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

**ACTS-014. THE HEALING POWER OF THE NAME by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And His name through faith in His name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all."*

*Acts 3:16*

Peter said, Why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk? eagerly disclaiming being anything else than a medium through which Another's power operated. Jesus Christ said, That ye may know that the Son of Man hath power on earth to forgive sins, I say unto thee, Arise, take up thy bed, and walk--unmistakably claiming to be a great deal more than a medium. Why the difference? Jesus Christ did habitually in His miracles adopt the tone on which Moses once ventured when he smote the rock and said, Ye rebels! must we bring the water for you? and he was punished for it by exclusion from the Promised Land. Why the difference? Moses was in all his house as a servant, but Christ as a Son over His own house; and what was arrogance in the servant was natural and reasonable in the Son.

The gist of this verse is a reference to Jesus Christ as a source of miraculous power, not merely because He wrought miracles when on earth, but because from heaven He gave the power of which Peter was but the channel. Now it seems to me that in these emphatic and singularly reduplicated words of the Apostle there are two or three very important lessons which I offer for your consideration.

**I. The first is the power of the Name.**

Now the Name of which Peter is speaking is not the collocation of syllables which are sounded Jesus Christ. His hearers were familiar with the ancient and Eastern method of regarding names as very much more than distinguishing labels. They are, in the view of the Old Testament, attempts at a summary description of things by their prominent characteristics. They are condensed definitions. And so the Old Testament uses the expression, the Name of God, as equivalent to that which God is manifested to be. Hence, in later days--and there are some tendencies thither even in Scripture--in Jewish literature the Name came to be a reverential synonym for God Himself. And there are traces that this peculiar usage with regard to the divine Name was beginning to shape itself in the Church with reference to the name of Jesus, even at that period in which my text was spoken. For instance, in the fifth chapter we read that the Apostles departed from the council rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for the Name, and we find at a much later date that missionaries of the Gospel are described by the Apostle John as going forth for the sake of the Name.

The name of Christ, then, is the representation or embodiment of that which Christ is declared to be for us men, and it is that Name, the totality of what He is manifested to be, in which lies all power for healing and for strengthening. The Name, that is, the whole Christ, in His nature, His offices, His work, His Incarnation, His Life, His Death, Resurrection, Session at the right hand of God--it is this Christ whose Name made that man strong, and will make us strong. Brethren, let us remember that, while fragments of the Name will have fragmentary power, as the curative virtue that resides in any substance belongs to the smallest grain of it, if detached from the mass--whilst fragments of the Name of Christ have power, thanks be to Him! so that no man can have even a very imperfect and rudimentary view of what Jesus Christ is and does, without getting strength and healing in proportion to the completeness of his conception, yet in order to realise all that He can be and do, a man must take the whole Christ as He is revealed.

The Early Church had a symbol for Jesus Christ, a fish, to which they were led because the Greek word for a fish is made up of the initials of the words which they conceived to be the Name. And what was it? Jesus Christ, God's Son, Saviour; Jesus, humanity; Christ, the apex of Revelation, the fulfilment of prophecy, the Anointed Prophet, Priest, and King; Son of God, the divine nature: and all these, the humanity, the Messiahship, the divinity, found their sphere of activity in the last name, which, without them, would in its fulness have been impossible--Saviour. He is not such a Saviour as He may be to each of us, unless our conception of the Name grasps these three truths: His humanity, His Messiahship, His divinity. His Name has made this man strong.

**II. Notice how the power of the Name comes to operate.**

Now, if you will observe the language of my text, you will note that Peter says, as it would appear, the same thing twice over: His Name, through faith in His Name, hath made this man strong. And then, as if he were saying something else, he adds what seems to be the same thing: Yea! the faith which is by Him hath given him this perfect soundness.

Now, note that in the first of these two statements nothing appears except the man, the Name, and faith I take it, though of course it may be questionable, that that clause refers to the man's faith, and that we have in it the intentional exclusion of the human workers, and are presented with the only two parties really concerned--at the one end the Name, at the other end this man made strong. And the link of connection between the two in this clause is faith--that is, the man's trust. But then, if we come to the next clause, we find that although Peter has just previously disclaimed all merit in the cure, yet there is a sense in which some one's faith, working as from without, gave to the man this perfect soundness. And it seems very natural to me to understand that here, where human faith is represented as being, in some subordinate sense, the bestower of the healing which really the Name had bestowed, it is the faith of the human miracle-worker or medium which is referred to. Peter's faith did give, but Peter only gave what he had received through faith. And so let all the praise be given to the water, and none to the cup.

Whether that be a fair interpretation of the words of my text, with their singular and apparently meaningless tautology or no, at all events the principle which is involved in the explanation is one that I wish to dwell upon briefly now; and that is, that in order for the Name, charged and supercharged with healing and strengthening power as it is, to come into operation, there must be a twofold trust.

The healer, the medium of healing, must have faith in the Name. Yes! of course. In all regions the first requisite, the one indispensable condition, of a successful propagandist, is enthusiastic confidence in what he promulgates. That man will go far, said a cynical politician about one of his rivals; he believes every word he says. And that is the condition always of getting other people to believe us. Faith is contagious; men catch from other people's tongues the accent of conviction. If one wants to enforce any opinion upon others, the first condition is that he shall be utterly self-oblivious; and when he is manifestly saying, as the Apostles in this context did, Do not fix your eyes on us, as though we were doing anything, then hearts will bow before him, as the trees of the wood are bowed by the wind.

If that is true in all regions, it is eminently true in regard to religion. For what we need there most is not to be instructed, but to be impressed. Most of us have, lying dormant in the bedchamber and infirmary of our brains, convictions which only need to be awakened to revolutionise our lives. Now one of the most powerful ways of waking them is contact with any man in whom they are awake. So all successful teachers and messengers of Jesus Christ have had this characteristic in common, however unlike each other they have been. The divergences of temperament, of moods, of point of view, of method of working which prevailed even in the little group of Apostles, and broadly distinguished Paul from Peter, Peter from James, and Paul and Peter and James from John, are only types of what has been repeated ever since. Get together the great missionaries of the Cross, and you would have the most extraordinary collection of miscellaneous idiosyncrasies that the world ever saw, and they would not understand each other, as some of them woefully misunderstood each other when here together. But there was one characteristic in them all, a flaming earnestness of belief in the power of the Name. And so it did not matter much, if at all, what their divergences were. Each of them was fitted for the Master's use.

And so, brethren, here is the reason--I do not say the only reason, but the main one, and that which most affects us--for the slow progress, and even apparent failure, of Christianity. It has fallen into the hands of a Church that does not half believe its own Gospel. By reason of formality and ceremonial and sacerdotalism and a lazy kind of expectation that, somehow or other, the benefits of Christ's love can come to men apart from their own personal faith in Him, the Church has largely ceased to anticipate that great things can be done by its utterance of the Name. And if you have, I do not say ministers, or teachers, or official proclaimers, or Sunday-school teachers, or the like, but I say if you have a Church, that is honeycombed with doubt, and from which the strength and flood-tide of faith have in many cases ebbed away, why, it may go on uttering its formal proclamations of the Name till the Day of Judgment, and all that will come of it will be--The man in whom the devils were, leaped upon them, and overcame them, and said--as he had a good right to say--Jesus I know, and Paul I know, but who are ye? You cannot kindle a fire with snowballs. If the town crier goes into a quiet corner of the marketplace and rings his bell apologetically, and gives out his message in a whisper, it is small wonder if nobody listens. And that is the way in which too many so-called Christian teachers and communities hold forth the Name, as if begging pardon of the world for being so narrow and old-fashioned as to believe in it still.

And no less necessary is faith on the other side. The recipient must exercise trust. This lame man, no doubt, like the other that Paul looked at in a similar case, had faith to be healed. That was the length of his tether. He believed that he was going to have his legs made strong, and they were made strong accordingly. If he had believed more, he would have got more. Let us hope that he did get more, because he believed more, at a later day. But in the meantime the Apostles' faith was not enough to cure him; and it is not enough for you that Jesus Christ should be standing with all His power at your elbow, and that, earnestly and enthusiastically, some of Christ's messengers may press upon you the acceptance of Him as a Saviour. He is of no good in the world to you, and never will be, unless you have the personal faith that knits you to Him.

It cannot be otherwise. Depend upon it, if Jesus Christ could save every one without terms and conditions at all, He would be only too glad to do it. But it cannot be done. The nature of His work, and the sort of blessings that He brings by His work, are such as that it is an impossibility that any man should receive them unless he has that trust which, beginning with the acceptance by the understanding of Christ as Saviour, passes on to the assent of the will, and the outgoing of the heart, and the yielding of the whole nature to Him. How can a truth do any good to any one who does not believe in it? How is it possible that, if you do not take a medicine, it will work? How can you expect to see, unless you open your eyes? How do you propose to have your blood purified, if you do not fill your lungs with air? Is it of any use to have gas-fittings in your house, if they are not connected with the main? Will a water tap run in your sculleries, if there is no pipe that joins it with the source of supply? My dear friend, these rough illustrations are only approximations to the absolute impossibility that Christ can help, heal, or save any man without the man's personal faith. Whosoever believeth is no arbitrary limitation, but is inseparable from the very nature of the salvation given.

**III. And now, lastly, note the effects of the power of the Name.**

The Apostle puts in two separate clauses what, in the case in hand, was really one thing--hath made this man strong, and hath given him perfect soundness. Ah! we can part the two, cannot we? There is the disease, the disease of an alienated heart, of a perverted will, of a swollen self, all of which we need to have cured and checked before we can do right. And there is weakness, the impotence to do what is good, how to perform I find not, and we need to be strengthened as well as cured. There is only one thing that will do these two, and that is that Christ's power, ay, and Christ's own life, should pass, as it will pass if we trust Him, into our foulness and precipitate all the impurity--into our weakness and infuse strength. A reed shaken with the wind, and without substance or solidity to resist, may be placed in what is called a petrifying well, and, by the infiltration of stony substance into its structure, may be turned into a rigid mass, like a little bar of iron. So, if Christ comes into my poor, weak, tremulous nature, there will be an infiltration into the very substance of my being of a present power which will make me strong.

My brother, you and I need, first and foremost, the healing, and then the strength-giving power, which we never find in its completeness anywhere but in Christ, and which we shall always find in Him.

And now notice, Jesus Christ does not make half cures--this perfect soundness. If any man, in contact with Him, is but half delivered from his infirmities and purged from his sins, it is not because Christ's power is inadequate, but because his own faith is defective.

Christ's cures should be visible to all around. A man's own testimony is not the most satisfactory. Peter appeals to the bystanders. You have seen him lying here for years, a motionless lump of mendicancy, at the Temple gate. Now you see him walking and leaping and praising God. Is it a cure, or is it not? You professing Christians, would you like to stand that test, to empanel a jury of people that have no sympathy with your religion, in order that they might decide whether you were healed and strengthened or not? It is a good thing for us when the world bears witness that Jesus Christ's power has come into us, and made us what we are.

And so, dear friends, I lay all these thoughts on your hearts. Christ's gift is amply sufficient to deliver us from all evils of weakness, sickness, incapacity: to endue us with all gifts of spiritual and immortal strength. But, while the limit of what Christ gives is His boundless wealth, the limit of what you possess is your faith. The rainfall comes down in the same copiousness on rock and furrow, but it runs off the one, having stimulated no growth and left no blessing, and it sinks into the other and quickens every dormant germ into life which will one day blossom into beauty. We are all of us either rock or soil, and which we are depends on the reality, the firmness, and the force of our faith in Christ. He Himself has laid down the principle on which He bestows His gifts when He says, According to thy faith be it unto thee!