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

**DANIEL-005. A TRIBUTE FROM ENEMIES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Then said these men, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God."*

*Daniel 6:5*

Daniel was somewhere about ninety years old when he was cast to the lions. He had been for many years the real governor of the whole empire; and, of course, in such a position had incurred much hatred and jealousy. He was a foreigner and a worshipper of another God, and therefore was all the more unpopular, as a Brahmin would be in England if he were a Cabinet Minister. He was capable and honest, and therefore all the incompetent and all the knavish officials would recognise in him their natural enemy. So, hostile intrigues, which grow quickly in courts, especially in Eastern courts, sprung up round him, and his subordinates laid their heads together in order to ruin him. They say, in the words of my text, We cannot find any holes to pick. There is only one way to put him into antagonism to the law, and that is by making a law which shall be in antagonism to God's law. And so they scheme to have the mad regulation enacted, which, in the sequel of the story, we find was enforced.

These intriguers say, We shall not find any occasion against this Daniel, except we find it against him concerning the law of his God.

Now, then, if we look at that confession, wrung from the lips of malicious observers, we may, I think, get two or three lessons.

**I. First, note the very unfavourable soil in which a character of singular beauty and devout consecration may be rooted and grow.**

What sort of a place was that court where Daniel was? Half shambles and half pigsty. Luxury, sensuality, lust, self-seeking, idolatry, ruthless cruelty, and the like were the environment of this man. And in the middle of these there grew up that fair flower of a character, pure and stainless, by the acknowledgment of enemies, and in which not even accusers could find a speck or a spot. There are no circumstances in which a man must have his garments spotted by the world. However deep the filth through which he has to wade, if God sent him there, and if he keeps hold of God's hand, his purity will be more stainless by reason of the impurity round him. There were saints in Cæ³¡r's household, and depend upon it, they were more saintly saints just because they were in Cæ³¡r's household. You will always find that people who have any goodness in them, and who live in conditions unusually opposed to goodness, have a clearer faith, and a firmer grasp of their Master, and a higher ideal of Christian life, just because of the foulness in which they have to live. It may sound a paradox, but it is a deep truth that unfavourable circumstances are the most favourable for the development of Christian character. For that development comes, not by what we draw from the things around, but by what we draw from the soil in which we are rooted, even God Himself, in whom the roots find both anchorage and nutriment. And the more we are thrown back upon Him, and the less we find food for our best selves in the things about us, the more likely is our religion to be robust and thorough-going, and conscious ever of His presence. Resistance strengthens muscles, and the more there is need for that in our Christian lives, the manlier and the stronger and the better shall we probably be. Let no man or woman say, If only circumstances were more favourable, oh, what a saint I could be; but how can I be one, with all these unfavourable conditions? How can a man keep the purity of his Christian life and the fervour of his Christian communion amidst the tricks and chicanery and small things of Manchester business? How can a woman find time to hold fellowship with God, when all day long she is distracted in her nursery with all these children hanging on her to look after? How can we, in our actual circumstances, reach the ideal of Christian character?'

Ah, brother, if the ideal's being realised depends on circumstances, it is a poor affair. It depends on you, and he that has vitality enough within him to keep hold of Jesus Christ, has thereby power enough within him to turn enemies into friends, and unfavourable circumstances into helps instead of hindrances. Your ship can sail wonderfully near to the wind if you trim the sails rightly, and keep a good, strong grip on the helm, and the blasts that blow all but in your face, may be made to carry you triumphantly into the haven of your desire. Remember Daniel, in that godless court reeking with lust and cruelty, and learn that purity and holiness and communion with God do not depend on environment, but upon the inmost will of the man.

**II. Notice the keen critics that all good men have to face.**

In this man's case, of course, their eyesight was mended by the microscope of envy and malice. That is no doubt the case with some of us too. But whether that be so or no, however unobtrusive and quiet a Christian person's life may be, there will be some people standing close by who, if not actually watching for his fall, are at least by no means indisposed to make the worst of a slip, and to rejoice over an inconsistency.

We do not need to complain of that. It is perfectly reasonable and perfectly right. There will always be a tendency to judge men, who by any means profess that they are living by the highest law, with a judgment that has very little charity in it. And it is perfectly right that it should be so. Christian people need to be trained to be indifferent to men's opinions, but they also need to be reminded that they are bound, as the Apostle says, to provide things honest in the sight of all men. It is a reasonable and right requirement that they should have a good report of them that are without. Be content to be tried by a high standard, and do not wonder, and do not forget that there are keen eyes watching your conduct, in your home, in your relations to your friends, in your business, in your public life, which would weep no tears, but might gleam with malicious satisfaction, if they saw inconsistencies in you. Remember it, and shape your lives so that they may be disappointed.

If a minister falls into any kind of inconsistency or sin, if a professing Christian makes a bad failure in Manchester, what a talk there is, and what a pointing of fingers! We sometimes think it is hard; it is all right. It is just what should be meted out to us. Let us remember that unslumbering tribunal which sits in judgment upon all our professions, and is very ready to condemn, and very slow to acquit.

**III. Notice, again, the unblemished record.**

These men could find no fault, forasmuch as Daniel was faithful. Neither was there any error--of judgment, that is,--or fault--dereliction of duty, that is,--found in him. They were very poor judges of his religion, and they did not try to judge that; but they were very good judges of his conduct as prime minister, and they did judge that. The world is a very poor critic of my Christianity, but it is a very sufficient one of my conduct. It may not know much about the inward emotions of the Christian life, and the experiences in which the Christian heart expatiates and loves to dwell, but it knows what short lengths, and light weights, and bad tempers, and dishonesty, and selfishness are. And it is by our conduct, in the things that they and we do together, that worldly men judge what we are in the solitary depths where we dwell in communion with God. It is useless for Christians to be talking, as so many of them are fond of doing, about their spiritual experiences and their religious joy, and all the other sweet and sacred things which belong to the silent life of the spirit in God, unless, side by side with these, there is the doing of the common deeds which the world is actually able to appraise in such a fashion as to extort, even from them, the confession, We find no occasion against this man.

You remember the pregnant, quaint old saying, If a Christian man is a shoeblack, he ought to be the best shoeblack in the parish. If we call ourselves Christians, we are bound, by the very name, to live in such a fashion as that men shall have no doubt of the reality of our profession and of the depth of our fellowship with Christ. It is by our common conduct that they judge us. And the Christian Endeavourer needs to remember, whether he or she be old or young, that the best sign of the reality of the endeavour is the doing of common things with absolute rightness, because they are done wholly for Christ's sake.

It is a sharp test, and I wonder how many of us would like to go out into the world, and say to all the irreligious people who know us, Now come and tell me what the faults are that you have seen in me. There would be a considerable response to the invitation, and perhaps some of us would learn to know ourselves rather better than we have been able to do. We shall not find any occasion in this Daniel--I wonder if they would find it in that Daniel--except we find it concerning the law of his God. There is a record for a man!

**IV. Lastly, note obedient disobedience.**

The plot goes on the calculation that, whatever happens, this man may be trusted to do what his God tells him, no matter who tells him not to do it. And so on that calculation the law, surely as mad a one as any Eastern despot ever hatched, is passed that, for a given space of time, nobody within the dominions of this king, Darius, is to make any petition or request of any man or god, save of the king only. It was one of the long series of laws that have been passed in order to be broken, and being broken, might be an instrument to destroy the men that broke it. It was passed with no intention of getting obedience, but only with the intention of slaying one faithful man, and the plot worked according to calculation.

What did it matter to Daniel what was forbidden or commanded? He needed to pray to God, and nothing shall hinder him from doing that. And so, obediently disobedient, he brushes the preposterous law of the poor, shadowy Darius on one side, in order that he may keep the law of his God.

Now I do not need to remind you how obedience to God has in the past often had to be maintained by disobedience to law. I need not speak of martyrs, nor of the great principle laid down so clearly by the apostle Peter, We ought to obey God rather than man. Nor need I remind you that if a man, for conscience sake, refuses to render active obedience to an unrighteous law, and unresistingly accepts the appointed penalty, he is not properly regarded as a law-breaker.

If earthly authorities command what is clearly contrary to God's law, a Christian is absolved from obedience, and cannot be loyal unless he is a rebel. That is how our forefathers read constitutional obligations. That is how the noble men on the other side of the Atlantic, fifty years ago, read their constitutional obligations in reference to that devilish institution of slavery. And in the last resort--God forbid that we should need to act on the principle--Christian men are set free from allegiance when the authority over them commands what is contrary to the will and the law of God.

But all that does not touch us. But I will tell you what does touch us. Obedience to God needs always to be sustained--in some cases more markedly, in some cases less so--but always in some measure, by disobedience to the maxims and habits of most men round about us. If they say Do this, and Jesus Christ says Don't, then they may talk as much as they like, but we are bound to turn a deaf ear to their exhortations and threats.

He is a slave that dare not be

In the right with two or three,'

as that peaceful Quaker poet of America sings.

And for us, in our little lives, the motto, This did not I, because of the fear of the Lord, is absolutely essential to all noble Christian conduct. Unless you are prepared to be in the minority, and now and then to be called narrow, fanatic, and to be laughed at by men because you will not do what they do, but abstain and resist, then there is little chance of your ever making much of your Christian profession.

These people calculated upon Daniel, and they had a right to calculate upon him. Could the world calculate upon us, that we would rather go to the lions den than conform to what God and our consciences told us to be a sin? If not, we have not yet learned what it means to be a disciple. The commandment comes to us absolutely, as it came to the servants in the first miracle, Whatsoever He saith unto you--that, and that only--whatsoever He saith unto you, do it.