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

**ISAIAH-090. THE WINEPRESS AND ITS TREADER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treadeth in the winefat? I have trodden the winepress alone."*

*Isaiah 63:2, 3*

The structure of these closing chapters is chronological, and this is the final scene. What follows is epilogue. The reference of this magnificent imagery to the sufferings of Jesus is a complete misapprehension. These sufferings were dealt with once for all in chapter liii., and it is Messiah triumphant who has filled the prophet's vision since then.

**I. The treading of the winepress.**

The nations are flung into the press, as ripe grapes. The picture is plainly a figure of some tremendous judgment in which the powers that oppose the majestic march of the triumphant Messiah will be crushed and trampled to ruin. They are trodden in Mine anger, and their life-blood is sprinkled on My garments. It is He who crushes, not He who is crushed. The winepress which He treads is the winepress of the wrath of Almighty God, and His treading of it is His executing of God's judgments on those whose antagonism to Him and to His redeemed has brought them within their sweep. The prophetic imagination kindles and casts its thought into that terrible picture, which some fastidious people would think coarse, of a peasant standing up to his knees in a vat heaped with purple clusters, and fiercely trampling them down, while the red juice splashes upon his girt-up clothes.

The prophet does not date his vision. It has been realised many a time, and will be many a time still. Wherever opposition to Christ and His kingdom has reached ripeness, wherever antagonistic tendencies have borne fruit which has matured, the winepress is set up and the treading begins. Wheresoever the carcass is, there will the eagles be gathered together. Immediately he putteth in the sickle because the harvest is done. The judgments tarry long, and Christ's servants, oppressed or hard pressed, get impatient, and cry How long, O Lord, dost Thou not judge? It is time for Thee to work. But long patience precedes the divine awaking, for it is not God's way nor Christ's to cut down even a cumbering tree, until the possibility of its bearing fruit is plainly ended, and the last use that He makes of anything is to burn it. The repeated settings up of Christ's winepress have all been one in principle, and they all point onwards to a final one. There have been many days of the Lord, and if men were wise and observed these things,--which most of them are not,--they would see that these lesser days made a final great and terrible day of the Lord supremely probable, and in perfect analogy with all that experience and history have testified as to the method of the divine government.

Surely it is strange that the groundless expectation of the unbroken continuance of the present order should be so strong that many should utterly ignore the truth taught by such teachers as these, and reiterated by science, which declares that the physical universe had a beginning and will have an end, and confirmed by Jesus Himself. There will come a to-morrow when the sun will not rise. There will come a to-morrow which will be the day of the Lord, of which all these earlier and partial epochs of judgment were but precursors and prophets.

**II. The Treader of the Winepress.**

The context clearly shows that, in the prophet's view, the suffering Messiah in His exalted royalty is the agent of this, as of all divine acts. He is clothed with majesty, and it is in His hand, or through His agency, that all the pleasure of the Lord is brought to pass. The contrast with the figure in chap. liii. is ever to be kept in view. The lowliness, the weales and bruises, the form without comeliness are gone, and for these we see a conqueror, glorious in apparel and striding onwards in conscious strength.

But the access of majesty does not imply the putting off of lowliness and meekness. There is much that is severe and terrible in the figure that rises here before the prophet's vision, but both aspects equally belong to the glorified Christ, and that duality in His character makes each element more impressive. His long-suffering mercy and more than human tenderness do not hamper His arm when it is bared to smite; His judicial severity does not dam up the flow of His mercy and tenderness. When He was on earth, He wept over Jerusalem, but His tears did not hinder His pronouncing woe on the city. His love leads Him to warn before He smites, but it does not contradict His threatenings, nor augur our impunity. Nay rather, love compels Him to smite. And, more terrible still, it is His very love that smites most severely hearts that have rejected it and learn their folly and sin too late.

**III. Why the winepress is trodden.**

The context tells us. The triumphant figure, seen by the prophet striding onwards from Edom, answers the question as to His identity with, I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Then the treading of the winepress, from which He is represented as coming, is regarded as an exemplification of both these characteristics. It is a great act of righteousness. It is a great act of salvation. Similarly, He is represented as having been moved to that destructive judgment by the vengeance that burned in His heart, and by His seeing that there were none to help His redeemed.

So, then, the destructive act is a manifestation of Righteousness, which in such a connection means retributive justice. Awe-inspiring as it may be, the thunderstorm brings relief to a world sweltering in a stagnant atmosphere, and each blinding flash freshens the air. When the wicked perish, there is shouting. The destruction of some hoary evil that has long afflicted humanity and blocked the progress of the kingdom which is righteousness and peace and joy, is a good. Christ's terrible things are all in righteousness, and meant to set Him forth as the confidence of all the ends of the earth. To clear His character and government from all suspicion of moral indifference, to demonstrate by facts which the blindest can see, that it is not all the same to Him whether men are good or bad, to write in great letters which, like the capitals on a map, stretch across a whole land, The Judge of all the earth shall do right--surely these are worthy ends to move even the loving Christ to tread the winepress.

Further, His destructive judgments, however terrible, will always be accurately measured by righteousness. They are not outbursts of feeling; they are in exact correspondence with the evils that bring them down. The lava flows according to its own density and the lie of the land which it covers. These judgments are deformed by no undue severity; no base elements of temper, no errors as to the degree of criminality mar them. They are calm and absolutely accurate judgments of Him who is not only just but Justice.

But the context further teaches us that the true point of view from which to regard Christ's treading of the winepress is to think of it as redemptive and contributory to the salvation of My redeemed. Therefore there follows immediately on this picture of the conqueror treading the peoples in His fury and pouring their life-blood on the earth, the song of the delivered. Up through the troubled air, heavy with thunder-clouds, soars their praise, as a lark might rise and pour its strains above a volcano in eruption--I will mention the loving kindness of the Lord, and the praises of the Lord, according to all that the Lord hath bestowed on us and the great goodness toward the house of Israel which He hath bestowed on them, according to His mercies, and according to the multitude of His loving kindnesses. Pharaoh is drowned in the Red Sea; Miriam and her maidens on the bank clash their cymbals, and lift shrill voices in their triumphant hymn. Babylon sinks like a millstone in the great waters--and I heard as it were a great voice of a great multitude in heaven saying, Hallelujah; salvation and glory and power belong to our God, for true and righteous are His judgments. The innermost impulse of judgment is love.