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

**ACTS-053. THE FIRST PREACHING IN ASIA MINOR by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"26. Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent. 27. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew Him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every Sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning Him. 28. And though they found no cause of death in Him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain. 29. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of Him, they took Him down from the tree, and laid Him in a sepulchre. 30. But God raised Him from the dead: 31. And He was seen many days of them which came up with Him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are His witnesses unto the people. 32. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, 33. God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that He hath raised up Jesus again; as it is also written in the second psalm. Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten Thee. 34. And as concerning that He raised Him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, He said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David. 35. Wherefore He saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 36. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37. But He, whom God raised again, saw no corruption. 38. Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this Man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins: 39. And by Him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses."*

*Acts 13:26-39*

The extended report of Paul's sermon in the synagogue at Antioch of Pisidia marks it, in accordance with Luke's method, as the first of a series. It was so because, though the composition of the audience was identical with that of those in the synagogues of Cyprus, this was the beginning of the special work of the tour, the preaching in the cities of Asia Minor. The part of the address contained in the passage falls into three sections,--the condensed narrative of the Gospel facts (vs. 26-31), the proof that the resurrection was prophesied (vs. 32-37), and the pungent personal application (v. 38 to end).

**I.** The substance of the narrative coincides, as it could not but do, with Peter's sermons, but yet with differences, partly due to the different audience, partly to Paul's idiosyncrasy. After the preceding historical resume, he girds himself to his proper work of proclaiming the Gospel, and he marks the transition in verse 26 by reiterating his introductory words.

His audience comprised the two familiar classes of Jews and Gentile proselytes, and he seeks to win the ears of both. His heart goes out in his address to them all as brethren, and in his classing himself and Barnabas among them as receivers of the message which he has to proclaim. What skill, if it were not something much more sacred, even humility and warm love, lies in that to us is the word of this salvation sent! He will not stand above them as if he had any other possession of his message than they might have. He, too, has received it, and what he is about to say is not his word, but God's message to them and him. That is the way to preach.

Notice, too, how skilfully he introduces the narrative of the rejection of Jesus as the reason why the message has now come to them his hearers away in Antioch. It is sent forth to us, Asiatic Jews, for the people in the sacred city would not have it. Paul does not prick his hearers consciences, as Peter did, by charging home the guilt of the rejection of Jesus on them. They had no share in that initial crime. There is a faint purpose of dissociating himself and his hearers from the people of Jerusalem, to whom the Dispersion were accustomed to look up, in the designation, they that dwell in Jerusalem, and their rulers. Thus far the Antioch Jews had had hands clean from that crime; they had now to choose whether they would mix themselves up with it.

We may further note that Paul says nothing about Christ's life of gentle goodness, His miracles or teaching, but concentrates attention on His death and resurrection. From the beginning of his ministry these were the main elements of his Gospel (1 Cor. 15:3, 4). The full significance of that death is not declared here. Probably it was reserved for subsequent instruction. But it and the Resurrection, which interpreted it, are set in the forefront, as they should always be. The main point insisted on is that the men of Jerusalem were fulfilling prophecy in slaying Jesus. With tragic deafness, they knew not the voices of the prophets, clear and unanimous as they were, though they heard them every Sabbath of their lives, and yet they fulfilled them. A prophet's words had just been read in the synagogue; Paul's words might set some hearer asking whether a veil had been over his heart while his ears had heard the sound of the word.

The Resurrection is established by the only evidence for a historical fact, the testimony of competent eyewitnesses. Their competence is established by their familiar companionship with Jesus during His whole career; their opportunities for testing the reality of the fact, by the many days of His appearances.

Paul does not put forward his own testimony to the Resurrection, though we know, from 1 Corinthians 15:8, that he regarded Christ's appearance to him as being equally valid evidence with that afforded by the other appearances; but he distinguishes between the work of the Apostles, as witnesses unto the people--that is, the Jews of Palestine--and that of Barnabas and himself. They had to bear the message to the regions beyond. The Apostles and he had the same work, but different spheres.

**II.** The second part turns with more personal address to his hearers. Its purport is not so much to preach the Resurrection, which could only be proved by testimony, as to establish the fact that it was the fulfilment of the promises to the fathers. Note how the idea of fulfilled prophecy runs in Paul's head. The Jews had fulfilled it by their crime; God fulfilled it by the Resurrection. This reiteration of a key-word is a mark of Paul's style in his Epistles, and its appearance here attests the accuracy of the report of his speech.

The second Psalm, from which Paul's first quotation is made, is prophetic of Christ, inasmuch as it represents in vivid lyrical language the vain rebellion of earthly rulers against Messiah, and Jehovah's establishing Him and His kingdom by a steadfast decree. Peter quoted its picture of the rebels, as fulfilled in the coalition of Herod, Pilate, and the Jewish rulers against Christ. The Messianic reference of the Psalm, then, was already seen; and we may not be going too far if we assume that Jesus Himself had included it among things written in the Psalms concerning Himself, which He had explained to the disciples after the Resurrection. It depicts Jehovah speaking to Messiah, after the futile attempts of the rebels: This day have I begotten Thee. That day is a definite point in time. The Resurrection was a birth from the dead; so Paul, in Colossians 1:18, calls Jesus the first begotten from the dead. Romans 1:4,declared to be the Son of God ... by the resurrection from the dead, is the best commentary on Paul's words here.

The second and third quotations must apparently be combined, for the second does not specifically refer to resurrection, but it promises to you, that is to those who obey the call to partake in the Messianic blessings, a share in the sure and enduring mercies of David; and the third quotation shows that not to see corruption was one of these mercies. That implies that the speaker in the Psalm was, in Paul's view, David, and that his words were his believing answer to a divine promise. But David was dead. Had the sure mercy proved, then, a broken reed? Not so: for Jesus, who is Messiah, and is God's Holy One in a deeper sense than David was, has not seen corruption. The Psalmist's hopes are fulfilled in Him, and through Him, in all who will eat that their souls may live,

**III.** But Paul's yearning for his brethren's salvation is not content with proclaiming the fact of Christ's resurrection, nor with pointing to it as fulfilling prophecy; he gathers all up into a loving, urgent offer of salvation for every believing soul, and solemn warning to despisers. Here the whole man flames out. Here the characteristic evangelical teaching, which is sometimes ticketed as Pauline by way of stigma, is heard. Already had he grasped the great antithesis between Law and Gospel. Already his great word justified has taken its place in his terminology. The essence of the Epistles to Romans and Galatians is here. Justification is the being pronounced and treated as not guilty. Law cannot justify. In Him we are justified. Observe that this is an advance on the previous statement that through Him we receive remission of sins.

In Him points, thought but incidentally and slightly, to the great truth of incorporation with Jesus, of which Paul had afterwards so much to write. The justifying in Christ is complete and absolute. And the sole sufficient condition of receiving it is faith. But the greater the glory of the light the darker the shadow which it casts. The broad offer of complete salvation has ever to be accompanied with the plain warning of the dread issue of rejecting it. Just because it is so free and full, and to be had on such terms, the warning has to be rung into deaf ears, Beware therefore! Hope and fear are legitimately appealed to by the Christian evangelist. They are like the two wings which may lift the soul to soar to its safe shelter in the Rock of Ages.