

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

13:51-58

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

The first thing which we ought to notice in these verses is the striking question with which our Lord winds up the seven wonderful parables of this chapter: he said, "Have you understood all these things?" Personal application has been called the "soul" of preaching. A sermon without application is like a letter posted without a direction: it may be well written, rightly dated and duly signed; but it is useless, because it never reaches its destination. Our Lord's inquiry is an admirable example of real heart-seaching application: "Have ye understood?" The mere form of hearing a sermon can benefit no man, unless he comprehend what it means: he might just as well listen to the blowing of a trumpet, or the beating of a drum. He might just as well attend a Roman Catholic service in Latin. His intellect must be set in motion, and his heart impressed: ideas must be received into his mind; he must carry off the seeds the seeds of new thoughts.. Without this he hears is in vain. It is of great important to see this point clearly; there is a vast amount of ignorance about it. There are thousands who go regularly to places of worship and think they have done their religious duty, but never carry away an idea, or receive an impression. Ask them, when they return home on a Sunday evening, what they have learned, and they cannot tell you a word. Examine them at the end of a year as to the religious knowledge they have attained, and you will find them as ignorant as the heathen. Let us watch our souls in this matter. Let us take with us to church not only our bodies, but our minds, our reason, our hearts and our consciences. Let us often ask ourselves, "What have I got from this sermon? What have I learned? What truths have been impressed on my mind?" Intellect, no doubt, is not everything in religion; but it does not therefore follow that it is nothing at all. The heart is unquestionably the main point: but we must never forget that the Holy Ghost generally reaches the heart through the mind. Sleepy, idle, inattentive hearers are never likely to be converted. The second thing which we ought to notice in these verses is the strange treatment which our Lord received in his own country. He came to the town of Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and taught in their synagogue. His teaching, no doubt, was the same as it always was: "Never man spake like this man." But it had no effect on the people of Nazareth. They were astonished, but their hearts were unmoved. They said, "Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary?" They despised him, because they were so familiar with him. They were offended in him. And they drew from our Lord the solemn remark, "A prophet is not without honour save in his own country and in his own house." Let us see in this history a melancholy page of human nature unfolded to our view. We are all apt to despise mercies if we are accustomed to them, and have them cheap. The Bibles and religious books which are so plentiful in England, the means of grace of which we have so abundant a supply, the

preaching of the Gospel which we hear every week—“all are liable to be undervalued. It is mournfully true that, in religion more than anything else, familiarity breeds contempt.” Men forget that truth is truth, however old and hackneyed it may sound—and despise it because it is old. Alas, by so doing they provoke God to take it away! Do we wonder that the relatives, servants and neighbors of godly people are not always converted? Do we wonder that the parishioners of eminent ministers of the Gospel are often their hardest and most impenitent hearers? Let us wonder no more. Let us note the experience of our Lord at Nazareth, and learn wisdom. Do we ever fancy that if we had only seen and heard Jesus Christ we should have been his faithful disciples? Do we think that if we had only lived near him, and been eyewitnesses of his ways, we should not have been undecided, wavering and half-hearted about religion? If we do, let us think so no longer. Let us observe the people of Nazareth, and learn wisdom. The last thing which we ought to notice in these verses is the ruinous nature of unbelief. The chapter ends with the fearful words, “He did not see in this single word the secret of the everlasting ruin of multitudes of souls! They perish forever, because they will not believe. There is nothing beside in earth or heaven that prevents their salvation: their sins, however many, might all be forgiven; the Father’s love is ready to receive them; the blood of Christ is ready to cleanse them; the power of the Spirit is ready to renew them. But a greater barrier interposes: they will not believe. Ye will not come to me,” says Jesus, “that ye might have life.” (John 5:40). May we all be on our guard against this accursed sin! It is the old root-sin which caused the fall of man. Cut down in the true child of God by the power of the Spirit, it is ever ready to bud and sprout again. There are three great enemies against which God’s children should daily pray: pride, worldliness, and unbelief. Of these three none is greater than unbelief. **mmatt14-1-12** We have in this passage a page out of God’s book of martyrs: the story of the death of John the Baptist

We have in this passage a page out of God’s book of martyrs: the history of the death of John the Baptist. The wickedness of King Herod, the bold reproof which John gave him, the consequent imprisonment of the faithful reproof, and the disgraceful circumstances of his death are all written for our learning. “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints” (Ps. 116:15) The story of John the Baptist’s death is told more fully by St. Mark than by St. Matthew. For the present it seems sufficient to draw two general lessons from St. Matthew’s narrative, and to fasten our attention exclusively upon them. Let us learn in the first place, from these verses the great power of conscience. King Herod hears of the fame of Jesus, and says to his servants, “This is John the Baptist; he has risen from the dead!” He remembered his own wicked dealings with that holy man, and his heart failed within him. His heart told him that he had despised his godly counsel, and committed a foul and abominable murder; and his heart told him that, though he had killed John, there would yet be a reckoning day. He and John the Baptist would yet meet again. Well says Bishop Hall: “A wicked man needs no other tormentor, especially for sins of blood, than his own heart.” There is a conscience in all men by nature. Let this never be forgotten. Fallen, lost, desperately wicked as we are all born into the world, God has taken care to leave himself a witness in our bosoms. It is a poor, blind guide, without the Holy Ghost: it can save no one; it leads no one to Christ: it may be seared and trampled under foot. But there is such a thing as conscience in every man, accusing or excusing him; and Scripture and experience alike declare it (Romans 2:15). Conscience can make even kings miserable when they have willfully rejected its advice; it can fill the princes of this world with fear and trembling, as it did Felix, when Paul preached. They find it easier to imprison and behead the preacher, than to bind his sermon, and silence the voice of his reproof in their own hearts. God’s witnesses may be put out of the way, but their testimony often lives and works on long after they are dead. God’s prophets live not forever, but their words often survive them (2 Timothy 2:9; Zechariah 1:5). Let the thoughtless

and ungodly remember this, and not sin against their consciences. Let them know that their sins will surely find them out. They may laugh, and jest, and mock at religion for a little time. They may cry, Who is afraid? Where is the mighty harm of our ways? They may depend upon it they are sowing misery for themselves, and will reap a bitter crop sooner or later. Their wickedness will overtake them one day: they will find, like Herod, that it is an evil thing and bitter to sin against God, (Jeremiah 2:19). Let ministers and teachers remember that there is a conscience in men, and let them work on boldly. Instruction is not always thrown away because it seems to bear no fruit at the time it is given; teaching is not always in vain, though we fancy that it is unheeded, wasted and forgotten. There is a conscience in the hearers of sermons; there is a conscience in the children at our schools. Many a sermon and lesson will yet rise again, when he who preached or taught it is lying like John the Baptist in the grave. Thousands know that we are right, and, like Herod, dare not confess it. Let us learn in the second place, that God's children must not look for their reward in this world. If ever there was a case of godliness unrewarded in this life, it was that of John the Baptist. Let us think for a moment what a remarkable man he was during his short career, and then think to what end he came. Behold him that was the prophet of the Highest, and greater than any born of women, imprisoned like a malefactor! Behold him cut off by a violent death before the age of thirty-four; the burning light quenched, the faithful preacher murdered for doing his duty, and this to gratify the hatred of an adulterous woman, and at the command of a capricious tyrant! Truly there was an event here, if there ever was one in the world, which might make an ignorant person say, What profit is it to serve God? But these are the sort of things which show us that there will one day be a judgment. The God of the spirits of all flesh shall at last set up an assize and reward every one according to his works. The blood of John the Baptist and James the Apostle and Stephen, the blood of Polycarp, and Hus, and Ridley and Latimer, shall yet be required. It is all written in God's book. The earth also shall disclose her blood; and shall not more cover her slain no longer. (Isaiah 26:21). The world shall yet know that there is a God that judges the earth. If thou seest the oppression of the poor and violent perverting of judgement and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter, for he that is higher than the highest regardeth: and there be higher than they. (Ecclesiastes 5:8). Let all true Christians remember that their best things are yet to come. Let us count it no strange thing if we have sufferings in this present time. It is a season of probation: we are yet at school. We are learning patience, longsuffering, gentleness and meekness, which we could hardly learn if we had our good things now. But there is an eternal holiday yet to begin; for this let us wait quietly: it will make amends for all. Our light affliction which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory. (2 Corinthians).
 matt14-13-21 These verses contain one of our Lord Jesus Christ's greatest miracles: the feeding of five thousand men, besides women and children

These verses contain one of our Lord Jesus Christ's greatest miracles: the feeding of five thousand men, besides women and children with five loaves and two fishes. Of all the miracles worked by our Lord, not one is so often mentioned in the New Testament as this. Matthew, Mark, Luke and John all dwell upon it. It is plain that this event in Lord's history is intended to receive special attention. Let us give it that attention, and see what we may learn. In the first place, this miracle is an unanswerable proof of our Lord's divine power. To satisfy the hunger of more than five thousand people with so small a portion of food as five loaves and two fishes would manifestly impossible without a supernatural multiplication of the food. It was a thing that no magician, impostor or false prophet would ever have attempted. Such a person might possibly pretend to cure a single sick person, or to raise a single dead body, and by jugglery and trickery might persuade weak people that he succeeded; but such a person would never attempt such a mighty work as that which is here recorded. He would know well that

he could not persuade 10,000 men, women and children that they were full when they were hungry. He would be exposed as a cheat and impostor on the spot. Yet this is the mighty work which our Lord actually performed, and by performing it gave a conclusive proof that he was God. He called that into being which did not before exist: he provided visible, tangible, material food for more than 5,000 people, out of a supply which in itself would not have satisfied fifty. Surely we must be blind if we do not see in this the hand of him who "giveth food to all flesh" (i.e. Psalm 136:25), and made the world and all that therein is. To create is the peculiar prerogative of God. We ought to lay firm hold on such passages as this. We should treasure up in our minds every evidence of our Lord's divine power. The cold, orthodox, unconverted man may see little in the story: the true believer should store it in his memory. Let him think of the world, the devil and his own heart, and learn to thank God that his Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ, is almighty. In the second place, this miracle is a striking example of our Lord's compassion towards men. Jesus "saw a great multitude" in a desert place, ready to faint for hunger. He knew that many in that multitude had no true faith and love towards himself: they followed him for fashion's sake, or from curiosity or some equally low motive (i.e. John). But our Lord had pity upon all: all were relieved; all partook of the food miraculously provided. All were filled and none went away hungry. Let us see in this the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ toward sinners. He is ever the same. He is now as he was of old, "the Lord God, merciful and gracious, longsuffering, and abundant in goodness and truth" (i.e. Exodus 34:6). He does not deal with men according to their sins, or reward them according to their iniquities. He loads even his enemies with benefits. None will be so excuseless as those who are found impenitent at last: "The Lord's goodness leads them to repentance" (i.e. Romans 2:4). In all his dealings with people on earth, he showed himself one that delighteth in mercy (i.e. Micah 7:18). Let us strive to be like him. "We ought," says an old writer, "to have abundance of pity and compassion on diseased souls." In the last place, this miracle is a lively emblem of the sufficiency of the Gospel to meet the soul-wants of all mankind. There can be little doubt that all our Lord's miracles have a deep figurative meaning, and teach great spiritual truths. They must be handled reverently and discreetly. Care must be taken that we do not, like many of the Fathers, see allegories where the Holy Spirit meant none to be seen. But, perhaps, if there is any miracle worked by Christ which has a clear figurative meaning, in addition to the plain lessons which may be drawn from its surface, it is that which is now before us. What does this hungry multitude in a desert place represent to us? It is an emblem of all mankind. The children of men are a large assembly of perishing sinners, famishing in the midst of a wilderness world "helpless, hopeless, and on the way to ruin. We have all gone astray like lost sheep" (i.e. Isaiah 53:6); we are by nature far away from God. Our eyes may not be opened to the full extent of our danger: but in reality we are "wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind and naked" (i.e. Revelation 3:17). There is but a step between us and everlasting death. What do these loaves and fishes represent, apparently so inadequate to meet the necessities of the case, but by miracle made sufficient to feed 10,000 people? They are an emblem of the doctrine of Christ crucified for sinners, as their vicarious substitute, and making atonement by his death for the sin of the world. That doctrine seems to the natural man weakness itself. Christ crucified was "to the Jews a stumbling block, and to the Greeks foolishness" (i.e. 1 Corinthians 1:23). And yet Christ crucified has proved "the bread of God which cometh down from heaven and giveth life to the world" (i.e. John). The story of the cross has amply met the spiritual wants of mankind wherever it has been preached. Thousands of every rank, age and nation are witnesses that it is "the wisdom of God and the power of God." They have eaten of it and been "filled," "they have found it meat indeed and drink indeed." Let us ponder these things well. There are great depths in all our Lord Jesus Christ's recorded dealings upon earth, which no one has ever fully fathomed. There are

mines of rich instruction in all his words and ways, which no one has thoroughly explored. Many a passage of the Gospels is like the cloud which Elijah's servant saw (1 Kings 18:44). The more we look at it, the greater it will appear. There is an inexhaustible fullness in Scripture. Other writings seem comparatively poor and threadbare when we become familiar with them; but the more we read the Bible the richer we shall find it.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-ryle/expository-thoughts-on-matthew-matthew-1351-58/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net