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

**JOHN-001**. **THE WORD IN ETERNITY, IN THE WORLD, AND IN THE FLESH by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2. The same was in the beginning with God. 3. All things were made by Him; and without Him was not any thing made that was made. 4. In Him was life; and the life was the light of men. 5. And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not. 6. There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7. The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe. 8. He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light. 9. That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world. 10. He was in the world, and the world was made by Him, and the world knew Him not. 11. He came unto His own, and His own received Him not. 12. But as many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name: 13. Which were born, not of blood, nor of the will of the flesh, nor of the will of man, but of God. 14. And the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, (and we beheld His glory, the glory as of the only-begotten of the Father,) full of grace and truth."*

*John 1:1-14*

The other Gospels begin with Bethlehem; John begins with the bosom of the Father. Luke dates his narrative by Roman emperors and Jewish high-priests; John dates his in the beginning. To attempt adequate exposition of these verses in our narrow limits is absurd; we can only note the salient points of this, the profoundest page in the New Testament.

The threefold utterance in verse 1 carries us into the depths of eternity, before time or creatures were. Genesis and John both start from the beginning, but, while Genesis works downwards from that point and tells what followed, John works upwards and tells what preceded--if we may use that term in speaking of what lies beyond time. Time and creatures came into being, and, when they began, the Word was. Surely no form of speech could more emphatically declare absolute, uncreated being, outside the limits of time. Clearly, too, no interpretation of these words fathoms their depth, or makes worthy sense, which does not recognise that the Word is a person. The second clause of verse 1 asserts the eternal communion of the Word with God. The preposition employed means accurately towards, and expresses the thought that in the Word there was motion or tendency towards, and not merely association with, God. It points to reciprocal, conscious communion, and the active going out of love in the direction of God. The last clause asserts the community of essence, which is not inconsistent with distinction of persons, and makes the communion of active Love possible; for none could, in the depths of eternity, dwell with and perfectly love and be loved by God, except one who Himself was God.

Verse 1 stands apart as revealing the pretemporal and essential nature of the Word. In it the deep ocean of the divine nature is partially disclosed, though no created eye can either plunge to discern its depths or travel beyond our horizon to its boundless, shoreless extent. The remainder of the passage deals with the majestic march of the self-revealing Word through creation, and illumination of humanity, up to the climax in the Incarnation.

John repeats the substance of verse 1 in verse 2, apparently in order to identify the Agent of creation with the august person whom he has disclosed as filling eternity. By Him creation was effected, and, because He was what verse 1 has declared Him to be, therefore was it effected by Him. Observe the three steps marked in three consecutive verses. All things were made by Him; literally became, where the emergence into existence of created things is strongly contrasted with the divine wasof verse 1. Through Himdeclares that the Word is the agent of creation; without Him(literally, apart from Him) declares that created things continue in existence because He communicates it to them. Man is the highest of these all things, and verse 4 sets forth the relation of the Word to Him, declaring that life, in all the width and height of its possible meanings, inheres in Him, and is communicated by Him, with its distinguishing accompaniment, in human nature, of light, whether of reason or of conscience.

So far, John has been speaking as from the upper or divine side, but in verse 5 he speaks from the under or human, and shows us how the self-revelation of the Word has, by some mysterious necessity, been conflict. The darknesswas not made by Him, but it is there, and the beams of the light have to contend with it. Something alien must have come in, some catastrophe have happened, that the light should have to stream into a region of darkness.

John takes the Fallfor granted, and in verse 5 describes the whole condition of things, both within and beyond the region of special revelation. The shining of the light is continuous, but the darkness is obstinate. It is the tragedy and crime of the world that the darkness will not have the light. It is the long-suffering mercy of God that the light repelled is not extinguished, but shines meekly on.

Verses 6-13 deal with the historical appearance of the Word. The Forerunner is introduced, as in the other Gospels; and, significantly enough, this Evangelist calls him only John,--omitting the Baptist, as was very natural to him, the other John, who would feel less need for distinguishing the two than others did. The subordinate office of a witness to the light is declared positively and negatively, and the dignity of such a function is implied. To witness to the light, and to be the means of leading men to believe, was honour for any man.

The limited office of the Forerunner serves as contrast to the transcendent lustre of the true Light. The meaning of verse 9 may be doubtful, but verses 10 and 11 clearly refer to the historical manifestation of the Word, and probably verse 9 does so too. Possibly, however, it rather points to the inner revelation by the Word, which is the light of men. In that case the phrase that cometh into the worldwould refer to every man, whereas it is more natural in this context to refer it to the light, and to see in the verse a reference to the illumination of humanity consequent on the appearance of Jesus Christ. The use of worldand camein verses 10 and 11 points in that direction. Verse 9 represents the Word as coming; verse 10 regards Him as come--He was in the world.

Note the three clauses, so like, and yet so unlike the august three in verse 1. Note the sad issue of the coming--The world knew Him not. In that worldthere was one place where He might have looked for recognition, one set of people who might have been expected to hail Him; but not only the wide world was blind (knew not) , but the narrower circle of His ownfought against what they knew to be light (received not) .

But the rejection was not universal, and John proceeds to develop the blessed consequences of receiving the light. For the first time he speaks the great word believe. The act of faith is the condition or means of receiving. It is the opening of the mental eye for the light to pour in. We possess Jesus in the measure of our faith. The object of faith is His name, which means, not this or that collocation of letters by which He is designated, but His whole self-revelation. The result of such faith is the right to become children of God, for through faith in the only-begotten Son we receive the communication of a divine life which makes us, too, sons. That new life, with its consequence of sonship, does not belong to human nature as received from parents, but is a gift of God mediated through faith in the Light who is the Word.

Verse 14 is not mere repetition of the preceding, but advances beyond it in that it declares the wonder of the way by which that divine Word did enter into the world. John here, as it were, draws back the curtain, and shows us the transcendent miracle of divine love, for which he has been preparing in all the preceding. Note that he has not named the Wordsince verse 1, but here he again uses the majestic expression to bring out strongly the contrast between the ante-temporal glory and the historical lowliness. These four words, The Word became flesh, are the foundation of all our knowledge of God, of man, of the relations between them, the foundation of all our hopes, the guarantee of all our peace, the pledge of all blessedness. He tabernacled among us. As the divine glory of old dwelt between the cherubim, so Jesus is among men the true Temple, wherein we see a truer glory than that radiant light which filled the closed chamber of the holy of holies. Rapturous remembrances rose before the Apostle as he wrote, We beheld His glory; and he has told us what he has beheld and seen with his eyes, that we also may have fellowship with him in beholding. The glory that shone from the Incarnate Word was no menacing or dazzling light. He and it were full of grace and truth, perfect Love bending to inferiors and sinners, with hands full of gifts and a heart full of tenderness and the revelation of reality, both as regards God and man. His grace bestows all that our lowness needs, His truth teaches all that our ignorance requires. All our gifts and all our knowledge come from the Incarnate Word, in whom believing we are the children of God.