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

**COLOSSIANS-025**. **RISEN WITH CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God. Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth."*

*Colossians 3:1-2*

There are three aspects in which the New Testament treats the Resurrection, and these three seem to have successively come into the consciousness of the Church. First, as is natural, it was considered mainly in its bearing on the person and work of our Lord. We may point for illustration to the way in which the Resurrection is treated in the earliest of the apostolic discourses, as recorded in the Acts of the Apostles. Then it came, with further reflection and experience, to be discerned that it had a bearing on the hope of the immortality of man. And last of all, as the Christian life deepened, it came to be discerned that the Resurrection was the pattern of the life of the Christian disciples. It was regarded first as a witness, then as a prophecy, then as a symbol. Three fragments of Scripture express these three phases: for the first, Declared to be the Son of God with power by the Resurrection from the dead; for the second, Now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first-fruits of them that slept; for the third, God hath raised us up together with Him, and made us sit together in the heavenly places. I have considered incidentally the two former aspects in the course of previous sermons; I wish to turn at present to that final third one.

One more observation I must make by way of introduction, and that is, that the way in which the Apostle here glides from being risen with Christ to where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God, confirms what I have pointed out in former discourses, that the Ascension of Jesus Christ is always considered in Scripture as being nothing more than the necessary outcome and issue of the process which began in the Resurrection. They are not separate facts, but they are two ends of one process. And so with these thoughts, that Resurrection develops into Ascension, and that in both Jesus Christ is the pattern for His followers, let us turn to the words before us.

Then we have here

**I. The Christian life considered as a risen life.**

Now, we are all familiar with the great evangelical point of view from which the death and Resurrection of Jesus Christ are usually contemplated. To many of us Christ's sacrifice is nothing more or less than the means by which the world is reconciled to God, and Christ's Resurrection nothing more than the seal which was set by Divinity upon that work. Crucified for our offences, and raised again for our justification, as Paul has it--that is the point of view from which most evangelical or orthodox Christian people are contented to regard the solemn fact of the Death and the radiant fact of the Resurrection. You cannot be too emphatic about these truths, but you may be too exclusive in your contemplation of them. You do well when you say that they are the Gospel; you do not well when you say, as some of you do, that they are the whole Gospel. For there is another stream of teaching in the New Testament, of which my text is an example, and a multitude of other passages that I cannot refer to now are equally conspicuous instances, in which that death and that Resurrection are regarded, not so much in respect to the power which they exercise in the reconciliation of the world to God, as in their aspect as the type of all noble and true Christian life. You remember how, when our Lord Himself touched upon the fruitful issues of His death, and said: Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone; but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit, He at once went on to say that a man that loved his life would lose it; and that a man that lost his life would find it, and proceeded to point, even then, and in that connection, to His Cross as our pattern, declaring: If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be.

Made like Him, like Him we rise; Ours the cross, the grave, the skies.

So, then, a risen life is the type of all noble life, and before there can be a risen life there must have been a death. True, we may say that the spiritual facts in a man's experience, which are represented by these two great symbols of a death and a rising, are but like the segment of a circle which, seen from the one side is convex and from the other is concave. But however loosely we may feel that the metaphors represent the facts, this is plain, that unless a man dies to flesh, to self-will, to the world, he never will live a life that is worth calling life. The condition of all nobleness and all growth upwards is that we shall die daily, and live a life that has sprung victorious from the death of self. All lofty ethics teach that; and Christianity teaches it, with redoubled emphasis, because it says to us, that the Cross and the Resurrection are not merely imaginative emblems of the noble and the Christian life, but are a great deal more than that. For, brethren, do not forget--if you do, you will be hopelessly at sea as to large tracts of blessed Christian truth--that by faith in Jesus Christ we are brought into such a true deep union with Him as that, in no mere metaphorical or analogous sense, but in most blessed reality, there comes into the believing heart a spark of the life that is Christ's own, so that with Him we do live, and from Him we do live a life cognate with His, who, having risen from the dead, dieth no more, and over whom death hath no dominion. So it is not a metaphor only, but a spiritual truth, when we speak of being risen with Christ, seeing that our faith, in the measure of its genuineness, its depth and its operative power upon our characters, will be the gate through which there shall pass into our deadness the life that truly is, the life that has nought to do with death or sin. And this unity with Jesus, brought about by faith, brings about that the depths of the Christian life are hid with Christ in God, and that we, risen with Him, do even now sit at the right hand in heavenly places, whilst our feet, dusty and sometimes blood-stained, are journeying along the paths of life. This is the great teaching of my text, and of a multitude of other places; and this is the teaching which modern Christianity, in its exclusive, or all but exclusive, contemplation of the Cross as the sacrifice for sin, has far too much forgotten. Ye are risen with Christ.

Let me remind you that this veritable death and rising again, which marks the Christian life, is set forth before us in the initial rite of the Christian Church. Some of you do not agree with me in my view, either of what is the mode or of who are the subjects of that ordinance, but if you know anything about the question, you know that everybody that has a right to give a judgment agrees with us Baptists in saying--although they may not think that it carries anything obligatory upon the practice of to-day--that the primitive Church baptized by immersion. Now, the meaning of baptism is to symbolise these two inseparable moments, dying to sin, to self, to the world, to the old past, and rising again to newness of life. Our sacramentarian friends say that, in my text, it was in baptism that these Colossian Christians rose again with Christ. I, for my part, do not believe that, but that baptism was the speaking sign of what lies at the gate of a true Christian life I have no manner of doubt.

So the first thought of our text is not only taught us in words, but it stands manifest in the ritual of the Church as it was from the beginning. We die, and we rise again, through faith and by union through faith, with Christ that died, yea, rather that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God.

Let me turn, secondly, to

**II. The consequent aims of the Christian life.**

If ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above. To seek implies the direction of the external life toward certain objects. It is not to seek as if perhaps we might not find; it is not even to seek in the sense of searching for, but it is to seek in the sense of aiming at. And now do you not think that if we had burning in our hearts, and conscious to our experiences, the sense of union with Jesus Christ the risen Saviour, that would shape the direction and dictate the aims of our earthly life? As surely as the elevation of the rocket tube determines the flight of the projectile that comes from it, so surely would the inward consciousness, if it were vivid as it ought to be in all Christian people, of that risen life throbbing within the heart, shape all the external conduct. It would give us wings and make us soar. It would make us buoyant, and lift us above the creeping aims that constitute the objects of life for so many men.

But you say, Things above: that is an indefinite phrase. What do you mean by it? I will tell you what the Bible means by it. It means Jesus Christ. All the nebulous splendours of that firmament are gathered together into one blazing sun. It is a vague direction to tell a man to shoot up, into an empty heaven. It is not a vague direction to tell him to seek the things above; for they are all gathered into a person. Where Christ is, sitting at the right hand of God,--that is the meaning of things above, which are to be the continual aim of the man who is conscious of a risen life. And of course they will be, for if we feel, as we ought to feel habitually, though with varying clearness, that we do carry within us a spark, if I might use that phrase, of the very life of Jesus Christ, so surely as fire will spring upwards, so surely as water will rise to the height of its source, so surely will our outward lives be directed towards Him, who is the life of our inward lives, and the goal therefore of our outward actions?

Jesus Christ is the summing up of the things that are above; therefore there stands out clear this one great truth, that the only aim for a Christian soul, consistent with the facts of its Christian life, is to be like Christ, to be with Christ, to please Christ.

Now, how does that aim--whether present or absent we labour that we may be well pleasing to Him--how does that aim bear upon the multitude of inferior and nearer aims which men pursue, and which Christians have to pursue along with other men? How does it bear upon them?--Why thus--as the culminating peak of a mountain-chain bears on the lower hills that for miles and miles buttress it, and hold it up, and aspire towards it, and find their perfection in its calm summit that touches the skies. The more we have in view, as our aim in life, Christ who is at the right hand of God, and assimilation, communion with Him, approbation from Him, the more will all immediate aims be ennobled and delivered from the evils that else cleave to them. They are more when they are second than when they are first. Seek ye first the Kingdom of God, and all your other aims--as students, as thinkers, as scientists, as men of business, as parents, as lovers, or anything else--will be greatened by being subordinated to the conscious aim of pleasing Him. That aim should persist, like a strain of melody, one long, holden-down, diapason note, through all our lives. Perfume can be diffused into the air, and dislodge no atom of that which it makes fragrant. This supreme aim can be pursued through, and by means of, all nearer ones, and is inconsistent with nothing but sin. Seek the things that are above.

Lastly, we have here--

**III. The discipline which is needed to secure the right direction of the life.**

The Apostle does not content himself with pointing out the aims. He adds practical advice as to how these aims can be made dominant in our individual cases, when he says, Set your affections on things above. Now, many of you will know that affections is not the full sense of the word that is here employed, and that the Revised Version gives a more adequate rendering when it says, Set your minds on the things that are above. A man cannot do with his love according to his will. He cannot say: Resolved, that I love So-and-So; and then set himself to do it. But though you cannot act on the emotions directly by the will, you can act directly on your understandings, on your thoughts, and your thoughts will act on your affections. If a man wants to love Jesus Christ he must think about Him. That is plain English. It is vain for a man to try to coerce his wandering affections by any other course than by concentrating his thoughts. Set your minds on the things that are above, and that will consolidate and direct the emotions; and the thoughts and the emotions together will shape the outward efforts. Seeking the things that are above will come, and will only come, when mind and heart and inward life are occupied with Him. There is no other way by which the externals can be made right than by setting a watch on the door of our hearts and minds, and this inward discipline must be put in force before there will be any continuity or sureness in the outward aim. We want, for that direction of the life of which I have been speaking, a clear perception and a concentrated purpose, and we shall not get either of these unless we fall back, by thought and meditation, upon the truths which will provide them both.

Brethren, there is another aspect of the connection between these two parts of our text, which I can only touch. Not only is the setting of our thoughts on the things above, the way by which we can make these the aim of our lives. They are not only aims to be reached at some future stage of our progress, but they are possessions to be enjoyed at the present. We may have a present Christ and a present Heaven. The Christian life is not all aspiration; it is fruition as well. We have to seek, but even whilst we seek, we should be conscious that we possess what we are seeking, even whilst we seek it. Do you know anything of that double experience of having the things that are above, here and now, as well as reaching out towards them?

I am afraid that the Christian life of this generation suffers at a thousand points, because it is more concerned with the ordering of the outward life, and the manifold activities which this busy generation has struck out for itself, than it is with the quiet setting of the mind, in silent sunken depths of contemplation, on the things that are above. Oh, if we would think more about them we should aim more at them; and if we were sure that we possessed them to-day we should be more eager for a larger possession to-morrow.

Dear brethren, we may all have the risen life for ours, if we will knit ourselves, in humble dependence and utter self-surrender, to the Christ who died for us that we might be dead to sin, and rose again that we might rise to righteousness. And if we have Him, in any deep and real sense, as the life of our lives, then we shall be blessed, amid all the divergent and sometimes conflicting nearer aims, which we have to pursue, by seeing clear above them that to which they all may tend, the one aim which corresponds to a man's nature, which meets his condition, which satisfies his needs, which can always be attained if it is followed, and which, when secured, never disappoints. God help us all to say, This one thing I do, and all else I count but dung, that I may know Him, and the power of His Resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death, if by any means I may attain unto the Resurrection from the dead!