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

**EXODUS-005. THE CALL OF MOSES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"10.* *Come now therefore, and I will send thee unto Pharaoh, that thou mayest bring forth My people the children of Israel, out of Egypt. 11. And Moses said unto God, Who am I, that I should go unto Pharaoh, and that I should bring forth the children of Israel out of Egypt? 12. And He said, Certainly I will be with thee; and this shall be a token unto thee, that I have sent thee: When thou hast brought forth the people out of Egypt, ye shall serve God upon this mountain. 13. And Moses said unto God, Behold, when I come unto the children of Israel, and shall say unto them, The God of your fathers hath sent me unto you; and they shall say to me, What is His name? what shall I say unto them? 14. And God said unto Moses, I AM THAT I AM: and He said, thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, I AM hath sent me unto you. 15. And God said moreover unto Moses, Thus shalt thou say unto the children of Israel, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, hath sent me unto you: this is my name for ever, and this is my memorial unto all generations. 16. Go, and gather the elders of Israel together, and say unto them, The Lord God of your fathers, the God of Abraham, of Isaac, and of Jacob, appeared unto me, saying, I have surely visited you, and seen that which is done to you in Egypt: 17. And I have said, I will bring you up out of the affliction of Egypt unto the land of the Canaanites, and the Hittites, and the Amorites, and the Perizzites, and the Hivites, and the Jebusites, unto a land flowing with milk and honey. 18. And they shall hearken to thy voice: and thou shalt come, thou and the elders of Israel, unto the king of Egypt, and ye shall say unto him, The Lord God of the Hebrews hath met with us: and now let us go, we beseech Thee, three days journey into the wilderness, that we may sacrifice to the Lord our God. 19. And I am sure that the king of Egypt will not let you go, no, not by a mighty hand. 20. And I will stretch out my hand, and smite Egypt with all My wonders which I will do in the midst thereof: and after that he will let you go."*

*Exodus 3:10-20*

The son of Pharaoh's daughter had been transformed, by nearly forty years of desert life, into an Arab shepherd. The influences of the Egyptian court had faded from him, like colour from cloth exposed to the weather; nor is it probable that, after the failure of his early attempt to play the deliverer to Israel, he nourished further designs of that sort. He appears to have settled down quietly to be Jethro's son-in-law, and to have lived a modest, still life of humble toil. He had flung away fair prospects,--and what had he made of it? The world would say Nothing, as it ever does about those who despise material advantages and covet higher good. Looking after sheep in the desert was a sad downcome from the possibility of sitting on the throne of Egypt. Yes, but it was in the desert that the vision of the bush burning, and not burning out, came; and it would not have come if Moses had been in a palace.

This passage begins in the midst of the divine communication which followed and interpreted the vision. We note, first, the divine charge and the human shrinking from the task. It was a startling transition from verse 9, which declares God's pitying knowledge of Israel's oppression, to verse 10, which thrusts Moses forward into the thick of dangers and difficulties, as God's instrument. I will send thee must have come like a thunder-clap. The commander's summons which brings a man from the rear rank and sets him in the van of a storming-party may well make its receiver shrink. It was not cowardice which prompted Moses answer, but lowliness. His former impetuous confidence had all been beaten out of him. Time was when he was ready to take up the role of deliverer at his own hand; but these hot days were past, and age and solitude and communion with God had mellowed him into humility. His recoil was but one instance of the shrinking which all true, devout men feel when designated for tasks which may probably make life short, and will certainly make it hard. All prophets and reformers till to-day have had the same feeling. Men who can do such work as the Jeremiahs, Pauls, Luthers, Cromwells, can do, are never forward to begin it.

Self-confidence is not the temper which God uses for His instruments. He works with bruised reeds, and breathes His strength into them. It is when a man says I can do nothing, that he is fit for God to employ. When I am weak, then I am strong. Moses remembered enough of Egypt to know that it was no slight peril to front Pharaoh, and enough of Israel not to be particularly eager to have the task of leading them. But mark that there is no refusal of the charge, though there is profound consciousness of inadequacy. If we have reason to believe that any duty, great or small, is laid on us by God, it is wholesome that we should drive home to ourselves our own weakness, but not that we should try to shuffle out of the duty because we are weak. Moses answer was more of a prayer for help than of a remonstrance, and it was answered accordingly.

God deals very gently with conscious weakness. Certainly I will be with thee. Moses estimate of himself is quite correct, and it is the condition of his obtaining God's help. If he had been self-confident, he would have had no longing for, and no promise of, God's presence. In all our little tasks we may have the same assurance, and, whenever we feel that they are too great for us, the strength of that promise may be ours. God sends no man on errands which He does not give him power to do. So Moses had not to calculate the difference between his feebleness and the strength of a kingdom. Such arithmetic left out one element, which made all the difference in the sum total. Pharaoh versus Moses did not look a very hopeful cause, but Pharaoh versus Moses and Another--that other being God--was a very different matter. God and I are always stronger than any antagonists. It was needless to discuss whether Moses was able to cope with the king. That was not the right way of putting the problem. The right way was, Is God able to do it?

The sign given to Moses is at first sight singular, inasmuch as it requires faith, and can only be a confirmation of his mission when that mission is well accomplished. But there was a help to present faith even in it, for the very sacredness of the spot hallowed now by the burning bush was a kind of external sign of the promise.

One difficulty being solved, Moses raised another, but not in the spirit of captiousness or reluctance. God is very patient with us when we tell Him the obstacles which we seem to see to our doing His work. As long as these are presented in good faith, and with the wish to have them cleared up, He listens and answers. The second question asked by Moses was eminently reasonable. He pictures to himself his addressing the Israelites, and their question, What is the name of this God who has sent you? Apparently the children of Israel had lost much of their ancestral faith, and probably had in many instances fallen into idolatry. We do not know enough to pronounce with confidence on that point, nor how far the great name of Jehovah had been used before the time of Moses, or had been forgotten in Egypt.

The questions connected with these points and with the history of the name do not enter into our present purpose. My task is rather to point out the religious significance of the self-revelation of God contained in the name, and how it becomes the foundation of Israel's deliverance, existence, and prerogatives. Whatever opinions are adopted as to the correct form of the name and other grammatical and philological questions, there is no doubt that it mainly reveals God as self-existent and unchangeable. He draws His being from no external source, nor borrows leave to be. Creatures are what they are made or grow to be; they are what they were not; they are what they will some time not any more be. But He is what He is. Lifted above time and change, self-existing and self-determined, He is the fountain of life, the same for ever.

This underived, independent, immutable being is a Person who can speak to men, and can say I am. Being such, He has entered into close covenant relations with men, and has permitted Himself to be called the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The name Jehovah lifts Him high above all creatures; the name the God of your fathers brings Him into tender proximity with men, and, in combination with the former designation, guarantees that He will forever be what He has been, even to all generations of children's children. That mighty name is, indeed, His memorial to all generations, and is as fresh and full of blessedness to us as to the patriarchs. Christ has made us understand more of the treasures for heart and mind and life which are stored in it. Our Father which art in heaven is the unfolding of its inmost meaning.

We may note that the bush burning but not consumed expressed in symbol the same truth which the name reveals. It seems a mistake to take the bush as the emblem of Israel surviving persecution. Rather the revelation to the eye says the same thing as that to the ear, as is generally the case. As the desert shrub flamed, and yet did not burn away, so that divine nature is not wearied by action nor exhausted by bestowing, nor has its life any tendency towards ending or extinction, as all creatural life has.

The closing verses of this passage (vs. 16-20) are a programme of Moses mission, in which one or two points deserve notice. First, the general course of it is made known from the beginning. Therein Moses was blessed beyond most of God's servants, who have to risk much and to labour on, not knowing which shall prosper. If we could see, as he did, the lie of the country beforehand, our journeys would be easier. So we often think, but we know enough of what shall be to enable us to have quiet hearts; and it is best for us not to see what is to fail and what to succeed. Our ignorance stimulates effort, and drives to clinging to God's hand.

Then we may note the full assurances to be given to the elders of Israel. Apparently some kind of civic organisation had been kept up, and there were principal people among the slaves who had to be galvanised first into enthusiasm. So they are to be told two things,--that Jehovah has appeared to Moses, and that He, not Moses only, will deliver them and plant them in the land. The enumeration of the many tribes (v. 17) might discourage, but it is intended to fire by the thought of the breadth of the land, which is further described as fertile. The more exalted our conceptions of the inheritance, the more willing shall we be to enter on the pilgrimage towards it. The more we realise that Jehovah has promised to lead us thither, the more willing shall we be to face difficulties and dangers.

The directions as to the opening of communications with Pharaoh have often been made a difficulty, as if there was trickery in the modest request for permission to go three days journey into the wilderness. But that request was to be made, knowing that it would not be granted. It was to be a test of Pharaoh's willingness to submit to Jehovah. Its very smallness made it so more effectually. If he had any disposition to listen to the voice speaking through Moses, he would yield that small point. It is useless to speculate on what would have happened if he had done so. But probably the Israelites would have come back from their sacrificing.

Of more importance is it to note that the failure of the request was foreseen, and yet the effort was to be made. Is not that the same paradox which meets us in all the divine efforts to win over hard-hearted men to His service? Is it not exactly what our Lord did when He appealed to Judas, while knowing that all would be vain?

The expression in verse 19, not by a mighty hand, is very obscure. It may possibly mean that Pharaoh was so obstinate that no human power was strong enough to bend his will. Therefore, in contrast to the mighty hand of man, which was not mighty enough for this work, God will stretch out His hand, and that will suffice to compel obedience from the proudest. God can force men by His might to comply with His will, so far as external acts go; but He does not regard that as obedience, nor delight in it. We can steel ourselves against men's power, but God's hand can crush and break the strongest will. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God. It is a blessed thing to put ourselves into them, in order to be moulded by their loving touch. The alternative is laid before every soul of man.