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

**ISAIAH-089. MIGHTY TO SAVE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Mighty to save."*

*Isaiah 63:1*

We have here a singularly vivid and dramatic prophecy, thrown into the form of a dialogue between the prophet and a stranger whom he sees from afar striding along from the mountains of Edom, with elastic step, and dyed garments. The prophet does not recognise him, and asks who he is. The Unknown answers, I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Another question follows, seeking explanation of the splashed crimson garments of the stranger, and its answer tells of a tremendous act of retributive destruction which he has recently launched at the nations hostile to My redeemed.

Now we note that this prophecy follows, both in the order of the book and in the evolution of events, on those in chapter lxi., which referred to our Lord's work on earth, and in chapter lxii., which has for part of its theme His intercession in heaven. And we are entitled to take the view that the place as well as the substance of this prophecy referred to the solemn act of final Judgment in which the returning Lord will manifest Himself. Very significant is it that the prophet does not recognise in this Conqueror, with blood-bespattered robes, the meek sufferer of chapter liii., or Him who in chapter lxi. came to bind up the broken-hearted. And very instructive is it that the title in our text comes from the stranger's own lips, as relevant to the tremendous act of judgment from which He is seen returning. The title might seem rather to look back to the former manifestation of Him as bearing our griefs and carrying our sorrows. It does indeed, thank God, look back to that never-to-be-forgotten miracle of mercy and power, but it also brings within the sweep of His saving might the judgment still to come.

**I. The mighty Saviour as made known in the past and present.**

We think much of the meek and gentle side of Christ's character. Perhaps we do not think enough of the strength of it. We trace His great sacrifice to His love, and we can never sufficiently adore that incomparable manifestation of a love deeper than our plummets can fathom. But probably we do not sufficiently realise what gigantic strength went to the completion of that sacrifice. We know the solemn imagining of a great artist who has painted a colossal Death overbearing the weak resistance of a puny Love; but here love is the giant, and his sovereign command brings Death obedient to it, to do his work. Yes, that weak man hanging on the Cross is therein revealed as the power of God. Strange clothing of weakness which yet cannot hide the mighty limbs that wear it!

And if we think of our Lord's life we see the same combination of gentleness and power. His very name rings with memories of the captain whose one commanded duty was to be strong and of a good courage.

* In Him was all strength of manhood--inflexible, iron will, unchanging purpose, strength from consecration, strength from righteousness. In Him was the heroism of prophets and martyrs in supreme degree.
* In Him was the strength of indwelling Divinity. He fought and conquered all man's enemies, routed sin, and triumphed over Death.
* In the Cross we see divine power in operation in its noblest form, in its intensest energy, in its widest sweep, in its most magnificent result. He is able to save, to save all, to save any.
* He is mighty to save, and is able to save unto the uttermost, because He lives for ever, and His power is eternal as Himself.

**II. The mighty Saviour as to be manifested in the future.**

Clearly the imagery of the context describes a tremendous act of judgment. And as clearly the Apocalyptic Seer understood this prophecy as not only pointing to Christ, but as to be fulfilled in the final act of judgment. He quotes its words when he paints his magnificent vision of the Conqueror riding forth on his white horse, with garments sprinkled with blood and treading the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. And the vision is interpreted unmistakably when we read that, though this Conqueror had a name unknown to any but Himself, His name is called the Word of God. So the unity of person in the Word made flesh who dwelt among us, full of grace and of this Mighty One girt for battle, is taught.

Keeping fast hold of this clue, the contrast between the characteristics of the historical Jesus and of the rider on the white horse becomes solemn and full of warning. And the contrast between the errand of the historical Jesus and that of the Conqueror bids us ponder on the possibilities that may sleep in perfect love. We have to widen our conceptions, if we have thought of our Jesus only as love, and have thought of love as shallow, as most men do. We are sometimes told that these two pictures, that of the Christ of the Gospels and that of the Christ of the Apocalypse, are incapable of being fused together in one original. But they can be stereoscoped, if we may say so. And they must be, if we are ever to understand the greatness of His love or the terribleness of His judgments. The wrath of the Lamb sounds an impossibility, but if we ponder it, we shall find depths of graciousness as well as of awe in it.

Let us learn that the righteous Judge is logically and chronologically the completion of the picture of the merciful Saviour. In this age there is a tendency to treat sin with too much pity and too little condemnation. And there is not a sufficiently firm grasp of the truth that divine love must be in irreconcilable antagonism with human sin, and can do nothing but chastise and smite it.

**III. The saving purpose of even that destructive might.**

Through the whole Old Testament runs the longing that God would awake to smite evil.

The tragedy of the drowned hosts in the Red Sea, and Miriam and her maidens standing with their timbrels and shrill song of triumph on the bank, is a prophecy of what shall be. Ye shall have a song as in the night a holy feast is kept, and gladness of heart as when one goeth with a pipe to come unto the mountain of the Lord. And at the thought of that solemn act of judgment they who love the Judge, and have long known Him, may lift up their heads in the confidence that their redemption draweth nigh. That is the last, and in some sense the mightiest, greatest act by which He shows Himself mighty to save His redeemed.

So we may, like the prophet, see that swift form striding nearer and nearer, but, unlike the prophet, we need not to ask, Who is this that cometh? for we have known Him from of old, and we remember the voice that said, This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness before Him in the day of judgment.