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

**ISAIAH-038. MIRACLES OF HEALING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Then the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped. Then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing."*

*Isaiah 35:5-6a*

Then--when? The previous verse answers, Behold, your God will come, He will come and save you. And what or when is that coming? A glance at the place which this grand hymn occupies in the series of Isaiah's prophecies answers that question. It stands at the close of the first part of these, and is the limit of the prophet's vision. He has been setting forth the Lord's judgments upon all heathen, and His deliverance of Israel from its oppressors; and the coming is His manifestation for that double purpose. Before its flashing brightness, barrenness is changed into verdure, diseases that lame men's powers vanish, the dry and thirsty land gleams with the shining light of sudden streams. Across the wilderness stretches a broad path, raised high above the bewildering monotony of pathless sand, too plain to be missed, too lofty for wild beasts suppleness to spring upon it: along it troop with song and gladness the returning exiles, with hope in their hearts as they journey to Zion, where they find a joyful home undimmed by sorrow, and in which sighing and sorrow are heard and felt no more.

Now this is poetry, no doubt; the golden light of imagination suffuses it all, but it is poetry with a solid meaning in it. It is not a mere play of fancy exalting the coming of the Lord by heaping together all images that suggest the vanishing of evil and the coming of good. If there is a basis of facts in it, what are they? What is the period of that emphatic then at the beginning of our text? The return of the Jews from exile? Yes, certainly; but some greater event shines through the words. Some future restoration of that undying race to their own land? Yes, possibly, again we answer, but that does not exhaust the prophecy. The great coming of God to save in the gift of His Son? Yes, that in an eminent degree. The second coming of Christ? Yes, that too. All the events in which God has come for men's deliverance are shadowed here; for in them all, the same principles are at work, and in all, similar effects have followed. But mainly the mission and work of Jesus Christ is pointed at here--whether in its first stage of Incarnation and Passion, or in its second stage of Coming in glory, the second time without sin, unto salvation.

And the bodily diseases here enumerated are symbols, just as Christ's miracles were symbolical, just as every language has used the body as a parable of the soul, and has felt that there is such a harmony between them that the outward and visible does correspond to and shadow the inward and spiritual.

I think, then, that we may fairly take these four promises as bringing out very distinctly the main characteristics of the blessed effects of Christ's work in the world. The great subject of these words is the power of Christ in restoring to men the spiritual capacities which are all but destroyed. We have here three classes of bodily infirmities represented as cured at the date of that blessed Then. Blindness and deafness are defects in perception, and stand for incapacities affecting the powers of knowledge. Lameness affects powers of motion, and stands for incapacity of activity. Dumbness prevents speech, and stands for incapacity of utterance.

**I. Christ as the restorer of the powers of knowing.**

Bodily diseases are taken to symbolise spiritual infirmities.

Mark the peculiarities of Scripture anthropology as brought out in this view of humanity:--

* Its gloomy views of man's actual condition.
* Its emphatic declaration that that condition is abnormal.
* Its confidence of effecting a cure.
* Its transcendentally glorious conception of what man may become.

Men are blind and deaf; that is to say, their powers of perception are destroyed by reason of disease. What a picture! The great spiritual realities are all unseen, as Elisha's young servant was blind to the fiery chariots that girdled the prophet. Men are blind to the starry truths that shine as silver in the firmament. They are deaf to the Voice which is gone out to the ends of the earth, and yet they have eyes and ears, conscience, intuitions. They possess organs, but these are powerless.

And while the blindness is primarily in regard to spiritual and religious truths, it is not confined to these, but wherever spiritual blindness has fallen, the whole of a man's knowledge will suffer. There will be blindness to the highest philosophy, to the true basis and motive of morals, to true psychology, to the noblest poetry. All will be of the earth, earthy. You cannot strike religion out of men's thoughts, as you might take a stone out of a wall and leave the wall standing; you take out foundation and mortar, and make a ruinous heap.

I know, of course, that there may be much mental activity without any perception of spiritual realities, but all knowledge which is not purely mathematical or physical suffers by the absence of such perception. All this blindness is caused by sin.

Christ is the giver of spiritual sight. He restores the faculty by taking away the hindrance to its exercise. Further, He gives sight because He gives light.

But turn to facts of experience, and consider the mental apathy of heathenism as contrasted with the energy of mind within the limits of Christendom. Greece, of course, is a brilliant exception, but even there (i) what of the conceptions of God? (ii) what of the effect of the wise on the mass of the nation? Think of the languid intellectual life of the East. Think of the energy of thought which has been working within the limits of Christianity. Think of Christian theology compared with the mythologies of idolatry. And the contrast holds not only in the religious field but all over the field of thought.

There is no such sure way of diffusing a culture which will refine and strengthen all the powers of mind as to diffuse the knowledge of Jesus, and to make men love Him. In His light they will see light.

To know Him and to keep company with Him is a liberal education, as is seen in many a lowly life, all uninfluenced by what is called learning, but enriched with the finest flowers of culture, and having gathered them all in Christ's garden.

Christ is the true light; in Him do we see. Without Him, what is all other knowledge? He is central to all, like genial heat about the roots of a plant. There is other knowledge than that of sense; and for the highest of all our knowledge we depend on Him who is the Word. In that region we can neither observe nor experiment. In that region facts must be brought by some other means than we can command, and we can but draw more or less accurate deductions from them. Logic without revelation is like a spinning-machine without any cotton, busy drawing out nothing. Here we have to listen. The entrance of Thy words giveth light. Your God shall come and save you; then, by that divine coming and saving, the eyes of the blind shall be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped.

**II. Christ as the Restorer of the Powers of Action.**

Again turn to heathenism, see the apathetic indolence, the unprogressive torpor, Better fifty years of Europe than a cycle of Cathay. Sin lames for service of God; it leaves the lower nature free to act, and that freedom paralyses all noble activity.

Christianity brings the Energising of the Soul--

**(a)** By its reference of everything to God--our powers and our circumstances and our activities.

**(b)** By its prominence given to Retribution. It speaks not merely of vita brevis--but of vita brevis and an Eternity which grows out of it.

**(c)** By its great motive for work--love.

**(d)** By the freedom It brings from the weight that paralysed.

It takes away sin. Lifting that dreary load from our backs, it makes us joyful, strong, and agile.

The true view of Christianity is not, as some of its friends, and some of its foes, mistakenly concur in supposing, that it weakens interest in, and energy on, the Present, but that it heightens the power of action. A life plunged in that jar of oxygen will glow with redoubled brilliance.

**III. Christ as the Restorer of Powers of Utterance.**

The silence that broods over the world. It is dumb for all holy, thankful words; with no voice to sing, no utterance of joyful praise.

Think of the effect of Christianity on human speech, giving it new themes, refining words and crowding them with new meanings. Translate the Bible into any language, and that language is elevated and enriched.

Think of the effect on human praise. That great treasure of Christian poetry.

Think of the effect on human gladness. Christ fills the heart with such reasons for praise, and makes life one song of joy.

Thus Christ is the Healer.

To men seeking for knowledge, He offers a higher gift--healing. And as for true knowledge and culture, in Christ, and in Christ alone, will you find it.

Let your culture be rooted in Him. Let your Religion influence all your nature.

The effects of Christianity are its best evidence. What else does the like of that which it does? Let Jannes and Jambres do the same with their enchantments. We may answer the question, Art Thou He that should come? as Christ did, The blind receive their sight, and the lame walk; the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear.

The perfect Restoration will be in heaven. Then, indeed, when our souls are freed from mortal grossness, and the thin veils of sense are rent and we behold Him as He is, then when they rest not day nor night, but with ever renewed strength run to His commandments, then when He has put into their lips a new song--then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as an hart, and the tongue of the dumb sing.