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Wizards in the Temple

Matthew 2:1-12

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[With a TV evangelist accent] We are so blessed, and can you just feel the presence of God? Let's see what we have here . . . [dumps pledges on the communion table] Ricky from Lakewood pledges a one-time gift of \$100! Sandy from Littleton sows a faith seed of \$1000 and believes for a car! Edgar from Golden pledges \$500 and prays that his wife would be saved. Hallelujah!

That's right! You sow your seed, and God brings the increase. There's probably a soul saved for every dollar sown. Just think of all the souls in Heaven that will be thanking you for salvation! And they would have otherwise burned in Hell! Just think if you hadn't given!

And people, I'm telling you, you need to understand, I have revelation knowledge of powerful, spiritual principles, and I have a special anointing on me for prosperity to break that spirit of poverty. And if you pledge just a dollar a day (don't do the math), as a free gift to you I'll send you a copy of my new book Prayers That Make God Give You Stuff. That's right!

You have only five more minutes. You must respond to the Word of God, and we'll place the pledges here on the holy altar. And the man of God will pray and release your miracle of prosperity.

Let's pray: "Father, I pray that everyone in this room would know I'm lying. Father, you give everything to us freely. May we give everything to you freely. Help us preach. Amen."

[Wizard of Oz video clip]:

Wizard of Oz: Why have you come back?

Dorothy: Please, sir, we've done what you told us. We've brought you the broomstick of the Wicked Witch of the West. We melted her.

Wizard: Oh, you liquidated her, ah? Very resourceful.

Dorothy: Yes, sir. So we'd like you to keep your promise to us, if you please, sir.

Wizard: Not so fast. Not so fast! I'll have to give the matter a little thought. Go away and come back tomorrow.

Dorothy: Tomorrow? But I want to go home *now!*

Tin Man: You've had plenty of time already.

Wizard: Do not arouse the wrath of the great and powerful Oz! I said come back tomorrow!

Dorothy: If you were *really* great and powerful, you'd keep your promises.

Wizard: Do you presume to criticize the great Oz, you ungrateful creatures? Think yourselves lucky that I'm giving you audience tomorrow instead of twenty years from now. The great Oz has spoken. Pay no attention to that man behind the curtain. The great Oz has spoken!

Dorothy: Who are you?

Wizard: I am the great and powerful Wizard of Oz . . .

Dorothy, to the man behind the curtain: You are? I don't believe you!

Wizard, as a man: I'm afraid it's true. There's no other wizard except me.

Scarecrow: You humbug!

Wizard: Yes, that's exactly so. I'm a humbug.

Dorothy: You're a very bad man.

In 1939 wizards were the stuff of children's stories. Few people thought wizardry actually worked. Sixty years later the magical arts have gone mainstream. Magic . . . not like Siegfried and Roy . . . but like warlocks, witches, and paganism.

Today there are entire bookstores devoted to wizardry, witchcraft, spiritualism, astrology, and the magical arts. Sometimes they use words like holistic or new age, but there's nothing new about it. It's simply old paganism in a variety of forms.

It's often holistic in that it includes every god that's marketable. So it's very multicultural — gods from a whole host of cultures . . . Hinduism, Shamanism, Buddhism . . . basically whatever works for you. It's very consumer-oriented.

At one popular web site of the California Astrology Association, Andreika the Witch will cast a spell for you for \$19.95, and she has lots of great testimonies that it really works. You can get a witchdoctor spell kit for \$38.00, and it has a one-year, money-back guarantee. You can purchase powerful wanga dolls for \$15.95. You can learn your psychic quotient, and you can cast out demons by purchasing amulets for \$13.95. All on-line!

Some people say, "All religions are the same." This is what our Scripture says in Deuteronomy 18:9:

"When you come into the land which the LORD your God gives you, you shall not learn to follow the abominable practices of those nations [cultures]. There shall not be found among you any one who burns his son or his daughter as an offering, any one who practices divination, a soothsayer, or an augur [someone who interprets omens, like an astrologer], or a sorcerer, or a charmer [who casts spells], or a medium [who channels spirits], or a wizard, or a necromancer [someone who consults the dead, like on Crossing Over]. For whoever does these things is an abomination to the LORD; and because of these abominable

practices the LORD your God is driving them out before you.”

Well, Scripture condemns witchcraft and wizardry, not because it’s silly and doesn’t work, but because it’s evil and does work . . . perhaps for a short time for *you*, but then for the Evil One and his demons.

Satan is a liar by nature who can appear as an “angel of light” and make you all kinds of promises. He can do little tricks like faking dead relatives on TV, but he does all that so you would start making deals with him. And the more you make deals with him, the more enslaved you get. The more enslaved you get, the more he feasts on your fear and shame. Believe me, a fallen child of Adam in deep, spiritual debt is not in a good position to begin making deals with the Prince of Darkness.

In The Wizard of Oz, the wizard is a little man behind the curtain seeking power through manipulating gadgets and switches. In Scripture the wizard is *still* a little man behind a curtain seeking power, but he tries to manipulate gadgets and switches in the *spiritual* realm—demons that in the end manipulate him.

The Wizard of Oz makes a deal with Dorothy. “Get me the witch’s broom and I’ll give you a mind, heart, courage, and the way home.”

Wizard is “magos” in Greek. It’s where we get our word magic. The 20th century anthropologist Bronislaw Malinowski offered the classical definition of magic. He taught that magic is a system in which people endeavor to get spiritual forces to do their will. Religion is a system in which people surrender their will to spiritual forces (or force) to do its (or His) will.

Do you remember Simon the Magician in Acts 8? He tried to buy the Holy Spirit, a deal to make himself powerful. That was his business.

Magic seeks power through deals and formulas.
Faith surrenders power to Love Himself.
Magic steals knowledge from the tree.
Faith surrenders knowledge to wisdom on the tree.

Magic is rebellion against God.
Faith is surrender to God.
Magic is seizing control.
Faith is surrendering control.

Magic is saving your life but losing it.
Faith is losing your life but finding it.
Magic is avoiding the cross.
Faith is carrying the cross.

Magic is the way of the world.

Faith is holy.
Magic is business.
Our faith is romance.

Magic is harlotry.
Our faith is covenant vow.

Leviticus 20:6:

“If a person turns to mediums and wizards, playing the harlot after them, I will set my face against that person, and will cut him off from among his people. Consecrate yourselves therefore, and be holy [different]; for I am the LORD your God.”

Remember it was the wizards (magi) from the east who tormented the Jews in Babylon and had Shadrac, Meshac, Abednego, and Daniel thrown into the fire and lions.

Leviticus 20:27:

“A man or a woman who is a medium or a wizard shall be put to death; they shall be stoned with stones, their blood shall be upon them.”

Matthew 2:1:

Now when Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king, behold, wise men [magi] from the East came to Jerusalem, saying, “Where is he who has been born king of the Jews? For we have seen his star in the East, and have come to worship him.”

When Herod the king heard this, he was troubled, and all Jerusalem with him; and assembling all the chief priests and scribes of the people, he inquired of them where the Christ was to be born. They told him, “In Bethlehem of Judea; for so it is written by the prophet: ‘And you, O Bethlehem, in the land of Judah, are by no means least among the rulers of Judah; for from you shall come a ruler who will govern my people Israel.’”

Then Herod summoned the wise men [magi] secretly and ascertained from them what time the star appeared; and he sent them to Bethlehem, saying, “Go and search diligently for the child, and when you have found him bring me word, that I too may come and worship him.”

When they had heard the king they went their way; and lo, the star which they had seen in the East went before them, till it came to rest over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they rejoiced exceedingly with great joy; and going into the house they saw the child with Mary his mother, and they fell down and worshiped him. Then, opening their treasures, they offered him gifts, gold and frankincense and myrrh.

And being warned in a dream not to return to Herod, they departed to their own country by another way.

They went home by another way. And Jesus said, “I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the father but by me.” Maybe the magi went home by “the way.”

Whatever the case, the very first worshipers of Jesus that we encounter in the Gospel of Matthew are wizards from the East. As if the four women of the last chapter aren’t shocking enough, now we have wizards! And God leads these wizards with stars. That’s astrology!

God is so great and so loving and so merciful and so desirous of those who would worship Him, that He even uses the idols of pagan wizards to lead them to Himself.

In seminary I had a friend named Rabindranath R. Maharaj. (We called him Rabi.) Rabi had been a pagan wizard, or as they called it, a guru. People would come to him for blessings and incantations. He exercised real power doing business with what he called gods. He wrote, “I wondered why none of the gods I ever encountered seemed kind and gentle and loving. But at least they seemed real — I had no doubt of that — and not mere myths like the Christian god, Santa Claus.”

Well, his mother told him that if he ever really got in trouble, and nothing else worked, there was another god named Jesus. One day Rabi did get into trouble, and he called on Jesus. And everything changed.

But Rabi shared that what made him first doubt his own faith was that one day while worshiping his cow, which he did faithfully, she suddenly grew angry and attacked him. He could no longer bow down to her, because she would bite his head!

God uses stars, mad cows, and all creation
to draw His people to Himself.

And so even though we’re commanded to not worship stars and cows, we can’t limit the power and glory of God to white, Anglo-Saxon missionaries from Colorado. God is speaking into every culture on the planet. “Jesus is the light that enlightens all men.” Our job is to find where He’s speaking and introduce folks to the One who speaks . . . to preach good news . . . to say:

I know the One who makes the stars and the cows, and He has broken the power of the Evil One and all your demon gods. You no longer have to serve them, sacrifice to them, and fear them. Your Creator is love, and He has come to us in Jesus and canceled your debts with His blood. He is the way home, the trip is free, and He is *nuts* about you! He’s the one you long for, hope for, yearn for. He’s the one who has been shaping that longing in you all along, preparing you for this

very day, so you would say with joy, “Yes! I love you too! And I want to go home.”

So God speaks in all cultures and religions, but not all cultures and religions are equal or the same. The magi bow down to Jesus and “go home another way.”

God uses the cows and stars —
that’s general revelation.

God uses the Scriptures in Jerusalem —
that’s special revelation.

The magi bow down before Jesus, the one revealed —
that’s salvation.

He’s the destination and the way, even for Abraham, David, and Rahab in the last chapter. I doubt they even knew Jesus’ name, but He was their destination and He was their way. They “go home another way.” They’re home free.

The magicians surrender their gold, frankincense, and myrrh (treasure and control), and it’s not payment, not a deal; it’s worship.

But Herod is worried about *his* gold, his treasure, his power, and his control. Soon he will sacrifice every baby boy in Bethlehem trying to stop Jesus. He’ll sacrifice babies for power. That’s what evil magicians do.

I think Matthew not so subtly points out that real wizards and witches aren’t kneeling in Bethlehem. The real wizards and witches are in the temple in Jerusalem. Did you hear what Matthew said? “When Herod heard about Jesus, he was troubled and all Jerusalem with him.” All Jerusalem! Herod the Great was the Jewish king, a puppet king of the Roman

Empire. He had already murdered two of his sons and was about to murder the third.

He used deceit, treachery, and murder to maintain his power and to control the priesthood in the temple. Jerusalem despised him yet depended on him: the economy, the money changers, the wealth, the power, the business of the temple. All Jerusalem was dependent on him. In fact, he built the temple beginning in 20 B.C. It was called Herod’s Temple.

It was a spiritual system in which everybody endeavored to get spiritual forces to do their will. The worship of Yahweh had become the practice of magic. It wasn’t that Jerusalem worshiped another God so much as Jerusalem worshiped Yahweh as if He *was* another God . . . not the creator God, but a magician’s god.

So the temple was business, the offerings were deals, the prayers were incantation, the worship was a formula, the priests were wizards, and they were treating the Holy God like a whore. “Here’s two bits. Turn a trick. Grow some grain.”

In thirty-three years the baby in Bethlehem will come back and cleanse the temple. He will destroy it and rebuild it in three days. His own body is the temple. He wants no deals, no formulas, no business, no magicians in His temple, except, of course, the kind who bow down and go home another way. They're not only in His temple; they *are* His temple.

The Church is His temple, and we are the New Jerusalem. But we sure do like magic.

At our house we skipped all the Harry Potter movies, because they glorify witchcraft as something good. But maybe the wizards in the temple are more dangerous than the ones outside. I don't want my kids watching the Harry Potter movies, but I think I'd be much more concerned if they got all wrapped up in certain shows on Christian TV. At least Harry isn't taking God's name in vain. Oh sure, he might say what we call a "cuss word," but at least he's not doing magic in the name of Jesus to make you rich and himself powerful and great!

My little act at the start of the sermon was actually quite conservative. I got it from watching just a few minutes of Christian TV on one particular channel here in town. They always seem to be taking pledges and reading pledges . . .

- and the pledges are connected to prayer requests.
- and you need the man of God to pray because he has the "anointing."
- and you want to pledge because it's the "seed faith" that will break that spirit of poverty.
- and you really should pledge because eternal souls are dependent on your giving.
- and if you act now they'll send the new book with a special understanding, revelation knowledge to bring you increase and make you prosper.
- and they have graphs and charts and twisted scripture and testimonies that it works.
- and it's all done in the name of Jesus, who was born in a stable, had no place to lay his head, and died on a cross for the sins of his enemies; who said, "Blessed are the poor" and "to be my disciple you must pick up a cross and follow me."

So this is how you know if it's working: If you have a cross strapped across your back and you're grateful.

Sure, there are miracles and healings. And after a little prayer God may even give you a hole in one on the golf course, just for kicks. But there is already an "immeasurable greatness of power" in you who believe. And you've already been "blessed with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places." And already "everything works for the good with them that love God and are called according to His purpose." And "all things are yours and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's." And you don't need some wizard priest

pastor to pray over your pledges, for Jesus Himself is your High Priest who lives to make intercession for you.

Yes, you need to give. You need to give *everything*, absolutely everything. But you don't pay for anything. There's nothing left to buy, least of all the eternal souls of men and women who have already been purchased by the eternal blood of the Lamb.

“Well, wouldn't it be wise to get the special anointing
and secret understanding?”

I John 2:26:

I write this to you about those who would deceive you; but the anointing which you received from him abides in you, and you have no need that any one should teach you; as his anointing teaches you about everything, and is true, and is no lie, just as it has taught you, abide in him.

Abide in Jesus,
Trust Jesus,
Surrender to Jesus,
Commune with Jesus.

If you have His Spirit, you are anointed, and if someone anoints you as a sign of His presence or movement of His Spirit, that's great! But don't be fooled. You can buy the oil at Safeway for a couple of bucks yourself, and you don't even have to fill out a pledge card.

I thought that maybe all the “bad magic” on so-called “Christian TV” was history in the early 90's after all the scandals when Jim Bakker said, “I was wrong.” But, you see, it's consumer driven. We demand it. Magic formulas . . . we *love* them.

The Prayer of Jabez was an evangelical Christian bestseller last year. And I know that the guy who wrote it may have intended something else and may be a great guy, and I know there is lots of good stuff in that little book, but I read it and I know why Americans bought it like we did. We hoped we could repeat an obscure, little, Old Testament prayer every day and make life *work*. We wanted The Mantra of Jabez. (There is a parody with that title.)

My prayer life quickly degenerates into mantras. My requests easily become incantations, and I think that I'm heard for my many words.

- My worship is often just a ritual to pay my debts
- Preaching easily turns into formula: “Do this and get that”
- Giving becomes casting a spell: “Tithe and be blessed”
- My good deeds are often deals

- My confessions and repentance are often payment
- My faith is about making my life work

People say, “Christianity doesn’t work.” It works when it’s killing you . . . prideful, self-centered you.

Believe in Jehovah Jirah. He supplies all your needs. And what do you need? To die to yourself and to “consider all things as refuse for the surpassing worth of knowing Him”—Christ Jesus.

Christianity is not sanctified sorcery. It’s not magic with the word “Jesus” plugged in. God is holy, and we are His holy temple. But we’re addicted to wizardry . . . wizards in the temple.

But who are the wizards?

It can get confusing. In Matthew 2 the priests in the temple are actually the evil wizards, and the evil wizards are actually the priests at the temple. Who are the wizards? Well, the true worshipers bow down and surrender all they have. The evil magicians secretly hate the Christ and try to make deals to get more stuff.

Spirits are one or the other, so if you’ve encountered spirits, take them to this table and see if they bow down. Angels always worship Jesus the Christ. Demons always want to make deals. And they hate this table, for it destroys all their deals.

People are usually a confusing mix of worshiper and wizard, and it’s not for you to judge them. But you must take the thoughts and ideas to this table and ask, “What bows down and what is burned away?” I’m telling you, at this table *every deal* is burned away . . . except one.

Alila stood on the beach holding her infant son to her heart. Tears welled in her eyes as she silently walked into the water. She stood there for a long time. (She had made some vows. She had a deal.) Suddenly she threw the six-month-old baby to his watery death.

An Indian Christian, M. V. Varghese, found Alila later that day kneeling in the sand, crying uncontrollably, and beating her chest. He knelt down and asked her what was wrong. Through her sobs she told him, “The problems in my home are too many, and my sins are heavy on my heart. So I offered the best I have to the goddess Ganges: my first born son.”

M. V. listened and his heart broke as she wept. Then he told her of her Creator and how He gave His best, His firstborn Son, for her; how He made a covenant to deliver us from bondage to demons and gurus. Alila looked up and said, “I never heard that before. Why couldn’t you have come thirty minutes earlier?”

Well, we don't know the answer. But that baby's blood is not on M. V. for not setting his alarm clock thirty minutes earlier. And furthermore, if Alila believes, the baby's blood is not on her. Perhaps she did believe. For God can speak through stars, mad cows, and even (perhaps especially) our own wretched sins, to break our hard hearts like fallow ground to receive His seed, the Christ.

I'm convinced Alila's baby is with Jesus. And all those babies from Bethlehem are with Jesus. God redeems them all for His glory in Christ Jesus. And perhaps Alila is favored, for she knows the heart of God. They both lost a firstborn son and received Him back with joy.

Those are mysteries beyond us, but the message is the same: Don't listen to wizards, either in the temple or outside the temple. God is through making deals. No more deals!

Remember that Dorothy and her friends were conned by the Wizard of Oz. They already *had* a brain, a heart, and courage. They only needed to believe. And Dorothy already had the power to go home.

If you come to this table, you have Jesus — mind, heart, and courage of God — the way to get home. There are no other deals on this altar.

How dare people make deals on this table! God is through making deals. For He made one with Himself, before time began. He made an eternal covenant ratified in space and time on a hill outside Jerusalem. "It is finished."

And He revealed the covenant the night before at the table when the only begotten Son of God took bread and having given thanks broke it saying, "This is my body broken for you. Do this in remembrance of me." And in the same manner after supper He took the cup saying, "This is my blood of the covenant which is poured out for you for the forgiveness of sins. As often as you drink it, do this in remembrance of me."

No more deals. God gave you everything for free. He expects your everything in return.

No more wizardry;
 only worship.
You are no longer a whore;
 you're the Bride of Christ.

Amen.

[Prayer] "Jesus, we confess it's really hard to believe, because it's so *good*. We believe, Jesus. Help our unbelief, so that when the old wizards come and say, 'That's not true. You can't believe that. You're not good enough, you're not smart enough, He can't forgive that!' we would hold up the cup of your blood and chase them back in the

shadows and dance with joy. For you are the Bridegroom. It's called worship. May our every breath be worship. Amen."

Maybe you came to the table for the first time today. When you came you said "Jesus, I want you," and you took His body and His blood. Now you're thinking, "Oh, man, I want to give Him everything, but I think I'll mess up." You will. But it's too late! He already gave *you* everything!

He's not making a deal with you; it's "while we were dead in our trespasses and sins" that He gave His only begotten Son as a sacrifice to pay for us. The problem is, you've been living in the fallen world for so long, you can't believe it could be *that good!*—that someone could love you that much. But it is. A greater price has never been paid than the one that was paid for you. This is the problem: believing it. But it's already been paid.

So the Lord tells us, "In this world you will have tribulation. But be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." "I will take all your tribulation and use it to help you believe." He'll help you to have faith, for He's a seed inside you that will grow. He surrounds you. And all these "slight, momentary afflictions" will be turned into "an eternal weight of glory." And He'll get you home.

Believe the Gospel in Jesus' name. And when you really believe, it changes you. The things you do are not payment but worship. No more wizardry; no more deals; only worship.

In Jesus' name, amen.

Further Reading

But there was a man named Simon who had previously practiced magic in the city and amazed the nation of Samaria, saying that he himself was somebody great. They all gave heed to him, from the least to the greatest, saying, "This man is that power of God which is called Great." And they gave heed to him, because for a long time he had amazed them with his magic. . . . Even Simon himself believed, and after being baptized he continued with Philip. And seeing signs and great miracles performed, he was amazed. . . . Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, "Give me also this power, that any one on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit." But Peter said to him, "Your silver perish with you, because you thought you could obtain the gift of God with money! You have neither part nor lot in this matter, for your heart is not right before God. Repent therefore of this wickedness of yours, and pray to the Lord that, if possible, the intent of your heart may be forgiven you. For I see that you are in the gall of bitterness and in the bond of iniquity." And Simon answered, "Pray for me to the Lord, that nothing of what you have said may come upon me."

-Acts 8:9-11, 13, 18-24

Bronislaw Malinowski, one of the great anthropologists of the twentieth century, differentiates between magic and religion. Magic is a system in which people endeavor to gain control over spiritual forces in order that they might obtain what they want. Magic is a means of gaining the power to dictate what the spiritual forces do. Contrariwise, religion is a system wherein people surrender themselves to spiritual forces so that they might be servants through whom those spiritual forces can minister in the world.

-Tony Campolo

A man traversed land and sea to check for himself the master's extraordinary fame. "What miracles has your master worked?" he said to the disciple. "Well, there are miracles and miracles. In your land it is regarded as a miracle if God does someone's will. In our country it is regarded as a miracle if someone does the will of God."

-Anthony DeMello

However, not everyone speaking in ecstasy is a prophet, except he has the ways of the Lord about him. . . . If anyone says in ecstasy, "Give me money," or something else, you must not listen to him. However, should he tell you to give something for others who are in need, let no one condemn him.

-Diadache (teaching of the Early Church Fathers, 1st or 2nd century A.D.)

Beloved, do not believe every spirit, but test the spirits to see whether they are of God; for many false prophets have gone out into the world. By this you know the Spirit of God: every spirit which confesses that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is of God, and every spirit which does not confess Jesus is not of God. This is the spirit of antichrist, of which you heard that it was coming, and now it is in the world already. Little children, you are of God, and have overcome them; for he who is in you is greater than he who is in the world. They are of the world, therefore what they say is of the world, and the world listens to them. We are of God. Whoever knows God listens to us, and he who is not of God does not listen to us. By this we know the spirit of truth and the spirit of error. Beloved, let us love one another; for love is of God, and he who loves is born of God and knows God. He who does not love does not know God; for God is love. In this the love of God was made manifest among us, that God sent his only Son into the world, so that we might live through him. In this is love, not that we loved God but that he loved us and sent his Son to be the expiation for our sins.

-I John 4:1-10

Then I fell at his feet and thought, Surely this is the hour of death, for the Lion (who is worthy of all honor) will know that I have served Tash all my days and not him. Nevertheless, it is better to see the Lion and die than to be Tisroc of the world and live and not to have seen him. But the Glorious One bent down his golden head and touched my forehead with his tongue and said, Son, thou art welcome. But I said, Alas, Lord, I am no son of thine but the servant of Tash. He answered, Child, all the service thou hast done to Tash, I account as service done to me. Then by reasons of my great desire for wisdom and understanding, I overcame my fear and questioned the Glorious One and said, Lord, is it then true, as the Ape said, that thou and Tash are one? The Lion growled so that the earth shook (but his wrath was not against me) and said, It

is false. Not because he and I are one, but because we are opposites, I take to me the services which thou hast done to him. For I and he are of such different kinds that no service which is vile can be done to me, and none which is not vile can be done to him. Therefore if any man swear by Tash and keep his oath for the oath's sake, it is by me that he has truly sworn, though he know it not, and it is I who reward him. And if any man do a cruelty in my name, then, though he says the name Aslan, it is Tash whom he serves and by Tash his deed is accepted. Dost thou understand, Child? I said, Lord, thou knowest how much I understand. But I said also (for the truth constrained me), Yet I have been seeking Tash all my days. Beloved, said the Glorious One, unless thy desire had been for me thou wouldst not have sought so long and so truly. For all find what they truly seek.

-C. S. Lewis, The Last Battle

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