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

**JOHN-004**. **THE FULNESS OF CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace."*

*John 1:16*

What a remarkable claim that is which the Apostle here makes for his Master! On the one side he sets His solitary figure as the universal Giver; on the other side are gathered the whole race of men, recipients from Him. As in the wilderness the children of Israel clustered round the rock from which poured out streams, copious enough for all the thirsty camp, John, echoing his Master's words, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink, here declares Of His fulness have all we received.

**I. Notice, then, the one ever full Source.**

The words of my text refer back to those of the fourteenth verse: The Word was made flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth. And of His fulness have all we received. The fulnesshere seems to mean that of which the Incarnate Word was full, the grace and truthwhich dwelt without measure in Him; the unlimited and absolute completeness and abundance of divine powers and glories which tabernacledin Him. And so the language of my text, both verbally and really, is substantially equivalent to that of the Apostle Paul. In Him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; and ye are complete in Him. The whole infinite Majesty, and inexhaustible resources of the divine nature, were incorporated and insphered in that Incarnate Word from whom all men may draw.

There are involved in that thought two ideas. One is the unmistakable assertion of the whole fulness of the divine nature as being in the Incarnate Word, and the other is that the whole fulness of the divine nature dwells in the Incarnate Word in order that men may get at it.

The words of my text go back, as I said, to the previous verse; but notice what an advance upon that previous verse they present to us. There we read, We beheld His glory. To behold is much, but to possess is more. It is much to say that Christ comes to manifest God, but that is a poor, starved account of the purpose of His coming, if that is all you have to say. He comes to manifest Him. Yes! but He comes to communicate Him, not merely to dazzle us with a vision, not merely to show us Him as from afar, not merely to make Him known to understanding or to heart; but to bestow--in no mere metaphor, but in simple, literal fact--the absolute possession of the divine nature. We beheld His gloryis a reminiscence that thrills the Evangelist, though half a century has passed since the vision gleamed upon his eyes; but of His fulness have all we receivedis infinitely and unspeakably more. And the manifestation was granted that the possession might be sure, for this is the very centre and heart of Christianity, that in Him who is Christianity God is not merely made known, but given; not merely beheld, but possessed.

In order that that divine fulness might belong to us there was needed that the Word should be made flesh; and there was further needed that incarnation should be crowned by sacrifice, and that life should be perfected in death. The alabaster box had to be broken before the house could be filled with the odour of the ointment. If I may so say, the sack, the coarse-spun sack of Christ's humanity, had to be cut asunder in order that the wealth that was stored in it might be poured into our hands. God came near us in the life, but God became ours in the death, of His dear Son. Incarnation was needed for that great privilege--we beheld His glory; but the Crucifixion was needed in order to make possible the more wondrous prerogative: Of His fulness have all we received. God gives Himself to men in the Christ whose life revealed and whose death imparted Him to the world.

And so He is the sole Source. All men, in a very real sense, draw from His fulness. In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. The life of the body and the life of the spirit willing, knowing, loving, all which makes life into light, all comes to us through that everlasting Word of God. And when that Word has become flesh and dwelt among us, His gifts are not only the gifts of light and life, which all men draw from Him, but the gifts of grace and truth which all those who love Him receive at His hands. His gifts, like the water from some fountain, may flow underground into many of the pastures of the wilderness; and many a man is blessed by them who knows not from whence they come. It is He from whom all the truth, all the grace which illuminates and blesses humanity, flow into all lands in all ages.

**II. Consider, then, again, the many receivers from the one Source. Of His fulness have all we received.**

Observe, we are not told definitely what it is that we receive. If we refer back to words in a previous verse, they may put us on the right track for answering the question, What is it that we get? He came unto His own, says verse 11, and His own received Him not; but as many as received Him, to them gave He power, etc. That answers the question, What do we receive? Christ is more than all His gifts. All His gifts are treasured up in Him and inseparable from Him. We get Jesus Christ Himself.

The blessings that we receive may be stated in many different ways. You may say we get pardon, purity, hope, joy, the prospect of Heaven, power for service; all these and a hundred more designations by which we might describe the one gift. All these are but the consequences of our having got the Christ within our hearts. He does not give pardon and the rest, as a king might give pardon and honours, a thousand miles off, bestowing it by a mere word, upon some criminal, but He gives all that He gives because He gives Himself. The real possession that we receive is neither more nor less than a loving Saviour, to enter our spirits and abide there, and be the spirit of our spirits, and the life of our lives.

Then, notice the universality of this possession. John has said, in the previous words, We beheld His glory. He refers there, of course, to the comparatively small circle of the eye-witnesses of our Master's life; who, at the time when he wrote, must have been very, very few in number. They had had the prerogative of seeing with their eyes and handling with their hands the Word of life that was manifested unto us; and with that prerogative the duty of bearing witness of Him to the rest of men. But in the receiving, John associates with himself, and with the other eyewitnesses, all those who had listened to their word, and had received the truth in the love of it. We beheldrefers to the narrower circle; we all receivedto the wider sweep of the whole Church. There is no exclusive class, no special prerogative. Every Christian man, the weakest, the lowliest, the most uncultured, rude, ignorant, foolish, the most besotted in the past, who has wandered furthest away from the Master; whose spirit has been most destitute of all sparks of goodness and of God--receives from out of His fulness. If any man have not the Spirit of Christ he is none of His. And every one of us, if we will, may have dwelling in our hearts, in the greatness of His strength, in the sweetness of His love, in the clearness of His illuminating wisdom, the Incarnate Word, the Comforter, the All-in-all whom we all receive.

And, as I said, that word allmight have even a wider extension without going beyond the limits of the truth. For on the one side there stands Christ, the universal Giver; and grouped before Him, in all attitudes of weakness and of want, is gathered the whole race of mankind. And from Him there pours out a stream copious enough to supply all the necessities of every human soul that lives to-day, of every human soul that has lived in the past, of every one that shall live in the future. There is no limit to the universality except only the limit of the human will: Whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

Think of that solitary figure of the Christ reared up, as it were, before the whole race of man, as able to replenish all their emptiness with His fulness, and to satisfy all their thirst with His sufficiency. Dear brother! you have a great gaping void in your heart--an aching emptiness there, which you know better than I can tell you. Look to Him who can fill it and it shall be filled. He can supply all your wants as He can supply all the wants of every soul of man. And after generations have drawn from Him, the water will not have sunk one hairsbreadth in the great fountain, but there will be enough for all coming eternities as there has been enough for all past times. He is like His own miracle--the thousands are gathered on the grass, they do all eat and are filled. As their necessities required the bread was multiplied, and at the last there was more left than there had seemed to be at the beginning. So of His fulness have all we received; and after a universe has drawn from it, for an Eternity, the fulness is not turned into scantiness or emptiness.

**III. And so, lastly, notice the continuous flow from the inexhaustible Source. Of His fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.**

The word foris a little singular. Of course it means instead of, in exchange for; and the Evangelist's idea seems to be that as one supply of grace is given and used, it is, as it were, given back to the Bestower, who substitutes for it a fresh and unused vessel, filled with new grace. He might have said, grace upon grace; one supply being piled upon the other. But his notion is, rather, one supply given in substitution for the other, new lamps for old ones.

Just as a careful gardener will stand over a plant that needs water, and will pour the water on the surface until the earth has drunk it up, and then add a little more; so He gives step by step, grace for grace, an uninterrupted bestowal, yet regulated according to the absorbing power of the heart that receives it. Underlying that great thought are two things: the continuous communication of grace, and the progressive communication of grace. We have here the continuous communication of grace. God is always pouring Himself out upon us in Christ. There is a perpetual out flow from Him to us: if there is not a perpetual inflow into us from Him it is our fault, and not His. He is always giving, and His intention is that our lives shall be a continual reception. Are they? How many Christian men there are whose Christian lives at the best are like some of those Australian or Siberian rivers; in the dry season, a pond here, a stretch of sand, waterless and barren there, then another place with a drop of muddy water in some hollow, and then another stretch of sand, and so on. Why should not the ponds be linked together by a flashing stream? God is always pouring Himself out; why do we not always take Him in?

There is but one answer, and the answer is, that we do not fulfil the condition, which condition is simple faith. As many as received Him, to them gave He power to become the sons of God; even to them that believed on His name. Faith is the condition of receiving, and wherever there is a continuous trust there will be an unbroken grace; and wherever there are interrupted gifts it is because there has been an intermitted trust in Him. Do not let your lives be like some dimly lighted road, with a lamp here, and a stretch of darkness, and then another twinkling light; let the light run all along the side of your path, because at every moment your heart is turning to Christ with trust. Make your faith continuous, and God will make His grace incessant, and out of His fulness you will draw continual supplies of needed strength.

But not only have we here the notion of continuous, but also, as it seems to me, of progressive gifts. Each measure of Christ received, if we use it aright, makes us capable of possessing more of Christ. And the measure of our capacity is the measure of His gift, and the more we can hold the more we shall get. The walls of our hearts are elastic, the vessel expands by being filled out; it throbs itself wider by desire and faith. The wider we open our mouths the larger will be the gift that God puts into them. Each measure and stage of grace utilised and honestly employed will make us capable and desirous, and, therefore, possessors, of more and more of the grace that He gives. So the ideal of the Christian life, and God's intention concerning us, is not only that we should have an uninterrupted, but a growing possession, of Christ and of His grace.

Is that the case with you, my friend? Can you hold more of God than you could twenty years ago? Is there any more capacity in your soul for more of Christ than there was long, long ago? If there is you have more of Him; if you have not more of Him it is because you cannot contain more; and you cannot contain more because you have not desired more, and because you have been so wretchedly unfaithful in your use of what you had. The ideal is, they go from strength to strength, and the end of that is, every one of them appeareth before God.

So, dear brother, as the dash of the waves will hollow out some little indentation on the coast, and make it larger and larger until there is a great bay, with its headlands miles apart, and its deep bosom stretching far into the interior, and all the expanse full of flashing waters and leaping waves, so the giving Christ works a place for Himself in a man's heart, and makes the spirit which receives and faithfully uses the gifts which He brings, capable of more of Himself, and fills the widened space with larger gifts and new grace.

Only remember the condition of having Him is trusting to His name and longing for His presence. If any man open the door I will come in. We have Him if we trust Him. That trust is no mere passive reception, such as is the case with some empty jar which lies open-mouthed on the shore and lets the sea wash into it and out of it, as may happen. But the receiveof our text might be as truly rendered take. Faith is an active taking, not a passive receiving. We must lay hold on eternal life. Faith is the hand that grasps the offered gift, the mouth that feeds upon the bread of God, the voice that says to Christ, Come in, Thou blessed of the Lord; why standest Thou without?Such a faith alone brings us into vital connection with Jesus. Without it, you will be none the richer for all His fulness, and may perish of famine in the midst of plenty, like a man dying of hunger outside the door of a granary. They who believe take the Saviour who is given, and they who take receive, and they who receive obtain day by day growing grace from the fulness of Christ, and so come ever nearer to the realisation of the ultimate purpose of the Father, that they should be filled with all the fulness of God.