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

**ACTS-011. A FOURFOLD CORD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved."*

*Acts 2:47*

And the Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved.--(R. V.) You observe that the principal alterations of these words in the Revised Version are two: the one the omission of the church, the other the substitution of were being saved for such as should be saved. The former of these changes has an interest as suggesting that at the early period referred to the name of the church had not yet been definitely attached to the infant community, and that the word afterwards crept into the text at a time when ecclesiasticism had become a great deal stronger than it was at the date of the writing of the Acts of the Apostles. The second of the changes is of more importance. The Authorised Version's rendering suggests that salvation is a future thing, which in one aspect is partially true. The Revised Version, which is also by far the more literally accurate, suggests the other idea, that salvation is a process going on all through the course of a Christian man's life. And that carries very large and important lessons.

**I. I ask you to notice here, first, the profound conception which the writer had of the present action of the ascended Christ. The Lord added to them day by day those that were being saved.**

Then Christ (for it is He that is here spoken of as the Lord), the living, ascended Christ, was present in, and working with, that little community of believing souls. You will find that the thought of a present Saviour, who is the life-blood of the Church on earth, and the spring of action for all good that is done in it and by it, runs through the whole of this Book of the Acts of the Apostles. The keynote is struck in its first verses: The former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up. That is the description of Luke's Gospel, and it implies that the Acts of the Apostles is the second treatise, which tells all that Jesus continued to do and teach after that He was taken up. So the Lord, the ascended Christ, is the true theme and hero of this book. It is He, for instance, who sends down the Spirit on the Day of Pentecost. It is He whom the dying martyr sees standing at the right hand of God, ready to help. It is He who appears to the persecutor on the road to Damascus. It is He who sends Paul and his company to preach in Europe. It is He who opens hearts for the reception of their message. It is He who stands by the Apostle in a vision, and bids him be of good cheer, and go forth upon his work. Thus, at every crisis in the history of the Church, it is the Lord--that is to say, Christ Himself--who is revealed as working in them and for them, the ascended but yet eve-present Guide, Counsellor, Inspirer, Protector, and Rewarder of them that put their trust in Him. So here it is He that adds to the Church daily them that were being saved.

I believe, dear brethren, that modern Christianity has far too much lost the vivid impression of this present Christ as actually dwelling and working among us. What is good in us and what is bad in us conspire to make us think more of the past work of an ascended Christ than of the present work of an indwelling Christ. We cannot think too much of that Cross by which He has laid the foundation for the salvation and reconciliation of all the world; but we may easily think too exclusively of it, and so fix our thoughts upon that work which He completed when on Calvary He said, It is finished! as to forget the continual work which will never be finished until His Church is perfected, and the world is redeemed. If we are a Church of Christ at all, we have Christ in very deed among us, and working through us and on us. And unless we have, in no mystical and unreal and metaphorical sense, but in the simplest and yet grandest prose reality, that living Saviour here in our hearts and in our fellowship, better that these walls were levelled with the ground, and this congregation scattered to the four winds of heaven. The present Christ is the life of His Church.

Notice, and that but for a moment, for I shall have to deal with it more especially at another part of this discourse,--the specific action which is here ascribed to Him. He adds to the Church, not we, not our preaching, not our eloquence, our fervour, our efforts. These may be the weapons in His hands, but the hand that wields the weapon gives it all its power to wound and to heal, and it is Christ Himself who, by His present energy, is here represented as being the Agent of all the good that is done by any Christian community, and the Builder-up of His Churches, in numbers and in power.

It is His will for, His ideal of, a Christian Church, that continuously it should be gathering into its fellowship those that are being saved. That is His meaning in the establishment of His Church upon earth, and that is His will concerning it and concerning us, and the question should press on every society of Christians: Does our reality correspond to Christ's ideal? Are we, as a portion of His great heritage, being continually replenished by souls that come to tell what God has done for them? Is there an unbroken flow of such into what we call our communion? I speak to you members of this church, and I ask you to ponder the question,--Is it so? and the other question, If it is not so, wherefore? The Lord added daily,-- why does not the Lord add daily to us?

**II. Let us go to the second part of this text, and see if we can find an answer. Notice how emphatically there is brought out here the attractive power of an earnest and pure Church.**

My text is the end of a sentence. What is the beginning of the sentence? Listen,--All that believed were together, and had all things common; and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the Temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart, praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added. Yes; of course. Suppose you were like these people. Suppose this church and congregation bore stamped upon it, plain and deep as the broad arrow of the king, these characteristics--manifest fraternal unity, plain unselfish unworldliness, habitual unbroken devotion, gladness which had in it the solemnity of Heaven, and a transparent simplicity of life and heart, which knew nothing of by-ends and shabby, personal motives or distracting duplicity of purpose--do you not think that the Lord would add to you daily such as should be saved? Or, to put it into other words, wherever there is a little knot of men obviously held together by a living Christ, and obviously manifesting in their lives and characters the likeness of that Christ transforming and glorifying them, there will be drawn to them--by natural gravitation, I was going to say, but we may more correctly say, by the gravitation which is natural in the supernatural realm--souls that have been touched by the grace of the Lord, and souls to whom that grace has been brought the nearer by looking upon them. Wherever there is inward vigour of life there will be outward growth; and the Church which is pure, earnest, living will be a Church which spreads and increases.

Historically, it has always been the case that in God's Church seasons of expansion have followed upon seasons of deepened spiritual life on the part of His people. And the only kind of growth which is wholesome, and to be desired in a Christian community, is growth as a consequence of the revived religiousness of the individuals who make up the community.

And just in like manner as such a community will draw to it men who are like-minded, so it will repel from it all the formalist people. There are congregations that have the stamp of worldliness so deep upon them that any persons who want to be burdened with as little religion as may be respectable will find themselves at home there. And I come to you Christian people here, for whose Christian character I am in some sense and to some degree responsible, with this appeal: Do you see to it that, so far as your influence extends, this community of ours be such as that half-dead Christians will never think of coming near us, and those whose religion is tepid will be repelled from us, but that they who love the Lord Jesus Christ with earnest devotion and lofty consecration, and seek to live unworldly and saint-like lives, shall recognise in us men like-minded, and from whom they may draw help. I beseech you--if you will not misunderstand the expression--make your communion such that it will repel as well as attract; and that people will find nothing here to draw them to an easy religion of words and formalism, beneath which all vermin of worldliness and selfishness may lurk, but will recognise in us a church of men and women who are bent upon holiness, and longing for more and more conformity to the divine Master.

Now, if all this be true, it is possible for worldly and stagnant communities calling themselves Churches to thwart Christ's purpose, and to make it both impossible and undesirable that He should add to them souls for whom He has died. It is a solemn thing to feel that we may clog Christ's chariot-wheels, that there may be so little spiritual life in us, as a congregation, that, if I may so say, He dare not intrust us with the responsibility of guarding and keeping the young converts whom He loves and tends. We may not be fit to be trusted with them, and that may be why we do not get them. It may not be good for them that they should be dropped into the refrigerating atmosphere of such a church, and that may be why they do not come.

Depend upon it, brethren, that, far more than my preaching, your lives will determine the expansion of this church of ours. And if my preaching is pulling one way and your lives the other, and I have half an hour a week for talk and you have seven days for contradictory life, which of the two do you think is likely to win in the tug? I beseech you, take the words that I am now trying to speak, to yourselves. Do not pass them to the man in the next pew and think how well they fit him, but accept them as needed by you. And remember, that just as a bit of sealing-wax, if you rub it on your sleeve and so warm it, develops an attractive power, the Church which is warmed will draw many to itself. If the earlier words of this context apply to any Christian community, then certainly its blessed promise too will apply to it, and to such a church the Lord will add day by day them that are being saved.

**III. And now, lastly, observe the definition given here of the class of persons gathered into the community.**

I have already observed, in the earlier portion of this discourse, that here we have salvation represented as a process, a progressive thing which runs on all through life. In the New Testament there are various points of view from which that great idea of salvation is represented. It is sometimes spoken of as past, in so far as in the definite act of conversion and the first exercise of faith in Jesus Christ the whole subsequent evolution and development are involved, and the process of salvation has its beginning then, when a man turns to God. It is sometimes spoken of as present, in so far as the joy of deliverance from evil and possession of good, which is God, is realised day by day. It is sometimes spoken of as future, in so far as all the imperfect possession and pre-libations of salvation which we taste here on earth prophesy and point onwards to their own perfecting in the climax of heaven. But all these three points of view, past, present, and future, may be merged into this one of my text, which speaks of every saint on earth, from the infantile to the most mature, as standing in the same row, though at different points; walking on the same road, though advanced different distances; all participant of the same process of being saved.

Through all life the deliverance goes on, the deliverance from sin, the deliverance from wrath. The Christian salvation, then, according to the teaching of this emphatic phrase, is a process begun at conversion, carried on progressively through the life, and reaching its climax in another state. Day by day, through the spring and the early summer, the sun shines longer in the sky, and rises higher in the heavens; and the path of the Christian is as the shining light. Last year's greenwood is this year's hardwood; and the Christian, in like manner, has to grow in the grace and knowledge of the Lord and Saviour. So these progressively, and, therefore, as yet imperfectly, saved people, were gathered into the Church.

Now I have but two things to say about that. If that be the description of the kind of folk that come into a Christian Church, the duties of that Church are very plainly marked. And the first great one is to see to it that the community help the growth of its members. There are Christian Churches--I do not say whether ours is one of them or not--into which, if a young plant is brought, it is pretty sure to be killed. The temperature is so low that the tender shoots are nipped as with frost, and die. I have seen people, coming all full of fervour and of faith, into Christian congregations, and finding that the average round them was so much lower than their own, that they have cooled down after a time to the fashionable temperature, and grown indifferent like their brethren. Let us, dear friends, remember that a Christian Church is a nursery of imperfect Christians, and, for ourselves and for one another, try to make our communion such as shall help shy and tender graces to unfold themselves, and woo out, by the encouragement of example, the lowest and the least perfect to lofty holiness and consecration like the Master's.

And if I am speaking to any in this congregation who hold aloof from Christian fellowship for more or less sufficient reasons, let me press upon them, in one word, that if they are conscious of a possession, however imperfect, of that incipient salvation, their place is thereby determined, and they are doing wrong if they do not connect themselves with some Christian Communion, and stand forth as members of Christ's Church.

And now one last word. I have tried to show you that salvation, in the New Testament, is regarded as a process. The opposite thing is a process too. There is a very awful contrast in one of Paul's Epistles. The preaching of the Cross is to them who are in the act of perishing foolishness; unto us who are being saved, it is the power of God. These two processes start, as it were, from the same point, one by slow degrees and almost imperceptible motion, rising higher and higher, the other, by slow degrees and almost unconscious descent, sliding steadily and fatally downward ever further and further. And my point now is that in each of us one or other of these processes is going on. Either you are slowly rising or you are slipping down. Either a larger measure of the life of Christ, which is salvation, is passing into your hearts, or bit by bit you are dying like some man with creeping paralysis that begins at the extremities, and with fell, silent, inexorable footstep, advances further and further towards the citadel of the heart, where it lays its icy hand at last, and the man is dead. You are either being saved or you are perishing. No man becomes a devil all at once, and no man becomes an angel all at once. Trust yourself to Christ, and He will lift you to Himself; turn your back upon Him, as some of you are doing, and you will settle down, down, down in the muck and the mire of your own sensuality and selfishness, until at last the foul ooze spreads over your head, and you are lost in the bog for ever.