is true for us. In fact, **Jesus Himself** taught us not to worry because **our Father will take care of us!**

We're in Mt 2; turn to Mt 6. Can't spend a lot of time on this but want to remind you of a couple of truths about the provision of God from this chapter.

A. God knows what you need

Mid of vs 8 "...for your Father knoweth what things ye have need of, before ye ask Him."

Mid of vs 32 "...for your Heavenly Father knoweth that ye have need of all these things."

What things? The things mentioned in vs 31—food, something to drink, and clothes!

B. God meets the needs of things He loves less

Does God love everything He created **the same**? No, He doesn't! How do we know that? Because Jesus tells us! Look at vs 26 "Behold—look at, consider, observe—the fowls of the air: for they sow not, neither do they reap, nor gather into barns;"

Birds don't plant gardens...or harvest what they grow and store it in a barn!

Why not? Look at the rest of the verse "...yet your heavenly Father feedeth them...." Because God feeds them—and uses **many of us** to help Him 😊!

Notice how the verse ends: "Are ye not **much better** than they?" **Why** did Jesus ask that question? Did He ask them so they would **wrestle in their minds** who was more valuable—**them or birds**? No; it was a **rhetorical question!** 'Of course, you are better than the birds—you are way **more valuable** than them.

And since God takes care of them, He will certainly take care *of you!*'

C. God promises to take care of your needs if you put Him first

We have that in Mt 6:33 "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and His righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

Good verse to memorize—and claim! Don't miss the fact that it is a **promise**: "**shall be** added unto you." Doesn't say **might** be...or **should** be...or **could** be.

It also doesn't have any **exclusion clauses**. It doesn't say **shall be**—unless things get really bad, does it? On Thursday, I was listening to Cross-Talk on VCY and they had Alex Newman on there talking about digital currency—and the planned demolition of our economy—and the push for the One world government.

But then Alex gave this reminder: "We should not live in fear! God fed Elijah with ravens—and He will take care of us, too!" As I thought about that afterward, we also know that God then used the widow of Zarephath to feed her, her son, and Elijah for months—with a handful of meal (flour) and a little bit of oil!

But what if the economy crashes...and Social Security runs out? If those things happen—or if even worse things happen—it will not **surprise** God—and it will not make God **take back** His promise of Mt 6:33!

Back to Mt 2. Principle #1—God provides for His children.

2. Principle #2—God protects His children

A. Protection of the wise men

Look at vs 12. God warned them not to return to Herod. Why? Was Herod going to harm them? We **don't know**, because we aren't told. But imagine how horrible it would have been for the wise men to report back to Herod, then have them lead Herod—and/or some wicked soldiers—back to where Jesus was, then kill Him right before their very eyes! God spared them from that, though, by sending them back another way.

B. Protection of the Christ child and His parents

Look at vs 13. Even though the **wise men didn't know** Herod was insincere when he said he wanted to know where Christ was so he could worship Him, **God knew** Herod's intent! And **because He knew** Herod's intent, God made sure that Joseph, Mary, and the young Jesus **were long gone** before Herod figured out the wise men had "disobeyed" his command to report back to him!

It would be easy to say, "There you have it—God protects His children! He protected the wise men—and He protected Mary, Joseph, and the young Jesus." But it is not always that simple, is it?

There is a... C. Perplexity regarding God's protection

Why do I say that? Because **God's children** die, don't they? We think most recently of Mary Harris, but there are a number of others that died in 2021. Bev, Jeanne, members in Karen's family...the list goes on.

And we see in this passage that although God **protected** the wise men—and Mary, Joseph, and Jesus from being killed—there **were innocent children** that were **killed by Herod**. For whatever reason, God chose **not to protect** them!

So what are we to think about this **perplexity** regarding God's **protection of some**—and the seeming **end of His protection** on others? How do we wrap our minds around that?

The "pat answer"—but really the **only** answer—is **we don't know why** God protects some—but not all! And we must be content in **not knowing** "why!"

--He is God—we are not!

He is All-knowing—we are not!

--And He knows the appointment day He has set for us—and we do not!

So, we live in faith, not fear!

--**George Whitefield** is credited with saying: "We are immortal until our work is done."

--**General Stonewall Jackson** stated: "[M]y religious belief teaches me to feel **as safe in battle as in bed**. God has **fixed the time for my death**. I do not concern myself about that, but to be always ready, no matter when it may overtake me. That is the way all men should live, and then all would be equally brave."

Principle #1—God provides for His children

Principle #2—God protects His children

3. Principle #3—God prompts His children

In other words, God guides and leads us to do certain things. We see that throughout this chapter.

--In vs 12, God warned the wise men **through a dream** to go home a different way

--In vs 13, an angel appeared to Joseph **in a dream** and told him to take the family to Egypt. Notice how specific the guidance was: "...and be thou there until I bring thee word." In other words, stay there until I **tell you to depart**.

--In vs 19-20, we see an angel again appearing to Joseph **in a dream** to go back to the land of Israel

--And in vs 22, toward the end of the verse, we again see Joseph being warned of God **in a dream**—this time to go to a specific part of Galilee—the city of Nazareth.

It would be easy to get the impression from this passage that the **normal way** God guides and leads and prompts His children is **through dreams**! Although that was somewhat true **before the Bible was completed**, I do not believe God guides us **through dreams now**.

Why? Because we have the **completed Word of God**—and the **Holy Spirit**! The wise men—and Joseph—did not have either! God's Word was **not complete** at that time—He had a lot more things to reveal to not only the disciples, but also the Apostle Paul. And the Holy Spirit **did not indwell believers** because Jesus had not yet died and risen again. So... how should we view dreams?

A. Danger of dreams. Why is there a danger in dreams?

i. They are easily influenced

The food we eat...or the medication we take...or the movie we just watched...or playing some kind of computer game...or being sick...can all influence our dreams. I'm guessing that a number of you have experienced that very thing!

A second danger is that... **ii. They are subjective in interpretation**

What does that mean? It means you can interpret them **any way you want**! It is based on **your preferences**—there is no **factual** information to base it on! There really would be no end to how you could interpret your dreams! Imagine waking up in the morning and telling your wife, "I had a dream about 101 dalmatians. Surely that means we need to go buy 101 of them!"

Somewhat of a silly example, but are there people that make decisions based on dreams? Sadly, there are—and often times those decisions are contrary to common sense—and to the Word of God!

B. Safety in Scripture

God now uses Scripture—His Word—to guide us. And if you are familiar with the dreams of both Joseph and Daniel, they both acknowledged that **God had given them** the interpretation of their dream. We aren't told exactly how, but they had **words from God**—facts—to interpret their dreams—**not their feelings**!

And that is now what we have—God's complete, inerrant, unchanging Word! And our counsel...and guidance...and wisdom...should come from God. **Prov 2:6** "For the Lord giveth wisdom: out of His mouth cometh knowledge and understanding."

Proverbs also says that "In the multitude of counselors there is safety." Why? Is it because **majority rules**? No; it is because a multitude of counselors—using the **same source**—come to the **same conclusion**!

C. Process of prompting

So how does God prompt us now? He doesn't speak with a voice in **our ear**—but He does speak to **our hearts**. But how? How does God use the Bible to lead us and guide us?

Here's an illustration that I believe will help. Back in August, a woman called asking for help. She wanted some Pastoral counsel—or so she said, and I agreed to meet with her—as long as I had my wife or someone else with me. She even called when Mike Pelletier and I were out to lunch, and I had her talk to him for a while. She agreed **to come to church** that night so the three of us could talk after—but she didn't make it. She was then **going to meet with Mike** and I the next day—but again backed out. But she still **kept reaching out** to me—and I still wanted to help her.

I wanted to sit down with her and open up the Bible with her and show her God was the only One who could help her with her problems and that her real need was to be born again—not just be rid of all her problems.

I even thought this might be an “Unshackled” kind of situation where this woman would be saved and really turn her life around. People need to hear the Word, right? **Rom 10:13-14** “For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved. ¹⁴How then shall they call on Him in whom they have not believed? and how shall they believe in Him of whom they have not heard? and how shall they hear without a preacher?”

But God brought other verses to mind, like **I Peter 5:8** “Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour:” And verses from Proverbs about **seductive women**.

And yet—she was the one who originally reached out to me! I couldn’t just ignore her requests for help, could I? So here is what God led me to do. I took one of the small *Bible Promises* books that we have here at church—and put it in an envelope—and dropped it off at the camp office in the campground she was at. I texted her **after I left there** to tell her that I had dropped it off.

Did she pick it up? Did she read it? Does she still have it? I don’t know because she basically stopped communicating with me after that! How thankful I was for God’s specific guidance—through His Word and His Spirit—to guide me.

One more thing I want us to look at regarding God’s prompting of His children and it is this...

D. Prerequisites of God’s prompting

Does God guide **all His children**—or just some? And **what does God look for** in the people He prompts? Again, we can learn some things here from the wise men—and Joseph.

i. Obedience

--In Mt 1:20, the angel says not to be afraid to take Mary as his wife. In 1:24, Joseph did as the angel said

--In Mt 2:8, the wise men are instructed from the Scripture to go to Bethlehem. In vs 9, they departed.

--In vs 12, the wise men are instructed not to return to Herod. They obeyed and went another way.

--In vs 13, Joseph is instructed to go do Egypt. In vs 14, he went to Egypt.

--In vs 20, Joseph is told to come back to Israel. In vs 21, we see him doing that.

Impossible to miss this truth: if you want to be led by God, you **need to obey** what God tells you to do! God will not lead you if you “pick and choose” what you want to obey! **Oswald Chambers** in his devotional *My Utmost for His Highest* writes: “No one ever receives a word from God without instantly being put to the test regarding it. We disobey and then wonder why we are not growing spiritually.” (July 27)

Think of it like this—is God going to guide you to **do something new** when you are refusing to do the **last thing He told you to do**? I don’t believe He will! And so, obedience is certainly a prerequisite for having guidance from God. What is another prerequisite for God to lead us besides obedience?

ii. Faith

We not only need to **do what** God says—we need to **believe** what He says!

--Joseph took Mary to be his wife—at the instruction of the angel—because he believed the angel’s message that “that which is conceived in her is of the Holy Ghost” (M 1:20)

--The wise men believed they would find Jesus in Bethlehem—that is why they went there!

--In vs 13, Joseph is told to go to Egypt “and be thou there until I bring thee word”—and he waited until that word came.

Do you want to be led by God? Then do what Joseph and the wise men did: believe what God says—and obey what God says.

So there we have it—3 principles to ponder as we prepare for this new year. What will 2022 bring? We don’t know, do we? But we do know these three things:

1. God will provide for us—as we seek first His kingdom

2. God will protect us—until our time here on earth is done

3. God will prompt us—He will lead us and guide us—as long as we believe what He says—and do what He says! Meditate on these things; let them be your foundation for the year ahead. **PRAY**

So what would God have us do in light of His Word this morning?

1. First, make sure you are a child of God! These principles of God's provision...and His protection...and His prompting in our lives, are for His children—not everyone!
2. If we are a child of God, I believe God wants us to have a renewed enthusiasm for knowing what He says—and doing what He says? That is what the wise men did—and that is what Joseph did!
3. We also should have a renewed faith and trust in God. He provided for Joseph, Mary, and Jesus—and provides for the fowls of the air! Surely, He will provide for us, too!

But obedience to God's Word and trust in God's Word have something in common—God's Word! So we need to be in God's Word in order to know what God says and claim what God says and obey what God says!