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

**ACTS-047. SOBER CERTAINTY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent His angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews."*

*Acts 12:11*

Where did Luke get his information of Peter's thoughts in that hour? This verse sounds like first-hand knowledge. Not impossibly John Mark may have been his informant, for we know that both were in Rome together at a later period. In any case, it is clear that, through whatever channels this piece of minute knowledge reached Luke, it must have come originally from Peter himself. And what a touch of naturalness and evident truth it is! No wonder that the Apostle was half dazed as he came from his dungeon, through the prison corridors and out into the street. To be wakened by an angel, and to have such following experiences, would amaze most men.

**I. The bewilderment of the released captive.**

God's mercies often come suddenly, and with a rush and a completeness that outrun our expectations and our power of immediate comprehension. And sometimes He sends us sorrows in such battalions and so overwhelming that we are dazed for the moment. A Psalmist touched a deep experience when he sang, When the Lord turned again the captivity of Zion, we were like unto them that dream.

The angel has to be gone before we are sure that he was really here. The tumult of emotion in an experience needs to be calmed down before we understand the experience. Reflection discovers more of heaven and of God in the great moments of our lives than was visible to us while we were living through them,

There is one region in which this is especially true--that of the religious life. There sometimes attend its beginnings in a soul a certain excitement and perturbation which disable from calm realising of the greatness of the change which has passed. And it is well when that excitement is quieted down and succeeded by meditative reflection on the treasures that have been poured into the lap, almost as in the dark. No man understands what he has received when he first receives Christ and Christ's gifts. It occupies a lifetime to take possession of that which we possess from the first in Him, and the oldest saint is as far from full possession of the unspeakable and infinite gift of God, as the babes in Christ are.

But, looking more generally at this characteristic of not rightly understanding the great epochs of our lives till they are past, we may note that, while in part it is inevitable and natural, there is an element of fault in it. If we lived in closer fellowship with God, we should live in an atmosphere of continual calm, and nothing, either sorrowful or joyful, would be able so to sweep us off our feet that we should be bewildered by it. Astonishment would never so fill our souls as that we could not rightly appraise events, nor should we need any time, even in the thick of the most wonderful experiences, to come to ourselves and discern the angel.

But if it be so that our lives disclose their meanings best, when we look back on them, how much of the understanding of them, and the drawing of all its sweetness out of each event in them, is entrusted to memory! And how negligent of a great means of happiness and strength we are, if we do not often muse on all the way by which God the Lord has led us these many years in the wilderness! It is needful for Christian progress to forget the things that are behind, and not to let them limit our expectations nor prescribe our methods, but it is quite as needful to remember our past, or rather God's past with us, in order to confirm our grateful faith and enlarge our boundless hope.

**II. The disappearance of the angel.**

Why did he leave Peter standing there, half dazed and with his deliverance incomplete? He led him through one street only, and straightway departed from him. The Apostle delivered by miracle has now to use his brains. One distinguishing characteristic of New Testament miracles is their economy of miraculous power. Jesus raised Lazarus, for He alone could do that, but other hands must loose him and let him go, He gave life to Jairus's little daughter, but He bid others give her something to eat God does nothing for us that we can do for ourselves. That economy was valuable as a preservative of the Apostles from the possible danger of expecting or relying on miracles, and as stirring them to use their own energies. Reliance on divine power should not lead us to neglect ordinary means. Alike in the natural and in the spiritual life we have to do our part, and to be sure that God will do His.

**III. The symbol here of a greater deliverance.**

Fancy may legitimately employ this story as setting forth for us under a lovely image the facts of Christian death, if only we acknowledge that such a use is entirely the work of fancy. But, making that acknowledgment, may we not make the use? Is not Death, too, God's messenger to souls that love Him, mighty and beauteous, though his face be hid? Would it not be more Christian-like, and more congruous with our eternal hope, if we pictured him thus than by the hideous emblems of our cemeteries and tombs? He comes to Christ's servants, and his touch is gentle though his fingers are icy-cold. He removes only the chains that bind us, and we ourselves are emancipated by his touch. He leads us to the iron gate that leadeth into the city, and it opens to us of its own accord. But he disappears as soon as our happy feet have touched the pavement of that street of the city which is pure gold, as transparent as glass, and in the midst of which flows the river of the crystal-bright water of life proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb. Then, when we see the Face as of the sun shining in his strength, we shall come to ourselves, and know of a surety that the Lord hath sent His angel and delivered us from all our foes and ills for evermore.