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

**1 TIMOTHY-005**. **A TEST CASE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe."*

*1 Timothy 1:16*

The smallest of God's creatures, if it were only a gnat dancing in a sunbeam, has a right to have its well-being considered as an end of God's dealings. But no creature is so isolated or great as that it has a right to have its well-being regarded as the sole end of God's dealings. That is true about all His blessings and gifts; it is eminently true about His gift of salvation. He saves men because He loves them individually, and desires to make them blessed; but He also saves them because He desires that through them others shall be brought into the living knowledge of His love. It is most especially true about great religious teachers and guides.

Paul's humility is as manifest as his self-consciousness when he says in my text, This is what I was saved for. Not merely, not even principally, for the blessings that thereby accrue to myself, but that in me, as a crucial instance, there should be manifested the whole fulness of the divine love and saving power. So he puts his own experience as giving no kind of honour or glory to himself, but as simply showing the grace and infinite love of Jesus Christ. Paul disappears as but a passive recipient; and Christ strides into the front as the actor in his conversion and apostleship.

So we may take this point of view of my text, and look at the story of what befell the great Apostle as being in many different ways an exhibition of the great verities of the Gospel. I desire to signalise, especially, three points here. We see in it the demonstration of the life of Christ; an exhibition of the love of the living Christ; and a marvellous proof of the power of that loving and living Lord.

**I. First, then, take the experience of this Apostle as a demonstration of the exalted life, and continuous energy in the world, of Jesus Christ.**

What was it that turned the brilliant young disciple of Gamaliel, the rising hope of the Pharisaic party, the hammer of the heretics, into one of themselves? The appearance of Jesus Christ. Paul rode out of Jerusalem believing Him to be dead, and His Resurrection a lie. He staggered into Damascus, blind but seeing, and knowing that Jesus Christ lived and reigned. Now if you will let the man tell you himself what he saw, or thought he saw, you will come to this, that it was a visible, audible manifestation of a corporeal Christ. For it is extremely noteworthy that the Apostle ranks the appearance to himself, on the road to Damascus, as in the same class with the appearances to the other apostles which he enumerates in the great chapter in the Epistle to the Corinthians. He draws no distinction, as far as evidential force goes, between the appearance to Simon and to the five hundred brethren and to the others, and that which flashed upon him and made a Christian of him. Other men that were with him saw the light. He saw the Christ within the blaze. Other men heard a noise; he heard audible and intelligible words in his own speech. This is his account of the phenomenon. What do you think of his account?

There are but three possible answers! It was imposture; it was delusion; it was truth. The theory of imposture is out of court. Do men gather grapes of thorns or figs of thistles? Such a life as followed is altogether incongruous with the notion that the man who lived it was a deceiver. A fanatic he may have been; self-deceived he may have been; but transparently sincere he undeniably was. It is not given to impostors to move the world, as Paul did and does.

Was it delusion? Well it is a strange kind of hallucination which has such physical accompaniments and consequences as those in the story--not wanting confirmation from witnesses--which has come to us.

At midday, O king--in no darkness; in no shut-up chamber, at midday, O king--I heard ... I saw ... The men that were with me partly shared in the vision. There was a lengthened conversation; two senses at least were appealed to, vision and hearing, and in both vision and hearing there were partial participators. Physical consequences that lasted for three days accompanied the hallucination; and the man was blind, not seeing the sun, and neither did eat nor drink. There must be some soil beforehand in which delusions of such a sort can root themselves. But, if we take the story in the Acts of the Apostles, there is not the smallest foothold for the fashionable notion, which is entirely due to men's dislike of the supernatural, that there was any kind of misgiving in the young Pharisee, springing from the influence of Stephen's martyrdom, as he went forth breathing out threatenings and slaughter. The plain fact is that, at one moment he hated Jesus Christ as a bad man, and believed that the story of the Resurrection was a gross falsehood; and that at the next moment he knew Him to be living and reigning, and the Lord of his life and of the world. Hallucinations do not come thus, like a thunderclap on unprepared minds. Nor is there anything in the subsequent history of the man that seems to confirm, but everything that contradicts, the idea that such a revolutionary change as upset all his mental furniture, and changed the whole current of his life, and slammed in his face the door that was wide open to advancement and reputation, came from a delusion.

I think the hallucination theory is out of court, too, and there is nothing left but the old-fashioned one, that what he said he saw, he saw, and did not fancy; and that which he said he heard, he heard; and that it was not a buzzing of a diseased nerve in his own ears, but the actual speech of the glorified Christ. Very well, then; if that be true, what then? The old-fashioned belief--Jesus who died on the Cross is living, Jesus who died on the Cross is glorified, Jesus who died on the Cross is exalted to the throne of the universe, puts His hand into the affairs of the world as a power amongst them. Paul's Christology is but the rationale of the vision that led to Paul's conversion. It was in part because he saw that Just One, and heard the words of His mouth, that he declares, God hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow. I do not say that the vision to Paul is a demonstration of the reality of the Resurrection, but I do say that it is a very strong confirmatory evidence, which the opponents of that truth will have much difficulty in legitimately putting aside.

**II. Secondly, let me ask you to consider how this man's experience is an exhibition of the love of the living Lord.**

That is the main point on which the Apostle dwells in my text, in which he says that in him Jesus Christ shows forth all long-suffering. The whole fulness of His patient, pitying grace was lavished upon him. He says this because he puts side by side his hostility and Christ's love, what he had believed of Jesus, and how Jesus had borne with him and loved him through all, and had drawn him to Himself and received him. So he established by his own experience this great truth, that the love of Jesus Christ is never darkened by one single speck of anger, that He suffereth long, and is kind; that He meets hostility with patient love, hatred with a larger outpouring of His affection, and that His only answer to men's departures from Him in heart and feeling is more mightily to seek to draw them to Himself. Long-suffering means, in its true and proper sense, the patient acceptance, without the smallest movement of indignation, of unworthy treatment. And just as Christ on earth gave His back to the smiter, and His cheeks to them that pulled off the hair; and let the lips of Judas touch His, nor withdrew His face from shame and spitting; and was never stirred to one impatient or angry word by any opposition, so now, and to us all, with equal boundlessness of endurance, He lets men hate Him, and revile Him, and forget Him, and turn their backs upon Him; and for only answer has, Come unto Me all ye that labour, and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest.

Oh, dear brethren, we can weary out all loves except one. By carelessness, rebelliousness, the opposition of indifference, we can chill the affection of those to whom we are dearest. Can a mother forget? Yea, she may forget, but you cannot provoke Jesus Christ to cease His love. Some of you have been trying it all your days, but you have not done it yet. There does come a time when the wrath of the Lamb--which is a very terrible paradox--is kindled, and will fall, I fear, on some men and women who are listening now. But not yet. You cannot make Christ angry. For this cause I obtained mercy, that in me Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern--for the same long-suffering is extended to us all.

And then, in like manner, I may remind you that out of Paul's experience, as a cardinal instance and standing example of Christ's heart and dealings, comes the thought that that long-suffering is always wooing men to itself, and making efforts to draw them away from their own evil. In Paul's case there was a miracle. That difference is of small consequence. As truly as ever Christ spoke to Paul from the heavens, so truly, and so tenderly, does He speak to every one of us. He is drawing us all--you that yield and you that do not yield to His attractions, by the kindliest gifts of His love, by the revelations of His grace, by the movements of His Spirit, by the providences of our days, by even my poor lips addressing you now--for, if I be speaking His truth, it is not I that speak, but He that speaks in me. I beseech you, dear friends, recognise in this old story of the persecutor turned apostle nothing exceptional, though there be something miraculous, but only an exceptional form of manifestation of the normal activity of the love of Christ towards every soul. He loves, He draws, He welcomes all that come to Him. His servant, who stood over the blind, penitent persecutor, and said to him, Brother Saul! was only faintly echoing the glad reception which the elder Brother of the family gives to this and to every prodigal who comes back; because He Himself has drawn Him.

If we will only recognise the undying truth for all of us that lies beneath the individual experience of this apostle, we, too, may share in the attraction of His love, in the constraining and blessed influences of that love received, and in the welcome with which He hails us when we turn. If this man were thus dealt with, no man need despair.

**III. Lastly, we may notice how this experience is a manifestation of the power of the living, loving Lord.**

The first and plainest thing that it teaches us about that power is that Jesus Christ is able in one moment to revolutionise a life. There is nothing more striking than the suddenness and completeness of the change which passed. One day is with the Lord as a thousand years; and there come moments in every life into which there is crammed and condensed a whole world of experience, so as that a man looks back from this instant to that before, and feels that a gulf, deep as infinity, separates him from his old self.

Now, it is very unfashionable in these days to talk about conversion at all. It is even more unfashionable to talk about sudden conversions. I venture to say that there are types of character and experience which will never be turned to good, unless they are turned suddenly; while there are others, no doubt, to whom the course is a gradual one, and you cannot tell where the dawn broadens into perfect day. But, in the case of men who have grown up to some degree of maturity of life, either in sensuous sin or crusted over with selfish worldliness, or in any other way, by reason of intellectual pursuits, or others have become forgetful of God and careless of religion--unless such men are in a moment arrested and wheeled round at once, there is very little chance of their ever being so at all.

I am sure I am speaking to some now who, unless the truth of Christ comes into their minds with arresting flash, and unless they are in one moment, into which an eternity is condensed, changed in their purposes, will never be changed.

Do not, my friend, listen to the talk that sudden conversion is impossible or unlikely. It is the only kind of conversion that some of you are capable of. I remember a man, one of the best Christian men in a humble station in life that I ever knew--he did not live in Manchester--he had been a drunkard up to his fortieth or fiftieth year. One day he was walking across an open field, and a voice, as he thought, spoke to him and said, naming him, If you don't sign the pledge to-day you will be damned! He turned on his heel, and walked straight down the street to the house of a temperance friend, and said, I have come to sign the pledge. He signed it, and from that day to the day of his death adorned the doctrine of Jesus Christ his Saviour. If that man had not been suddenly converted he would never have been converted. So I say that this story of the text is a crucial instance of Christ's power to lay hold upon a man, and wheel him right round all in a moment, and send him on a new path. He wants to do that with all of you to whom He has not already done it. I beseech you, do not stick your heels into the ground in resistance, nor when He puts His hand on your shoulder stiffen your back that He may not do what He desires with you.

May we not see here, too, a demonstration of Christ's power to make a life nobly and blessedly new, different from all its past, and adorned with strange and unexpected fruits of beauty and wisdom and holiness? This man's account of his future, from the moment of that incident on the Damascus road to the headman's block outside the walls of Rome, is this: If any man be in Christ he is a new creature; I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Christ will do that for us all; for long-suffering was shown on the Apostle for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe.

So, you Christian people, it is as much your business as it was Paul's, to be visible rhetoric, manifest demonstrations in your lives of the truth of the Gospel. Men ought to say about us, There must be something in the religion that has done that for these people. We ought to be such that our characters shall induce the thought that the Christ who has made men like us cannot be a figment. Do you show, Christian men, that you are grafted upon the true Vine by the abundance of the fruit that you bring forth? Can you venture to say, as Paul said, If you want to know what Jesus Christ's love and power are, look at me? Do not venture adducing yourself as a specimen of His power unless you have a life like Paul's to look back upon.

For us all the fountain to which Paul had recourse is open. Why do we draw so little from it? The fire which burned, refining and illuminating, in him may be kindled in all our hearts. Why are we so icy? His convictions are of some value, as subsidiary evidence to Gospel facts; his experience is of still more value as an attestation and an instance of Gospel blessings. Believe like Paul and you will be saved like Paul. Jesus Christ will show to you all long-suffering. For though Paul received it all he did not exhaust it, and the same long-suffering which was lavished on him is available for each of us. Only you too must say like him, I was not disobedient to the heavenly vision.