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

**JEREMIAH-017. WHAT THE IMMENSE CREATION TEACHES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"If heaven above can be measured, and the foundations of the earth searched out beneath, I will also cast off all the seed of Israel for all that they have done, saith the Lord."*

*Jeremiah 31:37*

In the former sermon we considered the previous verse as presenting the stability of creation as a guarantee of the firmness of God's gracious covenant. Now we have to consider these grand closing words which bring before us another aspect of the universe as a guarantee for another side of God's gracious character. The immensity of creation is a symbol of the inexhaustibleness of the forgiving love of God.

**I. A word or two as to the fact here used as a symbol of the divine long-suffering.**

The prophet had very likely no idea at all beyond the ordinary one that presents itself to the senses--a boundless vault above an endless plain on which we stand, deep, sunless foundations, the Titanic substructions on which all rests, going down who knows where, resting on who knows what. We may smile at the rude conception, but it will be well for us if we can get as vivid an impression of the fact as He had.

We thankfully avail ourselves of modern science to tell us something about the dimensions of this awful universe of ours. We learn to know that there are millions of miles between these neighbour orbs, that light which has been travelling for thousands of years may not yet have fallen on some portion of the mighty whole, that the planetary masses of our system are but tiny specks in the whole, that every fresh stride which astronomical observation takes but opens up new nebulae to be resolved, where suns and constellations and systems are dwarfed by distance into hazy brightness which hardly deserves the name of light. We know all this, and can find all about the distances in any book. So much for space. Then the geologist comes to bewilder us still more, with extension in time.

But while all this may serve to give definiteness to the impression, after all, perhaps, it is the eye alone, as it gazes, that really feels the impression. Astronomy is really a very prosaic science.

**II. The effects which this immensity often produces on men.**

Very commonly in old days it led to actual idolatry, bowing down before these calm, unreachable brightnesses. In our days it too often leads to forgetting God altogether, and not seldom to disbelief that man can be of any account in such a universe. We are told that the notions of a covenant, a redemption, or that God cares about us are presumptuous. We all know the talk of men who are so modestly conscious of their own insignificance that they rebuke God for saying that He loves us, and Christians for believing Him.

**III. The true lesson.**

The immensity of the material universe is for us a symbol of the infinity of God's long-suffering love.

The creation proceeds from a greater Creator. That gigantic and overwhelming magnitude, that hoary and immemorial age, that complicated and innumerable multitude of details, what less can they show than ONE Eternal and Infinite?

The immense suggests the infinite.

Granted that you cannot from the immense creation rise logically to the Infinite Creator, still the facts that the soul conceives that there is an infinite God, and is conscious of the spontaneous evoking of that thought by the contemplation of the immeasurable, are strong reasons for believing that it is a legitimate process of thought which hears the name of God thundered from the far-off depths of the silent heavens. The heavens cannot be measured, no plummet can reach to the deep foundations of the earth. We are surrounded by a universe which to our apprehensions is boundless. How much more so from expansions of our conceptions of celestial magnitudes since Jeremiah's days, and what is to be the lesson from that? That we are insignificant atoms in this mighty whole? that God is far away from us? that the material stretches so far that perhaps there is nothing beyond?

The thought of faith is that the material immensity teaches me my God's infinity, and especially His inexhaustible patience with us sinners. It teaches us the unfathomed depths of His gracious heart, and the abysses of His mysterious providence, and the unbounded sweep of His long-suffering forgiveness. His forgiving forbearance reaches further than the limits of the heavens. Not till these can be measured will it be exhausted, and the seed of Israel cast off for what they have done.

He, the Infinite Father, above all creation, mightier than it, is our true home, and living in Him we have an abode which can never be dissolved, and above us stretch far-shining glories, unapproached masses of brightness, nebulae of blessedness, spaces where the eye fails and the imagination faints. All is ours, our eternal possession, the inexhaustible source of our joy. Astronomers tell of light which has been travelling for millenniums and has not yet reached this globe; but what is that to the flashing glories which through eternity shall pour on us from Him? So, then, our confidence should be firm and inexhaustible.

God has written wondrous lessons in His creation. But they are hieroglyphs, of which the key is lost, till we hear Christ and learn of Him. God has set His glories in the heavens and the earth is full of His mercy, but these are lesser gifts than that which contains them all and transcends them all, even His Son by whom He made the worlds, and-- mightier still--by whom He redeemed man. God has written His mercy in the heavens and His faithfulness in the clouds, but His mercy and His faithfulness are more commended to us in Him who was before all things, and of whom it is written: As a vesture shalt Thou fold them up, but Thou art the same and Thy years shall not fail. God has confirmed the covenant of His love to us by the faithful witnesses in the heavens, but the love shall abide when they have perished. The heavens bend above us all, and over the head of every man the zenith stands. Every spot of this low earth is smiled upon by that serene apocalypse of the loving will of God. No lane is so narrow and foul in the great city, no spot is so bare and lonely in the waste desert, but that thither the sunlight comes, and there some patch of blue above beckons the downcast eye to look up. The day opens its broad bosom bathed in light, and shows the sun in the heavens, the Lord of light, to preach to us of the true light. The night opens deeper abysses and fills them with stars, to preach to us how fathomless and immense His loving kindnesses and tender mercy are. They are witnesses to thee, dear friend, whatsoever thy heart, whatsoever thy sins, whatsoever thy memories. No iniquity can shut out God's forgiving love. You cannot build out the heavens. He will not be sent away; you cannot measure, you cannot conceive, you cannot exhaust, His pardoning love. No storms disturb that serene sky. It is always there, blazing down upon us unclouded with all its orbs. Trust Christ; and then as years roll on, you will find that infinite love growing ever greater to your loving eyes, and through eternity will move onwards in the happy atmosphere and boundless heaven of the inexhaustible, deep heart and changeless love of God.