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

**ISAIAH-064. THE SERVANT'S INFLEXIBLE RESOLVE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"For the Lord God will help Me; therefore shall I not be confounded: therefore have I set My face like a flint."*

*Isaiah 50:7*

What a striking contrast between the tone of these words and of the preceding! There all is gentleness, docility, still communion, submission, patient endurance. Here all is energy and determination, resistance and martial vigour. It is like the contrast between a priest and a warrior. And that gentleness is the parent of this boldness. The same Will which is all submission to God is all resistance in the face of hostile men. The utmost lowliness and the most resolved resistance to opposing forces are found in that prophetic image of the Servant of the Lord--even as they are found in the highest degree and most perfectly in Jesus Christ.

The sequence in this context is worth noting. We had first Christ's communion with God and communications from the Father; then the perfect submission of His Will; then that submission expressed in His voluntary sufferings; and now we have His immovable steadfastness of resistance to the temptation, which lay in these sufferings, to depart from His attitude of submission, and to abandon His work.

The former verse led us up to the verge of the great mystery of His sacrificial death. This gives us a glimpse into the depths of His human life, and shows Him to us as our example in all holy heroism.

**I. The need which Christ felt to exercise firm resistance.**

The words of the text are found almost reproduced in Jeremiah i. and Ezekiel iii. All prophets and servants of God have had thus to resist, and it would be superfluous to show how resistance to opposing influences is the condition of all noble life and of all true service.

But was it so with Him? The more accurate translation of the second clause of our text is to be noticed: Therefore I will not suffer Myself to be overcome by the shame.

Then the shame had in it some tendency to divert Him from His course. Christ's humanity felt natural human shrinking from pain and suffering. It shrank from the contempt and mockery of those around Him, and did so with especial sensitiveness because of His pure and sinless nature, His yearning sympathy, the atmosphere of love in which He dwelt, His clear sight of the sin, and His prevision of the consequent sorrow. If so, His sufferings did appeal to His human nature and constituted a temptation.

At the beginning the Tempter addressed himself to natural desires to procure physical gratification (bread), and to the equally natural desire to avoid suffering and pain, and to secure His kingdom by an easier method (All these will I give Thee, if--).

And the latter temptation attended Him all through His life, and was most insistent at its close. The shadow of the cross stretched along His path from its beginning. But it is to be remembered that he had not the same need of self-control which we have, in that His Will was not reluctant, and that no rebellious desires had escaped from its control and needed to be reduced to submission. I was not rebellious. The spirit is willing but the flesh is weak was true in the fullest extent only of Him. So the context gives us His perfect submission of will, and yet the need to harden His face toward externals from which, instinctively and without breach of filial obedience, His sensitive nature recoiled. The reality of the temptation, the limits of its reach, His consciousness of it, and His immovable obedience and resistance, are all expressed in the deep and wonderful words, If it be possible, let this cup pass from Me, nevertheless not as I will, but as Thou wilt.

**II. The perfect inflexible resolve.**

Face like a flint seems to be quoted in Luke ix. 51; Steadily set His face. The whole story of the Gospels gives the one impression of a life steadfast in its great resolve. There are no traces of His ever faltering in His purpose, none of His ever suffering Himself to be diverted from it, no parentheses and no digressions. There are no blunders either. But what a contrast in this respect to all other lives! Mark's Gospel, which is eminently the gospel of the Servant, is full of energy and of this inflexible resolve, which speak in such sayings as I must be about My Father's business; I must work the works of My Father while it is day. That last journey, during which He steadfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem, is but a type of the whole. Christ's life was a continuous or rather a continually repeated effort.

This inflexible resolve is associated in Him with characteristics not usually allied with it. The gentleness of Christ is so obvious in His character that little needs to be said to point it out. To the influence of His character more than to any other cause may be traced the change in the perspective, so to speak, of Virtue, which characterises modern notions of perfection as contrasted with antique ones. Contrast the Greek and Roman type with the mediaeval ascetic, or with the philanthropic type of modern times. Carlyle's ideal is retrograde and an anachronism. Women and patient sufferers find example in Him. But we have in Jesus Christ, too, the highest example of all the stronger and robuster virtues, the more distinctly heroic, masculine; and that not merely passive firmness of endurance such as an American Indian will show in torments, but active firmness which presses on to its goal, and, immovably resolute, will not be diverted by anything. In Him we see a resolved Will and a gentle loving Heart in perfect accord. That is a wonderful combination. We often find that such firmness is developed at the expense of indifference to other people. It is like a war chariot, or artillery train, that goes crashing across the field, though it be over shrieking men and broken bones, and the wheels splash in blood. Resolved firmness is often accompanied with self-absorption which makes it gloomy, and with narrow limitations. Such men gather all their powers together to secure a certain end, and do it by shutting the eyes of their mind to everything but the one object, like the painter, who blocks up his studio window to get a top light, or as a mad bull lowers his head and blindly rushes on.

There is none of all this in Christ's firmness. He was able at every moment to give His whole sympathy to all who needed it, to take in all that lay around Him, and His resolute concentration of Himself on His work made Him none the less perfect in all which goes to make up complete manhood. Not only was Christ's firmness that of a fixed Will and a most loving Heart, like one of these rocking stones, whose solid mass can be set vibrating by a poising bird, but the fixed Will came from the loving Heart. The very compassion and pity of His nature led to that resolved continuance in His path of redeeming love, though suffering and mockery waited for Him at each turn.

And so He is the Joshua, the Warrior-King, as well as the Priest. That Face, ever ready to kindle into pity, to melt into tenderness, to express every shade of tender feeling, was set as a flint. That Eye, ever brimming with tears, was ever fixed on one goal. That Character is the type of all strength and of all gentleness.

**III. The basis of Christ's fixed resolve in filial confidence.**

The Lord God will help Me. So Christ lived by faith.

That faith led to this heroic resistance and immovable resolution.

That confidence of divine help was based upon consciousness of obedience.

It is most blessed for us to have Him as our example of faith and of brave opposition to all the antagonistic forces around us. But we need more than an example. He will but rebuke our wavering purposes of obedience, if He is no more than our pattern. Thank God, He is more, even our Fountain of Power, from Whom we can draw life akin to, because derived from, His own. In Him we can feel strength stealing into flaccid limbs, and gain the wrestling thews that throw the world. If we are in Christ and on the path of duty, we too may be able to set our faces as a flint, and to say truthfully: None of these things move me, neither count I my life dear to myself, that I may finish my course with joy. And yet we may withal be gentle, and keep hearts open as day to melting charity, and have leisure and sympathy to spare for every sorrow of others, and a hand to help and sustain him that is weary.