

—Matthew 14:1-12|| Expository Thoughts on Matthew by J.C. Ryle—
Module 41 – “Precious in the sight of the Lord is the death of his saints.”-Psa. 116:15

Background:

In this passage we have 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 reprover, and the disgraceful circumstances of this death, are all written for our learning.

First, we should consider the great power of conscience.

Herod thinks that Jesus is John the Baptist raised from the dead. He remembered his own wicked dealings with the holy man and his heart failed within him.

There is a conscience in all men by nature. Fallen, lost, desperately wicked as we are all born into the world, God has taken care to leave himself a witness in our consciences. It is a poor guide without the Holy Spirit: it can save no one; it leads no one to Christ. But there is such a thing as conscience in every man, accusing or excusing him; and scripture and experience both declare it. **Romans 2:15**

Conscience can make even kings miserable, when they have willfully rejected its advice. Conscience 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 prophets do not live forever, but their words often survive them. **2 Timothy 2:9 and Zechariah 1:5**

The thoughtless and ungodly should remember this, and not sin against their consciences. Their wickedness will overtake them one day. They will find, like Herod, that it is ‘evil and bitter to sin against God’ (Jeremiah 2:19).

Also, 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. Sermons and lessons will come to the mind of the hearer again, when he who preached or taught is long gone.

Second, we should learn 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. Truly there was an event here, if there ever was one in the world, which might make an ignorant man say, “What profit is it to serve God?”

These are the sort of things which show us that there will one day be a judgment. The blood of John the Baptist, and James the Apostle, and Stephen shall be required at the day of judgement. It is all written in God’s book. **Isaiah 26:21**. The world shall one day know that there is a God that judges the earth. **Ecclesiastes 5:8**.

Let all true Christians remember that the best things are yet to come. It is not a strange thing if we suffer in this present time. We are learning patience, longsuffering, gentleness, and meekness, which we could hardly learn if we had all good things now. **2 Corinthians 4:17**

—Matthew 14:13-21 || Expository Thoughts on Matthew by J.C. Ryle—
Module 42 – Unanswerable proof of our Lord’s divine power.

This is the most often mentioned miracle in the gospels and may be found in all of them. Why is this the greatest miracle?

Background: Jesus has just heard of the death of John the Baptist. He retreats in private but is followed by the masses. He is going to feed a multitude with five loaves and two fish.

First, 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 be manifestly impossible without a supernatural multiplication of the food.

Our Lord actually performed this mighty work and by performing it gave a conclusive proof that he was God. He called into being that which did not exist. To create is the peculiar prerogative of God.

We should treasure up in our minds every evidence of our Lord’s divine power. The true believer should store it in his memory.

Second, this miracle is a striking example of our Lord’s compassion toward 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. **John 6:26**

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. This is the heart of our Lord Jesus Christ towards sinners. He is ever the same. He is the same now as he has always been. **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. There will be no excuse on the day of judgement. **Romans 2:4**

Third, 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. Care must be taken that we do not see allegories where the Holy Spirit meant none to be seen.

What does this hungry multitude in a desert place represent to us? It is an emblem of *all mankind*. We are by nature far away from God. Our eyes may not be opened to the full extent of our danger. **Revelation 3:17**. There is but one step between us and everlasting death.

The loaves and fishes 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.

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 is but one step between us and everlasting death. **Revelation 3:17**