

## —J.C. Ryle *Expository Thoughts on Matthew* || Matthew 2—

- I. Introduction to the Bible's only account of the Magi.
  - A. What do we make of these wise men? Who are these Magi? Christians often don't know what to do with them. They were astrologers. Do they deserve to be an extension of the Christmas story? Do we know where to separate truth from tradition and mere speculation? We know they came from the East, followed the star they studied, and brought gifts to worship Christ. We can deduce a fair amount from the passage, but we are left with one burning question – How did they really know about Christ and what the star meant?
- II. Ryle gives us 5 main points to consider about this passage:
  - A. There may be true servants of God in places we should least expect to find them.
    1. We know that God calls his own from every tribe, tongue and nation; these wise men are among them. God works in mysterious ways, in mysterious places, and in the hearts of mysterious men. We know that God works outside of our comfortable corner of reformed faith, but do our thoughts and actions agree?
    2. *The Holy Spirit can lead souls to Christ without the help of any outward means. Men may be born in dark places of the earth and in dark times, and yet be made wise unto salvation like these wise men. There are some travelling to heaven at this moment of whom the church and the world know nothing. They flourish in secret places like the 'Lily among the thorns', but Christ loves them, and they love Christ.*
  - B. It is not always those who have the most religious privileges who give Christ the most honor.
    1. The scribes and pharisees should have been first in line to worship Christ. People looked to them for answers. Herod valued their opinion on religion matters above all others. Yet Christ had been alive under their noses for nearly two years without a care. They were intelligent, had full access to the truth, but they were woefully and intentionally ignorant!
    2. The religious leaders didn't begin denying Christ during his ministry, denying his deity, calling him a blasphemer, denouncing him as Messiah, as he walked on earth and performed miracles. It started in the manger, and they ignored him from the beginning! They didn't care because they rested in their status, and their knowledge of the scriptures. Their position was enough for them.
    3. *How often the very people who lie nearest to the means of grace are those who neglect them the most?*
      - a) This is a lesson for us all. How often do we rest in knowledge and comforts of our own understanding instead of seeking after Christ? Let this be a call to prayer for the children who grow up in our church.
    4. *Familiarity with sacred things has an awful tendency to make men despise them. There are many, who from residence and convenience ought to be the first and foremost in the worship of God, and yet are always last. There are many who might be well expected to be last, who are always first.*
      - a) Let's be certain we aren't missing and taking for granted the ministry here in our own church.
  - C. There may be knowledge of scripture in the head, while there is no grace in the heart.
    1. Growing up in the church best for anyone, but potential for danger and self-deception exists. A false sense of security, comforts of head knowledge, outward appearance of obedience to Christ, pseudo-participation in the means of grace are real. The answer is to run to Christ and throw ourselves at the foot of the cross.
    2. When Herod inquired of the scribes, the answer was immediate. They knew the prophecies but didn't know the savior. They had unparalleled head knowledge but no saving grace. Their absolute security in their head knowledge lulled them to sleep and drove them to ignorance. Beware that we are not likewise lulled to sleep. We love the word, we are steeped in the Puritans and we have the best preaching around.
      - a) Are we just filling our heads, or our hearts too? Are we being spurred on to love and good deeds? Are we seeing the work of the Holy Spirit in our hearts? Are we putting sin to death in our lives? Are we clinging to Christ and being conformed to His image? Are we seeing spiritual growth in ourselves? Are others seeing the same in us? These are important questions to consider.
    3. *Let us all beware of resting satisfied with head knowledge. It is an excellent thing, when rightly used. But a man may have much of it, and yet perish everlastingly. What is the state of our hearts? That is the great question. A little grace is better than many gifts. Gifts alone save no one, but grace leads to glory.*
  - D. These verses show us a splendid example of spiritual diligence.
    1. Consider the historical and geographical context of this passage. We don't know where the wise men travelled from, but it's likely it was thousands of miles. Regardless of their origin, they would have crossed large rivers, challenging mountain passes and vast deserts. The journey was perilous.
    2. The journey required a large entourage, for safety, as well as to transport enough food and water, or goods to barter along the way. Remember, they didn't know their final destination. The journey would also have been very costly, given the great distance and the size of their caravan, never mind the expensive gifts! But they had to go because there was a savior to be worshipped. They were literally compelled to go.
    3. *They set their hearts on seeing 'Him who was born, King of the Jews' and never rested until they saw him.*

- a) We must be ready to follow this example. To what great lengths would we go to meet the savior? We are so blessed to live in a time and place where we don't face persecution for worshipping God. But what if that changes? What if we must endure dangers and expense in order to worship God rightly? If we ever lose our freedoms, we must be prepared to endure all for the sake of our God.
- 4. *Where is our self-denial? What pains do we take about means of grace? What diligence do we show about following Christ? What does our religion cost us? These are serious questions. They deserve serious consideration.*
  - a) How quickly and easily do we give up prayer, Bible reading, family worship, attending church? At the slightest inconvenience? When we have other things to do? When we are fearful of the world around us? This can happen easily to all of us. We must take care to guard ourselves against this.
- E. Finally, these verses show us a striking example of faith.
  - 1. They believed in Christ though they had never seen him, had to travel a dangerous journey, and ultimately flee for their lives in the end. They believed him when the local religious leaders did not.
  - 2. They believe in him when they saw him, though an infant on Mary's knee, and worshipped Him as King.
  - 3. *This was the crowning point of their faith. They saw no miracles to convince them. They heard no teaching to persuade them. They beheld no signs of divinity and greatness to overawe them. They saw nothing but a newborn infant, helpless and weak, and needing a mother's care like any of ourselves. And yet when they saw that infant, they believed that they saw the divine savior of the world.*
  - 4. We see no greater example of faith in all of scripture. The faith of these wise men should be regarded as side by side with the thief on the cross. We must walk in the step of their faith, and not be ashamed to believe in Jesus and confess him, even though all those around us remain careless and unbelieving.
- III. Ryle gives 4 main points to consider in the second half of this passage.
  - A. The rulers of this world are seldom friendly to the cause of God
    - 1. No sooner did Herod learn of the birth of Christ than he seeks to destroy him. He wasn't always seeking to kill the Messiah, but this simultaneous fear and hatred was triggered when there was someone else to be worshipped. Thus the need to commit mass murder to eradicate the threat.
    - 2. Those who find their sufficiency in earthly wealth and power have no room for God and no need for a savior. It's not the possession of wealth or power but the love of them and enslavement to them.
    - 3. Greatness and riches are perilous possessions. Those who seek them don't know what they're after.
    - 4. *Let us beware of giving way to such feelings. The very wealth we admire may be gradually sinking its possessors down to hell. A little more money might be our ruin.*
    - 5. The greatest fear of all becomes losing what we have worked so hard to obtain. Like a boy King.
    - 6. *Do we think that Christ's cause depends on the power and patronage of princes? We are mistaken. They have seldom done much for the advancement of true religion. They have far more frequently been the enemies of the truth.*
  - B. The Lord Jesus was a man of sorrows, even from his infancy.
    - 1. He enters the world in poverty, his life is immediately threatened, then he becomes a foreign refugee.
    - 2. *The waves of humiliation were beating over him from the start.*
      - a) For this reason, we know that Jesus is exactly the savior we need. He knows our needs, he knows our troubles, he can sympathize with us when we cry out to him in our time of need. *Let us keep nothing back from him. Let us make him our bosom friend. Let us pour out our hearts before him.*
  - C. Death can remove the kings of this world like other men.
    - 1. No ruler has the power to outlive death or retain life; a striking contrast to the true King. Christ has power over death, the great equalizer among men. This is why the resurrection is so critical. No resurrection means no power over death and no salvation; it means we should live our best life now and it give validation to men like Herod.
    - 2. Christians should never be greatly moved by persecution of men. Our enemies may be strong and we may be weak, but the triumphing of the wicked is short (Job 20:5). Our champion triumphs over sin and death.
    - 3. *The worst rulers in this world did their utmost to bury and extinguish the truth. But the truth rose again from the earth, and they are dead. Let not the heart of any believer fail. Death is the mighty leveler and can take any mountain out of the way of Christ's church. Truth shall always prevail.*
  - D. What a lesson of humility is taught us by the dwelling place of the Son of God.
    - 1. Nazareth was a small, poor, obscure and unimportant town in Galilee.
    - 2. *We know that roughly 5/6ths of the time the savior of the world was on the earth was passed among the poor of this world and passed in complete retirement. Truly this was humility. We can learn much from this example.*

Next week: Matthew Chapter 3