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

**ACTS-102. PAUL IN ROME by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him, 31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him."*

*Acts 28:30-31*

So ends this book. It stops rather than ends. Many reasons might be suggested for closing here. Probably the simplest is the best, that nothing more is said for nothing more had yet been done. Probably the book was written during these two years. This abrupt close suggests several noteworthy thoughts.

**I. The true theme of the book.**

How convenient if Luke had told us a little more! But Paul's history is unfinished, like Peter's and John's. This book's treatment of all the Apostles teaches, as we have often had to remark, that Christ and His acts are its true subject.

We are wise if we learn the lesson of keeping all human teachers, even a Paul, in their inferior place, and if we say of each of them: He was not the Light, but came that he might bear witness of the Light.

**II. God's unexpected and unwelcome ways of fulfilling our desires, and His purposes.**

It had long been Paul's dream to see Rome. How little he knew the steps by which his dream was to be fulfilled! He told the Ephesian elders that he was going up to Jerusalem under compulsion of the Spirit, and not knowing the things that should befall him there, except that he was certain of bonds and imprisonment. He did not know that these were God's way of bringing him to Rome. Jewish fury, Roman statecraft and law-abidingness, two years of a prison, a stormy voyage, a shipwreck, led him to his long-wished-for goal. God uses even man's malice and opposition to the Gospel to advance the progress of the Gospel. Men, like coral insects, build their little bit, all unaware of the whole of which it is a part, but the reef rises above the waves and ocean breaks against it in vain.

So we may gather lessons of submission, of patient acceptance of apparently adverse circumstances, and of quiet faith that He who makes stormy winds to fulfil His word and flaming fires His ministers, will bend to the carrying out of His designs all things, be they seemingly friendly or hostile, and will realise our dreams, if in accordance with His will, even through events which seem to shatter them. Let us trust and be patient till we see the issues of events.

**III. The world's mistaken estimate of greatness.**

Who was the greatest man in Rome at that hour? Not the Caesar but the poor Jewish prisoner. How astonished both would have been if they had been told the truth! The two kingdoms were, so to speak, set face to face in these two, their representatives, and neither of them knew his own relative importance. The Caesar was all unaware that, for all his legions and his power, he was but a noise; Paul was as unconscious that he was incomparably the most powerful of the influences that were then at work in the world. The haughty and stolid eyes of Romans saw in him nothing but a prisoner, sent up from a turbulent subject land on some obscure charge, a mere nobody. The crowds in forum and amphitheatre would have laughed at any one who had pointed to that humble hired house, and said, There lodges a man who bears a word that will shatter and remould the city, the Empire, the world.

Let us have confidence in the greatness of the word, though the world may be deaf to its music and blind to its power, and let us never fear to ally ourselves with a cause which we know to be God's, however it may be unpopular and made light of by the leaders of opinion.

**IV. The true relation between the Church and the State.**

None forbidding him marks a great step forward. Paul's unhindered freedom of speech in Rome itself marks the victory of the word, the apex of the Gospel. The neutral attitude of the imperial power was, indeed, broken by subsequent persecutions, but we may say that on the whole Rome let Christianity alone. That is the best service that the State can render to the Church. Anything more is help which encumbers and is harmful to the true spiritual power of the Gospel. The real requirement which it makes on the civil power is simply what the Greek philosopher asked of the king who was proffering his good offices, Stand out of the sunshine!