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

**2 CHRONICLES-018. SACRIFICE RENEWED by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"18.* *Then they went in to Hezekiah the king, and said, We have cleansed all the house of the Lord, and the altar of burnt-offering, with all the vessels thereof, and the shew-bread table, with all the vessels thereof. 19. Moreover, all the vessels, which king Ahaz in his reign did cast away in his transgression, have we prepared and sanctified, and, behold, they are before the altar of the Lord. 20. Then Hezekiah the king rose early, and gathered the rulers of the city, and went up to the house of the Lord. 21. And they brought seven bullocks, and seven rams, and seven lambs, and seven he goats, for a sin-offering for the kingdom, and for the sanctuary, and for Judah. And he commanded the priests, the sons of Aaron, to offer them on the altar of the Lord. 22. So they killed the bullocks, and the priests received the blood, and sprinkled it on the altar: likewise, when they had killed the rams, they sprinkled the blood upon the altar: they killed also the lambs, and they sprinkled the blood upon the altar. 23. And they brought forth the he goats for the sin-offering before the king and the congregation; and they laid their hands upon them. 24. And the priests killed them, and they made reconciliation with their blood upon the altar, to make an atonement for all Israel: for the king commanded that the burnt-offering and the sin-offering should be made for all Israel. 25. And he set the Levites in the house of the Lord with cymbals, with psalteries, and with harps, according to the commandment of David, and of Gad the king's seer, and Nathan the prophet: for so was the commandment of the Lord by His prophets. 26. And the Levites stood with the instruments of David, and the priests with the trumpets. 27. And Hezekiah commanded to offer the burnt-offering upon the altar. And when the burnt-offering began, the song of the Lord began also with the trumpets, and with the instruments ordained by David king of Israel. 28. And all the congregation worshipped, and the singers sang, and the trumpeters sounded: and all this continued until the burnt-offering was finished. 29. And when they had made an end of offering, the king and all that were present with him bowed themselves, and worshipped. 30. Moreover, Hezekiah the king and the princes commanded the Levites to sing praises unto the Lord with the words of David, and of Asaph the seer. And they sang praises with gladness, and they bowed their heads and worshipped. 31. Then Hezekiah answered and said, Now ye have consecrated yourselves unto the Lord, come near, and bring sacrifices and thank-offerings into the house of the Lord. And the congregation brought in sacrifices and thank-offerings; and as many as were of a free heart burnt offerings.."*

*2 Chronicles 29:18-31*

Ahaz, Hezekiah's father, had wallowed in idolatry, worshipping any and every god but Jehovah. He had shut up the Temple, defiled the sacred vessels, and made him altars in every corner of Jerusalem. And the result was that he brought the kingdom very near ruin, was not allowed to be buried in the tombs of the kings, and left his son a heavy task to patch up the mischief he had wrought. Hezekiah began at the right end of his task. In the first year of his reign, in the first month, he set about restoring the worship of Jehovah. The relations with Syria and Damascus would come right if the relations with Judah's God were right. First things first was his motto, and perhaps he discerned the true sequence more accurately than some great political pundits do nowadays. So neglected had the Temple been that a strong force of priests and Levites took a fortnight to carry forth the filthiness out of the holy place to the brook Kidron, and to cleanse and ceremonially sanctify the sacred vessels. Then followed at once the re-establishment of the Temple worship, which is narrated in the passage.

The first thing to be noted is that the whole movement back to Jehovah was a one-man movement. It was Hezekiah's doing and his only. No priest is named as prominent in it, and the slowness of the whole order is especially branded in verse 34. No prophet is named; was there any one prompting the king? Perhaps Isaiah did, though his chapter i. with its scathing repudiation of the burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fed beasts, suggests that he did not think the restoration of sacrifice so important as that the nation should cease to do evil and learn to do well. The people acquiesced in the king's worship of Jehovah, as they had acquiesced in other kings worship of Baal or Moloch or Hadad. When kings take to being religious reformers, they make swift converts, but their work is as slight as it is speedy, and as short-lived as it is rapid. Manasseh was Hezekiah's successor, and swept away all his work after twenty-nine years, and apparently the mass of his people followed him just as they had followed Hezekiah. Religion must be a matter of personal conviction and individual choice. Imposed from without, or adopted because other people adopt it, it is worthless.

Another point to notice is that Hezekiah's reformation was mainly directed to ritual, and does not seem to have included either theology or ethics. Was be quite right in his estimate of what was the first thing? Isaiah, in the passage already referred to, does not seem to think so. To him, as to all the prophets, foul hands could not bring acceptable sacrifices, and worship was an abomination unless preceded by obedience to the command: Put away the evil of your doings from before Mine eyes. The filth in the hearts of the men of Judah was more rank, and smelt to heaven more offensively, than that in the Temple, which took sixteen days to shovel into Kidron. No doubt ceremonial bulked more largely in the days of the Old Covenant than it does in those of the New, and both the then stage of revelation and the then spiritual stature of the recipients of revelation required that it should do so. But the true religious reformers, the prophets, were never weary of insisting that, even in those days, moral and spiritual reformation should come first, and that unless it did, ritual worship, though it were nominally offered to Jehovah, was as abhorrent to Him as if it had been avowedly offered to Baal. Not a little so-called Christian worship today, judged by the same test, is as truly heathen superstition as if it had been paid to Mumbo-Jumbo.

But when all deductions have been made, the scene depicted in the passage is not only an affecting, but an instructive one. Strangely unlike our notions of worship, and to us almost repulsive, must have been the slaying of three hundred and seventy animals and the offering of them as burnt offerings. Try to picture the rivers of blood, the contortions of the dumb brutes, the priests bedaubed with gore, the smell of the burnt flesh, the blare of the trumpets, the shouts of the worshippers, the clashing cymbals, and realise what a world parts it from They went up into the upper chamber where they were abiding ... these all with one accord continued steadfastly in prayer, with the women, and Mary, the mother of Jesus, and with His brethren! Sacrifice has been the essential feature in all religions before Christ. It has dropped out of worship wherever Christ has been accepted. Why? Because it spoke of a deep, permanent, universal need, and because Christ was recognised as having met the need. People who deny the need, and people who deny that Jesus on the Cross has satisfied it, may be invited to explain these two facts, written large on the history of humanity.

That brings us to the most important aspect of Hezekiah's great sacrifice. It sets forth the stages by which men can approach to God. It is symbolic of spiritual facts, and prophetic of Christ's work and of our way of coming to God through Him. The first requisite for Judah's return to Jehovah, whom they had forsaken, was the presentation of a sin offering. The king and the congregation laid their hands on the heads of the goats, thereby, as it were, transferring their own sinful personality to them. Thus laden with the nation's sins, they were slain, and in their death the nation, as it were, bore the penalty of its sin. Representation and substitution were dramatised in the sacrifice. The blood sprinkled on the altar (which had previously been sanctified by sprinkling of blood, and so made capable of presenting what touched it to Jehovah), made atonement for all Israel. We note in passing the emphasis of Israel here, extending the benefit of the sacrifice to the separated tribes of the Northern Kingdom, in a gush of yearning love and desire that they, too, might be reconciled to Jehovah. And is not this the first step towards any man's reconciliation with God? Is not

My faith would lay her hand

On that dear head of Thine,

the true expression of the first requisite for us all? Jesus is the sin-offering for the world. In His death He bears the world's sin. His blood is presented to God, and if we have associated ourselves with Him by faith, that blood sprinkled on the altar covers all our sins.

Then followed in this parabolic ceremonial the burnt offering. And that is the second stage of our return to God, for it expresses the consecration of our forgiven selves, as being consumed by the holy and blessed fire of a self-devotion, kindled by the unspeakable gift, which fire, burning away all foulness, will make us tenfold ourselves. That fire will burn up only our bonds, and we shall walk at liberty in it. And that burnt-offering will always be accompanied with the song of Jehovah, and the joyful sound of the trumpets and the instruments of David. The treasures of Christian poetry have always been inspired by the Cross, and the consequent rapture of self-surrender. Calvary is the true fountain of song.

The last stage in Hezekiah's great sacrifice was thank-offerings, brought by as many as were of a willing heart. And will not the self-devotion, kindled by the fire of love, speak in daily life by practical service, and the whole activities of the redeemed man be a long thank-offering for the Lamb who bears away the sins of the world? And if we do not thus offer our whole lives to God, how shall we profess to have taken the priceless benefit of Christ's death? Hezekiah followed the order laid down in the Law, and it is the only order that leads to the goal. First, the atoning sacrifice of the slain Lamb; next, our identification with Him and it by faith; then the burnt-offering of a surrendered self, with the song of praise sounding ever through it; and last, the life of service, offering all our works to God, and so reaching the perfection of life on earth and antedating the felicities of heaven.