

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

13:44-50

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

The parables of the treasure hidden in a field and the merchant man seeking goodly pearls, appear intended to convey one the same lesson. They vary, no doubt, in one striking particular: the treasure was found of one who does not seem to have sought it; the pearl was found of one who was actually seeking pearls. But the conduct of the finders, in both cases, was precisely alike: both sold all to make the thing found their own property; and it is exactly at this point that the instruction of both parables agrees. These two parables are meant to teach us that men who are really convinced of the importance of salvation will give up everything to win Christ and eternal life. What was the conduct of the two men our Lord describes? The one was persuaded that there was a treasure hid in a field, which would amply repay him if he bought the field, however great the price that he might give. The other was persuaded that the pearl he had found was so immensely valuable that it would answer to him to purchase it at any cost. Both were convinced that they had found a thing of great value: both were satisfied that it was worth a great present sacrifice to make this thing their own. Others might wonder at them; others might think them foolish for paying such a sum of money for the field and pearl, but they knew what they were about. They were sure that they were making a good bargain. We see, in this simple picture, the conduct of a true Christian explained. He is what he is, and does what he does in his religion, because he is thoroughly persuaded that it is worthwhile. He comes out from the world; he puts off the old man; he forsakes the vain companions of his past life. Like Matthew, he gives up everything, and like Paul, he counts all things loss for Christ's sake. And why? Because he is convinced that Christ will make amends to him for all he gives up. He sees in Christ an endless treasure, he sees in Christ a precious pearl: to win Christ he will make any sacrifice. This is true faith. This is the stamp of a genuine work of the Holy Ghost. We see in these two parables the real clue to the conduct of many unconverted people. They are what they are in religion because they are not fully persuaded that it is worthwhile to be different. They flinch from decision; they shrink from taking up the cross; they halt between two opinions; they will not commit themselves. They will not come forward boldly on the Lord's side. And why? Because they are not convinced that it will answer they have not faith. They are not sure that the treasure is before them; they are not satisfied that the pearl is worth so great a price. They cannot yet make up their minds to sell all that they may win Christ. And so, too often, they perish everlastingly! When a man will venture nothing for Christ's sake, we must draw the sorrowful conclusion that he has not got the grace of God. The parable of the net let down into the sea has some points in common with that of the wheat and the tares. It

is intended to instruct us on a most important subject: the true nature of the visible church of Christ. The preaching of the Gospel was the letting down of a large net into the midst of the sea of this world; the professing church which it was to gather together was to be a mixed body. Within the folds of the net there were to be fish of every kind, both good and bad; within the pale of the church there were to be Christians of various sorts, unconverted as well as converted, false as well as true. The separation of good and bad was sure to come at last, but not before the end of the world. Such was the account which the great Master gave to his disciples of the churches which they were to found. It is of the utmost importance to have the lessons of this parable deeply graven on our minds. There is hardly any point in Christianity on which greater mistakes exist than the nature of the visible church. There is none, perhaps, on which mistakes are so perilous to the soul. Let us learn from this parable that all congregations of professed christians ought to be regarded as mixed bodies: they are all assemblies containing "good fish and bad," converted and unconverted, children of God and children of the world, and ought to be described and addressed as such. To tell all baptized people that they are born again, and have the Spirit, and are members of Christ, and are wholly in the face of such a parable as this is unwarrantable. Such a mode of address may flatter and please; it is not likely to profit or save. It is painfully calculated to promote self-righteousness, and lull sinners to sleep; it overthrows the plain teaching of Christ, and is ruinous to souls. Do we ever hear such doctrine? If we do, let us remember "the net." Finally, let it be a settled principle with us never to be satisfied with mere outward church membership. We may be inside the net, and yet not be in Christ. The waters of baptism are poured on myriads who are never washed in the water of life; the bread and wine are eaten and drunk by thousands at the Lord's table, who never feed on Christ by faith. Are we converted? Are we among the "good fish"? This is the grand question! It is one which must be answered at last. The net will soon be "drawn to shore," and the true character of everyone's religion will at length be exposed. There will be an eternal separation between the good fish and the bad: there will be a "furnace of fire" for "the wicked." Surely, as Baxter says, "these plain words more need belief and consideration than exposition."

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