

Expository Thoughts On Matthew - Matthew

8:1-15

by J.C. Ryle

Transcript

The eighth chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel is full of our Lord's miracles: no less than five are specially recorded. There is beautiful fitness in this. It was fitting that the greatest sermon ever preached should be immediately followed by mighty proofs that the preacher was the Son of God. Those who heard the Sermon on the Mount would be obliged to confess that as "none spake such words as this man," so also no one did such works.

The verses we have now read contain three great miracles: a leper is healed with a touch, a palsied person is made well by a word, a woman sick with a fever is restored in a moment to health and strength. On the face of these three miracles we may read three striking lessons. Let us examine them and lay them to heart. Let us learn for one thing how great is the power of our Lord Jesus Christ. Leprosy is the most fearful disease by which man's body can be afflicted. He that has it is like one dead person while he lives; it is a complaint regarded by physicians as incurable (see "2 Kings 5:7"). Yet Jesus says, "Be thou clean!" and immediately the leprosy was cleansed.

To heal a person of the palsy without even seeing him, by only speaking a word, is to do that which our minds cannot even conceive: yet Jesus commands, and at once it is done. To give a woman prostrate with a fever, not merely relief, but strength to do work in an instant, would baffle the skill of all the physicians on earth: yet Jesus touched Peter's wife's mother and she arose and ministered unto them. These are the doings of one that is almighty. There is no escape from the conclusion. This was "the finger of God" ("Exodus 8:19").

Behold here a broad foundation for the faith of a Christian. We are told in the Gospel to come to Jesus, to believe on Jesus, to live the life of faith in Jesus; we are encouraged to lean on him, to cast all our care on him, to repose all the weight of our souls on him. We may do so without fear: he can bear all; he is a strong rock: he is almighty. It was a fine saying of an old saint, "My faith can sleep sound on no other pillow than Christ's omnipotence." He can give life to the dead; he can give power to the weak; he can increase strength to them that have no might. Let us trust him and not be afraid. The world is full of snares; our hearts are weak. But with Jesus nothing is impossible.

Let us learn for another thing, the mercifulness and compassion of our Lord Jesus Christ. The circumstances of the three cases we are now considering were all different. He heard the leper's pitiful cry, "Lord, if thou wilt thou canst make me clean." He was told of the centurion's servant,

but he never saw him. He saw Peter's wife's mother, who layed and sick of a fever, and we are not told that he spoke a word. Yet in each case the heart of the Lord Jesus was one and the same. In each case he was quick to show mercy, and ready to heal. Each poor sufferer was tenderly pitied, and each effectually relieved.

Behold here another strong foundation for our faith. Our great High Priest is very gracious. He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; he is never tired of doing us good. He knows that we are a weak and feeble people in the midst of a weary and troublous world. He is as ready to bear with us and help us, as he was 1800 years ago. It is as true of him now as it was then. He despiseth not any (Job 36:5). No heart can feel for us so much as the heart of Christ.

Let us learn in the last place what a precious thing is the grace of faith. We know little about the centurion described in these verses; his name, his nation, his past history are all hidden from us. But one thing we know, and that is that he believed. Lord, I am not worthy that thou shouldst come under my roof. Speak the word only and my servant shall be healed. He believed, let us remember, when scribes and Pharisees were unbelievers; he believed, though a Gentile born, when Israel was blinded. And our Lord pronounced upon him the commendation which has been read all over the world from that time to this: I have not found so great faith no not in Israel.

Let us lay firm hold on to this lesson. It deserves to be remembered. To believe Christ's power and willingness to help, and to make a practical use of our belief, is a rare and precious gift: let us always be thankful if we have it. To be willing to come to Jesus as helpless, lost sinners and commit our souls into his hands is a mighty privilege; let us ever bless God if this willingness is ours, for it is his gift. Such faith is better than all other gifts and knowledge in the world. Many a poor converted heathen, who knows nothing but that he is sick of sin, and trusts in Jesus, shall sit down in heaven while many learned scholars are rejected for evermore. Blessed indeed are they that believe!

What do we each know of this faith? This is the great question. Our learning may be small, but do we believe? Our opportunities of giving and working for Christ's cause may be few, but do we believe? We may neither be able to preach, nor write, nor argue for the Gospel, but do we believe? May we never rest till we can answer this inquiry! Faith in Christ appears a small and simple thing to the children of this world. They see in it nothing great or grand. But faith in Christ is most precious in God's sight and, like most precious things, is rare. By it true Christians live; by it they stand; by it they overcome the world. Without this faith no one can be saved.

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