**THE EXPOSITION OF HOLY SCRIPTURE BY ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

**1 CORINTHIANS-023**. **THE POWER OF THE RESURRECTION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"3. I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures; 4. And that He was buried, and that He rose again the third day according to the Scriptures."*

*1 Corinthians 15:3-4*

Christmas day is probably not the true anniversary of the Nativity, but Easter is certainly that of the Resurrection. The season is appropriate. In the climate of Palestine the first fruits of the harvest were ready at the Passover for presentation in the Temple. It was an agricultural as well as a historical festival; and the connection between that aspect of the feast and the Resurrection of our Lord is in the Apostle's mind when he says, in a subsequent part of this chapter, that Christ is risen from the dead and become the first fruits of them that slept.

In our colder climate the season is no less appropriate. The life re-orient out of dust which shows itself to-day in every bursting leaf-bud and springing flower is Nature's parable of the spring that awaits man after the winter of death. No doubt, apart from the Resurrection of Jesus, the yearly miracle kindles sad thoughts in mourning hearts, and suggests bitter contrasts to those who sorrow, having no hope, but the grave in the garden has turned every blossom into a smiling prophet of the Resurrection.

And so the season, illuminated by the event, teaches us lessons of hope that we shall not all die. Let us turn, then, to the thoughts naturally suggested by the day, and the great fact which it brings to each mind, and confirmed thereafter by the miracle that is being wrought round about us.

**I. First, then, in my text, I would have you note the facts of Paul's gospel.**

First of all ... I delivered these things. And the first not only points to the order of time in the proclamation, but to the order of importance as well. For these initial facts are the fundamental facts, on which all that may follow thereafter is certainly built. Now the first thing that strikes me here is that, whatever else the system unfolded in the New Testament is, it is to begin with a simple record of historical fact. It becomes a philosophy, it becomes a religious system; it is a revelation of God; it is an unveiling of man; it is a body of ethical precepts. It is morals and philosophy and religion all in one; but it is first of all a story of something that took place in the world.

If that be so, there is a lesson for men whose work it is to preach it. Let them never forget that their business is to insist upon the truth of these great, supernatural, all-important, and fundamental facts, the death and the Resurrection of Jesus Christ. They must evolve all the deep meanings that lie in them; and the deeper they dig for their meanings the better. They must open out the endless treasures of consolation and enforce the omnipotent motives of action which are wrapped up in the facts; but howsoever far they may carry their evolving and their application of them, they will neither be faithful to their Lord nor true stewards of their message unless, clear above all other aspects of their work, and underlying all other forms of their ministry, there be the unfaltering proclamation--first of all, midst of all, last of all--how that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that He was raised again according to the Scriptures.

Note, too, how this fundamental and original character of the gospel which Paul preached, as a record of facts, makes short work of a great deal that calls itself liberal Christianity in these days. We are told that it is quite possible to be a very good Christian man, and reject the supernatural, and turn away with incredulity from the story of the Resurrection. It may be so, but I confess that it puzzles me to understand how, if the fundamental character of Christian teaching be the proclamation of certain facts, a man who does not believe those facts has the right to call himself a Christian.

Note, further, how there is an element of explanation involved in the proclamation of the facts which turns them into a gospel. Mark how that Christ died, not Jesus. It is a great truth, that the man, our Brother, Jesus, passed through the common lot, but that is not what Paul says here, though he often says it. What he says is that Christ died. Christ is the name of an office, into which is condensed a whole system of truth, declaring that it is He who is the Apex, the Seal, and ultimate Word of all divine revelation. It was the Christ who died; unless it was so, the death of Jesus is no gospel.

He died for our sins. Now, if the Apostle had only said He died for us, that might conceivably have meant that, in a multitude of different ways of example, appeal to our pity and compassion and the like, His death was of use to mankind. But when he says He died for our sins, I take leave to think that that expression has no meaning, unless it means that He died as the expiation and sacrifice for men's sins. I ask you, in what intelligible sense could Christ die for our sins unless He died as bearing their punishment and as bearing it for us? And then, finally, He died and rose ... according to the Scriptures, and so fulfilled the divine purposes revealed from of old.

To the fact that a man was crucified outside the gates of Jerusalem, and rose again the third day, which is the narrative, there are added these three things--the dignity of the Person, the purpose of His death, the fulfilment of the divine intention manifested from of old. And these three things, as I said, turn the narrative into a Gospel.

So, brethren, let us remember that, without all three of them, the death of Jesus Christ is nothing to us, any more than the death of thousands of sweet and saintly men in the past has been, who may have seen a little more of the supreme goodness and greatness than their fellows, and tried in vain to make purblind eyes participate in their vision. Do you think that these twelve fishermen would ever have shaken the world if they had gone out with the story of the Cross, unless they had carried along with it the commentary which is included in the words which I have emphasised? And do you suppose that the type of Christianity which slurs over the explanation, and so does not know what to do with the facts, will ever do much in the world, or will ever touch men? Let us liberalise our Christianity by all means, but do not let us evaporate it; and evaporate it we surely shall if we falter in saying with Paul, I declare, first of all, that which received, how that the death and resurrection were the death and resurrection of the Christ, for our sins, according to the Scriptures. These are the facts which make Paul's gospel.

**II. Now I ask you to look, in the second place, at what establishes the facts.**

We have here, in this chapter, a statement very much older than our existing written gospels. This epistle is one of the four letters of Paul which nobody that I know of--with some quite insignificant exceptions in modern times--has ever ventured to dispute. It is admittedly the writing of the Apostle, written before the gospels, and in all probability within five-and-twenty years of the date of the Crucifixion. And what do we find alleged by it as the state of things at its date? That the belief in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ was the subject of universal Christian teaching, and was accepted by all the Christian communities. Its evidence to that fact is undeniable; because there was in the early Christian Church a very formidable and large body of bitter antagonists of Paul's, who would have been only too glad to have convicted him, if they could, of any misrepresentation of the usual notions, or divergence from the usual type of teaching. So we may take it as undeniable that the representation of this chapter is historically true; and that within five-and-twenty years of the death of Jesus Christ every Christian community and every Christian teacher believed in and proclaimed the fact of the Resurrection.

But if that be so, we necessarily are carried a great deal nearer the Cross than five-and-twenty years; and, in fact, there is not, between the moment when Paul penned these words and the day of Pentecost, a single chink in the history where you can insert such a tremendous innovation as the full-fledged belief in a resurrection coming in as something new.

I do not need to dwell at all upon this other thought, that, unless the belief that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead originated at the time of His death, there would never have been a Church at all. Why was it that they did not tumble to pieces? Take the nave out of the wheel and what becomes of the spokes? A dead Christ could never have been the basis of a living Church. If He had not risen from the dead, the story of His disciples would have been the same as that which Gamaliel told the Sanhedrim was the story of all former pseudo-Messiahs such as that man Theudas. He was slain, and as many as followed him were dispersed and came to naught. Of course! The existence of the Church demands, as a pre-requisite, the initial belief in the Resurrection. I think, then, that the contemporaneousness of the evidence is sufficiently established.

What about its good faith? I suppose that nobody, nowadays, doubts the veracity of these witnesses. Anybody that knows an honest man when he sees him, anybody that has the least ear for the tone of sincerity and the accent of conviction, must say that they may have been fanatics, they may have been mistaken, but one thing is clear as sunlight, they were not false witnesses for God.

What, then, about their competency? Their simplicity, their ignorance, their slowness to believe, their stupor of surprise when the fact first dawned upon them, which they tell not with any idea of manufacturing evidence in their own favour, but simply as a piece of history, all tend to make us certain that there was no play of a morbid imagination, no hysterical turning of a wish into a fact, on the part of these men. The sort of things which they say that they saw and experienced are such as to make any such supposition altogether absurd. There are long conversations, appearances appealing to more than one sense, appearances followed by withdrawals, sometimes in the morning, sometimes in the evening, sometimes at a distance, as on the mountain, sometimes close by, as in the chamber, to single souls and to multitudes. Fancy five hundred people all at once smitten with the same mistake, imagining that they saw what they did not see! Miracles may be difficult to believe, they are not half so difficult to believe as absurdities. And this modern explanation of the faith in the Resurrection I venture respectfully to designate as absurd.

But there is one other point to which I would like to turn for a moment; and that is that little clause in my text that He was buried. Why does Paul introduce that amongst his facts? Possibly in order to affirm the reality of Christ's death; but I think for another reason. If it be true that Jesus Christ was laid in that sepulchre, a stone's throw outside the city gate, do you not see what a difficulty that fact puts in the way of disbelief or denial of His Resurrection? If the grave--and it was not a grave, remember, like ours, but a cave, with a stone at the door of it, that anybody could roll away for entrance--if the grave was there, why, in the name of common-sense, did not the rulers put an end to the pestilent heresy by saying, Let us go and see if the body is there?

Modern deniers of the Resurrection may fairly be asked to front this thought--If Jesus Christ's body was in the sepulchre, how was it possible for belief in the Resurrection to have been originated, or maintained? If His body was not in the grave, what had become of it? If His friends stole it away then they were deceivers of the worst type in preaching a resurrection; and we have already seen that that hypothesis is ridiculous. If His enemies took it away, for which they had no motive, why did they not produce it and say, There is an answer to your nonsense. There is the dead man. Let us hear no more of this absurdity of His having risen from the dead?

He died ... according to the Scriptures, and He was buried. And the angels word carries the only explanation of the fact which it proclaims, He is not here--He is risen.

I take leave to say that the Resurrection of Jesus Christ is established by evidence which nobody would ever have thought of doubting unless for the theory that miracles were impossible. The reason for disbelief is not the deficiency of the evidence, but the bias of the judge.

**III. And now I have no time to do more than touch the last thought. I have tried to show what establishes the facts. Let me remind you, in a sentence or two, what the facts establish.**

I by no means desire to suspend the whole of the evidence for Christianity on the testimony of the eyewitnesses to the Resurrection. There are a great many other ways of establishing the truth of the Gospel besides that, upon which I do not need to dwell now. But, taking this one specific ground which my text suggests, what do the facts thus established prove?

Well, the first point to which I would refer, and on which I should like to enlarge, if I had time, is the bearing of Christ's Resurrection on the acceptance of the miraculous. We hear a great deal about the impossibility of miracle and the like. It upsets the certainty and fixedness of the order of things, and so forth, and so forth. Jesus Christ has risen from the dead; and that opens a door wide enough to admit all the rest of the Gospel miracles. It is of no use paring down the supernatural in Christianity, in order to meet the prejudices of a quasi-scientific scepticism, unless you are prepared to go the whole length, and give up the Resurrection. There is the turning point. The question is, Do you believe that Jesus Christ rose from the dead, or do you not? If your objections to the supernatural are valid, then Christ is not risen from the dead; and you must face the consequences of that. If He is risen from the dead, then you must cease all your talk about the impossibility of miracle, and be willing to accept a supernatural revelation as God's way of making Himself known to man.

But, further, let me remind you of the bearing of the Resurrection upon Christ's work and claims. If He be lying in some forgotten grave, and if all that fair thought of His having burst the bands of death is a blunder, then there was nothing in His death that had the least bearing upon men's sin, and it is no more to me than the deaths of thousands in the past. But if He is risen from the dead, then the Resurrection casts back a light upon the Cross, and we understand that His death is the life of the world, and that by His stripes we are healed.

But, further, remember what He said about Himself when He was in the world--how He claimed to be the Son of God; how He demanded absolute obedience, implicit trust, supreme love, how He identified faith in Himself with faith in God--and consider the Resurrection as bearing on the reception or rejection of these tremendous claims. It seems to me that we are brought sharp up to this alternative--Jesus Christ rose from the dead, and was declared by the Resurrection to be the Son of God with power; or Jesus Christ has not risen from the dead--and what then? Then He was either deceiver or deceived, and in either case has no right to my reverence and my love. We may be thankful that men are illogical, and that many who reject the Resurrection retain reverence, genuine and deep, for Jesus Christ. But whether they have any right to do so is another matter. I confess for myself that, if I did not believe that Jesus Christ had risen from the dead, I should find it very hard to accept, as an example of conduct, or as religious teacher, a man who had made such great claims as He did, and had asked from me what He asked. It seems to me that He is either a great deal more, or a great deal less, than a beautiful saintly soul. If He rose from the dead He is much more; if He did not, I am afraid to say how much less He is.

And, finally, the bearing of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ upon our own hopes of the future may be suggested. It teaches us that life has nothing to do with organisation, but persists apart from the body. It teaches us that a man may pass from death and be unaltered in the substance of his being; and it teaches us that the earthly house of our tabernacle may be fashioned like unto the glorious house in which He dwells now at the right hand of God. There is no other absolute proof of immortality than the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

If we accept with all our hearts and minds Paul's Gospel in its fundamental facts, we need not fear to die, because He has died, and by dying has been the death of death. We need not doubt that we shall live again, because He was dead and is alive for ever more. This Samson has carried away the gates on His strong shoulders, and death is no more a dungeon but a passage. If we rest ourselves upon Him, then we can take up, for ourselves and for all that are dear to us and have gone before us, the triumphant song, O Death, where is thy sting? Thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.