

Joke: John and his girlfriend Mary decide to become bank-robbers. I know bad choice.

Mary does the actual robbing at gunpoint, nonetheless, inside the banks while John waits outside as the getaway driver. They are successful with a string of heists that make headlines and they become folk-heroes. Until one day their luck runs out and they get caught.

At the trial, the judge gives Mary ten years in prison, while John gets two. However, once they get to their respective prisons, they discover that due to a clerical error John will actually be serving ten years and Mary only two. Mary pleads for John to make it right but despite of her insistence, John convinces Mary to keep quiet about it.

So, after two years Mary gets out and she continues to visit John faithfully every month, they even exchange letters and phone calls regularly for the remainder of his ten years.

Finally, after he does his time, John gets out and is joyfully reunited with Mary. They get married, move to a different

state and start over, leaving their life of crime behind. They raise a family with children and grandchildren they are living such a happy life together.

On their 50th wedding anniversary a party is thrown on their behalf, the entire family is there, friends are gathered as well to join in the celebration. A what a celebration is was, many laughs and stories were told, recounting their life together.

The conversation turns to the secrets to a happy marriage. One of the guests asks Mary why she decided to stick with John while he was in prison, despite all of the hardships.

Mary answers: "Well. . .you know you have found the one when you finish each other's sentences."

The Wonder of Christmas - Week 3 - Joy

Play Video - skitguys.com TWOC - Joy

What a powerful sentence to stop and ponder this Christmas concerning how the path of your life has been unfolding. No doubt there has been some ups and downs on your road that have brought you where you are today, but what if that last statement we just heard in the video is true about your life?

“The journey was always leading you to Jesus.”

There is a wonder of joy waiting to be experienced this Christmas when you realize the road you have been traveling intersects with the Savior who was born for you.

And the truth is, the more difficult the journey, the greater the joy will be when you come to the realization that He really is the Lord and Savior over all.

Church, He is worthy to be pursued and worthy of all we have to offer before Him once we come into His presence. This is what the wise men ultimately found when they followed the star that led them to the promised Messiah.

It was a difficult and taxing journey for sure, one that cost them time and resources to fulfill.

Ultimately, it was worth it and it allowed them to come face to face with the newborn King. After miles upon miles of searching and persistence, the star in the night sky guided them to the Savior who had been born in the stall. They likely were overcome with emotion, reverence, awe, and I can only imagine an abundance joy as well!

Their story is told in Matthew's gospel.

Matthew 2:1–12 (NIV): After Jesus was born in Bethlehem in Judea, during the time of King Herod, Magi from the east came to Jerusalem and asked, “Where is the one who has been born king of the Jews? We saw his star when it rose and have come to worship him.”³ When King Herod heard this he was disturbed, and all Jerusalem with him.⁴ When he had called together all the people's chief priests and teachers of the law, he asked them where the Messiah was to be born.⁵ “In Bethlehem in Judea,” they replied,

“for this is what the prophet has written: 6 “ ‘But you, Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for out of you will come a ruler who will shepherd my people Israel.’” 7 Then Herod called the Magi secretly and found out from them the exact time the star had appeared. 8 He sent them to Bethlehem and said, “Go and search carefully for the child. As soon as you find him, report to me, so that I too may go and worship him.” 9 After they had heard the king, they went on their way, and the star they had seen when it rose went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. 10 When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. 11 On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshiped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. 12 And having been warned in a dream not to go back to Herod, they returned to their country by another route.

As the wisemen departed from the One they had invested so much to seek, they likely shared their story with people they came into contact with on their journey home.

A star that bright would not have been a hidden phenomenon to others living in that region. Rather, It likely would have been a connection point of remembrance as the wise men shared their story of where they had been, how they traveled, and what ultimately led them to Jesus.

They likely shared the good news of their encounter with the Christ child to all who would listen. They set out with a purpose and found it in this baby who had been foretold by the prophets of old.

While Jesus came from Heaven to earth on purpose, He did so with you in His mind's eye and joy in His heart.

Yes, you were created on purpose for a purpose.

Part of that purpose is to experience the wonderful joy that a life-changing relationship with Jesus affords to all who put their faith, hope, and trust in Him not just for salvation, but for all that He has called us to be.

At just the right time on your journey through life, it is as if the stars align in just the right manner and point you to the One whose birth we celebrate this time of year: Jesus.

Perhaps this is the first time you've ever really stopped on your journey through life and paused long enough to look up and see that God has been waiting to connect with you and help you connect the dots in your life leading toward Jesus.

Maybe today is the first time in a long time that you have found yourself remembering what you once held dear as it pertains to the true meaning of Christmas.

Perhaps you once walked your path of life in ways that you felt close to Jesus and were following Him.

However, somewhere along the road something happened and you have taken a detour that now finds you farther away from where you thought you were traveling with Jesus.

Wherever you are on your journey through life, however difficult it may have been up until now, Jesus wants to give you the wonder of His joy this Christmas and invite you to follow Him.

Just as the wise men were led on their journey by a bright and shining star in the sky that moved them to Jesus, God uses different moments in life to help guide people to a place where they are meant to meet the Savior of the world.

Regardless of where you have been on your journey or how you have arrived at where you are today, God has a history of using different situations, people, and even circumstances at just the right time to help us see how our “stars have aligned” in a way that leads to Jesus.

God has a way of helping to give the right direction in our path when we need it the most, be that through a star in the sky like He did for the wise men in the Christmas story, or perhaps through an individual helping to shine the light on the path towards a “God encounter” for you.

While there may not be a literal shining light in the Christmas sky giving direction right now for you, often times God uses people to help shine a spotlight on parts of our life and point the way to a new encounter with Jesus the Savior.

This is what we see the Apostle Paul doing in a season of his life that is recorded in Acts 13.

While what he said to some people he crossed paths with was intended for them to be like a spotlight on the path ahead in their lives during a moment 2000 years ago, the fact that you are hearing his story may also mean the same truth was meant for you where you are in your journey through life at this very moment.

In other words, if God could use someone like Paul 2000 years ago to help people see where they have been and where they are heading that leads to Jesus, He may be doing the same thing through that example in the Scriptures, but for your life today.

The Apostle Paul's life was intended to be less like a star in the Christmas night sky, and more like a spotlight on the path that pointed people toward Jesus.

In a very real sense, your life and my life also are intended to be like spotlights that point people to Jesus. God wants us to position ourselves along the roads of life that we walk and live among and help point people to Jesus with what we say and what we do.

2 Corinthians 5:20 (TPT): We are ambassadors of the Anointed One who carry the message of Christ to the world, as though God were tenderly pleading with them directly through our lips. So we tenderly plead with you on Christ's behalf, "Turn back to God and be reconciled to him."

As I mentioned earlier, it is likely that the wise men who met Jesus did their best to tell others about their encounter with Him.

However, there is no doubt this is what we see happening in Paul's life as God uses him to point other people to Jesus in the pages of the New Testament.

Paul shines the spotlight of his life encounters with Jesus on the path other people have been walking. He does this to help them see where they have been and how it connects with where they are headed which was intended to lead them to an encounter with Jesus.

At the point in Paul's life recorded in Acts 13, he was not too far into the beginning of his first missionary journey with his friend Barnabas. They were sent out by the church at Antioch in Syria and sailed to the island of Cyprus to share the gospel with people on that island where Barnabas originally called home.

And while they were there, they encountered some opposition.

By the way often times when you do anything for the gospel there will be some opposition. So Paul, sort of let's us in and tells us to expect it.

Truth is church opposition is normal when you follow God. Just consider our woke culture that we live in today, it is trying so hard to have us abandon what we know is truth.

But regardless, that can make the joy of worship sweeter and more consequential for true followers of Jesus.

As they traveled onward together, it says in Acts 13:14-15 what Paul and Barnabas did next after they made it to their destination.

Acts 13:14–15 (TPT): as they journeyed on to the city of Antioch in the region of Pisidia. On the Sabbath they went into the synagogue and took their seats. 15 After the reading from the scrolls of the books of Moses and the prophets, the leader of the meeting sent Paul and Barnabas a message, saying, “Brothers, do you have a

word of encouragement to share with us? If so, please feel free to give it.”

In that culture it was customary for the leader of the synagogue in worship to call on any visitors to give a word to the rest of the group.

Think about that, that custom would cause some us here today to tense up a bit, wouldn't it?

However, that was not the case with Paul. Paul was visiting the synagogue in Antioch in Pisidia on that day; when they offered him the floor to extend a word to those present, he took the opportunity to say some things.

Notice how Paul begins to point the spotlight of the historical road these people had been walking along with their Jewish ancestors towards Jesus.

Acts 13:16–25 (TPT): Paul stood and motioned that he had something to say. He said, “Listen, all of you Jews and non-Jews who worship God. 17 The God of Israel divinely

chose our ancestors to be his people. While they were enslaved in Egypt, he made them great, both in numbers and in strength, until he unveiled his mighty power and led them out of bondage. 18 For nearly forty years, he nourished them in the wilderness. 19 He was the one who destroyed the seven nations inhabiting the land of Canaan and afterward gave the land to his people as their inheritance. 20 This took about four hundred and fifty years. “Then God raised up deliverers for the people until the time of the prophet Samuel. 21 The people craved for a king, so God gave them one from the tribe of Benjamin: Saul, the son of Kish, who ruled for forty years. 22 After removing him, God raised up David to be king, for God said of him, ‘I have found in David, son of Jesse, a man who always pursues my heart and will accomplish all that I have destined him to do.’ 23 “From David’s lineage God brought Israel a Savior, just as he promised. 24 So before Jesus appeared, John preached the message of a baptism of repentance to prepare all of Israel. 25 As John was about to finish his mission, he said repeatedly, ‘If you think that I am the one to come, you’re mistaken. He will come

after me, and I don't even deserve to stoop down and untie his sandals!'

That is the first sermon we have recorded by the Apostle Paul. He didn't just give an Old Testament and New Testament history lesson. No no no, Paul was shining the spotlight on the historical road of where these people had been walking that led up to their present moment that crossed paths with the gospel of Jesus.

As N.T. Wright says, "Paul is setting up a system of signposts, from David a thousand years before to John a mere 15 or 20 years earlier. And all the signposts point to one person: Jesus the Messiah, the Rescuer."

It is the same Messiah and Rescuer the wise men had been guided to and met in person in the early days of Jesus' life. Whether through a miraculous star in the sky or through an intentional follower of Jesus shining the spotlight of the gospel on the road of people he came into contact with, there is the possibility of a joy-filled miracle of

salvation when a person encounters the truth of the gospel of Jesus.

Everything Paul was saying to his audience was shining the spotlight on a recognizable signpost that pointed them to the next part of the faith journey that eventually would lead them to Jesus.

God chooses to plant some people throughout history ultimately to point others to the Messiah. Notice that point of truth in Acts 13:17?

Acts 13:17 (TPT): The God of Israel divinely chose our ancestors to be his people. While they were enslaved in Egypt, he made them great, both in numbers and in strength, until he unveiled his mighty power and led them out of bondage.

What Paul is saying about God “choosing” people is this: God chose the Jewish fathers to be a spotlight shining on the way that eventually led to Jesus. God chose the judges to be a spotlight shining on the way that eventually

led to Jesus. God chose kings to be spotlights shining on the way that eventually led to Jesus. And each of these spotlights shining on the road throughout history are not just events; they are people.

God wants people, to be spotlights shining the way that point other people to Jesus. That includes you and I we are called not just to be ambassadors, but spotlights that point others to Jesus.

Paul is not a star in the sky but rather is acting like a spotlight as he shines the light on the historical road for his audience to see their faith journey through history and how it has led them to Jesus.

Paul reminds them that God kept putting people in the path to point them to salvation. God gave his people judges to lead them until the time of Samuel when the people clamored for a King. And then God gave them their wish and gave them a King named Saul.

Unfortunately, that chapter of their story did not end well regarding the leadership of Saul the King. Saul got confused and thought that he was meant to be a destination rather than a spotlight that pointed people forward to the path that led to God.

Saul became a glory hog who kept shining the spotlight on himself rather than towards God. So, God allowed Saul's spotlight to burn out in a deadly defeat from war before then putting the next king in place: King David.

And in Acts 13:22 Paul reminds them how David is described.

Acts 13:22 (TPT): After removing him, God raised up David to be king, for God said of him, 'I have found in David, son of Jesse, a man who always pursues my heart and will accomplish all that I have destined him to do.

Paul is shining the spotlight back to this important ancestor of his Jewish audience named David. And David is

standing on the road of faith pointing people ultimately toward Jesus.

If you are familiar with the story of David, some may have a difficult time getting over the way God describes David as “a man who always pursues my heart and will accomplish all that I have destined him to do. Or another translation says, “a man after God’s own heart.” David wasn’t perfect by any stretch of the imagination. Remember Bathsheba. . .need I say more.

But David, was available and he desired to be used by God to point other people to Him as history shows. Just turn your Bible to some of Psalms he wrote. Start there you can see the spotlight.

You, too, can be a part of history as you shine your own spotlight in life in such a way that you point people to Jesus.

It happened to David in the Old Testament. And it’s what Paul articulates to his audience in Acts 13.

As Paul leads his audience through the faith journey of their history, he shines the spotlight in such a way that points people to Jesus. . .

Acts 13:23 (TPT): 23 “From David’s lineage God brought Israel a Savior, just as he promised.

Paul then reminds them that this is the same Savior that John the Baptist was preparing the way for before Jesus began his public ministry.

Once again, God is faithful to point the wise men to Jesus through a star in the sky as well as through a prophet who pointed the people within the sound of His voice to the Lamb of God who was born to take away the sin of the world.

Later, Paul shows his audience where the spotlight ultimately points to, deeper in the chapter in Acts 13 verses 38 and 39. . .

Acts 13:38–39 (TPT): 38 “So listen, friends! Through this Jesus, the forgiveness of sins is offered to you.

39 Everyone who believes in him is set free from sin and guilt—something the law of Moses had no power to do.

Paul’s strategy of pointing the spotlight on the historical road of his Jewish audience in such a way that it shines on to Jesus is a challenge to us all this Christmas.

It encourages us to understand our audience well enough to know how to tell them the story that points them to Jesus in a way they will find compelling, interesting, and authenticated by our joy-filled lives.

Some of us need to tell our face we’re happy, and that the joy of the Lord is my strength.

Paul shining the spotlight down the Jewish historical road in a way that leads to Jesus was compelling and connecting for his first century audience.

For Paul's audience, history was huge to connect the dots because first century Jewish people wanted to know: "Is it true? Help me see that this faith journey leads to what is true historically and is fulfilled in prophetic truth of the coming Messiah."

Is it true?

However, many among our 21st century audiences whom we are trying to point people to Jesus want to know the answer to a different question: "Does it work? Does Jesus work in your life? Does following Jesus make any difference for you? Does being a Christian make life work in a better, more fulfilling, and joyful way?"

Does it work? Does it work for you?

That's why so many people read customer reviews or customer comments before making decisions about various things that will cost them time and money.

We want to know if the product we are thinking about buying or the restaurant we are thinking about eating at or the vacation spot we are considering taking our family to enjoy works for you?

Therefore, many of our audiences whom God will allow us to share our faith experiences with may have a better result leading to joy if we share how our relationship with Jesus works for us, rather than starting with the historical facts of how it is true.

Shine the spotlight of our experiences of joy in Jesus and give them a “customer review” that is saturated with authentic joy. And topped off with genuine love.

Shining a personal spotlight on the perspective of: “Here is what Jesus means to me and why I believe in Him” may be much more compelling than anything else we could share with someone traveling along the road of life who needs a reason to look up and see that their journey is culminating at an encounter with Jesus.

Will you be a person who willingly and intentionally shines your spotlight of life in such a way that it points people to Jesus in all that you say and in all that you do?

Matthew 5:14–16 (TPT): 14 “Your lives light up the world. Let others see your light from a distance, for how can you hide a city that stands on a hilltop? 15 And who would light a lamp and then hide it in an obscure place? Instead, it’s placed where everyone in the house can benefit from its light. 16 So don’t hide your light! Let it shine brightly before others, so that the commendable things you do will shine as light upon them, and then they will give their praise to your Father in heaven.”

1 Peter 2:9 (TPT): But you are God’s chosen treasure—priests who are kings, a spiritual “nation” set apart as God’s devoted ones. He called you out of darkness to experience his marvelous light, and now he claims you as his very own. He did this so that you would broadcast his glorious wonders throughout the world.

The wonder of Christmas and the joy found in Jesus is waiting to be illuminated through your life and your story. Be faithful to point people to Jesus and trust Him to connect their hearts with His this Christmas season and after.