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

**ACTS-009. THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"36.* *Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ."*

*Acts 2:36*

It is no part of my purpose at this time to consider the special circumstances under which these words were spoken, nor even to enter upon an exposition of their whole scope. I select them for one reason, the occurrence in them of the three names by which we designate our Saviour--Jesus, Lord, Christ. To us they are very little more than three proper names; they were very different to these men who listened to the characteristically vehement discourse of the Apostle Peter. It wanted some courage to stand up at Pentecost and proclaim on the housetop what he had spoken in the ear long ago, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God! To most of his listeners to say Jesus is the Christ was folly, and to say Jesus is the Lord was blasphemy.

The three names are names of the same Person, but they proclaim altogether different aspects of His work and His character. The name Jesus is the name of the Man, and brings to us a Brother; the name Christ is the name of office, and brings to us a Redeemer; the name Lord is the name of dignity, and brings to us a King.

**I. First, then, the name Jesus is the name of the Man, and tells us of a Brother.**

There were many men in Palestine who bore the name of Jesus when He bore it. We find that one of the early Christians had it; and it comes upon us with almost a shock when we read that Jesus, called Justus, was the name of one of the friends of the Apostle Paul (Col. iv. 11). But, through reverence on the part of Christians, and through horror on the part of Jews, the name ceased to be a common one; and its disappearance from familiar use has hid from us the fact of its common employment at the time when our Lord bore it. Though it was given to Him as indicative of His office of saving His people from their sins, yet none of all the crowds who knew Him as Jesus of Nazareth supposed that in His name there was any greater significance than in those of the Simon's, John's, and Judah's in the circle of His disciples.

Now the use of Jesus as the proper name of our Lord is very noticeable. In the Gospels, as a rule, it stands alone hundreds of times, whilst in combination with any other of the titles it is rare. Jesus Christ, for instance, only occurs, if I count aright, twice in Matthew, once in Mark, twice in John. But if you turn to the Epistles and the latter books of the Scriptures, the proportions are reversed. There you have a number of instances of the occurrence of such combinations as Jesus Christ, Christ Jesus, The Lord Jesus, Christ the Lord, and more rarely the full solemn title, The Lord Jesus Christ, but the occurrence of the proper name Jesus alone is the exception. So far as I know, there are only some thirty or forty instances of its use singly in the whole of the books of the New Testament outside of the four Evangelists. The occasions where it is used are all of them occasions in which one may see that the writer's intention is to put strong emphasis, for some reason or other, on the Manhood of our Lord Jesus, and to assert, as broadly as may be, His entire participation with us in the common conditions of our human nature, corporeal and mental.

And I think I shall best bring out the meaning and worth of the name by putting a few of these instances before you.

For example, more than once we find phrases like these: we believe that Jesus died, having therefore boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, and the like--which emphasise His death as the death of a man like ourselves, and bring us close to the historical reality of His human pains and agonies for us. Christ died is a statement which makes the purpose and efficacy of His death more plain, but Jesus died shows us His death as not only the work of the appointed Messiah, but as the act of our brother man, the outcome of His human love, and never rightly to be understood if His work be thought of apart from His personality.

There is brought into view, too, prominently, the side of Christ's sufferings which we are all apt to forget--the common human side of His agonies and His pains. I know that a certain school of preachers, and some unctuous religious hymns, and other forms of composition, dwell, a great deal too much for reverence, upon the mere physical aspect of Christ's sufferings. But the temptation, I believe, with most of us is to dwell too little upon that,--to argue about the death of Christ, to think about it as a matter of speculation, to regard it as a mysterious power, to look upon it as an official act of the Messiah who was sent into the world for us; and to forget that He bore a manhood like our own, a body that was impatient of pains and wounds and sufferings, and a human life which, like all human lives, naturally recoiled and shrank from the agony of death.

And whilst, therefore, the great message, It is Christ that died, is ever to be pondered, we have also to think with sympathy and gratitude on the homelier representation coming nearer to our hearts, which proclaims that Jesus died. Let us not forget the Brother's manhood that had to agonise and to suffer and to die as the price of our salvation.

Again, when the Scripture would set our Lord before us, as in His humanity, our pattern and example, it sometimes uses this name, in order to give emphasis to the thought of His Manhood--as, for example, in the words of the Epistle to the Hebrews, looking unto Jesus, the Author and Perfecter of faith. That is to say--a mighty stimulus to all brave perseverance in our efforts after higher Christian nobleness lies in the vivid and constant realisation of the true manhood of our Lord, as the type of all goodness, as having Himself lived by faith, and that in a perfect degree and manner. We are to turn away our eyes from contemplating all other lives and motives, and to look off from them to Him. In all our struggles let us think of Him. Do not take poor human creatures for your ideal of excellence, nor tune your harps to their keynotes. To imitate men is degradation, and is sure to lead to deformity. None of them, is a safe guide. Black veins are in the purest marble, and flaws in the most lustrous diamonds. But to imitate Jesus is freedom, and to be like Him is perfection. Our code of morals is His life. He is the Ideal incarnate. The secret of all progress is, Run--looking unto Jesus.

Then, again, we have His manhood emphasised when His sympathy is to be commended to our hearts. The great High Priest, who is passed into the heavens is Jesus ... who was in all points tempted like as we are. To every sorrowing soul, to all men burdened with heavy tasks, unwelcome duties, pains and sorrows of the imagination, or of the heart, or of memory, or of physical life, or of circumstances--to all there comes the thought, Every ill that flesh is heir to He knows by experience, and in the Man Jesus we find not only the pity of a God, but the sympathy of a Brother.

When one of our princes goes for an afternoon into the slums in East London, everybody says, and says deservedly, right! and princely! This prince has learned pity in the huts where poor men lie, and knows by experience all their squalor and misery. The Man Jesus is the sympathetic Priest. The Rabbis, who did not usually see very far into the depth of things, yet caught a wonderful glimpse when they said: Messias will be found sitting outside the gate of the city amongst the lepers. That is where He sits; and the perfectness of His sympathy, and the completeness of His identification of Himself with all our tears and our sorrows, are taught us when we read that our High Priest is not merely Christ the Official, but Jesus the Man.

And then we find such words as these: If we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him': I think any one that reads with sympathy must feel how very much closer to our hearts that consolation comes, Jesus rose again, than even the mighty word which the Apostle uses on another occasion, Christ is risen from the dead. The one tells us of the risen Redeemer, the other tells us of the risen Brother. And wherever there are sorrowing souls, enduring loss and following their dear ones into the darkness with yearning hearts, they are comforted when they feel that the beloved dead lie down beside their Brother, and with their Brother they shall rise again.

So, again, most strikingly, and yet somewhat singularly, in the words of Scripture which paint most loftily the exaltation of the risen Saviour to the right hand of God, and His wielding of absolute power and authority, it is the old human name that is used; as if the writers would bind together the humiliation and the exaltation, and were holding up hands of wonder at the thought that a Man had risen thus to the Throne of the Universe. What an emphasis and glow of hope there is in such words as these: We see not yet all things put under Him, but we see Jesus--the very Man that was here with us-- crowned with glory and honour. So in the Book of the Revelation the chosen name for Him who sits amidst the glories of the heavens, and settles the destinies of the universe, and orders the course of history, is Jesus. As if the Apostle would assure us that the face which looked down upon him from amidst the blaze of the glory was indeed the face that he knew long ago upon earth, and the breast that was girded with a golden girdle was the breast upon which he so often had leaned his happy head.

So the ties that bind us to the Man Jesus should be the human bonds that knit us to one another, transferred to Him and purified and strengthened. All that we have failed to find in men we can find in Him. Human wisdom has its limits, but here is a Man whose word is truth, who is Himself the truth. Human love is sometimes hollow, often impotent; it looks down upon us, as a great thinker has said, like the Venus of Milo, that lovely statue, smiling in pity, but it has no arms. But here is a love that is mighty to help, and on which we can rely without disappointment or loss. Human excellence is always limited and imperfect, but here is One whom we may imitate and be pure. So let us do like that poor woman in the Gospel story--bring our precious alabaster box of ointment--the love of these hearts of ours, which is the most precious thing we have to give. The box of ointment that we have so often squandered upon unworthy heads--let us come and pour it upon His, not unmingled with our tears, and anoint Him, our beloved and our King. This Man has loved each of us with a brother's heart; let us love Him with all our hearts.

**II. So much for the first name. The second--Christ--is the name of office, and brings to us a Redeemer.**

I need not dwell at any length upon the original significance and force of the name; it is familiar, of course, to us all. It stands as a transference into Greek of the Hebrew Messias; the one and the other meaning, as we all know, the Anointed. But what is the meaning of claiming for Jesus that He is anointed? A sentence will answer the question. It means that He fulfils all which the inspired imagination of the great ones of the past had seen in that dim Figure that rose before prophet and psalmist. It means that He is anointed or inspired by the divine indwelling to be Prophet, Priest, and King all over the world. It means that He is--though the belief had faded away from the minds of His generation--a sufferer whilst a Prince, and appointed to turn away unrighteousness from the world, and not from Jacob only, by a sacrifice and a death.

I cannot see less in the contents of the Jewish idea, the prophetic idea, of the Messias, than these points: divine inspiration or anointing; a sufferer who is to redeem; the fulfiller of all the rapturous visions of psalmist and of prophet in the past.

And so, when Peter stood up amongst that congregation of wondering strangers and scowling Pharisees, and said, The Man that died on the Cross, the Rabbi-peasant from half-heathen Galilee, is the Person to whom Law and Prophets have been pointing,--no wonder that no one believed him except those whose hearts were touched, for it is never possible for the common mind, at any epoch, to believe that a man who stands beside them is very much bigger than themselves. Great men have always to die, and get a halo of distance around them, before their true stature can be seen.

And now two remarks are all I can afford myself upon this point, and one is this: the hearty recognition of His Messiahship is the centre of all discipleship. The earliest and the simplest Christian creed, which yet--like the little brown roll in which the infant beech-leaves lie folded up--contains in itself all the rest, was this: Jesus is Christ. Although it is no part of my business to say how much imperfection and confusion of head comprehension may co-exist with a heart acceptance of Jesus that saves a soul from sin, yet I cannot in faithfulness to my own convictions conceal my belief that he who contents himself with Jesus and does not grasp Christ has cast away the most valuable and characteristic part of the Christianity which he professes. Surely a most simple inference is that a Christian is at least a man who recognises the Christ-ship of Jesus. And I press that upon you, my friends. It is not enough for the sustenance of your own souls and for the cultivation of a vigorous religious life that men should admire, howsoever profoundly and deeply, the humanity of the Lord unless that humanity leads them on to see the office of the Messiah to whom their whole hearts cleave. Jesus is the Christ is the minimum Christian creed.

And then, still further, let me remind you how the recognition of Jesus as Christ is essential to giving its full value to the facts of the manhood. Jesus died! Yes. What then? What is that to me? Is that all that I have to say? If His is simply a human death, like all others, I want to know what makes the story of it a Gospel. I want to know what more interest I have in it than I have in the death of Socrates, or in the death of any man or woman whose name was in the obituary column of yesterday's newspaper. Jesus died. That is a fact. What is wanted to turn the fact into a gospel? That I shall know who it was that died, and why He died. I declare unto you the gospel which I preach, Paul says, how that Christ died for our sins, according to the Scriptures. The belief that the death of Jesus was the death of the Christ is needful in order that it shall be the means of my deliverance from the burden of sin. If it be only the death of Jesus, it is beautiful, pathetic, as many another martyr's has been, but if it be the death of Christ, then my faith can lay her hand on that great Sacrifice and know her guilt was there.

So in regard to His perfect example. If we only see His manhood when we are looking unto Jesus, the contemplation of His perfection would be as paralysing as spectacles of supreme excellence usually are. But when we can say, Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, and so can deepen the thought of His Manhood into that of His Messiahship, and the conception of His work as example into that of His work as sacrifice, we can hope that His divine power will dwell in us to mould our lives to the likeness of His human life of perfect obedience.

So in regard to His Resurrection and glorious Ascension to the right hand of God. We have not only to think of the solitary man raised from the grave and caught up to the throne. If it were only Jesus who rose and ascended, His Resurrection and Ascension might be as much to us as the raising of Lazarus, or the rapture of Elijah-- namely, a demonstration that death did not destroy conscious being, and that a man could rise to heaven; but they would be no more. But if Christ is risen from the dead, He is become the first-fruits of them that slept. If Jesus has gone up on high, others may or may not follow in His train. He may show that manhood is not incapable of elevation to heaven, but has no power to draw others up after Him. But if Christ is gone up, He is gone to prepare a place for us, not to fill a solitary throne, and His Ascension is the assurance that He will lift us too to dwell with Him and share His triumph over death and sin.

Most of the blessedness and beauty of His Example, all the mystery and meaning of His Death, and all the power of His Resurrection, depend on the fact that it is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God.

**III. The Lord is the name of dignity and brings before us the King.**

There are three grades, so to speak, of dignity expressed by this one word Lord in the New Testament. The lowest is that in which it is almost the equivalent of our own English title of respectful courtesy, Sir, in which sense it is often used in the Gospels, and applied to our Lord as to many other of the persons there. The second is that in which it expresses dignity and authority--and in that sense it is frequently applied to Christ. The third and highest is that in which it is the equivalent of the Old Testament Lord, as a divine name; in which sense also it is applied to Christ in the New Testament.

The first and last of these may be left out of consideration now: the central one is the meaning of the word here. I have only time to touch upon two thoughts--to connect this name of dignity first with one and then with the other of the two names that we have already considered.

Jesus is Lord, that is to say, wonderful as it is, His manhood is exalted to supreme dignity. It is the teaching of the New Testament, that in Jesus, the Child of Mary, our nature sits on the throne of the universe and rules over all things. Those rude herdsmen, brothers of Joseph, who came into Pharaoh's palace--strange contrast to their tents!--there found their brother ruling over that ancient and highly civilised land! We have the Man Jesus for the Lord over all. Trust His dominion and rejoice in His rule, and bow before His authority. Jesus is Lord.

Christ is Lord. That is to say: His sovereign authority and dominion are built upon the fact of His being Deliverer, Redeemer, Sacrifice. His Kingdom is a Kingdom that rests upon His suffering. Wherefore God also hath exalted Him, and given Him a Name that is above every name.

It is because He wears a vesture dipped in blood, that on the vesture is the name written "King of kings, and Lord of lords." It is because He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, as the prophetic psalm has it, that all kings shall fall down before Him and all nations shall serve Him. Because He has given His life for the world He is the Master of the World. His humanity is raised to the throne because His humanity stooped to the cross. As long as men's hearts can be touched by absolute unselfish surrender, and as long as they can know the blessedness of responsive surrender, so long will He who gave Himself for the world be the Sovereign of the world, and the First-born from the dead be the Prince of all the kings of the earth.

And so, dear friends, our thoughts to-day all point to this lesson-- do not you content yourselves with a maimed Christ. Do not tarry in the Manhood; do not think it enough to cherish reverence for the nobility of His soul, the gentle wisdom of His words, the beauty of His character, the tenderness of His compassion. All these will be insufficient for your needs. There is more in His mission than these --even His death for you and for all men. Take Him for your Christ, but do not lose the Person in the Work, any more than you lose the work in the Person. And be not content with an intellectual recognition of Him, but bring Him the faith which cleaves to Him and His work as its only hope and peace, and the love which, because of His work as Christ, flows out to the beloved Person who has done it all. Thus loving Jesus and trusting Christ, you will bring obedience to your Lord and homage to your King, and learn the sweetness and power of the name that is above every name--the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.

May we all be able, with clear and unfaltering conviction of our understandings and loving affiance of our whole souls, to repeat as our own the grand words in which so many centuries have proclaimed their faith--words which shed a spell of peacefulness over stormy lives, and fling a great light of hope into the black jaws of the grave: I believe in Jesus Christ, His only Son, our Lord!