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

**1 THESSALONIANS-002**. **GOD'S TRUMPET by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"From you sounded out the word of God."*

*1 Thessalonians 1:8*

This is Paul's first letter. It was written very shortly after his first preaching of the Gospel in the great commercial city of Thessalonica. But though the period since the formation of the Thessalonian Church was so brief, their conversion had already become a matter of common notoriety; and the consistency of their lives, and the marvellous change that had taken place upon them, made them conspicuous in the midst of the corrupt heathen community in which they dwelt. And so says Paul, in the text, by reason of their work of faith and labour of love and patience of hope, they had become ensamples to all that believe, and loud proclaimers and witnesses of the Gospel which had produced this change.

The Apostle employs a word never used anywhere else in the New Testament to describe the conspicuous and widespread nature of this testimony of theirs. He says, The word of the Lord sounded out from them. That phrase is one most naturally employed to describe the blast of a trumpet. So clear and ringing, so loud, penetrating, melodious, rousing, and full was their proclamation, by the silent eloquence of their lives, of the Gospel which impelled and enabled them to lead such lives. A grand ideal of a community of believers! If our churches to-day were nearer its realisation there would be less unbelief, and more attraction of wandering prodigals to the Father's house. Would that this saying were true of every body of professing believers! Would that from each there sounded out one clear accordant witness to Christ, in the purity and unworldliness of their Christlike lives!

**I. This metaphor suggests the great purpose of the Church.**

It is God's trumpet, His means of making His voice heard through all the uproar of the world. As the captain upon the deck in the gale will use his speaking-trumpet, so God's voice needs your voice. The Gospel needs to be passed through human lips in order that it may reach deaf ears. The purpose for which we have been apprehended of Christ is not merely our own personal salvation, whether we understand that in a narrow and more outward, or in a broader and more spiritual sense. No man is an end in himself, but every man, though he be partially and temporarily an end, is also a means. And just as, according to the other metaphor, the Kingdom of Heaven is like leaven, each particle of the dead dough, as soon as it is leavened and vitalised, becoming the medium for transmitting the strange, transforming, and living influence to the particle beyond, so all of us, if we are Christian people, have received that grace into our hearts, for our own sakes indeed, but also that through us might be manifested to the darkened eyes beyond, and through us might drop persuasively on the dull, cold ears that are further away from the Divine Voice, the great message of God's mercy. The Church is God's trumpet, and the purpose that He has in view in setting it in the world is to make all men know the fellowship of the mystery, and that through it there may ring out, as by some artificial means a poor human voice will be flung to a greater distance than it would otherwise reach, the gentle entreaties, and the glorious proclamation, and the solemn threatenings of the Word, the Incarnate as well as the written Word, of God.

Of course all this is true, not only about communities, but it is true of a community, just because it is true of each individual member of it. The Church is worse than as sounding brass, it is as silent brass and an untinkling cymbal, unless the individuals that belong to it recognise God's meaning in making them His children, and do their best to fulfil it. Ye are my witnesses, saith the Lord. You are put into the witness-box; see that you speak out when you are there.

**II. Another point that this figure may suggest is, the sort of sound that should come from the trumpet.**

A trumpet note is, first of all, clear. There should be no hesitation in our witness; nothing uncertain in the sound that we give. There are plenty of so-called Christian people whose lives, if they bear any witness for the Master at all, are like the notes that some bungling learner will bring out of a musical instrument: hesitating, uncertain, so that you do not know exactly what note he wants to produce. How many of us, calling ourselves Christian people, testify on both sides; sometimes bearing witness for Christ; and alas! alas! oftener bearing witness against Him. Will the trumpet, the instrument of clear, ringing, unmistakable sounds, be the emblem of your Christian testimony? Would not some poor scrannel-pipe, ill-blown, be nearer the mark? The note should be clear.

The note should be penetrating. There is no instrument, I suppose, that carries further than the ringing clarion that is often heard on the field of battle, above all the strife; and this little church at Thessalonica, a mere handful of people, just converted, in the very centre of a strong, compact, organised, self-confident, supercilious heathenism, insisted upon being heard, and got itself made audible, simply by the purity and the consistency of the lives of its members. So that Paul, a few weeks, or at most a few months, after the formation of the church, could say, From you sounded out the word of the Lord, not only in Macedonia and Achaia, your own province and the one next door to it, but also in every place your faith to Godward is spread abroad. No man knows how far his influence will go. No man can tell how far his example may penetrate. Thessalonica was a great commercial city. So is Manchester. Hosts of people of all sorts came into it as they come here. There were many different circles which would be intersected by the lives of this Christian church, and wherever its units went they carried along with them the conviction that they had turned from idols to serve the living God, and to wait for His Son from heaven.

And so, dear brethren, if our witness is to be worth anything it must have this penetrating quality. There is a difference in sounds as there is a difference in instruments. Some of them carry further than others. A clear voice will fling words to a distance that a thick, mumbling one never can attain. One note will travel much further than another. Do you see to it that your notes are of the penetrating sort.

And then, again, the note should be a musical one. There is nothing to be done for God by harshness; nothing to be done by discords and gangling; nothing to be done by scolding and rebuke. The ordered sequence of melodious sound will travel a great deal further than unmusical, plain speech. You can hear a song at a distance at which a saying would be inaudible. Which thing is an allegory, and this is its lesson,--Music goes further than discord; and the witness that a Christian man bears will travel in direct proportion as it is harmonious, and gracious and gentle and beautiful.

And then, again, the note should be rousing. You do not play on a trumpet when you want to send people to sleep; dulcimers and the like are the things for that purpose. The trumpet means strung-up intensity, means a call to arms, or to rejoicing; means at any rate, vigour, and is intended to rouse. Let your witness have, for its utmost signification, Awake! thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light.

**III. Then, still further, take another thought that may be suggested from this metaphor, the silence of the loudest note.**

If you look at the context, you will see that all the ways in which the word of the Lord is represented as sounding out from the Thessalonian Church were deeds, not words. The context supplies a number of them. Such as the following are specified in it: their work; their toil, which is more than work; their patience; their assurance; their reception of the word, in much affliction with joy in the Holy Ghost; their faith to Godward; their turning to God from idols, to serve and to wait.

That is all. So far as the context goes there might not have been a man amongst them who ever opened his mouth for Jesus Christ. We know not, of course, how far they were a congregation of silent witnesses, but this we know, that what Paul meant when he said, The whole world is ringing with the voice of the word of God sounding from you, was not their going up and down the world shouting about their Christianity, but their quiet living like Jesus Christ. That is a louder voice than any other.

Ah! dear friends! it is with God's Church as it is with God's heavens; the stars in Christ's right hand sparkle in the same fashion as the stars that He has set in the firmament. Of them we read: There is neither voice nor language, their speech is not heard; and yet, as man stands with bared head and hushed heart beneath the violet abysses of the heavens, their line (or chord, the metaphor being that of a stringed instrument) is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world. Silent as they shine, they declare the glory of God, and proclaim His handiwork. And so you may speak of Him without speaking, and though you have no gift of tongues the night may be filled with music, and your lives be eloquent of Christ.

I do not mean to say that Christian men and women are at liberty to lock their lips from verbal proclamation of the Saviour they have found, but I do mean to say that if there was less talk and more living, the witness of God's Church would be louder and not lower; and men would take knowledge of us, that we had been with Jesus; and of Jesus, that He had made us like Himself.

**IV. And so, lastly, let me draw one other thought from this metaphor, which I hope you will not think fanciful playing with a figure; and that is the breath that makes the music.**

If the Church is the trumpet, who blows it? God! It is by His Divine Spirit dwelling within us, and breathing through us, that the harsh discords of our natural lives become changed into melody of praise and the music of witness for Him. Keep near Christ, live in communion with God, let Him breathe through you, and when His Spirit passes through your spirits their silence will become harmonious speech; and from you will sound out the word of the Lord.

In a tropical country, when the sun goes behind a cloud, all the insect life that was cheerily chirping is hushed. In the Christian life, when the Son of Righteousness is obscured by the clouds born of our own carelessness and sin, all the music in our spirit ceases, and no more can we witness for Him. A scentless substance lying in a drawer, with a bit of musk, will become perfumed by contact, and will bring the fragrance wherever it is carried. Live near God, and let Him speak to you and in you; and then He will speak through you. And if He be the breath of your spiritual lives, and the soul of your souls, then, and only then, will your lives be music, the music witness, and the witness conviction. And only then will there be fulfilled what I pray there may be more and more fulfilled in us as a Christian community, this great word of our text, from you sounded out, clear, rousing, penetrating, melodious, the word of the Lord, so that we, with our poor preaching, need not to speak anything.