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

**ISAIAH-055. HIDDEN AND REVEALED by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Verily thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour... . I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth; I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye Me in vain: I the Lord speak righteousness, I declare things that are right."*

*Isaiah 45:15, 19*

The former of these verses expresses the thoughts of the prophet in contemplating the close of a great work of God's power which issues in the heathen's coming to Israel and acknowledging God. He adores the depth of the divine counsels which, by devious ways and after long ages, have led to this bright result. And as he thinks of all the long-stretching preparations, all the apparently hostile forces which have been truly subsidiary, all the generations during which these Egyptian and Ethiopian tribes have been the enemies and oppressors of that Israel whom they at last acknowledge for the dwelling-place of God, and enemies of that Jehovah before whom they finally bow down, he feels that he has no measuring-line to fathom the divine purposes, and bows his face to the ground in reverent contemplation with that word upon his lips: Verily Thou art a God that hidest Thyself, O God of Israel, the Saviour. It is a parallel to the apostolic words, O the depths of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God. How unsearchable are His judgments, and His ways past finding out.

But such thoughts are but a half truth, and may very easily become in men's minds a whole error, and therefore they are followed by a marvellous section in which the Lord Himself speaks, and of which the whole burden is--the clearness and fulness with which God makes Himself known to men. True it is that there are depths inaccessible in the divine nature. True it is that there are mysteries unrevealed in the method of the divine procedure, and especially in that of the relation of heathen tribes to His gospel and His love. True it is that there are mysteries opened in the very word of His grace. But notwithstanding all this--it is also true that He makes Himself known to us all, that He declares righteousness, that He calls us to seek Him, and that He wills to be found and known by us.

The collocation of these two passages may be taken, then, as representing the two phases of the Divine Manifestation, the obscurity which must ever be associated with all our finite knowledge of God, and the clear sunlight in which blazes all that we need to know of Him.

**I. After all revelation, God is hidden.**

There is revelation of His Name in all His works. His action must be all self-manifestation. But after all it is obscure and hidden.

**(a)** Nature hides while it reveals.

* Nature's revelation is unobtrusive.
* God is concealed behind second causes.
* God is concealed behind regular modes of working (laws).
* Nature's revelation is partial, disclosing only a fragment of the name.

Nature's revelation is ambiguous. Dark shadows of death and pain in the sensitive world, of ruin and convulsions, of shivered stars, seem to contradict the faith that all is very good; so that it has been possible for men to drop their plummet in the deep and say, I find no God, and for others to fall into Manichaeism or some form or other of dualism.

(b) Providence hides while it reveals.

* That is the sphere in which men are most familiar with the idea of mystery.
* There is much of which we do not see the issue. The process is not completed, and so the end is not visible.
* Even when we believe that to Him and for good are all things, we cannot tell how all will come circling round. We are like men looking only at one small segment of an ellipse which is very eccentric.
* There is much of which we do not see the consistency with the divine character.

We are confronted with stumbling-blocks in the allotment of earthly conditions; in the long ages and many tribes which are without knowledge of God; in the sore sorrows, national and individual.

We can array a formidable host. But it is to be remembered that revelation actually increases these. It is just because we know so much of God that we feel them so keenly. I suppose the mysteries of the divine government trouble others outside the sphere of revelation but little. The darkness is made visible by the light.

**(c)** Even in grace God is hidden while revealed.

* The Infinite and Eternal cannot be grasped by man.
* The conception of infinity and eternity is given us by revelation, but it is not comprehended so that its contents are fully known. The words are known, but their full meaning is not, and no revelation can make them, known to finite intelligences.
* God dwells in light inaccessible, which is darkness.
* Revelation opens abysses down which we cannot look. It raises and leaves unsettled as many questions as it solves.
* The telescope resolves many nebulae, but only to bring more unresolvable ones into the field of vision.

Now all this is but one side of the truth. There is a tendency in some minds to underrate what is plain because all is not plain. For some minds the obscure has a fascination, apart altogether from its nature, just because it is obscure. It is a noble emulation to press forward and still to be closing up what we know not with what we know. But neither in science nor in religion shall we make progress if we do not take heed of the opposing errors of thinking that all is seen, and of thinking that what we have is valueless because there are gaps in it. The constellations are none the less bright nor immortal fires, though there be waste places in heaven where nothing but opaque blackness is seen. In these days it is especially needful to insist both on the incompleteness of all our religious knowledge, and to say that--

**II. Notwithstanding all obscurity, God has amply revealed Himself.**

Though God hides Himself, still there comes from heaven the voice--I have not spoken in secret, Now these words contain these thoughts--

**(a)** That whatever darkness there may be, there is none due to the manner of the revelation.

God has not spoken in secret, in a corner. There are no arbitrary difficulties made or unnecessary darkness left in His revelation. We have no right to say that He has left difficulties to test our faith. He Himself has never said so. He deals with us in good faith, doing all that can be done to enlighten, regard being had to still loftier considerations, to the freedom of the human will, to the laws which He has Himself imposed on our nature, and the purposes for which we are here. It is very important to grasp this. We have been told as much as can be told. Contrast with such a revelation the cave-muttered oracles of heathenism and their paltering double sense. Be sure that when God speaks, He speaks clearly and to all, and that in Christianity there is no esoteric teaching for a few initiated only, while the multitude are put off with shows.

**(b)** That whatever obscurity there may be, there is none which hides the divine invitation or Him from those who obey it.

I have never said ... seek ye Me in vain. Much is obscure if speculative completeness is looked for, but the moral relations of God and man are not obscure.

All which the heart needs is made known. His revelation is clearly His seeking us, and His revelation is His gracious call to us to seek Him. He is ever found by those who seek. They have not to press through obscurities to find Him, but the desire to possess must precede possession in spiritual matters. He is no hidden God, lurking in obscurity and only to be found by painful search. They who seek Him know where to find Him, and seek because they know.

**(c)** That whatever may be obscure, the Revelation of righteousness is clear.

We have to face speculative difficulties in plenty, but the great fact remains that in Revelation steady light is focussed on the moral qualities of the divine Nature and especially on His righteousness.

And the revelation of the divine righteousness reaches its greatest brightness, as that of all the divine Nature does, in the Person and work of Jesus. Very significantly the idea of God's righteousness is fully developed in the immediately subsequent context. There we find that attribute linked in close and harmonious conjunction with what shallower thought is apt to regard as being in antagonism to it. He declares Himself to be a just (righteous) God and a Saviour. So then, if we would rightly conceive of His righteousness, we must give it a wider extension than that of retributive justice or cold, inflexible aloofness from sinners. It impels God to be man's saviour. And with similar enlarging of popular conceptions there follows: In the Lord is righteousness and strength, and therefore, In the Lord shall all the seed of Israel be justified (declared and made righteous) and shall glory--then, the divine Righteousness is communicative.

All these thoughts, germinal in the prophet's words, are set in fullest light, and certified by the most heart-moving facts, in the Person and work of Jesus Christ. He declares at this time His righteousness, that He might Himself be righteous and the maker righteous of them that have faith in Jesus. Whatever is dark, this is clear, that Jehovah our Righteousness has come to us in His Son, in whom seeking Him we shall never seek in vain, but be found in Him, not having a righteousness of our own, even that which is of the law, but that which is through faith in Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith.

If the great purpose of revelation is to make us know that God loves us, and has given us His Son that in Him we may know Him and possess His Righteousness, difficulties and obscurities in its form or in its substance take a very different aspect. What need we more than that knowledge and possession? Be not robbed of them.

Many things are not written in the book of the divine Revelation, whether it be that of Nature, of human history, or of our own spirits, or even of the Gospel, but these are written that we may believe that Jesus is the Son of God, and believing, may have life in His name.