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

**JOHN-007**. **THE FIRST DISCIPLES - PART 1: JOHN AND ANDREW by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"37. And the two disciples heard Him speak, and they followed Jesus. 38. Then Jesus turned, and saw them following, and saith unto them, What seek ye? They said unto Him, Rabbi, (which is to say, being interpreted, Master,) where dwellest Thou? 39. He saith unto them, Come and see. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day: for it was about the tenth hour."*

*John 1:37-39*

In these verses we see the head waters of a great river, for we have before us nothing less than the beginnings of the Christian Church. So simply were the first disciples made. The great society of believers was born like its Master, unostentatiously and in a corner.

Jesus has come back from His conflict in the wilderness after His baptism, and has presented Himself before John the Baptist for his final attestation. It was a great historical moment when the last of the Prophets stood face to face with the Fulfilment of all prophecy. In his words, Behold the Lamb of God which taketh away the sin of the world!Jewish prophecy sang its swan-song, uttered its last rejoicing, Eureka! I have found Him!and died as it spoke.

We do not sufficiently estimate the magnificent self-suppression and unselfishness of the Baptist, in that he, with his own lips, here repeats his testimony in order to point his disciples away from himself, and to attach them to Jesus. If he could have been touched by envy he would not so gladly have recognised it as his lot to decrease while Jesus increased. Bare magnanimity that in a teacher! The two who hear John's words are Andrew, Simon Peter's brother, and an anonymous man. The latter is probably the Evangelist. For it is remarkable that we never find the names of James and John in this Gospel (though from the other Gospels we know how closely they were associated with our Lord), and that we only find them referred to as the sons of Zebedee, once near the close of the book. That fact points, I think, in the direction of John's authorship of this Gospel.

These two, then, follow behind Jesus, fancying themselves unobserved, not desiring to speak to Him, and probably with some notion of tracking Him to His home, in order that they may seek an interview at a later period. But He who notices the first beginnings of return to Him, and always comes to meet men, and is better to them than their wishes, will not let them steal behind Him uncheered, nor leave them to struggle with diffidence and delay. So He turns to them, and the events ensue which I have read in the verses that follow as my text.

We have, I think, three things especially to notice here. First, the Master's question to the whole world, What seek ye?Second, the Master's invitation to the whole world, Come and see!Lastly, the personal communion which brings men's hearts to Him, They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day.

**I. So, then, first look at this question of Christ to the whole world, What seek ye?**

As it stands, on its surface, and in its primary application, it is the most natural of questions. Our Lord hears footsteps behind Him, and, as any one would do, turns about, with the question which any one would ask, What is it that you want?That question would derive all its meaning from the look with which it was accompanied, and the tone in which it was spoken. It might mean either annoyance and rude repulsion of a request, even before it was presented, or it might mean a glad wish to draw out the petition, and more than half a pledge to bestow it. All depends on the smile with which it was asked and the intonation of voice which carried it to their ears. And if we had been there we should have felt, as these two evidently felt, that though in form a question, it was in reality a promise, and that it drew out their shy wishes, made them conscious to themselves of what they desired, and gave them confidence that their desire would be granted. Clearly it had sunk very deep into the Evangelist's mind; and now, at the end of his life, when his course is nearly run, the never-to-be-forgotten voice sounds still in his memory, and he sees again, in sunny clearness, all the scene that had transpired on that day by the fords of the Jordan. The first words and the last words of those whom we have learned to love are cut deep on our hearts.

It was not an accident that the first words which the Master spoke in His Messianic office were this profoundly significant question, What seek ye?He asks it of us all, He asks it of us to-day. Well for them who can answer, Rabbi! where dwellest Thou?It is Thou whom we seek!So, venturing to take the words in that somewhat wider application, let me just suggest to you two or three directions in which they seem to point.

First, the question suggests to us this: the need of having a clear consciousness of what is our object in life. The most of men have never answered that question. They live from hand to mouth, driven by circumstances, guided by accidents, impelled by unreflecting passions and desires, knowing what they want for the moment, but never having tried to shape the course of their lives into a consistent whole, so as to stand up before God in Christ when He puts the question to them, What seek ye?and to answer the question.

These incoherent, instinctive, unreflective lives that so many of you are living are a shame to your manhood, to say nothing more. God has made us for something else than that we should thus be the sport of circumstances. It is a disgrace to any of us that our lives should be like some little fishing-boat, with an unskilful or feeble hand at the tiller, yawing from one point of the compass to another, and not keeping a straight and direct course. I pray you, dear brethren, to front this question: After all, and at bottom, what is it I am living for? Can I formulate the aims and purposes of my life in any intelligible statement of which I should not be ashamed?Some of you are not ashamed to do what you would be very much ashamed to say, and you practically answer the question, What are you seeking?by pursuits that you durst not call by their own ugly names.

There may be many of us who are living for our lusts, for our passions, for our ambitions, for avarice, who are living in all uncleanness and godlessness. I do not know. There are plenty of shabby, low aims in all of us which do not bear being dragged out into the light of day. I beseech you to try and get hold of the ugly things and bring them up to the surface, however much they may seek to hide in the congenial obscurity and twist their slimy coils round something in the dark. If you dare not put your life's object into words, bethink yourselves whether it ought to be your life's object at all.

Ah, brethren! if we would ask ourselves this question, and answer it with any thoroughness, we should not make so many mistakes as to the places where we look for the things for which we are seeking. If we knew what we were really seeking, we should know where to go to look for it. Let me tell you what you are seeking, whether you know it or not. You are seeking for rest for your heart, a home for your spirits; you are seeking for perfect truth for your understandings, perfect beauty for your affections, perfect goodness for your conscience. You are seeking for all these three, gathered into one white beam of light, and you are seeking for it all in a Person. Many of you do not know this, and so you go hunting in all manner of impossible places for that which you can only find in one. To the question, What seek ye?the deepest of all answers, the only real answer, is, My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. If you know that, you know where to look for what you need! Do men gather grapes of thorns?If these are really the things that you are seeking after, in all your mistaken search--oh! how mistaken is the search! Do men look for pearls in cockle-shells, or for gold in coal-pits; and why should you look for rest of heart, mind, conscience, spirit, anywhere and in anything short of God? What seek ye?--the only answer is, We seek Thee!

And then, still further, let me remind you how these words are not only a question, but are really a veiled and implied promise. The question, What do you want of Me?may either strike an intending suppliant like a blow, and drive him away with his prayer sticking in his throat unspoken, or it may sound like a merciful invitation, What is thy petition, and what is thy request, and it shall be granted unto thee?We know which of the two it was here. Christ asks all such questions as this (and there are many of them in the New Testament), not for His information, but for our strengthening. He asks people, not because He does not know before they answer, but that, on the one hand, their own minds may be clear as to their wishes, and so they may wish the more earnestly because of the clearness; and that, on the other hand, their desires being expressed, they may be the more able to receive the gift which He is willing to bestow. So He here turns to these men, whose purpose He knew well enough, and says to them, What seek ye?Herein He is doing the very same thing on a lower level, and in an outer sphere, as is done when He appoints that we shall pray for the blessings which He is yearning to bestow, but which He makes conditional on our supplications, only because by these supplications our hearts are opened to a capacity for receiving them.

We have, then, in the words before us, thus understood, our Lord's gracious promise to give what is desired on the simple condition that the suppliant is conscious of his own wants, and turns to Him for the supply of them. What seek ye?It is a blank cheque that He puts into their hands to fill up. It is the key of His treasure-house which He offers to us all, with the assured confidence that if we open it we shall find all that we need.

Who is He that thus stands up before a whole world of seeking, restless spirits, and fronts them with the question which is a pledge, conscious of His capacity to give to each of them what each of them requires? Who is this that professes to be able to give all these men and women and children bread here in the wilderness? There is only one answer--the Christ of God.

And He has done what He promises. No man or woman ever went to Him, and answered this question, and presented their petition for any real good, and was refused. No man can ask from Christ what Christ cannot bestow. No man can ask from Christ what Christ will not bestow. In the loftiest region, the region of inward and spiritual gifts, which are the best gifts, we can get everything that we want, and our only limit is, not His boundless omnipotence and willingness, but our own poor, narrow, and shrivelled desires. Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find.

Christ stands before us, if I may so say, like some of those fountains erected at some great national festival, out of which pour for all the multitude every variety of draught which they desire, and each man that goes with his empty cup gets it filled, and gets it filled with that which he wishes. What seek ye?Wisdom? You students, you thinkers, you young men that are fighting with intellectual difficulties and perplexities, What seek ye?Truth? He gives us that. You others, What seek ye?Love, peace, victory, self-control, hope, anodyne for sorrow? Whatever you desire, you will find in Jesus Christ. The first words with which He broke the silence when He spake to men as the Messias, were at once a searching question, probing their aims and purposes, and a gracious promise pledging Him to a task not beyond His power, however far beyond that of all others, even the task of giving to each man his heart's desire. What seek ye?Seek, and ye shall find.

**II. Then, still further, notice how, in a similar fashion, we may regard here the second words which our Lord speaks as being His merciful invitation to the world. Come and see.**

The disciplesanswer was simple and timid. They did not venture to say, May we talk to you?Will you take us to be your disciples?All they can muster courage to ask now is, Where dwellest Thou?At another time, perhaps, we will go to this Rabbi and speak with Him. His answer is, Come, come now; come, and by intercourse with Me learn to know Me. His temporary home was probably nothing more than some selected place on the river's bank, for He had not where to lay His head; but such as it was, He welcomes them to it. Come and see!

Take a plain, simple truth out of that. Christ is always glad when people resort to Him. When He was here in the world, no hour was inconvenient or inopportune; no moment was too much occupied; no physical wants of hunger, or thirst, or slumber were ever permitted to come between Him and seeking hearts. He was never impatient. He was never wearied of speaking, though He was often wearied in speaking. He never denied Himself to any one or said, I have something else to do than to attend to you. And just as in literal fact, whilst He was here upon earth, nothing was ever permitted to hinder His drawing near to any man who wanted to draw near to Him, so nothing now hinders it; and He is glad when any of us resort to Him and ask Him to let us speak to Him and be with Him. His weariness or occupation never shut men out from Him then. His glory does not shut them out now.

Then there is another thought here. This invitation of the Master is also a very distinct call to a firsthand knowledge of Jesus Christ. Andrew and John had heard from the Baptist about Him, and now what He bids them to do is to come and hear Himself. That is what He calls you, dear brethren, to do. Do not listen to us, let the Master Himself speak to you. Many who reject Christianity reject it through not having listened to Jesus Himself teaching them, but only to theologians and other human representations of the truth. Go and ask Christ to speak to you with His own lips of truth, and take Him as the Expositor of His own system. Do not be contented with traditional talk and second-hand information. Go to Christ, and hear what He Himself has to say to you.

Then, still further, in this Come and seethere is a distinct call to the personal act of faith. Both of these words, comeand see, are used in the New Testament as standing emblems of faith. Coming to Christ is trusting Him; trusting Him is seeing Him, looking unto Him. Come unto Me, and I will give you rest, Look unto Me, and be ye saved, all ye ends of the earth. There are two metaphors, both of them pointing to one thing, and that one thing is the invitation from the dear lips of the loving Lord to every man, woman, and child in this congregation. Come and see!Put your trust in Me, draw near to Me by desire and penitence, draw near to Me in the fixed thought of your mind, in the devotion of your will, in the trust of your whole being. Come to Me, and see Me by faith; and then--and then--your hearts will have found what they seek, and your weary quest will be over, and, like the dove, you will fold your wings and nestle at the foot of the Cross, and rest for evermore. Come! "Come and see!"

**III. So, lastly, we have in these words a parable of the blessed experience which binds men's hearts to Jesus for ever. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him that day, for it was about the tenth hour.**

Dweltand abodeare the same words in the original. It is one of John's favourite words, and in its deepest meaning expresses the close, still communion which the soul may have with Jesus Christ, which communion, on that never-to-be-forgotten day, when he and Andrew sat with Him in the quiet, confidential fellowship that disclosed Christ's glory full of grace and truthto their hearts, made them His for ever.

If the reckoning of time here is made according to the Hebrew fashion, the tenth hourwill be ten o'clock in the morning. So, one long day of talk! If it be according to the Roman legal fashion, the hour will be four o'clock in the afternoon, which would only give time for a brief conversation before the night fell. But, in any case, sacred reserve is observed as to what passed in that interview. A lesson for a great deal of blatant talk, in this present day, about conversion and the details thereof!

Not easily forgiven

Are those, who setting wide the doors, that bar

The secret bridal chambers of the heart.

Let in the day.

John had nothing to say to the world about what the Master said to him and his brother in that long day of communion.

One plain conclusion from this last part of our narrative is that the impression of Christ's own personality is the strongest force to make disciples. The character of Jesus Christ is, after all, the central and standing evidence and the mightiest credential of Christianity. It bears upon its face the proof of its own truthfulness. If such a character was not lived, how did it ever come to be described, and described by such people? And if it was lived, how did it come to be so? The historical veracity of the character of Jesus Christ is guaranteed by its very uniqueness. And the divine origin of Jesus Christ is forced upon us as the only adequate explanation of His historical character. Truly this man was the Son of God.

I believe that to lift Him up is the work of all Christian preachers and teachers; as far as they can to hide themselves behind Jesus Christ, or at the most to let themselves appear, just as the old painters used to let their own likenesses appear in their great altar-pieces--a little kneeling figure there, away in a dark corner of the background. Present Christ, and He will vindicate His own character; He will vindicate His own nature; He will vindicate His own gospel. They came and saw where He dwelt, and abode with Him, and the end of it was that they abode with Him for evermore. And so it will always be.

Once more, personal experience of the grace and sweetness of this Saviour binds men to Him as nothing else will:

He must be loved ere that to you

He will seem worthy of your love.

The deepest and sweetest and most precious part of His character and of His gifts can only be known on condition of possessing Him and them, and they can be possessed only on condition of holding fellowship with Him. I do not say to any man: Try trust in order to be sure that Jesus Christ is worthy to be trusted, for by its very nature faith cannot be an experiment or provisional. I do not say that my experience is evidence to you, but at the same time I do say that it is worth any man's while to reflect upon this, that none who ever trusted in Him have been put to shame. No man has looked to Jesus and has said: Ah! I have found Him out! His help is vain, His promises empty. Many men have fallen away from Him, I know, but not because they have proved Him untruthful, but because they have become unfaithful.

And so, dear brethren, I come to you with the old message, Oh! taste, and thus you will see that the Lord is good. There must be the faith first, and then there will be the experience, which will make anything seem to you more credible than that He whom you have loved and trusted, and who has answered your love and your trust, should be anything else than the Son of God, the Saviour of mankind. Come to Him and you will see. The impregnable argument will be put into your mouth--Whether this man be a sinner or no, I know not. One thing I know, that whereas I was blind, now I see. Look to Him, listen to Him, and when He asks you, What seek ye?answer, Rabbi, where dwellest Thou? It is Thou whom I seek. He will welcome you to close blessed intercourse with Him, which will knit you to Him with cords that cannot be broken, and with His loving voice making music in memory and heart, you will be able triumphantly to confess--Now we believe, not because of any man's saying, for we have heard Him ourselves, and know that this is indeed the Christ, the Saviour of the world.