

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

24:1-14

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

These verses begin a chapter full of prophecy: prophecy of which a large portion is unfulfilled; prophecy which ought to be deeply interesting to all true Christians. It is a subject to which, the Holy Ghost says, we ought to do well to take heed (1 Peter 1:19). All portions of Scripture like this ought to be approached with deep humility and earnest prayer for the teaching of the Spirit. On no point have good men so entirely disagreed as on the interpretation of prophecy; on no point have the prejudices of one class, the dogmatism of a second and the extravagance of a third done so much to rob the church of truths which God intended to be a blessing. Well says a certain divine, "What does not man see, or fail to see, when it serves to establish his own favorite opinions?" To understand the drift of the whole chapter we must carefully keep in view the question which gave rise to our Lord's discourse. On leaving the temple for the last time, the disciples, with the natural feeling of Jews, had called their Master's attention to the splendid buildings of which it was composed. To their surprise and amazement, he tells them that the whole was about to be destroyed. These words appear to have sunk deeply into the minds of the disciples. They came to him as he was sitting on the Mount of Olives and asked him with evident anxiety, "Tell us, when shall these things be, and what shall be the sign of thy coming and of the end of the world?" In these words we see the clue to the subject of the prophecy now before us. It embraces three points: one, the destruction of Jerusalem; another, the second personal advent of Christ; and a third, the end of the world. These three points are undoubtedly in some parts of the chapter so entwined together that it is difficult to separate and disentangle them: but all these points appear distinctly in the chapter and without them it cannot be fairly explained. The first fourteen verses of the prophecy are taken up with general lessons of wide range and application. They seem to apply with equal force to the close of both Jewish and Christian dispensations, the one event being typical of the other. They certainly demand special notice from us, on whom the ends of the world are come (1 Corinthians 10:11). Let us now see what those lessons are. The first general lesson before us is a warning against deception: The very first words of the discourse are "Take heed that no man deceive you." A more needful warning than this cannot be conceived. Satan knows well the value of prophecy, and has always labored to bring the subject into contempt. How many false Christs and false prophets arose before the destruction of Jerusalem, the works of Josephus abundantly prove. In how many ways the eyes of man are continually blinded in the present day, as to things to come, it might easily be shown. Irvingism and Mormonism have been only too successfully used as arguments for rejecting the whole doctrine of the second advent of Christ. Let us watch, and be on our guard. Let no one deceive us as to the leading facts of unfulfilled prophecy, by telling us they are impossible; or as to the manner in

which they will be brought to pass, by telling us it is improbable, and contrary to past experience. Let no one deceive us as to the time when unfulfilled prophecies will be accomplished, either by fixing dates on the one hand or bidding us wait for the conversion of the world on the other. On all these points let the plain meaning of Scripture be our only guide, and not the human interpretations of men. Let us not be ashamed to say that we expect a literal fulfillment of unfulfilled prophecy. Let us frankly allow that there are many things we do not understand, but still hold our ground tenaciously—“believe much, wait long”—and not doubt that all will one day be made clear. Above all, let us remember that the first coming of messiah to suffer was the most improbable event that could have been conceived, and let us not doubt that as he literally came in person to suffer, so he will literally come again in person to reign . The second grand lesson before us is a warning against over-sanguine and extravagant expectations as to things which are to happen before the end comes. It is a warning as deeply important as the preceding one. Happy would it have been happy for the church if it had not been so much neglected. We are not to expect a reign of universal peace, happiness and prosperity before the end comes: if we do, we shall be greatly deceived. Our Lord bids us look for wars, famines pestilence and persecution. It is vain to expect peace until the Prince of peace returns: then, and not till then, swords shall be beaten into plowshares, and nations learn war no more; then, and not till then, “the earth shall bring forth her increase.” (Isa.2:4 ; Psalm 67:6). We are not to expect a time of universal purity of doctrine and practice in the church of Christ before the end comes: if we do, we shall be greatly mistaken. Our Lord bids us look for the rising of “false prophets” “the abounding of iniquity,” and “the waxing cold of the love of many.” The truth will never be received by all professing Christians, and holiness will never be the rule among men, until the great head of the church returns, and Satan is bound: then, and not till then, there will be a glorious church without spot or blemish (; Ephesians 5:27). We are not to expect that all the world will be converted before the end comes: if we do, we shall be greatly mistaken. “The gospel is to be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations,” but we must not think that we shall see it universally believed. It will take our a people, wherever it is faithfully preached, as witnesses to Christ, but the full gathering of the nations shall never take place until Christ comes: then, and not till then, shall the earth be full of the knowledge of the , as the waters cover the sea. (; Habakkuk 2:14 Let us lay these things to heart and remember them well. They are eminently truths for the present times. Let us learn to be moderate in our expectations from any existing machinery in the church of Christ, and we shall be spared much disappointment: let us make haste to spread the Gospel in the world, for the time is short, not long. “The Night cometh, when no man can work” . Troublous times are ahead. Heresies and persecutions may soon weaken and distract the churches; a fierce war of principles may soon convulse the nations. Doors now open to do good may soon be shut forever. Our eyes may yet see the sun of Christianity go down like the sun of Judaism, in clouds and storm. Above all, let us long for our Lord’s return. May we all have a heart to pray daily, “Come, Lord Jesu” (; Revelation 22:20).

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