

“GLORIFYING THE SON OF GOD”

Isaiah 60:1-6, Ephesians 3:1-12, Matthew 2:1-12

December 31, 2022 & January 1, 2023

“Sadie Smithson grew up in Johnson Falls, West Virginia. Her father kept a livery stable, Sadie herself contributed to the family income by sewing, and the family floated just above the poverty level. But Sadie craved respect. She wanted to mingle with the upper crust of Johnson Falls, and she had a plan for doing it. Her secret ambition was to join the Laurel Literary Society, an organization that represented all that was socially prestigious in her town. After high school graduation, she applied for admission into the Laurel Literary Society. Nothing doing. She was rejected.

“Well, she thought, perhaps they’ll think better of me if I tour Europe. Few in Johnson Falls had ever been abroad. So she saved up her money, daydreaming of the soft-gloved hands clapping after she had read her paper on ‘My Trip to Europe.’

“For many years she saved her money. Finally, she took her long-planned trip abroad, traveling with a professor and his wife, only to be caught in the opening shots of World War 1. Sadie, in Belgium at the time, managed to get a ride to Paris; but the driver lost his way, and suddenly they found themselves crossing a battlefield.

“Right beside the car lay one young soldier, badly wounded. He looked into Sadie’s eyes and moaned, ‘Water, for God’s sake!’ Sadie immediately jumped out of the car with her drinking cup and made her way to a near-by spring. Then another dying soldier wanted a drink. Sadie refused to leave those boys, and finally the car drove off without her. All night long, she ran back and forth to the spring with her little cup, carrying water to injured men. She tore her skirt into bandages. She scribbled notes and messages for loved ones at home. And as she worked with each wounded man, she offered a prayer: ‘The Lord bless you and keep you and make His face to shine upon you.’

“It was a night of horror, of darkness, and of moaning, dying men. Finally, the darkness gave way to the dawn and with it an ambulance and a young doctor. He was astonished to find a poor girl from West Virginia amid all the blood and carnage of war. ‘Who are you?’ he asked, ‘and what in thunder are you doing here?’

“I’m Sadie Smithson,’ she said, ‘and I’ve been holding hell back all night.’

“Well!’ said the young doctor quietly, “Miss Sadie Smithson, I’m glad you held some of it back, for everybody else in the world was letting it loose last night.’

“As she was returning to America, she told her story to a fellow passenger on the ship. ‘I’ve never been married - never known what it was to have children - but that night all those men were my children, even the biggest and roughest of them, and I believe I could have died for any one of them.’

“Well,’ said the friend, ‘the Laurel Literary Society will be glad enough to have you belong to it now.’

“No,’ Sadie Smithson replied, ‘I’ve been face to face with war, and death, and hell, and God. Now, little things like the Laurel Literary Society don’t matter to me any more.’

“What does matter?’ asked the friend.

“Nothing,’ Sadie said. ‘Nothing but God and love - and doing what I can do for those He sends me to.’

“Jesus Christ came in the darkness of night to a dying race of humanity. He loves us and gave Himself for us. When we receive Him, our perspective changes, and with it our attitude. Then the trivial and the important change places.”<sup>1</sup>

I share this account with you today because with it comes the great question, “What will it take to change your perspective on life?” Our lives today are easily focused on trivial things, maybe craving respect from others, maybe seeking fame and glory, maybe seeking acceptance into a particular group, maybe seeking the love of a man or woman that has captured your attention, maybe striving for peace and justice, maybe it’s the desire for great wealth and riches, or possibly its changing the political outlook around you. We are surrounded by so many things that distract us from the important things in life, and we get laser focused on those things and miss out on the things of the Lord. We miss out on touching the lives of others in simple, yet vital ways that impact their lives to the depths of their souls.

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<sup>1</sup> (Robert J. Morgan, *Stories, Illustrations & Quotes*, [Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 2000] pg. 38-39)

Isaiah 60 challenges us to change our perspective with these vital words, *“Arise, shine, for your light has come, and the glory of the Lord rises upon you. See, darkness covers the earth and thick darkness is over the peoples, but the Lord rises upon you and His glory appears over you”* (60:1-2). When we let the Lord come into our hearts and minds, filling our very souls, He fills us with such beauty and light and love that we are able to share it with all those around us. God’s light is not just for us to enjoy for our own, but to share with all those around us, not to make ourselves look better, but to possibly lift up the eyes that are downcast, or to strengthen the knees that are feeble, or to encourage those who have little hope. What will it take to change our perspective, from focused only on ourselves to look beyond us to see the world around us living in such darkness and despair?

Isaiah 60 is also the challenge for us to receive the Lord’s Anointed One, the Savior who would bring His light into the hearts of all who would receive Him. He is the One who brings the light of life, and He is the One who uses us to move in our communities for the sake of the hurting and the lost. But if our eyes are focused only upon ourselves, we cannot see the hurt or the pain or the need or the desperation that is around us. So God often puts us into “battlefield situations” where we are forced to see more than ourselves in order to change our perspective to include others. But I hope it won’t take such drastic measures for God to get your attention and help you to see His purpose for your life.

Over the last few weeks, we’ve seen that when Jesus was born on the earth, God revealed it first to the shepherds living in the fields surrounding Bethlehem. The angels told them the great thing that God had done for all people, sending the Messiah into the world. They were so excited about God’s Messiah, they left their sheep in the fields and went looking for the “babe wrapped in clothes and lying in a manger” (Luke 2:16-17). They shared this good news to everyone who would listen as they returned to tend their flocks. It had changed their lives.

But there were others who had their perspectives changed far away from the little town of Bethlehem. Listen to Matthew 2:1-17. (READ Matthew 2:1-17)

God had revealed His mystery of the Salvation of the world to these men from the east. We’re

not told what country they were from, but obviously they had gained information from the writings of the prophets foretelling the Messiah's coming. They may have lived in one of the districts of Babylon, and had access to the Hebrew texts taken there by Daniel, and where there was still a sizeable Jewish population. We don't know. But they had been focusing on the stars in the sky when God opened up their eyes to something marvelous happening in another part of the world that would bring universal consequences. They began to see what the Lord was doing, and they were given insight into the mystery of God bringing Salvation to the Gentiles. They were now given the opportunity to explore what the Lord God was doing in the world, bringing it about in the little country of Israel, in the little town of Bethlehem.

Matthew's Gospel alludes to the status of these men called Magi. In Daniel's day of the Babylonian exile, the Magi were "a priestly caste of Medes who enjoyed special power to interpret dreams." They were also men interested in "astrology, magic, books thought to contain mysterious references to the future and the like. Some Magi honestly inquired after truth; many were rogues and charlatans."<sup>2</sup> Their pursuit of "truth" was their single purpose to life and that often left them missing out on what God was doing around them.

But these Magi were different. Instead of focusing upon their own lives, their own positions of power, their own wealth and majesty, these men recognized the work of God, and they decided to go and find this one whom they determined had been born, King of the Jews. If indeed they were from Babylon, it would give us the reason that it took them so long to arrive in Judea. They did not come on the night that Jesus was born, like most of the accounts today indicate, but came following the "star" that announced Jesus' birth. That is why in Matthew's account, we see that when they arrived in Bethlehem, they found "*the child and his mother Mary*" in a house (Matt. 2:11), not the stable where Jesus was born.

These men put aside their studies for a while and pursued the "*one who has been born king of the Jews*" (Matt. 2:2). God had so piqued their interest that they left their homes, their families, their

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<sup>2</sup> (*The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, Frank Gaebelin, ed., [Grand Rapids: Regency Reference Library, 1984] vol. 8, p. 85)

comfortable amenities, and their important positions, to actually “*come to worship Him.*” Their perspectives had changed in such a way that they prepared for, and undertook, a long journey covering many months, if not years, to satisfy their new focus of interest. They no longer sought their own personal status and position, but decided to pay homage to the new king that God had disclosed to them.

Along their journey, these men were able to touch the lives of others. In particular was the aging King Herod, who did not receive the news of a “newborn king” very well. Herod was solely focused upon himself, and his being the King of Judea filled His mindset completely. “He was wealthy, politically gifted, intensely loyal, an excellent administrator, and clever enough to remain in the good graces of successive Roman emperors. His famine relief was superb and his building projects (including the temple, begun 20 B.C.) were admired even by his foes. BUT he loved power, inflicted incredibly heavy taxes on the people, and resented the fact that many Jews considered him a usurper. In his last years, suffering an illness that compounded his paranoia, he turned to cruelty and in fits of rage and jealousy, killed close associates, his wife Mariamne..., and at least two of his sons.”<sup>3</sup>

This man was all about himself, focused on his own position and power. So instead of welcoming the news from the Magi that a new king had been born, Herod set upon a scheme to try to destroy Him. He had no room in his heart or his life for any competition, even if the new king had just been born. It was Herod’s way or none, so he gathered all the information needed to send the Magi on their way, but in the process, conscripted the Magi to be the informers as to the location of the child. His intentions were very far from “*worshipping him, too*” (Matt. 2:8).

So we have the contrast between the Magi, who had seen God’s sign in the sky and took action to find and worship the child, and Herod, who knew the prophecies of the coming Christ, but ignored God’s call to change the perspective of his life and worship Him. The Magi saw the Light of the Lord and were drawn toward it, while Herod saw the Light of the Lord only as a threat to his personal power and sought to destroy it. The Magi brought expensive and precious gifts to present to the child they

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<sup>3</sup> (*Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, pg. 84)

recognized as royalty. Herod only brought anger, violence and death. While Jesus came into the world to bring love, hope, peace and eternal life, not everyone welcomed Him.

Yet, God continues to present us with opportunities to change our perspective of life and welcome Him into our daily routines. But that demands that we refocus our attention and put aside the trivial things in our lives so that we might recognize the Lord's call on us. So what might that look like? Let me give you just one account to help you see how God can change your perspective in order to bring honor and glory to the Lord. This is an account of William Borden.

“In 1904 William Borden graduated from a Chicago high school. As heir to the Borden family fortune, he was already wealthy. For his high school graduation present, William Borden's parents gave their 16-year-old son a trip around the world. As the young man traveled through Asia, the Middle East, and Europe, he felt a growing burden for the world's hurting people. Finally, Bill Borden wrote home about his ‘desire to be a missionary.’ One friend expressed disbelief that Bill was ‘throwing himself away as a missionary.’ A story often associated with Borden says that, in response, he wrote two words in the back of his Bible: **No reserves.**’

“Even though young Borden was wealthy, he arrived on the campus of Yale University in 1905 trying to look like just one more freshman. Very quickly, however, Borden's classmates noticed something unusual about him and it wasn't that he had lots of money. One of them wrote: ‘He came to college far ahead, spiritually, of any of us. He had already given his heart in full surrender to Christ and had really done it. We who were his classmates learned to lean on him and find in him a strength that was solid as a rock, just because of this settled purpose and consecration.’

“During his college years, Bill Borden made an entry in his personal journal that defined what his classmates were seeing in him. That entry said simply: ‘Say “no” to self and “yes” to Jesus every time.’

“Borden's first disappointment at Yale came when the university president spoke in a convocation about the students' need of ‘having a fixed purpose.’ After that speech, Borden wrote: ‘He

neglected to say what our purpose should be, and where we should get the ability to persevere and the strength to resist temptations.’ Surveying the Yale faculty and much of the student body, Borden lamented what he saw as the end result of an empty, humanistic philosophy: moral weakness and sin-ruined lives.

“During his first semester at Yale, Borden started something that would transform campus life. One of his friends described how it began: ‘It was well on in the first term when Bill and I began to pray together in the morning before breakfast. I cannot say positively whose suggestion it was, but I feel sure it must have originated with Bill. We had been meeting only a short time when a third student joined us and soon after a fourth. The time was spent in prayer after a brief reading of Scripture. Bill’s handling of Scripture was helpful. . . . He would read to us from the Bible, show us something that God had promised and then proceed to claim the promise with assurance.’

“Borden’s small morning prayer group gave birth to a movement that soon spread across the campus. By the end of his first year, 150 freshman were meeting weekly for Bible study and prayer. By the time Bill Borden was a senior, one thousand of Yale’s 1,300 students were meeting in such groups.

“Borden made it his habit to seek out the most ‘incurable’ students and try to bring them to salvation. ‘In his sophomore year we organized Bible study groups and divided up the class of 300 or more, each man interested taking a certain number, so that all might, if possible, be reached. The names were gone over one by one, and the question asked, “Who will take this person?” When it came to someone thought to be a hard proposition, there would be an ominous pause. Nobody wanted the responsibility. Then Bill’s voice would be heard, ‘Put him down to me.’

“Borden’s outreach ministry was not confined to the Yale campus. He cared about widows and orphans and the disabled. He rescued drunks from the streets of New Haven. To try to rehabilitate them, he founded the Yale Hope Mission. One of Bill Borden’s friends wrote that he ‘might often be found in the lower parts of the city at night, on the street, in a cheap lodging house or some restaurant to which he had taken a poor hungry fellow to feed him, seeking to lead men to Christ.’

“Borden's missionary call narrowed to the Muslim Kansu people in China. Fixing his eyes on that goal, Borden never wavered. He also challenged his classmates to consider foreign missionary service. One of them said of him: ‘He certainly was one of the strongest characters I have ever known, and he put backbone into the rest of us at college. There was real iron in him, and I always felt he was of the stuff martyrs were made of, and heroic missionaries of more modern times.’

“Although he was a millionaire, Bill seemed to ‘realize always that he must be about his Father's business, and not wasting time in the pursuit of amusement.’ Although Borden refused to join a fraternity, ‘he did more with his classmates in his senior year than ever before.’ He presided over the huge student missionary conference held at Yale and served as president of the honor society Phi Beta Kappa.

“Upon graduation from Yale, Borden turned down some high-paying job offers. It has been reported that in his Bible, Bill Borden wrote two more words: ‘**No retreats.**’

“William Borden went on to do graduate work at Princeton Seminary in New Jersey. When he finished his studies at Princeton, he sailed for China. Because he was hoping to work with Chinese Muslims, he stopped first in Egypt to study Arabic. While there, he contracted spinal meningitis. Within a month, 25-year-old William Borden was dead.

“Was Borden's untimely death a waste? Not in God's perspective. As the story has it, prior to his death, Borden had written two more words in the back of his Bible. Underneath the words ‘No reserves’ and ‘No retreats,’ he is reported to have written: ‘**No regrets.**’”<sup>4</sup>

Looking at Bill Borden’s short life, what might we do in our life to bring glory to the Son of God? Let’s pray.

Father, thank You for the gift of Your Son, Jesus. Thank You for Your call on each of our lives to receive Him as our Savior and King. Give us the courage to focus our lives on serving You in whatever we do so that Your Light might shine through us into the lives of others. Use us, Lord, to touch the lives of all of those living around us so that they, too may find Jesus as Savior and Lord. This we pray in Jesus’ Name. AMEN.

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<sup>4</sup> (Portions based on material in *Daily Bread*, December 31, 1988, and *The Yale Standard*, Fall 1970 edition.)