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

**1 CORINTHIANS-020**. **IN REMEMBRANCE OF ME by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"This do in remembrance of Me."*

*1 Corinthians 11:24*

The account of the institution of the Lord's Supper, contained in this context, is very much the oldest extant narrative of that event. It dates long before any of the Gospels, and goes up, probably, to somewhere about five and twenty years after the Crucifixion. It presupposes a previous narrative which had been orally delivered to the Corinthians, and, as the Apostle alleges, was derived by him from Christ Himself. It is intended to correct corruptions in the administration of the rite which must have taken some time to develop themselves. And so we are carried back to a period very close indeed to the first institution of the rite, by the words before us.

No reasonable doubt can exist, then, that within a very few years of our Lord's death, the whole body of Christian people believed that Jesus Christ Himself appointed the Lord's Supper. I do not stay to dwell upon the value of a rite contemporaneous with the fact which it commemorates, and continuously lasting throughout the ages, as a witness of the historical veracity of the alleged fact; but I want to fix upon this thought, that Jesus Christ, who cared very little for rites, who came to establish a religion singularly independent of any outward form, did establish two rites, one of them to be done once in a Christian lifetime, one of them to be repeated with indefinite frequency, and, as it appears, at first repeated daily by the early believers. The reason why these two, and only these two, external ordinances were appointed by Jesus Christ was, that, taken together, they cover the whole ground of revealed fact, and they also cover the whole ground of Christian experience. There is no room for any other rites, because these two, the rite of initiation, which is baptism, and the rite of commemoration, which is the Lord's Supper, say everything about Christianity as a revelation, and about Christianity as a living experience.

Not only so, but in the simple primitive form of the Lord's Supper there is contained a reference to the past, the present and the future. It covers all time as well as all revelation and all Christian experience. For the past, as the text shows us, it is a memorial of one Person, and one fact in that Person's life. For the present, it is the symbol of the Christian life, as that great sixth chapter in John's gospel sets forth; and for the future, it is a prophecy, as our Lord Himself said on that night in the upper chamber, Till I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom, and as the Apostle in this context says, Till He come. It is to these three aspects of this ordinance, as the embodiment of all essential Christian truth, and as the embodiment of all deep Christian experience, covering the past, the present, and the future, that I wish to turn now. I do not deal so much with the mere words of my text as with this threefold significance of the rite which it appoints.

**I. So then, first, we have to think of it as a memorial of the past.**

Do this, is the true meaning of the words, not in remembrance of Me, but something far more sweet and pathetic--do this for the remembering of Me. The former expression is equal to Do this because you remember. The real meaning of the words is, Do this in case you forget; do this in order that you may recall to memory what the slippery memory is so apt to lose--the impression of even the sweetest sweetness, of the most loving love, and the most self-abnegating sacrifice, which He offered for us.

There is something to me infinitely pathetic and beautiful in looking at the words not only as the commandment of the Lord, but as the appeal of the Friend, who wished, as we all do, not to be utterly forgotten by those whom He cared for and loved; and who, not only because their remembrance was their salvation, but because their forgetfulness pained His human heart, brings to their hearts the plaintive appeal: Do not forget Me when I am gone away from you; and even if you have no better way of remembering Me, take these poor symbols, to which I am not too proud to entrust the care of My memory, and do this, lest you forget Me.

But, dear brethren, there are deeper thoughts than this, on which I must dwell briefly. In remembrance of Me--Jesus Christ, then, takes up an altogether unique and solitary position here, and into the sacredest hours of devotion and the loftiest moments of communion with God, intrudes His personality, and says, When you are most religious, remember Me; and let the highest act of your devout life be a thought turned to Myself.

Now, I want you to ask, is that thought diverted from God? And if it is not, how comes it not to be? I want you honestly to ask yourselves this question--what did He think about Himself who, at that moment, when all illusions were vanishing, and life was almost at its last ebb, took the most solemn rite of His nation and laid it solemnly aside and said: A greater than Moses is here; a greater deliverance is being wrought : Remember Me. Is that insisting on His own personality, and making the remembrance of it the very apex and shining summit of all religious aspiration--is that the work of one about whom all that we have to say is, He was the noblest of men? If so, then I want to know how Jesus Christ, in that upper chamber, founding the sole continuous rite of the religion which He established, and making its heart and centre the remembrance of His own personality, can be cleared from the charge of diverting to Himself what belongs to God only, and how you and I, if we obey His commands, escape the crime of idolatry and man-worship? Do this in remembrance,--not of God--in remembrance of Me, and let memory, with all its tendrils, clasp and cleave to My person. What an extraordinary demand! It is obscuring God, unless the Me is God manifest in the flesh.

Then, still further, let me remind you that in the appointment of this solitary rite as His memorial to all generations, Jesus Christ Himself designates one part of His whole manifestation as the part into which all its pathos, significance, and power are concentrated. We who believe that the death of Christ is the life of the world, are told that one formidable objection to our belief is that Jesus Christ Himself said so little during His life about His death. I believe His reticence upon that question is much exaggerated, but apart altogether from that, I believe also that there was a necessity in the order of the evolution of divine truth, for the reticence, such as it is, because, whatsoever might be possible to Moses and Elias, on the Mount of Transfiguration, His decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, could not be much spoken about in the plain till it had been accomplished. But, apart from both of these considerations, reflect, that whether He said much about His death or not, He said something very much to the purpose about it when He said Do this in remembrance of Me.

It is not His personality only that we are to remember. The whole of the language of the institution of the ritual, as well as the form of the rite, and its connection with the ancient passover, and its connection with the new covenant into connection with which Christ Himself brings it, all point to the significance in His eyes of His death as the Sacrifice for the world's sin. Wherefore the body and the blood separately remembered, except to indicate death by violence? Wherefore the language the body broken for you; the blood shed for many for the remission of sins? Wherefore the association with the Passover sacrifice? Wherefore the declaration that this is the blood of the Covenant, unless all tended to the one thought--His death is the foundation of all loving relationships possible to us with God; and the condition of the remission of sins--the Sacrifice for the whole world?'

This is the point that He desires us to remember; this is that which He would have live for ever in our grateful hearts.

I say nothing about the absolute exclusion of any other purpose of this memorial rite. If it was the mysterious thing that the superstition of later ages has made of it, how, in the name of common-sense, does it come that not one syllable, looking in that direction, dropped from His lips when He established it? Surely He, in that upper chamber, knew best what He meant, and what He was doing when He established the rite; and I, for my part, am contented to be told that I believe in a poor, bald Zwinglianism, when I say with my Master, that the purpose of the Lord's Supper is simply the commemoration, and therein the proclamation, of His death. There is no magic, no mystery, no sacrament about it. It blesses us when it makes us remember Him. It does the same thing for us which any other means of bringing Him to mind does. It does that through a different vehicle. A sermon does it by words, the Communion does it by symbols. That is the difference to be found between them. And away goes the whole fabric of superstitious Christianity, and all its mischiefs and evils, when once you accept the simple Remember. Christ told us what He meant by the rite when He said Do this in remembrance of Me.

**II. And now one word or two more about the other particulars which I have suggested. The past, however sweet and precious, is not enough for any soul to live upon. And so this memorial rite, just because it is memorial, is a symbol for the present.**

That is taught us in the great chapter--the sixth of John's Gospel--which was spoken long before the institution of the Lord's Supper, but expresses in words the same ideas which it expresses by material forms. The Christ who died is the Christ who lives, and must be lived upon by the Christian. If our relation to Jesus Christ were only that Once in the end of the ages He appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of Himself; and if we had to look back through lengthening vistas of distance and thickening folds of oblivion, simply to a historical past, in which He was once offered, the retrospect would not have the sweetness in it which it now has. But when we come to this thought that the Christ who was for us is also the Christ in us, and that He is not the Christ for us unless He is the Christ in us; and His death will never wash away our sins unless we feed upon Him, here and now, by faith and meditation, then the retrospect becomes blessedness. The Christian life is not merely the remembrance of a historical Christ in the past, but it is the present participation in a living Christ, with us now.

He is near each of us that we may make Him the very food of our spirits. We are to live upon Him. He is to be incorporated within us by our own act. This is no mysticism, it is a piece of simple reality. There is no Christian life without it. The true life of the believer is just the feeding of our souls upon Him,--our minds accepting, meditating upon, digesting the truths which are incarnated in Jesus; our hearts feeding upon the love which is so tender, warm, stooping, and close; our wills feeding upon and nourished by the utterance of His will in commandments which to know is joy and to keep is liberty; our hopes feeding upon Him who is our Hope, and in whom they find no chaff and husks of peradventures, but the pure wheat of Verily! verily I say unto you; the whole nature thus finding its nourishment in Jesus Christ. You are Christians in the measure in which the very strength of your spirits, and sustenance of all your faculties, are found in loving communion with the living Lord.

Remember, too, that all this communion, intimate, sweet, sacred, is possible only, or at all events is in its highest forms and most blessed reality, possible only, to those who approach Him through the gate of His death. The feeding upon the living Christ which will be the strength of our hearts and our portion for ever, must be a feeding upon the whole Christ. We must not only nourish our spirits on the fact that He was incarnated for our salvation, but also on the truth that He was crucified for our acceptance with God. He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me, has for its deepest explanation, He that eateth My flesh and drinketh My blood hath eternal life.

My friends, what about the hunger of your souls? Where is it satisfied? With the swine's husks, or with the Bread of God which came down from Heaven?'

**III. Now, lastly, that rite which is a memorial and a symbol is also a prophecy.**

In the original words of the institution our Lord Himself makes reference to the future; till I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom. And in the context here, the Apostle provides for the perpetual continuance, and emphasises the prophetic aspect, of the rite, by that word, till He come. His death necessarily implies His coming again. The Cross and the Throne are linked together by an indissoluble bond. Being what it is, the death cannot be the end. Being what He is, if He has once been offered to bear the sins of many, so He must come the second time without sin unto salvation. The rite, just because it is a rite, is the prophecy of a time when the need for it, arising from weak flesh and an intrusive world, shall cease. They shall say no more, The ark of the covenant of the Lord; at that time they shall call Jerusalem the throne of the Lord. There shall be no temple in that great city, because the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the Temple thereof. So all external worship is a prophecy of the coming of the perfect time, when that which is perfect being come, the external helps and ladders to climb to the loftiest shall be done away.

But more than that, the memorial and symbol is a prophecy. That upper chamber, with its troubled thoughts, its unbidden tears, starting to the eyes of the half-understanding listeners, who only felt that He was going away and the sweet companionship was dissolved, may seem to be but a blurred and a poor image of the better communion of heaven. But though on that sad night the Master bore a burdened heart, and the servants had but partial apprehension and a more partial love; though He went forth to agonise and to die, and they went forth to deny and to betray, and to leave Him alone, still it was a prophecy of Christ's table in His kingdom. Heaven is to be a feast. That representation promises society to the solitary, rest to the toilers, the oil of joy for mourning, and the full satisfaction of all desires. That heavenly feast surpasses indeed the antitype in the upper chamber, in that there the Master Himself partook not, and yonder we shall sup with Him and He with us, but is prophetic in that, as there He took a towel and girded Himself and washed the disciples feet, so yonder He will come forth Himself and serve them. The future is unlike the prophetic past in that we shall go no more out; there shall be no sequences of sorrow, and struggle, and distance and ignorance; but like it in that we shall feast on Christ, for through eternity the glorified Jesus will be the Bread of our spirits, and the fact of His past sacrifice the foundation of our hopes.

So, dear brethren, though our external celebration of this rite be dashed, as it always is, with much ignorance and with feeble faith; and though we gather round this table as the first generation of Israelites did round the passover, of which it is the successor, with staff in hand and loins girded, and have to eat it often with bitter herbs mingled, and though there be at our sides empty places, yet even in our clouded and partial apprehension, and in the imperfections of this outward type, we may see a gracious shadow of what is waiting for us when we shall go no more out, and all empty places shall be filled, and the bitter herbs shall be changed for the asphodel of Heaven and the sweet flowerage round the throne of God, and we shall feast upon the Christ, and in the loftiest experience of the utmost glories of the Heavens, shall remember the bitter Cross and agony as that which has bought it all. This do in remembrance of Me. May it be a symbol of our inmost life, and the prophecy of the Heaven to which we each shall come!