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

**ACTS-003. THE FORTY DAYS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"To whom also He shewed Himself alive after His passion by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God."*

*Acts 1:3*

The forty days between the Resurrection and the Ascension have distinctly marked characteristics. They are unlike to the period before them in many respects, but completely similar in others; they have a preparatory character throughout; they all bear on the future work of the disciples, and hearten them for the time when they should be left alone.

The words of the text give us their leading features. They bring out--

**I. Their evidential value, as confirming the fact of the Resurrection.**

* He showed Himself alive after His passion by ... proofs.
* By sight, repeated, to individuals, to companies, to Mary in her solitary sadness, to Peter the penitent, to the two on the road to Emmaus. At all hours: in the evening when the doors were shut; in the morning; in grey twilight; in daytime on the road. At many places--in houses, out of doors.
* The signs of true corporeity--the sight, the eating.
* The signs of bodily identity,--Reach hither thy hand. He showed them His hands and His side.

Was this the glorified body?

The affirmative answer is usually rested on the facts that He was not known by Mary or the disciples on the road to Emmaus, and that He came into the upper room when the doors were shut. But the force of these facts is broken by remembering that Mary saw nothing about Him unlike other men, but supposed Him to be the gardener--which puts the idea of a glorified body out of the question, and leaves us to suppose that she was full of weeping indifference to any one.

Then as to the disciples on the road to Emmaus, Luke carefully tells us that the reason why they did not know Him was in them and not in Him--that it was because their eyes were holden, not because His body was changed.

And as to His coming when the doors were shut, why should not that be like the other miracles, when He conveyed Himself away, a multitude being in the place, and when He walked on the waters?

There cannot then be anything decidedly built on these facts, and the considerations on the other side are very strong. Surely the whole drift of the narrative goes in the direction of representing Christ's glory as beginning with His Ascension, and consequently the body of His glory as being then assumed. Further, the argument of 1 Cor. xv. goes on the assumption that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God, that is, that the material corporeity is incongruous with, and incapable of entrance into, the conditions of that future life, and, by parity of reasoning, that the spiritual body, which is to be conformed to the body of Christ's glory, is incongruous with, and incapable of entrance into, the conditions of this earthly life. As is the environment, so must be the body that is at home in it.

Further, the facts of our Lord's eating and drinking after His Resurrection are not easily reconcilable with the contention that He was then invested with the glorified body.

We must, then, think of transfiguration, rather than of resurrection only, as the way by which He passed into the heavens. He slept but woke, and, as He ascended, was changed.

**II. The renewal of the old bond by the tokens of His unchanged disposition.**

Recall the many beautiful links with the past: the message to Peter; that to Mary; Tell My brethren, He was known in breaking of bread, Peace be with you! (repetition from John xvii.), the miraculous draught of fishes, and the meal and conversation afterwards, recalling the miracle at the beginning of the closer association of the four Apostles of the first rank with their Lord. The forty days revealed the old heart, the old tenderness. He remembers all the past. He sends a message to the penitent; He renews to the faithful the former gift of peace.

How precious all this is as a revelation of the impotence of death in regard to Him and us! It assures us of the perpetuity of His love. He showed Himself after His passion as the same old Self, the same old tender Lover. His appearances then prepare us for the last vision of Him in the Apocalypse, in which we see His perpetual humanity, His perpetual tenderness, and hear Him saying: I am ... the Living One, and I became dead, and behold, I am alive for evermore.

These forty days assure us of the narrow limits of the power of death. Love lives through death, memory lives through it. Christ has lived through it and comes up from the grave, serene and tender, with unruffled peace, with all the old tones of tenderness in the voice that said Mary! So may we be sure that through death and after it we shall live and be ourselves. We, too, shall show ourselves alive after we have experienced the superficial change of death.

**III. The change in Christ's relations to the disciples and to the world. Appearing unto them by the space of forty days.**

The words mark a contrast to Christ's former constant intercourse with the disciples. This is occasional; He appears at intervals during the forty days. He comes amongst them and disappears. He is seen again in the morning light by the lake-side and goes away. He tells them to come and meet Him in Galilee. That intermittent presence prepared the disciples for His departure. It was painful and educative. It carried out His own word, And now I am no more in the world.

We observe in the disciples traces of a deeper awe. They say little. Master! My Lord and my God! None durst ask Him, Who art Thou? Even Peter ventures only on Lord, Thou knowest all things, and on one flash of the old familiarity: What shall this man do? John, who recalls very touchingly, in that appendix to his Gospel, the blessed time when he leaned on Jesus' breast at supper, now only humbly follows, while the others sit still and awed, by that strange fire on the banks of the lonely lake.

A clearer vision of the Lord on their parts, a deeper sense of who He is, make them assume more of the attitude of worshippers, though not less that of friends. And He can no more dwell with them, and go in and out among them.

As for the world--It seeth Me no more, but ye see Me. He was seen of them, not of others. There is no more appeal to the people, no more teaching, no more standing in the Temple. Why is this? Is it not the commentary on His own word on the Cross, It is finished! marking most distinctly that His work on earth was ended when He died, and so confirming that conception of His earthly mission which sees its culmination and centre of power in the Cross?

**IV. Instruction and prophecy for the future.**

The preparation of the disciples for their future work and condition was a chief purpose of the forty days. Jesus spoke of the things pertaining to the Kingdom of God. He also gave commandments to the Apostles.

Note how much there is, in His conversations with them--

1. Of opening to them the Scriptures. Christ must needs suffer, etc.

2. Of lessons for their future, thus fitting them for their task.

3. Mark how this transitional period taught them that His going away was not to be sorrow and loss, but joy and gain, Touch Me not, for I have not yet ascended.

Our present relation to the ascended Lord is as much an advance on that of the disciples to the risen Lord, as that was on their relation to Him during His earthly life. They had more real communion with Him when, with opened hearts, they heard Him interpret the Scriptures concerning Himself, and fell at His feet crying My Lord and my God! though they saw Him but for short seasons and at intervals, than when day by day they were with Him and knew Him not. As they grew in love and ripened in knowledge, they knew Him better and better.

For us, too, these forty days are full of blessed lessons, teaching us that real communion with Jesus is attained by faith in Him, and that He is still working in and for us, and is still present with us. The joy with which the disciples saw Him ascend should live on in us as we think of Him enthroned. The hope that the angels' message lit up in their hearts should burn in ours. The benediction which the Risen Lord uttered on those who have not seen and yet have believed falls in double measure on those who, though now they see Him not, yet believing rejoice in Jesus with joy unspeakable and full of glory.