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

**ISAIAH-077. THE SUFFERING SERVANT Part 5 by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied: by His knowledge shall My righteous servant justify many; and He shall bear their iniquities."*

*Isaiah 53:11*

These are all but the closing words of this great prophecy, and are the fitting crown of all that has gone before. We have been listening to the voice of a member of the race to whom the Servant of the Lord belonged, whether we limit that to the Jewish people or include in it all humanity. That voice has been confessing for the speaker and his brethren their common misapprehensions of the Servant, their blindness to the meaning of His sufferings and the mystery of His death. It has been proclaiming the true significance of these as now he had learned them, and has in verse 10 touched the mystery of the reward and triumph of the Servant.

That note of His glory and coronation is caught up in the two closing verses, which, in substance, are the continuation of the idea of verse 10. But this identity of substance makes the variety of form the more emphatic. Observe the My Servant of verse 11, and the I will divide of verse 12. These oblige us to take this as the voice of God. The confession and belief of earth is hushed, that the recognition and the reward of the Servant may be declared from heaven. An added solemnity is thus given to the words, and the prophecy comes round again to the keynote on which it started in chapter lii, 13, My Servant. Notice, too, how the same characteristic is here as in verse 10--that the recapitulation of the sufferings is almost equally prominent with the description of the reward. The two are so woven together that no power can part them. We may take these two verses as setting forth mainly two things--the divine promise that the Servant shall give righteousness to many, and the divine promise that the Servant shall conquer many for Himself.

As to the exposition, of here is probably casual, not partitive, as the Authorised Version has it; travail is not to be understood in the sense of childbirth, but of toil and suffering; soul is equivalent to life. This fruit of His soul's travail is further defined in the words which follow. The great result which will be beheld by Him and will fill and content His heart is that by His knowledge He shall justify many. By His knowledge certainly means, by the knowledge of Him on the part of others. The phrase might be taken either objectively or subjectively, but it seems to me that only the former yields an adequate sense. My righteous servant is scarcely emphatic enough. The words in the original stand in an unusual order, which might be represented by the righteous one, My servant, and is intended to put emphasis on the Servant's righteousness, as well as to suggest the connection between His righteousness and His justifying, in virtue of His being righteous. Justify is an unusual form, and means to procure for, or impart righteousness to. The many has stress on the article, and is the antithesis not to all, but to few. We might render it the masses, an indefinite expression, which if not declaring universality, approaches very near to it, as in Romans v. 19 and Matthew xxvi. 28. He shall bear, a future referring to the Servant in a state of exaltation, and pointing to His continuous work after death. This bearing is the root of our righteousness.

We may put the thoughts here in a definite order.

**I. The great work which the Servant carries on.**

It consists in giving or imparting righteousness. It seems to me that it is out of place to be too narrow here in interpreting so as to draw distinctions between righteousness imparted and righteousness bestowed. We should rather take the general idea of making righteous, making, in fact, like Himself. Note that this is the work which is Christ's characteristic one. All thoughts of His blessings to the world which omit that are imperfect.

**II. The preparation for that making of us righteous.**

The roots of our being made righteous by the righteous Servant are found in His bearing our sins. His sin-bearing work is basis of our righteousness. Christ justifies men by giving to them His own righteousness, and taking in turn their sins on Himself that He may expiate them.

Not only did He bear our sins in His own body on the tree, but He will bear them in His exaltation to the Throne, and only because He continuously and eternally does so are we justified on earth and shall we be sanctified in heaven.

**III. The condition on which He imparts righteousness.**

His knowledge, which is to be taken in the profound Biblical sense as including not only understanding but experience also.

Parallels are found in This is life eternal to know Thee (John xvii. 3), and in That I may know Him (Phil. 3:10). So this prophecy comes very near to the New Testament proclamation of righteousness by faith.

**IV. The grand sweep of the Servant's work.**

The many is indefinite, and its very indefiniteness approximates it to universality. A shadowy vision of a great multitude that no man can number stretches out, as to the horizon, before the prophet. How many they are he knows not. He knows that they are numerous enough to satisfy the Servant for all His sufferings. He knows, too, that there is no limit to the happy crowd except that which is set by the necessary condition of joining the bands of the justified--namely, the knowledge of Him. They who receive the benefits which the Servant has died and will live to bring cannot be few; they may be all. If any are shut out, they are self-excluded.

**V. The Servant's satisfaction.**

It may be that the word employed means full, rather than content, but the latter idea can scarcely be altogether absent from it. We have, then, the great hope that the Servant, gazing on the results of His sufferings, will be content, content to have borne them, content with what they have effected.

The glory dies not and the grief is past.

And the grief has had for fruit not only glory gathering round the thorn-pierced head, but reflected glory shining on the brows of the many, whom He has justified and sanctified by their experience of Him and His power. The creative week ended with the rest of the Creator, not because His energy was tired and needed repose, but because He had fully carried out His purpose, and saw the perfected idea embodied in a creation that was very good. The redemptive work ends with the Servant's satisfied contemplation of the many whom He has made like Himself, His better creation.