

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

16:24-28

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

In order to see the connection of these verses we must remember the mistaken impressions of our Lord's disciples as to the purpose of his coming into the world. Like Peter they could not bear the idea of the crucifixion. They thought that Jesus had come to set up an earthly kingdom; they did not see that he must needs suffer and die. They dreamed of worldly honors and temporal rewards in their Master's service; they did not understand that true Christians, like Christ, must be made perfect through suffering.

Our Lord corrects these misapprehensions in words of peculiar solemnity, which we shall do well to lay up in our hearts. Let us learn in the first place from these verses that men must make up their minds to trouble and self-denial if they follow Christ. Our Lord dispels the fond dreams of his disciples by telling them that his followers must take up the cross. The glorious kingdom they were expecting was not about to be set up immediately. They must make up their minds to persecutions and afflictions if they intended to be his servants: they must be content to lose their lives if they would have their souls saved. It is good for us all to see this point clearly. We must not conceal from ourselves that true Christianity brings with it a daily cross in this life, while it offers us a crown of glory in the life to come. The flesh must be daily crucified; the devil must be daily resisted; the world must be daily overcome. There is a war to be waged, and a battle to be fought. All this is the inseparable accompaniment of true religion: heaven is not to be won without it. Never was there a truer word than the old saying, "No cross, no crown." If we have never found this out by experience, our souls are in a poor condition. Let us learn in the second place from these verses that there is nothing so precious as a man's soul. Our Lord teaches this lesson by asking one of the most solemn questions that the New Testament contains. It is a question so well known, and so often repeated, that people often lose sight of its searching character; but it is a question that ought to sound in our ears like a trumpet whenever we are tempted to neglect our eternal interests: "What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose his own soul?" There can only be one answer to this question. There is nothing on earth, or under the earth, that can make amends to us for the loss of our souls. There is nothing that money can buy, or man can give, to be named in comparison with our souls. The world and all that it contains is temporal: it is all fading, perishing and passing away. The soul is eternal: that one single word is the key to the whole question. Let it sink down deeply into our hearts. Are we wavering in our religion? Do we fear the cross? Does the way seem too narrow? Let our Master's words ring in our ears: "What shall it profit a man?" and let us doubt no more. Let us learn in the last place that the second coming of Christ is the time when his people shall receive their rewards. "The Son of Man shall come in the glory of His father, and then he will reward every man according to his works." There is deep wisdom in this saying of our Lord's when

viewed in connection with the preceding verses. He knows the heart of a man: he knows how soon we are ready to be cast down and, like Israel of old, to be discouraged because of the way. (Numbers 21:4). He therefore holds out to us a gracious promise. He reminds us that he has yet to come a second time, as surely as he came the first time. He tells us that this is the time when his disciples shall receive their good things. There will be glory, honor and reward in abundance one day for all who have served and loved Jesus; but it is to be in the dispensation of the second advent, and not of the first. The bitter must come before the sweet, the cross before the crown. The first advent is the dispensation of the crucifixion; the second advent is the dispensation of the kingdom. We must submit to take part with our Lord in his humiliation if we desire to share in his glory. And now let us not leave these verses without serious self-inquiry as to the matters which they contain. We have heard of the necessity of taking up the cross and denying ourselves: have we taken it up, and are we carrying it daily? We have heard of the value of the soul: do we live as if we believed it? We have heard of Christ's second advent: do we look forward to it with hope and joy? Happy is that man who can give a satisfactory answer to these questions!

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