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

**COLOSSIANS-032**. **WITHOUT AND WITHIN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Them that are without."*

*Colossians 4:5*

That is, of course, an expression for the non-Christian world; the outsiders who are beyond the pale of the Church. There was a very broad line of distinction between it and the surrounding world in the early Christian days, and the handful of Christians in a heathen country felt a great gulf between them and the society in which they lived. That distinction varies in form, and varies somewhat in apparent magnitude according as Christianity has been rooted in a country for a longer or a shorter time, but it remains, and is as real to-day as it ever was, and there is neither wisdom nor kindness in ignoring the distinction.

The phrase of our text may sound harsh, and might be used, as it was by the Jews, from whom it was borrowed, in a very narrow and bitter spirit. Close corporations of any sort are apt to generate, not only a wholesome esprit de corps, but a hostile contempt for outsiders, and Christianity has too often been misrepresented by its professors, who have looked down upon those that are without with supercilious and unchristian self-complacency.

There is nothing of that sort in the words themselves; the very opposite is in them. They sound to me like the expression of a man conscious of the security and comfort and blessedness of the home where he sat, and with his heart yearning for all the houseless wanderers that were abiding the pelting of the pitiless storm out in the darkness there. The spirit and attitude of Christianity to such is one of yearning pity and urgent entreaty to come in and share in the blessings. There is deep pathos in the words, as well as solemn earnestness, and in such a spirit I wish to dwell upon them now for a short time.

**I. I begin with the question: Who are they that are outside? And what is it of which they are outside?**

As I have already remarked, the phrase was apparently borrowed from Judaism, where it meant, outside the Jewish congregation, and its primary application, as used here, is no doubt to those who are outside the Christian Church. But do not let us suppose that that explanation gets to the bottom of the meaning of the words. It may stand as a partial answer, but only as partial. The evil tendency which attends all externalising of truth in the concrete form of institutions works in full force on the Church, and ever tempts us to substitute outward connection with the institution for real possession of the truth of which the institution is the outgrowth. Therefore I urge upon you very emphatically--and all the more earnestly because of the superstitious overestimate of outward connection with the outward institution of the Church which is eagerly proclaimed all around us to-day--that connection with any organised body of believing men is not being within, and that isolation from all these is not necessarily being without. Many a man who is within the organisation is not in the truth, and, blessed be God, a man may be outside all churches, and yet be one of God's hidden ones, and may dwell safe and instructed in the very innermost shrine of the secret place of the Most High. We hear from priestly lips, both Roman Catholic and Anglican, that there is no safety outside the Church. The saying is true when rightly understood. If by the Church be meant the whole company of those who are trusting to Jesus Christ, of course there is no safety outside, because to trust in Jesus is the one condition of safety, and unless we belong to those who so trust we shall not possess the blessing. So understood, the phrase may pass, and is only objectionable as a round-about and easily misunderstood way of saying what is much better expressed by Whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

But that is not the meaning of the phrase in the mouths of those who use it most frequently. To them the Church is a visible corporation, and not only so, but as one of the many organisations into which believers are moulded, it is distinguished from the others by certain offices and rites, bishops, priests, and sacraments, through whom and which certain grace is supposed to flow, no drop of which can reach a community otherwise shaped and officered!

Nor is it only Roman Catholics and Anglicans who are in danger of externalising personal Christianity into a connection with a church. The tendency has its roots deep in human nature, and may be found flourishing quite as rankly in the least sacerdotal of the sects as in the Vatican itself. There is very special need at present for those who understand that Christianity is an immensely deeper thing than connection with any organised body of Christians, to speak out the truth that is in them, and to protest against the vulgar and fleshly notion which is forcing itself into prominence in this day when societies of all sorts are gaining such undue power, and religion, like much else, is being smothered under forms, as was the maiden in the old story, under the weight of her ornaments. External relationships and rites cannot determine spiritual conditions. It does not follow because you have passed through certain forms, and stand in visible connection with any visible community, that you are therefore within the pale and safe. Churches are appointed by Christ. Men who believe and love naturally draw together. The life of Christ is in them. Many spiritual blessings are received through believing association with His people. Illumination and stimulus, succour and sympathy pass from one to another, each in turn experiencing the blessedness of receiving, and the greater blessedness of giving. No wise man who has learned of Christ will undervalue the blessings which come through union with the outward body which is a consequence of union with the unseen Head. But men may be in the Church and out of Christ. Not connection with it, but connection with Him, brings us within. Those that are without may be either in or out of the pale of any church.

We may put the answer to this question in another form, and going deeper than the idea of being within a visible church, we may say, those that are without are they who are outside the Kingdom of Christ.

The Kingdom of Christ is not a visible external community. The Kingdom of Christ, or of God, or of Heaven, is found wherever human wills obey the Law of Christ, which is the will of God, the decrees of Heaven; as Christ himself put it, in profound words--profound in all their simplicity--when He said, Not every man that saith unto Me Lord! Lord! shall enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he that doeth the will of My Father, which is in Heaven. Them that are without are they whose wills are not bent in loving obedience to the Lord of their spirit.

But we must go deeper than that. In the Church? Yes! In the Kingdom? Yes! But I venture to take another Scripture phrase as being the one satisfactory fundamental answer to the question: What is it that these people are outside of? and I say Christ, Christ. If you will take your New Testament as your guide, you will find that the one question upon which all is suspended is the, Am I, or Am I not, in Jesus Christ? Am I in Him, or Am I outside of Him? And the answer to that question is the answer to this other: Who are they that are without?

They that are outside are not the non-Christian world who are not church members; they that are inside are not the Christian world who make an outward profession of being in the Kingdom. It is not going down to the foundation to explain the antithesis so; but those that are within are those who have simple trust upon Jesus Christ as the sole and all-sufficient Saviour of their sinful spirits and the life of their life, and having entered into that great love, have plunged themselves, as it were, into the very heart of Jesus; have found in Him righteousness and peace, forgiveness and love, joy and salvation. Are you in Christ because you love Him and trust your soul to Him? If not, if not, you are amongst those that are without, though you be ever so much joined to the visible Church of the living God.

And then there is one more remark that I must drop in here before I go on, namely, that whilst I thankfully admit, and joyfully preach, that the most imperfect, rudimentary faith knits a man to Jesus Christ, even if in this life it may be found covered over with a great deal that is contradictory and inconsistent; on the other hand there are some people who stand like the angel in the Apocalypse, with one foot on the solid land and one upon the restless sea, half in and half out, undecided, halting--that is, limping--between two opinions. Some people of that sort are listening to me now, who have been like that for years. Now I want them to remember this plain piece of common-sense--half in is altogether out! So that is my answer to the first question: Who are they that are outside, and what is it that they are outside of?

I cannot carry round these principles and lay them upon the conscience of each hearer, but I pray you to listen to your own inmost voice speaking, and I am mistaken if many will not hear it saying: Thou art the man! Do not stop your ears to that voice!

**II. Notice next the force of this phrase as implying the woeful condition of those without.**

I have said that it is full of pathos. It is the language of a man whose heart yearns as, in the midst of his own security, he thinks of the houseless wanderers in the dark and the storm. He thinks pityingly of what they lose, and of that to which they are exposed.

There are two or three ways in which I may illustrate that condition, but perhaps the most graphic and impressive may be just to recall for a moment three or four of the Scripture metaphors that fit into this representation: Those that are without; and thus to gain some different pictures of what the inside and the outside means in these varying figures.

First, then, there is a figure drawn from the Old Testament which is often applied, and correctly applied, to this subject--Noah's Ark.

Think of that safe abode floating across the waters, whilst all without it was a dreary waste. Without were death and despair, but those that were within sat warm and dry and safe and fed and living. The men that were without, high as they might climb upon rocks and hills, strong as they might be--when the dreary rainstorm wept itself dry, they were all dead corpses. To be in was life, to be out was death.

That is the first metaphor. Take another. That singular institution of the old Mosaic system, in which the man who inadvertently, and therefore without any guilt or crime of his own, had been the cause of death to his brother, had provided for him, half on one side Jordan and half on the other, and dotted over the land, so that it should not be too far to run to one of them, Cities of Refuge. And when the wild vendetta of those days stirred up the next of kin to pursue at his heels, if he could get inside the nearest of these he was secure. They that were within could stand at the city gates and look out upon the plain, and see the pursuer with his hate glaring from his eyes, and almost feel his hot breath on their cheeks, and know that though but a yard from him, his arm durst not touch them. To be inside was to be safe, to be outside was certain bloody death.

That is the second figure; take a third; one which our Lord Himself has given us. Here is the picture--a palace, a table abundantly spread, lights and music, delight and banqueting, gladness and fulness, society and sustenance. The guests sit close and all partake. To be within means food, shelter, warmth, festivity, society; to be without, like Lear on the moor, is to stand the pelting of the storm, weary, stumbling in the dark, starving, solitary, and sad. Within is brightness and good cheer; without is darkness, hunger, death.

That is the third figure. Take a fourth, another of our Master's. Picture a little rude, stone-built enclosure with the rough walls piled high, and a narrow aperture at one point, big enough for one creature to pass through at a time. Within, huddled together, are the innocent sheep; without, the lion and the bear. Above, the vault of night with all its stars, and watching all, the shepherd, with unslumbering eye. In the fold is rest for the weary limbs that have been plodding through valleys of the shadow of death, and dusty ways; peace for the panting hearts that are trembling at every danger, real and imaginary. Inside the fold is tranquillity, repose for the wearied frame, safety, and the companionship of the Shepherd; and without, ravening foes and a dreary wilderness, and flinty paths and sparse herbage and muddy pools. Inside is life; without is death. That is the fourth figure.

In the Ark no Deluge can touch; in the City of Refuge no avenger can smite; in the banqueting-hall no thirst nor hunger but can be satisfied; in the fold no enemy can come and no terror can live.

Brethren! are you amongst them that are without, or are you within?

**III. Lastly--why is anybody outside?**

Why? It is no one's fault but their own. It is not God's. He can appeal with clean hands and ask us to judge what more could have been done for His vineyard that He has not done for it. The great parable which represents Him as sending out His summons to the feast in His palace puts the wonderful words in the mouth of the master of the house, after his call by his servants had been refused. Go out into the highways and hedges, beneath which the beggars squat, and compel them to come in, that my house may be full. Nature abhors a vacuum, the old natural philosophers used to say. So does grace; so does God's love. It hates to have His house empty and His provisions unconsumed. And so He has done all that He could do to bring you and me inside. He has sent His Son, He beckons us, He draws us by countless mercies day by day. He appeals to our hearts, and would have us gathered into the fold. And if we are outside it is not because He has neglected to do anything which He can do in order to bring us in.

But why is it that any of us resist such drawing, and make the wretched choice of perishing without, rather than find safety within? The deepest reason is an alienated heart, a rebellious will. But the reason for alienation and rebellion lie among the inscrutable mysteries of our awful being. All sin is irrational. The fact is plain, the temptations are obvious; excuses there are in plenty, but reasons there are none. Still we may touch for a moment on some of the causes which operate with many hearers of God's merciful call to enter in, and keep them without.

Many remain outside because they do not really believe in the danger. No doubt there was a great deal of brilliant sarcasm launched at Noah for his folly in thinking that there was anything coming that needed an ark. It seemed, no doubt, food for much laughter, and altogether impossible to think of gravely, that this flood which he talked about should ever come. So they had their laughter out as they saw him working away at his ludicrous task until the day when the flood came and swept them all away, and the laughter ended in gurgling sobs of despair.

If a manslayer does not believe that the next of kin is on his track, he will not flee to the City of Refuge. If the sheep has no fear of wolves, it will choose to be outside the fold among the succulent herbage. Did you ever see how, in a Welsh slate-quarry, before a blast, a horn is blown, and at its sound all along the face of the quarry the miners run to their shelters, where they stay until the explosion is over? What do you suppose would become of one of them who stood there after the horn had blown, and said: Nonsense! There is nothing coming! I will take my chance where I am! Very likely a bit of slate would end him before he had finished his speech. At any rate, do not you, dear friend, trifle with the warning that says: Flee for refuge to Christ and shelter yourself in Him.

There are some people, too, who stop outside because they do not much care for the entertainment that they will get within. It does not strike them as being very desirable. They have no appetite for it. We preachers seek to draw hearts to Jesus by many motives--and among others by setting forth the blessings which he bestows. But if a man does not care about pardon, does not fear judgment, does not want to be good, has no taste for righteousness, is not attracted by the pure and calm pleasures which Christ offers, the invitation falls flat upon his ear. Wisdom cries aloud and invites the sons of men to her feast, but the fare she provides is not coarse and high spiced enough, and her table is left unfilled, while the crowd runs to the strong-flavoured meats and foaming drinks which her rival, Folly, offers. Many of us say, like the Israelites Our souls loathe this light bread, this manna, white and sweet, and Heaven-descended, and angels food though it be, and we hanker after the reeking garlic and leeks and onions of Egypt.

Some of us again, would like well enough to be inside, if that would keep us from dangers which we believe to be real, but we do not like the doorway. You may see in some remote parts of the country strange, half-subterranean structures which are supposed to have been the houses of a vanished race. They have a long, narrow, low passage, through which a man has to creep with his face very near the ground. He has to go low and take to his knees to get through; and at the end the passage opens out into ampler, loftier space, where the dwellers could sit safe from wild weather and wilder beasts and wildest men. That is like the way into the fortress home which we have in Jesus Christ. We must stoop very low to enter there. And some of us do not like that. We do not like to fall on our knees and say, I am a sinful man, O Lord. We do not like to bow ourselves in penitence. And the passage is narrow as well as low. It is broad enough for you, but not for what some of you would fain carry in on your back. The pack which you bear, of earthly vanities and loves, and sinful habits, will be brushed off your shoulders in that narrow entrance, like the hay off a cart in a country lane bordered by high hedges. And some of us do not like that. So, because the way is narrow, and we have to stoop, our pride kicks at the idea of having to confess ourselves sinners, and of having to owe all our hope and salvation to God's undeserved mercy, therefore we stay outside. And because the way is narrow, and we have to put off some of our treasures, our earthward-looking desires shrink from laying these aside, and therefore we stop outside. There was room in the boat for the last man who stood on the deck, but he could not make up his mind to leave a bag of gold. There was no room for that. Therefore he would not leap, and went down with the ship.

The door is open. The Master calls. The feast is spread. Dangers threaten. The flood comes. The avenger of blood makes haste. Why standest thou without? Enter in, before the door is shut. And if you ask, How shall I pass within?--the answer is plain: They could not enter in because of unbelief. We which have believed do enter into rest.