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

**ISAIAH-070. CLEAN CARRIERS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Be ye clean, that bear the vessels of the Lord."*

*Isaiah 52:11*

The context points to a great deliverance. It is a good example of the prophetical habit of casting prophecies of the future into the mould of the past. The features of the Exodus are repeated, but some of them are set aside. This deliverance, whatever it be, is to be after the pattern of that old story, but with very significant differences. Then, the departing Israelites had spoiled the Egyptians and come out, laden with silver and gold which had been poured into their hands; now there is to be no bringing out of anything which was tainted with the foulness of the land of captivity. Then the priests had borne the sacred vessels for sacrifice, now they are to exercise the same holy function, and for its discharge purity is demanded. Then, they had gone out in haste; now, there is to be no precipitate flight, but calmly, as those who are guided by God for their leader, and shielded from all pursuit by God as their rearward, the men of this new Exodus are to take their march from the new Egypt.

No doubt the nearest fulfilment is to be found in the Return from Babylon, and the narrative in Ezra may be taken as a remarkable parallel to the prophecy here. But the restriction to Babylon must seem impossible to any reader who interprets aright the significance of the context, and observes that our text follows the grand words of verse 10, and precedes the Messianic prophecy of verse 13 and of ch. liii. To such a reader the principle will not be doubtful according to which Egypt and Babylon are transparencies through which mightier forms shine, and a more wonderful and world-wide making bare of the arm of the Lord is seen. Christ's great redemption is the highest interpretation of these words; and the trumpet-call of our text is addressed to all who have become partakers of it.

So Paul quotes the text in 2 Cor. vi. 17, blending with it other words which are gathered from more than one passage of Scripture. We may then take the whole as giving the laws of the new Exodus, and also as shadowing certain great peculiarities connected with it, by which it surpasses all the former deliverances.

**I. The Pilgrims of this new Exodus.**

A true Christian is a pilgrim, not only because he, like all men, is passing through a life which is transient, but because he is consciously detached from the Visible and Present, as a consequence of his conscious attachment to the Unseen and Eternal. What is said in Hebrews of Abraham is true of all inheritors of his faith: dwelling in tabernacles, for he looked for the city.

**II. The priests.**

Priests and Levites bore the sacred vessels. All Christians are priests. The only true priesthood is Christ's, ours is derived from Him. In that universal priesthood of believers are included the privileges and obligations of

**(a)** Access to God--Communion.

**(b)** Offering spiritual sacrifices. Service and self-surrender.

**(c)** Mediation with men.

Proclamation. Intercession. Thus follows d. Bearing the holy vessels. A sacred deposit is entrusted to them--the honour and name of God; the treasure of the Gospel.

**III. The separation that becomes pilgrims.**

Come out and be ye separate. The very meaning of our Christian profession is separation. There is ludicrous inconsistency in saying that we are Christians and not being pilgrims. Of course, the separation is not to be worked out by mere external asceticism or withdrawal from the world. That has been so thoroughly preached and practised of late years that we much need the other side to be put. There should be some plain difference between the life of Christians and that of men whose portion is in this life. They should differ in the aspect under which all outward things are regarded.

To a Christian they are to be means to an end, and ever to be felt to be evanescent. They should differ in the motive for action, which should, for a Christian, ever be the love of God. They should differ in that a Christian abstains from much which non-Christians feel free to do, and often has to say, So did not I, because of the fear of the Lord. He who marches light marches quickly and marches far; to bring the treasures of Egypt along with us, is apt to retard our steps.

**IV. The purity that becomes priests.**

The Levites would cleanse themselves before taking up the holy vessels. And for us, clean hands and a pure heart are essential. There is no communion with God without these; a small speck of dust in the eye blinds us. There is no sacrificial service without them. No efficient work among men can be done without them. One main cause of the weakness of our Christian testimony is the imperfection of character in the witnesses, which is more powerful than all talk and often neutralises much effort. Keen eyes are watching us.

The consciousness of our own impurity should send us to Jesus, with the prayer and the confidence, Cleanse me and I shall be clean. The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin. He hath loosed us from our sins and made us kings and priests to God.