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

**ACTS-071. PAUL AT CORINTH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1.* *After these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth; 2. And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them. 3. And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tent-makers. 4. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. 5. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ. 6. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles. 7. And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue. 8. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized. 9. Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace: 10. For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city. 11. And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them."*

*Acts 18:1-11*

Solitude is a hard trial for sensitive natures, and tends to weaken their power of work. Paul was entirely alone in Athens, and appears to have cut his stay there short, since his two companions, who were to have joined him in that city, did not do so till after he had been some time in Corinth. His long stay there has several well-marked stages, which yield valuable lessons.

**I.** First, we note the solitary Apostle, seeking friends, toiling for bread, and withal preaching Christ. Corinth was a centre of commerce, of wealth, and of moral corruption. The celebrated local worship of Aphrodite fed the corruption as well as the wealth. The Apostle met there with a new phase of Greek life, no less formidable in antagonism to the Gospel than the culture of Athens. He tells us that he entered on his work in Corinth in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling, but also that he did not try to attract by adaptation of his words to the prevailing tastes either of Greek or Jew, but preached Jesus Christ, and Him crucified, knowing that, while that appeared to go right in the teeth of the demands of both, it really met their wants. This ministry was begun, in his usual fashion, very unobtrusively and quietly. His first care was to find a home; his second, to provide his daily bread; and then he was free to take the Sabbath for Christian work in the synagogue.

We cannot tell whether he had had any previous acquaintance with Aquila and his wife, nor indeed is it certain that they had previously been Christians. Paul's reason for living with them was simply the convenience of getting work at his trade, and it seems probable that, if they had been disciples, that fact would have been named as part of his reason. Pontus lay to the north of Cilicia, and though widely separated from it, was near enough to make a kind of bond as of fellow-countrymen, which would be the stronger because they had the same craft at their finger-ends.

It was the wholesome practice for every Rabbi to learn some trade. If all graduates had to do the same now there would be fewer educated idlers, who are dangerous to society and burdens to themselves and their friends. What a curl of contempt would have lifted the lips of the rich men of Corinth if they had been told that the greatest man in their city was that little Jew tent-maker, and that in this unostentatious fashion he had begun to preach truths which would be like a charge of dynamite to all their social and religious order! True zeal can be patiently silent.

Sewing rough goat's-hair cloth into tents may be as truly serving Christ as preaching His name. All manner of work that contributes to the same end is the same in worth and in recompense. Perhaps the wholesomest form of Christian ministry is that after the Apostolic pattern, when the teacher can say, as Paul did to the people of Corinth, When I was present with you and was in want, I was not a burden on any man. If not in letter, at any rate in spirit, his example must be followed. If the preacher would win souls he must be free from any taint of suspicion as to money.

**II.** The second stage in Paul's Corinthian residence is the increased activity when his friends, Silas and Timothy, came from Beroea. We learn from Philippians 4:15, and 2 Corinthians 11:9, that they brought gifts from the Church at Philippi; and from 1 Thessalonians 3:6, that they brought something still more gladdening namely, good accounts of the steadfastness of the Thessalonian converts. The money would make it less necessary to spend most of the week in manual labour; the glad tidings of the Thessalonians' faith and love did bring fresh life, and the presence of his helpers would cheer him. So a period of enlarged activity followed their coming.

The reading of verse 5, Paul was constrained by the word, brings out strikingly the Christian impulse which makes speech of the Gospel a necessity. The force of that impulse may vary, as it did with Paul; but if we have any deep possession of the grace of God for ourselves, we shall, like him, feel it pressing us for utterance, as soon as the need of providing daily bread becomes less stringent and our hearts are gladdened by Christian communion. It augurs ill for a man's hold of the word if the word does not hold him. He who never felt that he was weary of forbearing, and that the word was like a fire, if it was shut up in his bones, has need to ask himself if he has any belief in the Gospel. The craving to impart ever accompanies real possession.

The Apostle's solemn symbolism, announcing his cessation of efforts among the Jews, has of course reference only to Corinth, for we find him in his subsequent ministry adhering to his method, to the Jew first. It is a great part of Christian wisdom in evangelical work to recognise the right time to give up efforts which have been fruitless. Much strength is wasted, and many hearts depressed, by obstinate continuance in such methods or on such fields as have cost much effort and yielded no fruit. We often call it faith, when it is only pride, which prevents the acknowledgment of failure. Better to learn the lessons taught by Providence, and to try a new claim, than to keep on digging and washing when we only find sand and mud. God teaches us by failures as well as by successes. Let us not be too conceited to learn the lesson or to confess defeat, and shift our ground accordingly.

It is a solemn thing to say I am clean. We need to have been very diligent, very loving, very prayerful to God, and very persuasive in pleading with men, before we dare to roll all the blame of their condemnation on themselves. But we have no right to say, Henceforth I go to others, until we can say that we have done all that man--or, at any rate, that we--can do to avert the doom.

Paul did not go so far away but that any whose hearts God had touched could easily find him. It was with a lingering eye to his countrymen that he took up his abode in the house of one that feared God, that is, a proselyte; and that he settled down next door to the synagogue. What a glimpse of yearning love which cannot bear to give Israel up as hopeless, that simple detail gives us! And may we not say that the yearning of the servant is caught from the example of the Master? How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? Does not Christ, in His long-suffering love, linger in like manner round each closed heart? and if He withdraws a little way, does He not do so rather to stimulate search after Him, and tarry near enough to be found by every seeking heart?

Paul's purpose in his solemn warning to the Jews of Corinth was partly accomplished. The ruler of the synagogue believed in the Lord with all his house. Thus men are sometimes brought to decision for Christ by the apparently impending possibility of His Gospel leaving them to themselves. Blessings brighten as they take their flight. Severity sometimes effects what forbearance fails to achieve. If the train is on the point of starting, the hesitating passenger will swiftly make up his mind and rush for a seat. It is permissible to press for immediate decision on the ground that the time is short, and that soon these things will be hid from the eyes.

We learn from 1 Corinthians 1:14, that Paul deviated from his usual practice, and himself baptized Crispus. We may be very sure that his doing so arose from no unworthy subserviency to an important convert, but indicated how deeply grateful he was to the Lord for giving him, as a seal to a ministry which had seemed barren, so encouraging a token. The opposition and blasphemy of many are outweighed, to a true evangelist, by the conversion of one; and while all souls are in one aspect equally valuable, they are unequal in the influence which they may exert on others. So it was with Crispus, for many of the Corinthians hearing of such a signal fact as the conversion of the chief of the synagogue, likewise believed. We may distinguish in our estimate of the value of converts, without being untrue to the great principle that all men are equally precious in Christ's eyes.

**III.** The next stage is the vision to Paul and his consequent protracted residence in Corinth. God does not waste visions, nor bid men put away fears which are not haunting them. This vision enables us to conceive Paul's state of mind when it came to him. He was for some reason cast down. He had not been so when things looked much more hopeless. But though now he had his friends and many converts, some mood of sadness crept over him. Men like him are often swayed by impulses rising within, and quite apart from outward circumstances. Possibly he had reason to apprehend that his very success had sharpened hostility, and to anticipate danger to life. The contents of the vision make this not improbable.

But the mere calming of fear, worthy object as it is, is by no means the main part of the message of the vision. Speak, and hold not thy peace, is its central word. Fear which makes a Christian dumb is always cowardly, and always exaggerated. Speech which comes from trembling lips may be very powerful, and there is no better remedy for terror than work for Christ. If we screw ourselves up to do what we fear to do, the dread vanishes, as a bather recovers himself as soon as his head has once been under water.

Why was Paul not to be afraid? It is easy to say, Fear not, but unless the exhortation is accompanied with some good reason shown, it is wasted breath. Paul got a truth put into his heart which ends all fear--For I am with thee. Surely that is enough to exorcise all demons of cowardice or despondency, and it is the assurance that all Christ's servants may lay up in their hearts, for use at all moments and in all moods. His presence, in no metaphor, but in deepest inmost reality, is theirs, and whether their fears come from without or within, His presence is more than enough to make them brave and strong.

Paul needed a vision, for Paul had never seen Christ after the flesh, nor heard His parting promise. We do not need it, for we have the unalterable word, which He left with all His disciples when He ascended, and which remains true to the ends of the world and till the world ends.

The consequence of Christ's presence is not exemption from attacks, but preservation in them. Men may set on Paul, but they cannot hurt him. The promise was literally fulfilled when the would-be accusers were contemptuously sent away by Gallio, the embodiment of Roman even-handedness and despising of the deepest things. It is fulfilled no less truly to-day; for no hurt can come to us if Christ is with us, and whatever does come is not hurt.

I have much people in this city. Jesus saw what Paul did not, the souls yet to be won for Him. That loving Eye gladly beholds His own sheep, though they may be yet in danger of the wolves, and far from the Shepherd. Them also He must bring; and His servants are wise if, in all their labours, they cherish the courage that comes from the consciousness of His presence, and the unquenchable hope, which sees in the most degraded and alienated those whom the Good Shepherd will yet find in the wilderness and bear back to the fold. Such a hope will quicken them for all service, and such a vision will embolden them in all peril.