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

**ACTS-056. UNWORTHY OF LIFE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... Seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles."*

*Acts 13:46*

So ended the first attempt on Paul's great missionary journey to preach to the Jews. It is described at great length and the sermon given in full because it is the first. A wonderful sermon it was; touching all keys of feeling, now pleading almost with tears, now flashing with indignation, now calmly dealing with Scripture prophecies, now glowing as it tells the story of Christ's death for men. It melted some of the hearers, but the most were wrought up to furious passion--and with characteristic vehemence, like their ancestors and their descendants through long dreary generations, fell to contradicting and blaspheming. We can see the scene in the synagogue, the eager faces, the vehement gestures, the hubbub of tongues, the bitter words that stormed round the two in the midst, Barnabas like Jupiter, grave, majestic, and venerable; Paul like Mercury, agile, mobile, swift of speech. They bore the brunt of the fury till they saw it to be hopeless to try to calm it, and then departed with these remarkable words.

They are even more striking if we notice that judge here may be used in its full legal sense. It is not merely equivalent to consider, for these Jews by no means thought themselves unworthy of eternal life, but it means, ye adjudge and pass sentence on yourselves to be. Their rejection of the message was a self-pronounced sentence. It proved them to be, and made them, unworthy of eternal life. There are two or three very striking thoughts to be gathered from these words which I would dwell on now.

**I. What constitutes worthiness and unworthiness.**

There are two meanings to the word worthy--deserving or fit. They run into each other and yet they may be kept quite apart. For instance you may say of a man that he is worthy to be something or other, for which he is obviously qualified, not thinking at all whether he deserves it or not.

Now in the first of these senses--we are all unworthy of eternal life. That is just to state in other words the tragic truth of universal sinfulness. The natural outcome and issue of the course which all men follow is death. But yet there are men who are fit for and capable of eternal life. Who they are and what fitness is can only be ascertained when we rightly understand what eternal life is. It is not merely future blessedness or a synonym for a vulgar heaven. That is the common notion of its meaning. Men think of that future as a blessed state to which God can admit anybody if He will, and, as He is good, will admit pretty nearly everybody. But eternal life is a present possession as well as a future one, and passing by its deeper aspects, it includes--

Deliverance from evil habits and desires.

Purity, and love of all good and fair things.

Communion with God.

As well as forgiveness and removal of punishment.

What then are the qualifications making a man worthy of, in the sense of fit for, such a state?

**(a)** To know oneself to be unworthy. He who judges himself to be worthy is unworthy. He who knows himself to be unworthy is worthy. The first requisite is consciousness of sin, leading to repentance.

**(b)** To abandon striving to make oneself worthy. By ourselves we never can do so. Many of us think that we must do our best, and then God will do the rest. There must be the entire cessation of all attempt to work out by our own efforts characters that would entitle us to eternal life.

**(c)** To be willing to accept life on God's terms. As a mere gift.

**(d)** To desire it.

God cannot give it to any one who does not want it. He cannot force His gifts on us.

This then is the worthiness.

**II. How we pass sentence on ourselves as unworthy.**

It is quite clear that judge here does not mean consider, for a sense of unworthiness is not the reason which keeps men away from the Gospel. Rather, as we have seen, a proud belief in our worthiness keeps very many away. But judge here means adjudicate or pronounce sentence on, and worthy means fit, qualified.

Consider then--

**(a)** That our attitude to the Gospel is a revelation of our deepest selves. The Gospel is a discerner of thoughts and intents of the heart. It judges us here and now, and by their attitude to it the thoughts of many hearts shall be revealed.

**(b)** That our rejection of it plainly shows that we have not the qualifications for eternal life. No doubt some men are kept from accepting Christ by intellectual doubts and difficulties, but even these would alter their whole attitude to Him if they had a profound consciousness of sin, and a desire for deliverance from it.

But with regard to the great bulk of its hearers, no doubt the hindrance is chiefly moral. Many causes may combine to produce the absence of qualification. The excuses in the parable--farm, oxen, wife--all amount to engrossment with this present world, and such absorption in the things seen and temporal deadens desire. So the Gospel preached excites no longings, and a man hears the offer of salvation without one motion of his heart towards it, and thus proclaims himself unworthy of eternal life.

But the great disqualification is the absence of all consciousness of sin. This is the very deepest reason which keeps men away from Christ.

How solemn a thing the preaching and hearing of this word is!

How possible for you to make yourselves fit!

How simple the qualification! We have but to know ourselves sinners and to trust Jesus and then we shall be counted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead. Then we shall be worthy to escape and to stand before the Son of Man. Then shall we be worthy of this calling, and the Judge himself shall say: They shall walk with Me in white, for they are worthy.