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

**JEREMIAH-024. EBEDMELECH THE ETHIOPIAN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"For I will surely deliver thee, and thou shalt not fall by the sword, but thy life shall be for a prey unto thee: because thou hast put thy trust in Me, saith the Lord."*

*Jeremiah 39:18*

Ebedmelech is a singular anticipation of that other Ethiopian eunuch whom Philip met on the desert road to Gaza. It is prophetic that on the eve of the fall of the nation, a heathen man should be entering into union with God. It is a picture in little of the rejection of Israel and the ingathering of the Gentiles.

**I. The identity in all ages of the bond that unites men to God.**

It is a common notion that faith is peculiar to the New Testament. But the Old Testament trust is identical with the New Testament faith, and it is a great pity that the variation in translation has obscured that identity. The fact of the prominence given to law in the Old Testament does not affect this. For every effort to keep the law must have led to consciousness of imperfection, and that consciousness must have driven to the exercise of penitent trust. The difference of degrees of revelation does not affect it, for faith is the same, however various the contents of the creed.

Note further the personal object of Faith--in ME. The object of Faith is not a proposition but a Person. That Person is the same in the Old Testament and in the New. The Jehovah of the one is the God in Christ of the other. Consequently faith must be more than intellectual assent, it must be voluntary and emotional, the act of the whole man, the synthesis of the reason and the will.

**II. The contrast of a formal and real union with God.**

The king, prophets, priests, the whole nation, had an outward connection with Him, but it meant nothing. And this foreigner, a slave, perhaps not even a proselyte, a eunuch, had what the children of the covenant had not, a true union with God through Faith.

Judaism was not an exclusive system, but was intended to bring in the nations to share in its blessings. Outward descent gave outward place within the covenant, but the distinction of real and formal place there was established from the beginning. What else than this is the meaning of all the threatenings of Deuteronomy? What else did Isaiah mean when he called the rulers in Jerusalem Rulers of Sodom? Here the fates of Ebedmelech and of Zedekiah illustrate both sides of the truth. The danger of trusting in outward possession and of thinking that God's mercy is our property besets all Churches. Organisations of Christianity are necessary, but it is impossible to tell the harm that formal connection with them has done. There is only one bond that unites men to God--personal trust in Him as in Christ reconciling the world to Himself.

**III. The possibility of exercising uniting faith even in most unfavourable circumstances.**

This Ebedmelech had everything against him. The contemptuous exclusion of him from any share in the covenant might well have discouraged him. The poorest Jew treated him as a heathen dog, who had no right even to crumbs from the table spread for the children only. He was plunged into a sea of godlessness, and saw examples enough of utter carelessness as to Jehovah in His professed servants to drive him away from a religion which had so little hold on its professed adherents. The times were gloomy, and the Jehovah whom Judah professed to worship seemed to have small power to help His worshippers. It would have been no wonder if the conduct of the people of Jerusalem had caused the name of Jehovah to be blasphemed by this Gentile, nor if he had revolted from a religion that was alleged to be the special property of one race, and that such a race! But he listened to the cry of his own heart, and to the words of God's prophet, and his faith pierced through all obstacles--like the roots of some tree feeling for the water. He found the vitalising fountain that he sought, and His name stands to all ages as a witness that no seeking heart, that longs for God, is ever balked in its search, and that a faith, very imperfect as to its knowledge, may be so strong as to its substance that it unites him who exercises it with God, while the possessors of ecclesiastical privileges and of untarnished and full-orbed orthodox knowledge have no fellowship with Him.

**IV. The safety given by such uniting faith.**

To Ebedmelech, escape from death by the besiegers swords was promised. To us a more blessed safety and exemption from a worse destruction are assured. The life which is life indeed may be ours, and shall assuredly be ours, if our trust knits us to Him who is the Life, and who has said He that liveth and believeth in Me shall never die.