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

**ACTS-085. PAUL ON HIS OWN CONVERSION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"6.* *And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me. 7. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why perseoutest thou Me? 8. And I answered, Who art Thou, Lord? And He said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest. 9. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid; but they heard not the voice of Him that spake to me. 10. And I said, What shall I do, Lord? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do. 11. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus. 12. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, 13. Came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him. 14. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know His will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of His mouth. 15. For thou shalt be His witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard. 16. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.--."*

*Acts 22:6-16*

We follow Paul's example when we put Jesus' appearance to him from heaven in a line with His appearances to the disciples on earth. Last of all, He appeared to me also. But it does not follow that the appearances are all of the same kind, or that Paul thought that they were. They were all equally real, equally objective, equally valid proofs of Jesus' risen life. On two critical occasions Paul told the story of Jesus' appearance as his best Apologia. I saw and heard Him, and that revolutionised my life, and made me what I am. The two accounts are varied, as the hearers were, but the differences are easily reconciled, and the broad facts are the same in both versions, and in Luke's rendering in chapter 9.

A favourite theory in some quarters is that Paul's conversion was not sudden, but that misgivings had been working in him ever since Stephen's death. Surely that view is clean against facts. Persecuting its adherents to the death is a strange result of dawning belief in this way. Paul may be supposed to have known his state of mind as well as a critic nineteen centuries off does, and he had no doubt that he set out from Jerusalem a bitter hater of the convicted impostor Jesus, and stumbled into Damascus a convinced disciple because he had seen and heard Him. That is his account of the matter, which would not have been meddled with if the meddlers had not taken offence at the supernatural element. We note the emphasis which Paul puts on the suddenness of the appearance, implying that the light burst all in a moment. A little bit of personal reminiscence comes up in his specifying the time as about noon, the brightest hour. He remembers how the light outblazed even the blinding brilliance of a Syrian noontide. He insists too on the fact that his senses were addressed, both eye and ear. He saw the glory of that light, and heard the voice. He does not say here that he saw Jesus, but that he did so is clear from Ananias' words, to see the Righteous One (ver. 14), and from 1 Corinthians 15:8. Further, he makes it very emphatic that the vision was certified as no morbid fancy of his own, but yet was marked as meant for him only, by the double fact that his companions did share in it, but only in part. They did see the light, but not the Righteous One; they did hear the sound of the voice, but not so as to know what it said. The difference between merely hearing a noise and discerning the sense of the words is probably marked by the construction in the Greek, and is certainly to be understood.

The blaze struck all the company to the ground (Acts 26:14). Prone on the earth, and probably with closed eyes, their leader heard his own name twice sounded, with appeal, authority, and love in the tones. The startling question which followed not only pierced conscience, and called for a reasonable vindication of his action, but flashed a new light on it as being persecution which struck at this unknown heavenly speaker. So the first thought in Saul's mind is not about himself or his doings but about the identity of that Speaker. Awe, if not actual worship, is expressed in addressing Him as Lord. Wonder, with perhaps some foreboding of what the answer would be, is audible in the question, Who art Thou? Who can imagine the shock of the answer to Saul's mind? Then the man whom he had thought of as a vile apostate, justly crucified and not risen as his dupes dreamed, lived in heaven, knew him, Saul, and all that he had been doing, was apparelled in celestial light, and yet in heavenly glory was so closely identified with these poor people whom he had been hunting to death that to strike them was to hurt Him! A bombshell had burst, shattering the foundation of his fortifications. A deluge had swept away the ground on which he had stood. His whole life was revolutionised. Its most solid elements were dissolved into vapour, and what he had thought misty nonsense was now the solid thing. To find a why for his persecuting was impossible, unless he had said (what in effect he did say), I did it ignorantly. When a man has a glimpse of Jesus exalted to heaven, and is summoned by Him to give a reason for his life of alienation, that life looks very different from what it did, when seen by dimmer light. Clothes are passable by candle-light that look very shabby in sunshine. When Jesus comes to us, His first work is to set us to judge our past, and no man can muster up respectable answers to His question, Why? for all sin is unreasonable, and nothing but obedience to Him can vindicate itself in His sight.

Saul threw down his arms at once. His characteristic impetuosity and eagerness to carry out his convictions impelled him to a surrender as complete as his opposition. The test of true belief in the ascended Jesus is to submit the will to Him, to be chiefly desirous of knowing His will, and ready to do it. Who art Thou, Lord? should be followed by What shall I do, Lord?

Blind Saul, led by the hand into the city which he had expected to enter so differently, saw better than ever before. The glory of that light blinds us to things seen, but makes us able to see afar off the only realities, the things unseen. Speaking to Jews, as here, Paul described Ananias as a devout adherent of the law, in order to conciliate them and to suggest his great principle that a Christian was not an apostate but a complete Jew. To Agrippa he drops all reference to Ananias as irrelevant, and throws together the words on the road and the commission received through Ananias as equally Christ's voice. Here he lays stress on his agency in restoring sight, and on his message as including two points--that it was the God of our fathers who had appointed the vision, and that the purpose of the vision was to make Saul a witness to all men. The bearing of this on the conciliatory aim of the discourse is plain. We note also the precedence given in the statement of the particulars of the vision to knowing his will--that was the end for which the light and the voice were given. Observe too how the twofold evidence of sense is signalised, both in the reference to seeing the Righteous One and to hearing His voice and in the commission to witness what Saul had seen and heard. The personal knowledge of Jesus, however attained, constitutes the qualification and the obligation to be His witness. And the convincing testimony is when we can say, as we all can say if we are Christ's, That which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that ... declare we unto you.