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

**ISAIAH-076. THE SUFFERING SERVANT Part 4 by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"It pleased the Lord to bruise Him; He hath put Him to grief: when Thou shalt make His soul an offering for sin, He shall see His seed, He shall prolong His days, and the pleasure of the Lord shall prosper in His hand."*

*Isaiah 53:10*

We have seen a distinct progress of thought in the preceding verses. There was first the outline of the sorrows and rejection of the Servant; second, the profound explanation of these as being for us; third, the sufferings, death and burial of the Servant.

We have followed Him to the grave. What more can there be to be said? Whether the Servant of the Lord be an individual or a collective or an ideal, surely all fitness of metaphor, all reality of fact would require that His work should be represented as ending with His life, and that what might follow His burial should be the influence of His memory, the continued operation of the principles He had set agoing and so on, but nothing more.

Now observe that, however we may explain the fact, this is the fact to be explained, that there is a whole section, this closing one, devoted to the celebration of His work after His death and burial, and, still more remarkable, that the prophecy says nothing about His activity on the world till after death. In all the former portion there is not a syllable about His doing anything, only about His suffering; and then when He is dead He begins to work. That is the subject of these last three verses, and it would be proper to take them all for our consideration now, but fur two reasons, one, because of their great fulness and importance, and one because, as you will observe, the two latter verses are a direct address of God's concerning the Servant. The prophetic words, spoken as in his own person, end with verse 10, and, catching up their representations, expanding, defining, glorifying them, comes the solemn thunder of the voice of God. I now deal only with the prophet's vision of the work of the Servant of the Lord.

One other preliminary remark is that the work of the Servant after death is described in these verses with constant and very emphatic reference to His previous sufferings. The closeness of connection between these two is thus thrown into great prominence.

**I. The mystery of God's treatment of the sinless Servant.**

The first clause is to be read in immediate connection with the preceding verse. The Servant was of absolute sinlessness, and yet the Divine Hand crushed and bruised Him. Certainly, if we think of the vehemence of prophetic rebukes, and of the standing doctrine of the Old Testament that Israel was punished for its sin, we shall be slow to believe that this picture of the Sinless One, smitten for the sins of others, can have reference to the nation in any of its parts, or to any one man. However other poetry may lament over innocent sufferers, the Old Testament always takes the ground: Our iniquities, like the wind, have carried us away. But mark that here, however understood, the prophet paints a figure so sinless that God's bruising Him is an outstanding wonder and riddle, only to be solved by regarding these bruises as the stripes by which our sins were healed, and by noting that the pleasure of the Lord is carried on through Him, after and through His death. What conceivable application have such representations except to Jesus? We note, then, here:--

**(a)** The solemn truth that His sufferings were divinely inflicted. That is a truth complementary to the other views in the prophecy, according to which these sufferings are variously regarded as either inflicted by men (By oppression and judgment He was taken away) or drawn on Him by His own sacrificial act (His soul shall make an offering for sin). It was the divine counsel that used men as its instruments, though they were none the less guilty. The hands that crucified and slew were no less the hands of lawless men, because it was the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God that delivered Him up.

But a still deeper thought is in these words. For we can scarcely avoid seeing in them a glimpse into that dim region of eclipse and agony of soul from which, as from a cave of darkness, issued that last cry: Eloi, Eloi, lama sabacthani? The bruises inflicted by the God, who made to meet on Him the iniquities of us all, were infinitely more severe than the weales of the soldiers rods, or the wounds of the nails that pierced His hands and feet.

**(b)** The staggering mystery of His sinlessness and sufferings.

The world has been full from of old of stories of goodness tortured and evil exalted, which have drawn tears and softened hearts, but which have also bewildered men who would fain believe in a righteous Governor and loving Father. But none of these have cast so black a shadow of suspicion on the government of the world by a good God as does the fate of Jesus, unless it is read in the light of this prophecy. Standing at the cross, faith in God's goodness and providence can scarcely survive, unless it rises to be faith in the atoning sacrifice of Him who was wounded there for our transgressions.

**II. The Servant's work in His sufferings.**

The margin of the Revised Version gives the best rendering--His soul shall make an offering for sin. The word employed for offering means a trespass offering, and carries us at once back to the sacrificial system. The trespass offering was distinguished from other offerings. The central idea of it seems to have been to represent sin or guilt as debt, and the sacrifice as making compensation. We must keep in view the variety of ideas embodied in His sacrifice, and how all correspond to realities in our wants and spiritual experience.

Now there are three points here:--

**(a)** The representation that Christ's death is a sacrifice. Clearly connecting with whole Mosaic system--and that in the sense of a trespass offering. Christ seems to quote this verse in John x. 15, when He speaks of laying down His life, and when He declares that He came to give His life a ransom for many. At any rate here is the great word, sacrifice, proclaimed for the first time in connection with Messiah. Here the prophet interprets the meaning of all the types and shadows of the law.

That sacrificial system bore witness to deep wants of men's souls, and prophesied of One in whom these were all met and satisfied.

**(b)** His voluntary surrender.

He is sacrifice, but He is Priest also. His soul makes the offering, and His soul is the offering and offers itself in concurrence with the Divine Will. It is difficult and necessary to keep that double aspect in view, and never to think of Jesus as an unwilling Victim, nor of God as angry and needing to be appeased by blood.

**(c)** The thought that the true meaning of His sufferings is only reached when we contemplate the effects that have flowed from them. The pleasure of the Lord in bruising Him is a mystery until we see how pleasure of the Lord prospers in the hand of the Crucified.

**III. The work of the Servant after death.**

Surely this paradox, so baldly stated, is meant to be an enigma to startle and to rouse curiosity. This dead Servant is to see of the travail of His soul, and to prolong His days. All the interpretations of this chapter which refuse to see Jesus in it shiver on this rock. What a contrast there is between platitudes about the spirit of the nation rising transformed from its grave of captivity (which was only very partially the case), and the historical fulfilment in Jesus Christ! Here, at any rate, hundreds of years before His Resurrection, is a word that seems to point to such a fact, and to me it appears that all fair interpretation is on the side of the Messianic reference.

Note the singularity of special points.

**(a)** Having died, the Servant sees His offspring.

The sacrifice of Christ is the great power which draws men to Him, and moves to repentance, faith, love. His death was the communication of life. Nowhere else in the world's history is the teacher's death the beginning of His gathering of pupils, and not only has the dead Servant children, but He sees them. That representation is expressive of the mutual intercourse, strange and deep, whereby we feel that He is truly with us, Jesus Christ, whom having not seen we love.

**(b)** Having died, the Servant prolongs His days.

He lives a continuous life, without an end, for ever. The best commentary is the word which John heard, as he felt the hand of the Christ laid on his prostrate form: I became dead, and lo, I am alive for evermore.

**(c)** Having died, the Servant carries into effect the divine purposes.

Prosper implies progressive advancement. Christ's Sacrifice carried out the divine pleasure, and by His Sacrifice the divine pleasure is further carried out.

If Christ is the means of carrying out the divine purpose, consider what this implies of divinity in His nature, of correspondence between His will and the divine.

But Jesus not only carries into effect the divine purpose as a consequence of a past act, but by His present energy this dead man is a living power in the world today. Is He not?

The sole explanation of the vitality of Christianity, and the sole reason which makes its message a gospel to any soul, is Christ's death for the world and present life in the world.