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

**ISAIAH-052. JACOB – ISRAEL - JESHURUN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Yet now hear, O Jacob My servant; and Israel, whom I have chosen... . Fear not, O Jacob, My servant; and thou, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen."*

*Isaiah 44:1, 2*

You observe that there are here three different names applied to the Jewish nation. Two of them, namely Jacob and Israel, were borne by their great ancestor, and by him transmitted to his descendants. The third was never borne by him, and is applied to the people only here and in the Book of Deuteronomy.

The occurrence of all three here is very remarkable, and the order in which they stand is not accidental. The prophet begins with the name that belonged to the patriarch by birth; the name of nature, which contained some indications of character. He passes on to the name which commemorated the mysterious conflict where, as a prince, Jacob had power with God and prevailed. He ends with the name Jeshurun, of which the meaning is the righteous one, and which was bestowed upon the people as a reminder of what they ought to be.

Now, as I take it, the occurrence of these names here, and their sequence, may teach us some very important lessons; and it is simply to these lessons, and not at all to the context, that I ask your attention.

**I. I take, then, these three names in their order as teaching us, first, the path of transformation.**

Every Jacob may become a righteous one, if he will tread Jacob's road. We start with that first name of nature which, according to Esau's bitter etymology of it, meant a supplanter--not without some suggestions of craft and treachery in it. It is descriptive of the natural disposition of the patriarch, which was by no means attractive. Cool, calculating, subtle, with a very keen eye to his own interests, and not at all scrupulous as to the means by which he secured them, he had no generous impulses, and few unselfish affections. He told lies to his poor old blind father, he cheated his brother, he met the shiftiness of Laban with equal shiftiness. It was diamond cut diamond all through. He tried to make a bargain with God Himself at Bethel, and to lay down conditions on which he would bring Him the tenth of his substance. And all through his earlier career he does not look like the stuff of which heroes and saints are made.

But in the mid-path of his life there came that hour of deep dejection and helplessness, when, driven out of all dependence on self, and feeling round in his agony for something to lay hold upon, there came into his nightly solitude a vision of God. In conscious weakness, and in the confidence of self-despair, he wrestled with the mysterious Visitant in the only fashion in which He can be wrestled with. He wept and made supplication to Him, as one of the prophets puts it, and so he bore away the threefold gift--blessing from those mighty lips whose blessing is the communication, and not only the invocation, of mercy, a deeper knowledge of that divine and mysterious Name, and for himself a new name.

That new name implied a new direction given to his character.

Hitherto he had wrestled with men whom he would supplant, for his own advantage, by craft and subtlety; henceforward he strove with God for higher blessings, which, in striving, he won. All the rest of his life was on a loftier plane. Old ambitions were dead within him, and though the last of these names in our text was never actually borne by him, he began to deserve it, and grew steadily in nobleness and beauty of character until the end, when he sang his swan-song and lay down to die, with thanksgiving for the past and glowing prophecies for the future, pouring from his trembling lips.

And now, brethren, that is the outline of the only way in which, from out of the evil and the sinfulness of our natural disposition, any of us can be raised to the loftiness and purity of a righteous life. There must be a Peniel between the two halves of the character, if there is to be transformation.

Have you ever been beaten out of all your confidence, and ground down into the dust of self-disgust and self-abandonment? Have you ever felt, there is nothing in me or about me that I can cling to or rely upon? Have you ever in the thickest of that darkness had, gleaming in upon your solitude, the vision of His face, whose face we see in Jesus Christ? Have you ever grasped Him who is infinitely willing to be held by the weakest hand, and who never makes as though He would go further, except in order to induce us to say, with deeper earnestness of desire, Abide with us, for it is dark? And have you ever, in fellowship with Him thus, found pouring into your enlightened mind a deeper reading of the meaning of His character and a fuller conception of the mystery of His love? And have you ever--certainly you have if these things have preceded it, certainly you have not if they have not --have you ever thereby been borne up on to a higher level of feeling and life, and been aware of new impulses, hopes, joys, new directions and new capacities budding and blossoming in your spirit?

Brethren! there is only one way by which, out of the mire and clay of earth, there can be formed a fair image of holiness, and that is, that Jacob's experience, in deeper, more inward, more wonderful form, should be repeated in each one of us; and that thus, penitent and yet hopeful, we should behold the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ, and draw from Him our righteousness. That is the path of transformation. The road passes through Peniel, and Jacob must become Israel before he is Jeshurun. He must hold communion with God in Christ before he is clothed with righteousness.

How different that path is from the road which men are apt to take in working out their own self-improvement! How many forms of religion, and how many toiling souls put the cart before the horse, and in effect just reverse the process, and say practically--first make yourselves righteous, and then you will have communion with God! That is an endless and a hopeless task. I have no doubt that some of you have spent--and I would not say wasted, but it has been almost so--years of life, not without many an honest effort, in the task of self-improvement, and are very much where you were long ago. Why have you failed? Because you have never been to Peniel. You have never seen the face of God in Christ, You have not received from Him the blessing, even righteousness, from the God of your salvation.

Dear friends, give up treading that endless, weary path of vain effort; and learn--oh! learn--that the righteousness which makes a soul pure and beautiful must come as a gift from God, and is given only in Jesus Christ.

This sequence too, I think, may very fairly be used to teach us the lesson that there is no kind of character so debased but that it may partake of the purifying and ennobling influence. All the Jacobs may be turned into righteous ones, however crafty, however subtle, however selfish, however worldly they are. Christianity looks at no man and says, That is too bad a case for me to deal with. It will undertake any and every case, and whoever will take its medicines can be cured of whatsoever disease he had.

To all of us, no matter what our past may have been, this blessed message comes: There is hope for thee, if thou wilt use these means. Only remember, the road from the depths of evil to the heights of purity always lies through Peniel. You must have power with God and draw a blessing from Him, and hold communion with Him, before you can become righteous.

How do they print photographs? By taking sensitive paper, and laying it, in touch with the negative, in the sun. Lay your spirits on Christ, and keep them still, touching Him, in the light of God, and that will turn you into His likeness. That, and nothing else will do it.

**II. And now there is a second lesson from the occurrence of these three names, viz., here we may find expressed the law for the Christian life.**

There are some religious people that seem to think that it is enough if only they can say; Well! I have been to Jesus Christ and I have got my past sins forgiven; I have been on the mountain and have held communion with God; I do know what it is to have fellowship with Him, in many an hour of devout communion. and who are in much danger of treating the further stage of simple, practical righteousness as of secondary importance. Now the order of these names here points the lesson that the apex of the pyramid, the goal of the whole course, is--Righteousness. The object for which the whole majestic structure of Revelation has been builded up, is simply to make good men and women. God does not tell us His Name merely in order that we may know His Name, but in order that, knowing it, we may be smitten with the love of it, and so may come into the likeness of it. There is no religious truth which is given men for the sake of clearing their understandings and enlightening their minds only. We get the truth to enlighten our minds and to clear our understandings in order that thereby, as becomes reasonable men with heads on our shoulders, we may let our principles guide our conduct. Conduct is the end of principle, and all Revelation is given to us in order that we may be pure and good men and women.

For the same end all God's mercy of forgiveness and deliverance from guilt and punishment in Jesus Christ is given to you, not merely in order that you may escape the penalties of your evil, but in order that, being pardoned, you may in glad thankfulness be lifted up into an enthusiasm of service which will make you eager to serve Him and long to be like Him. He sets you free from guilt, from punishment, and His wrath, in order that by the golden cord of love you may be fastened to Him in thankful obedience. God's purpose in redemption is that we, being delivered out of the hand of our enemies should serve Him without fear, in holiness and righteousness before Him all our days.

And in like manner, righteousness, by which, in the present connection, we mean simply the doing of the things, and the being the character, which a conscience enlightened by the law of God dictates to us to be and to do--righteousness is the intention and the aim of all religious emotion and feeling. It is all very well to have the joy of fellowship with God in our inmost soul, but there is a type of Christianity which is a great deal stronger on the side of devout emotion than on the side of transparent godliness; and although it becomes no man to say what Jesus Christ could say to those whose religion is mainly emotional, Hypocrites! it is the part of every honest preacher to warn all that listen to him that there does lie a danger, a very real danger, very close to some of us, to substitute devout emotion for plain, practical goodness, and to be a great deal nearer God in the words of our prayers than we are in the current and set of our daily lives. Take, then, these three names of my text as flashing into force and emphasis the exhortation that the crown of all religion is righteousness, and as preaching, in antique guise, the same lesson that the very Apostle of affectionate contemplation uttered with such earnestness:--Little children! let no man deceive you. He that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. An ounce of practical godliness is worth a pound of fine feeling and a ton of correct orthodoxy. Remember what the Master said, and take the lesson in the measure in which you need it: Many will say to Me in that day, Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Thy name, and in Thy name have cast out devils, and in Thy name done many wonderful works? And then will I profess unto them, I never knew you, depart from Me. And the proof that I never knew you, nor you Me, is: Ye that work iniquity.

**III. Then there is another lesson still which I draw from these words, viz. the merciful judgment which God makes of the character of them that love Him.**

Jeshurun means the righteous one. How far beneath the ideal of the name these Jewish people fell we all know, and yet the name is applied to them. Although the realisation of the ideal has been so imperfect, the ideal is not destroyed. Although they have done so many sins, yet He calls them by His name of righteous. And so we Christian people find that the New Testament calls us saints. That name is not applied to some select and lofty specimens of Christianity, but to all Christians, however imperfect their present life and character may be. Then people sneer and say, Ah! a strange kind of saints these Christians are! Do you think that a man can condone practical immorality by saying that he is trusting in Jesus Christ? The Church's "saint" seems to mean less than the world's "man of honour." God forbid that it should be fancied that Christian sainthood is more tolerant of evil than worldly morality, or has any fantastic standard of goodness which makes up for departures from the plain rule of right by prayers and raptures. But surely there may be a principle of action deep down at the bottom of a heart, very feeble in its present exercise and manifestation, which yet is the true man, and is destined to conquer the whole nature which now wars against it. Here, for instance, is a tiny spark, and there is a huge pile of damp, green wood. Yes; and the little spark will turn all the wood into flame, if you give it time and fair play. The leaven may be hid in an immensely greater mass of meal, but it, and not the three measures of flour, is the active principle. And if there is in a man, overlaid by ever so many absurdities, and contradictions, and inconsistencies, a little seed of faith in Jesus Christ, there will be in him proportionately a little particle of a divine life which is omnipotent, which is immortal, which will conquer and transform all the rest into its own likeness; and He who sees not as men see, beholds the inmost tendencies and desires of the nature, as well as the facts of the life, and discerning the inmost and true self of His children, and knowing that it will conquer, calls us righteous ones, even while the outward life has not yet been brought into harmony with the new man, created in righteousness after God's image.

All wrong-doing is inconsistent with Christianity, but, thank God, it is not for us to say that any wrong-doing is incompatible with it; and therefore, for ourselves there is hope, and for our estimate of one another there ought to be charity, and for all Christian people there is the lesson--live up to your name. Noblesse oblige! Fulfil your ideal. Be what God calls you, and press toward the mark for the prize.

If one had time to deal with it, there is another lesson naturally suggested by these names, but I only put it in a sentence and leave it; and that is the union between the founder of the nation and the nation. The name of the patriarch passes to his descendants, the nation is called after him that begat it. In some sense it prolongs his life and spirit and character upon the earth. That is the old-world way of looking at the solidarity of a nation. There is a New Testament fact which goes even deeper than that. The names which Christ bears are given to Christ's followers. Is He a King, is He a Priest? He makes us kings and priests. Is He anointed the Messiah? God hath anointed us in Him. Is He the Light of the World?

Ye are the lights of the world. His life passeth into all that love Him in the measure of their trust and love. We are one with Jesus if we rest upon Him; one in life, one in character, approximating by slow degrees, but surely, to His likeness; and blessed be His name! one in destiny. Then, my friend, if you will only keep near that Lord, trust Him, live in the light of His face, go to Him in your weakness, in your despair, in your self-abandonment; wrestle with Him, with the supplication and the tears that He delights to receive, then you will be knit to Him in a union so real and deep that all which is His shall be yours, His life shall be the life of your spirit, His power the strength of your life, His dominion the foundation of your dignity as a prince with God, His all-prevailing priesthood the security that your prayer shall have power, and the spotless robe of His righteousness the fine linen, clean and white, in which arrayed, you shall be found of Him, and in Him at last, in peace, not having your own righteousness, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.