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

**MATTHEW-111**. **THE TABLES TURNED: THE QUESTIONERS QUESTIONED by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"34.* *But when the Pharisees had heard that He had put the Sadducees to silence, they were gathered together. 35. Then one of them, which was a lawyer, asked Him a question, tempting Him, and saying, 36. Master, which is the great commandment in the law? 37. Jesus said unto him, Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. 38. This is the first and great commandment. 39. And the second is like unto it, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. 40. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. 41. While the Pharisees were gathered together, Jesus asked them, 42. Saying, What think ye of Christ? whose Son is He? They say unto Him, The son of David. 43. He saith unto them, How then doth David in spirit call Him Lord, saying, 44. The Lord said unto my Lord, Sit Thou on My right hand, till I make Thine enemies Thy footstool? 45. If David then call Him Lord, how is He his son? 46. And no man was able to answer Him a word; neither durst any man, from that day forth, ask Him any more questions."*

*Matthew 22:34-46*

Herodians, Sadducees, Pharisees, who were at daggers drawn with each other, patched up an alliance against Jesus, whom they all hated. Their questions were cunningly contrived to entangle Him in the cobwebs of casuistry and theological hair-splitting, but He walked through the fine-spun snares as a lion might stalk away with the nooses set for him dangling behind him. The last of the three questions put to Jesus, and the one question with which He turned the tables and silenced His questioners, are our subject. In the former, Jesus declares the essence of the law or of religion; in the latter, He brings to light the essential loftiness of the Messiah.

**I. The two preceding questions are represented to have been asked by deputations; this is specially noted as emanating from an individual.**

The lawyerseems to have anticipated his colleagues, and possibly his question was not that which they had meant to put. His motive in asking it was that of temptingJesus, but we must not give that word too hostile a sense, for it may mean no more than testingor trying. The legal expert wished to find out the attainments and standpoint of this would-be teacher, and so he proposed a question which would bring out the whereabouts of Jesus, and give opportunity for a theological wrangle. He did not ask the question for guidance, but as an inquisitor cross-examining a suspected heretic. Probably the question was a stereotyped one, and there are traces in the Gospels that the answer recognised as orthodox was that which Jesus gave (Luke x. 27). The two commandments are quoted from Deuteronomy vi. 5 and Leviticus xix. 18 respectively. The lawyer probably only desired to raise a discussion as to the relative worth of isolated precepts. Jesus goes deep down below isolated precepts, and unifies, as well as transforms, the law. Supreme and undivided love to God is not only the great, but also the first, commandment. In more modern phrase, it is the sum of man's duty and the germ of all goodness. Note that Jesus shifts the centre from conduct to character, from deeds to affections. As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he, said the sage of old; Christ says, As a man loves, so is he. Two loves we have,--either the dark love of self and sense, or the white love of God, and all character and conduct are determined by which of these sways us. Note, further, that love to God must needs be undivided. God is one and all; man is one and finite. To love such an object with half a heart is not to love. True, our weakness leads astray, but the only real love corresponding to the natures of the lover and the loved is whole-hearted, whole-souled, whole-minded. It must be all in all, or not at all.

A second is like unto it,--love to man is the under side, as it were, of love to God. The two commandments are alike, for both call for love, and the second is second because it is a consequence of the first. Each sets up a lofty standard; with all thy heartand as thyselfsound equally impossible, but both result necessarily from the nature of the case. Religion is the parent of all morality, and especially of benevolent love to men. Innate self-regard will yield to no force but that of love to God. It is vain to try to create brotherhood among men unless the sense of God's fatherhood is its foundation. Love of neighbours is the second commandment, and to make it the first, as some do now, is to end all hope of fulfilling it. Still further, Jesus hangs law and prophets on these two precepts, which, at bottom, are one. Not only will all other duties be done in doing these, since love is the fulfilling of the law, but all other precepts, and all the prophetsappeals and exhortations, are but deductions from, or helps to the attainment of, these. All our forms of worship, creeds, and the like, are of worth in so far as they are outcomes of love to God, or aid us in loving Him and our neighbours. Without love, they are as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

**II. The Pharisees remained gathered together, and may have been preparing another question, but Jesus had been long enough interrogated.**

It was not fitting that He should be catechised only. His questions teach. He does not seek to entanglethe Pharisees in their speech, nor to make them contradict themselves, but brings them full up against a difficulty, that they may open their eyes to the great truth which is its only solution. His first question, What think ye of the Christ?is simply preparatory to the second. The answer which He anticipated was given,--as, of course, it would be, for the Davidic descent of the Messiah was a commonplace universally accepted. One can fancy that the Pharisees smiled complacently at the attempt to puzzle them with such an elementary question, but the smile vanished when the next one came. They interpreted Psalm 110 as Messianic, and David in it called Messiah my Lord. How can He be both? Jesusquestion is in two forms,--If He is son, how does David call Him Lord?or, if He is Lord, how then is He his son?Take either designation, and the other lands you in inextricable difficulties.

Now what was our Lord's purpose in thus driving the Pharisees into a corner? Not merely to muzzlethem, as the word in verse 34, rendered put to silence, literally means, but to bring to light the inadequate conceptions of the Messiah and of the nature of His kingdom, to which exclusive recognition of his Davidic descent necessarily led. David's son would be but a king after the type of the Herods and Caesars, and his kingdom as carnalas the wildest zealot expected, but David's Lord, sitting at God's right hand, and having His foes made His footstool by Jehovah Himself,--what sort of a Messiah King would that be? The majestic image, that shapes itself dimly here, was a revelation that took the Phariseesbreath away, and made them dumb. Nor are the words without a half-disclosed claim on Christ's part to be that which He was so soon to avow Himself before the high priest as being. The first hearers of them probably caught that meaning partly, and were horrified; we hear it clearly in the words, and answer, Thou art the King of glory, O Christ! Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father.

Jesus here says that Psalm 110 is Messianic, that David was the author, and that he wrote it by divine inspiration. The present writer cannot see how our Lord's argument can be saved from collapse if the psalm is not David's.