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

**2 KINGS-010. IMPOSSIBLE -- ONLY I SAW IT by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1.* *Then Elisha said, Hear ye the word of the Lord; Thus saith the Lord, Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour he sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria. 2. Then a lord on whose hand the king leaned answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be? And he said, Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof. 3. And there were four leprous men at the entering in of the gate: and they said one to another, Why sit we here until we die? 4. If we say, We will enter into the city, then the famine is in the city, and we shall die there: and if we sit still here, we die also. Now therefore come, and let us fall unto the host of the Syrians: if they save us alive, we shall live; and if they kill us, we shall but die. 5. And they rose up in the twilight, to go unto the camp of the Syrians: and when they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there. 6. For the Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host: and they said one to another, Lo, the king of Israel hath hired against us the kings of the Hittites, and the kings of the Egyptians, to come upon us. 7. Wherefore they arose and fled in the twilight, and left their tents, and their horses, and their asses, even the camp as it was, and fled for their life. 8. And when these lepers came to the uttermost part of the camp, they went into one tent, and did eat and drink, and carried thence silver, and gold, and raiment, and went and hid it; and came again, and entered into another tent, and carried thence also, and went and hid it. 9. Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace: if we tarry till the morning light, some mischief will come upon us: now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household. 10. So they came and called unto the porter of the city: and they told them, saying, We came to the camp of the Syrians, and, behold, there was no man there, neither voice of man, but horses tied, and asses tied, and the tents as they were. 11. And he called the porters; and they told it to the king's house within. 12. And the king arose in the night, and said unto his servants, I will now shew you what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city 13. And one of his servants answered and said, Let some take, I pray thee, five of the horses that remain, which, are left in the city, (behold, they are as all the multitude of Israel that are left in it: behold, I say, they are even as all the multitude of the Israelites that are consumed:) and let us send and see. 14. They took therefore two chariot horses; and the king sent after the host of the Syrians, saying, Go and see. 15. And they went after them unto Jordan: and, lo, all the way was full of garments and vessels, which the Syrians had cast away in their haste. And the messengers returned, and told the king. 16. And the people went out, and spoiled the tents of the Syrians. So a measure of fine flour was sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, according to the word of the Lord."*

*2 Kings 7:1-16*

The keynote of this incident lies in the promise in the first verse. The whole story illustrates man's too frequent rejection of God's promise, and God's wonderful way of fulfilling it.

**I.** We note first the promise which common-sense finds incredible. It came from Elisha when all seemed desperate. The wonderfully vivid narrative in the previous chapter tells a pitiful tale of women boiling their children, of unclean food worth more than its weight in silver, of a king worked up to a pitch of frenzy and murderous designs, and renouncing his allegiance to Jehovah. Such faith as he had was strained to the breaking point, and his messenger was sent to tell the prophet that the king would not wait for the Lord any longer. That was the moment chosen to speak the promise. It came, as God's helps, both of promise and act, so often come, at the very nick of time, when faith is ready to fail and human aid is vain. Before we had learned our hopeless state, they would come too soon for our good; after faith had wholly parted from its moorings, they would come too late.

Note the precision and confidence of the promise. The hour of the fulfilment, and the price of flour and the cheaper barley are stated. Man's promises are vague; God's are specific. Mark, too, the entire silence of the promise as to the mode of its fulfilment. Probably Elisha knew as little as any one, how it was going to be accomplished. The particularity and vagueness combined are remarkable. A hint as to how the thing was to be done would have made the belief in the fact so much easier. Yes, and just because it would have smoothed the road for worthless belief, it was not given, but the apparently impossible promise was left in nakedness, for any one who needed sense to animate his faith, to scoff at. Is not that emphatic assertion of the fact, and emphatic silence as to the how, a frequent characteristic of God's promises? If ever we are kept in the dark as to the latter, it is for our good, and for the encouragement of our growth in utter dependence and perfect trust. It is not well for the trusting soul to ask too curiously about methods intervening between the promise in the present and its accomplishment in the future. It is better for peace and the simplicity of our trust, that we should be content to cling to the faithful word, and to believe... that it shall be even as it was told us, without troubling ourselves about His way of effecting His purposes. Passengers are not admitted to the engine-room, nor allowed on the bridge. Let them leave all the working of the ship to the captain.

**II.** The noble who blurted out his incredulity had a great deal to say for himself from the common-sense and worldly point of view. But he need not have sneered, in the same breath, at old miracles and new. His sarcasm about windows in heaven refers to the story of the flood; and perhaps there is a hint of allusion to the manna. He neither believed these ancient deeds, nor the promise for to-morrow. Why not? Simply because he--wise as he thought himself--could not see any way of bringing it about. There are many of us yet who have the same modest opinion of our own acuteness, and go on the supposition that what we do not see is invisible, and what we cannot do, or imagine done, is impossible. Why should not the Lord make windows in heaven if He please? Or, how does the pert objector know that that is the only way of fulfilling the promise? He will be taught that he has not quite exhausted all the possibilities open to Omnipotence, and that something much simpler than windows in heaven can do what is wanted. Unbelief which rejects God's plain promises because it does not see how they can be fulfilled is common enough still, and is as unreasonable as it is impertinent. Elisha was as ignorant as this nobleman was, of the means, but his faith fixed its eyes on the faithful word, and trusted, while sense, self-conceit, and worldliness, a mole pretending to have an eagle's eye, declared that to be impossible which it could not see the way to bring about, and thereby exposed only its own blind arrogance.

**III.** Elisha's answer (v. 2) sounds like Elijah. The utmost gentleness is stirred to pronounce condemnation on self-confident unbelief, and a gentler gentleness than Elisha's, even Christ's, shrinks not from executing the sentence. Is not the sentence on this scoffing lord the very sentence pronounced ever on unbelief? In his case, it was fulfilled by the crowd that pressed, in their ravenous hunger, through the gate, and trod him down; but in ordinary cases, in our days, the natural operation of unbelief is to shut men out from the fruition, of which faith is the necessary and only condition. It is no avenging and arbitrarily imposed exclusion, but the necessary result of self-made disqualification, which brings on the unbeliever the doom, Thou shalt not eat thereof. The blessings of the religious life on earth, and the glories of its perfection in heaven, are only enjoyable through faith. These are not so plainly visible to the unbelieving heart as the scene at the gate was to the nobleman; but, in some measure, even those who do not possess them do, in some lucid moments, see their worth. It is one sad part of the sad lives of godless men that they have their seasons of calm weather, when, in the clearer atmosphere, they catch glimpses of their true good, but that they yet do not behold it long and close enough to be smitten with the desire to possess it; and so the sight remains inoperative, or adds to their condemnation. Not to taste is the sadder fate, because there has been sight. To have eyes opened at last to our own folly, and to see the rich provision of God's table, when it is too late, will be a chief pang of future retribution,--as it sometimes is of present god-lessness.

**IV.** Passing over for the present the account of the discovery by the four lepers, we may next note God's way of fulfilling His promise. A panic would spread fast in an undisciplined army, and history supplies examples of the swift change into a mob under the influence of groundless terror. There is nothing wonderful in the helter-skelter rush for the Jordan, or in the road being littered with abandoned baggage. The divine intervention produced the impression which naturally brought the flight about, and the coincidence of the prophecy and the panic which fulfilled it stamp both as divinely originated. But if we looked on events as devoutly, and saw into their true character as deeply as the author of the Books of Kings does, we should see that many a similar coincidence, which we trace no farther than to men or circumstances, was due to the same divine cause which made the Syrians to hear the noise of a great host. Track the river of life to its source, and you come to God.

The wicked fleeth when no man pursueth. Imaginary terrors are apt to beset those who have no trust in God. If we fear Him, we need have no other fear; but if we have not Him for our anchorage, we shall be driven by gusts of passion and terror. The unseen possibilities of attack and defeat may well terrify a man who has not the unseen God to keep him calm.

Windows in heaven, then, were not needed, and the arrogance which said Impossible! had not measured all the resources of God. A very wise scientist here in England proved that the Atlantic could not be crossed by a steamer, and the first steamer that did cross took out copies of his book. How foolish men's demonstrations of impossibility look beside God's deliverances! We have not gone through all the chambers of His storehouse, and His ways are far above, out of our sight. Let us hold fast by the faith that His arm is strong to do whatever His lips are gracious to engage, nor let our inability to see where the river gets through the mountains ever make us doubt that it will reach the sunlit ocean.

**V.** We may throw together the remaining parts of the incident, as showing how the fulfilled promise was received. These four lepers had heard nothing of it, when despair made them venturesome. How reckless they were, and how they harp on the one gloomy word die! The thought was familiar to them, and yet, lepers though they were, life was sweet, and a chance of prolonging it, even as slaves, was worth trying. They chose twilight, that they might be unobserved. We can see them creeping cautiously, with beating hearts, towards the camp, expecting every moment to be challenged, and possibly slain. How their caution would diminish and their wonder grow, as they passed from end to end, and found no one! There stood the horses and asses, left behind lest their footfalls should betray the flight, and every tent empty of men and full of spoil. The lepers seem to have gone right through the camp before they ventured to begin plundering; for the uttermost part in verse 5 and that in verse 8 are naturally understood of its opposite extremities. Then, secure against surprise, they eat and drink as ravenously as men who had been starving so long would do. Twilight had deepened into darkness before hunger and greed were satisfied. Not till then did they awake to their duty; and even when they bethink themselves, it is fear of punishment, not care for a city full of hungry men, that moves them. But their tardy awaking to duty is couched in words which carry a great truth, especially to all who have tasted the Bread of Life. It is not well to hold our peace in a day of good tidings. If we have good news, especially the good news, its possession obliges us to impart it. If we have tasted the graciousness of the Lord, we are bound to tell of the stores we have found. He that withholdeth corn, the people shall curse him. Of how much sorer punishment...shall he be thought worthy, who keeps to himself the food of the world?

Lepers were strange messengers of good, but the message graces the bringer, and they who tell good tidings are sure of a welcome. God does not choose great men for the heralds of His mercy, but the qualification is personal experience. These four could only say, We have seen and tasted, but that was enough. The king's caution was very natural, and would have been quite blameless, if God's promise had not been spoken the day before. But that made the slowness to believe a sin. Feeling one's way over untried ice is prudent; but if we have previously been told that it will bear, it proves our distrust of him who told us. The despatch of the chariots to make a reconnaissance was needless trouble. But men are always apt to think that faith is but a shaky ground of certitude unless it be backed up by sense. When God gives us His word to trust to, we are wisest if we trust to it alone, and we may save ourselves the trouble of sending out scouts to see if it is really beginning to be fulfilled. Elisha had no need to wait the report of the charioteers before he believed in the fulfilment of the promise, which others had found incredible when spoken, and too good to be true even when fulfilled. Let us trust God, whether sense can attest the incipient accomplishment of His words or no.