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

**JOHN-008**. **THE FIRST DISCIPLES - PART 2: SIMON PETER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"40. One of the two which heard John speak, and followed him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. 41. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. 42. And he brought him to Jesus. And when Jesus beheld him, He said, Thou art Simon the son of Jona: thou shalt be called Cephas, which is, by interpretation, a stone."*

*John 1:40-42*

There are many ways by which souls are brought to their Saviour. Sometimes, like the merchantman seeking goodly pearls, men seek Him earnestly and find Him. Sometimes, by the intervention of another, the knowledge of Him is kindled in dark hearts. Sometimes He Himself takes the initiative, and finds those that seek Him not. We have illustrations of all these various ways in these simple records of the gathering in of the first disciples. Andrew and his friend, with whom we were occupied in our last sermon, looked for Christ and found Him. Peter, with whom we have to do now, was brought to Christ by his brother; and the third of the group, consisting of Philip, was sought by Christ while he was not thinking of Him, and found an unsought treasure; and then Philip again, like Andrew, finds a friend, and brings him to Christ.

Each of the incidents has its own lesson, and each of them adds something to the elucidation of John's two great subjects: the revelation of Jesus as the Son of God, and the development of that faith in Him which gives us life. It may be profitable to consider each group in succession, and mark the various aspects of these two subjects presented by each.

In this incident, then, we have two things mainly to consider: first, the witness of the disciple; second, the self-revelation of the Master.

**I. The witness of the disciple.**

We have seen that the unknown companion of Andrew was probably the Evangelist himself, who, in accordance with his uniform habit, suppresses his own name, and that that omission points to John's authorship of this Gospel. Another morsel of evidence as to the date and purpose of the Gospel lies in the mention here of Andrew as Simon Peter's brother. We have not yet heard anything about Simon Peter. The Evangelist has never mentioned his name, and yet he takes it for granted that his hearers knew all about Peter, and knew him better than they did Andrew. That presupposes a considerable familiarity with the incidents of the Gospel story, and is in harmony with the theory that this fourth Gospel is the latest of the four, and was written for the purpose of supplementing, not of repeating, their narrative. Hence a number of the phenomena of the Gospel, which have troubled critics, are simply and sufficiently explained.

But that by the way. Passing that, notice first the illustration that we get here of how instinctive and natural the impulse is, when a man has found Jesus Christ, to tell some one else about Him. Nobody said to Andrew, Go and look for your brother, and yet, as soon as he had fairly realised the fact that this Man standing before him was the Messiah, though the evening seems to have come, he hurries away to find his brother, and share with him the glad conviction.

Now, that is always the case. If a man has any real depth of conviction, he cannot rest till he tries to share it with somebody else. Why, even a dog that has had its leg mended, will bring other limping dogs to the man that was kind to it. Whoever really believes anything becomes a propagandist.

Look round about us to-day! and hearken to the Babel, the wholesale Babel of noises, where every sort of opinion is trying to make itself heard. It sounds like a country fair where every huckster is shouting his loudest. That shows that the men believe the things that they profess. Thank God that there is so much earnestness in the world! And now are Christians to be dumb whilst all this vociferous crowd is calling its wares, and quacks are standing on their platforms shouting out their specifics, which are mostly delusions? Have you not a medicine that will cure everything, a real heal-all, a veritable pain-killer? If you believe that you have, certainly you will never rest till you share your boon with your brethren.

If the natural effect of all earnest conviction, viz. a yearning and an absolute necessity to speak it out, is no part of your Christian experience, very grave inferences ought to be drawn from that. This man, before he was four-and-twenty hours a disciple, had made another. Some of you have been disciples for as many years, and have never even tried to make one. Whence comes that silence which is, alas, so common among us?

It is very plain that, making all allowance for changed manners, for social difficulties, for timidity, for the embarrassment that besets people when they talk to other people about religion, which is such an awkward subject to introduce into mixed company, and the like,--making all allowance for these, there is a deplorable number of Christian people who ought to be, in their own circles, evangelists and missionaries, who are, if I may venture to quote very rude words which the Bible uses, Dumb dogs lying down, and loving to slumber. He first findeth his own brother, Simon!

Now, take another lesson out of this witness of the disciple, as to the channel in which such effort naturally runs. He first findeth his own brother; does not that imply a second finding by the other of the two? The language of the text suggests that the Evangelist's tendency to the suppression of himself, of which I have spoken, hides away, if I may so say, in this singular expression, the fact that he too went to look for a brother, but that Andrew found his brother before John found his. If so, each of the original pair of disciples went to look for one who was knit to him by close ties of kindred and affection, and found him and brought him to Christ; and before the day was over the Christian Church was doubled, because each member of it, by God's grace, had added another. Home, then, and those who are nearest to us, present the natural channels for Christian work. Many a very earnest and busy preacher, or Sunday-school teacher, or missionary, has brothers and sisters, husband or wife, children or parents at home to whom he has never said a word about Christ. There is an old proverb, The shoemaker's wife is always the worst shod. The families of many very busy Christian teachers suffer woefully for want of remembering he first findeth his own brother. It is a poor affair if all your philanthropy and Christian energy go off noisily in Sunday-schools and mission-stations, and if your own vineyard is neglected, and the people at your own fireside never hear anything from you about the Master whom you say you love. Some of you want that hint; will you take it?

But then, the principle is one that might be fairly expanded beyond the home circle. The natural relationships into which we are brought by neighbourhood and by ordinary associations prescribe the direction of our efforts. What, for instance, are we set down in this swarming population of Lancashire for? For business and personal ends? Yes, partly. But is that all? Surely, if we believe that there is a divinity that shapes our endsand determines the bounds of our habitation, we must believe that other purposes affecting other people are also meant by God to be accomplished through us, and that where a man who knows and loves Christ Jesus is brought into neighbourly contact with thousands who do not, he is thereby constituted his brethren's keeper, and is as plainly called to tell them of Christ as if a voice from Heaven had bid him do it. What is to be said of the depth and vital energy of the Christianity that neither hears the call nor feels the impulse to share its blessing with the famishing Lazarus at its gate? What will be the fate of such a church? Why, if you live in luxury in your own well drained and ventilated house, and take no heed to the typhoid fever or cholera in the slums at its back, the chances are that seeds of the disease will find their way to you, and kill your wife, or child, or yourself. And if you Christian people, living in the midst of godless people, do not try to heal them, they will infect you. If you do not seek to impress your conviction that Christ is the Messiah upon an unbelieving generation, the unbelieving generation will impress upon you its doubts whether He is; and your lips will falter, and a pallor will come over the complexion of your love, and your faith will become congealed and turn into ice.

Notice again the simple word which is the most powerful means of influencing most men.

Andrew did not begin to argue with his brother. Some of us can do that and some of us cannot. Some of us are influenced by argument and some of us are not. You may pound a man's mistaken creed to atoms with sledge-hammers of reasoning, and he is not much the nearer being a Christian than he was before; just as you may pound ice to pieces and it is pounded ice after all. The mightiest argument that we can use, and the argument that we can all use, if we have got any religion in us at all, is that of Andrew, We have found the Messias.

I recently read a story in some newspaper or other about a minister who preached a very elaborate course of lectures in refutation of some form of infidelity, for the special benefit of a man that attended his place of worship. Soon after, the man came and declared himself a Christian. The minister said to him, Which of my discourses was it that removed your doubts?The reply was, Oh! it was not any of your sermons that influenced me. The thing that set me thinking was that a poor woman came out of the chapel beside me, and stumbled on the steps, and I stretched out my hand to help her, and she said "Thank you!" Then she looked at me and said, "Do you love Jesus Christ, my blessed Saviour?" And I did not, and I went home and thought about it; and now I can say I love Jesus. The poor woman's word, and her frank confession of her experience, were all the transforming power.

If you have found Christ, you can say that you have. Never mind about the how! Any how! Only say it! A boy that is sent on an errand by his father has only one duty to perform, and that is to repeat what he was told. Whether we have any eloquence or not, whether we have any logic or not, whether we can speak persuasively and gracefully or not, if we have laid hold of Christ at all we can say that we have; and it is at our peril that we do not. We can say it to somebody. There is surely some one who will listen to you more readily than to any one else. Surely you have not lived all your life and bound nobody to you by kindness and love, so that they will gladly attend to what you say. Well, then, use the power that is given to you.

Remember the beginnings of the Christian Church--two men, each of whom found his brother. Two and two make four; and if every one of us would go, according to the old law of warfare, and each of us slay our man, or rather each of us give life by God's grace to some one, or try to do it, our congregations and our churches would grow as fast as, according to the old problem, the money grew that was paid down for the nails in the horse's shoes. Two snowflakes on the top of a mountain gather an avalanche by the time they reach the valley. He first findeth his brother, Simon.

**II. And now I turn to the second part of this text, the self-revelation of the Master.**

The bond which knit these men to Christ at first was by no means the perfect Christian faith which they afterwards attained. They recognised Him as the Messiah, they were personally attached to Him, they were ready to accept His teaching and to obey His commandments. That was about as far as they had gone. But they were scholars. They had entered the school. The rest would come. It would be absurd to expect that Christ would begin by preaching to them faith in His divinity and atoning work. He binds them to Himself. That is lesson enough for a beginner for one day.

It was the impression which Christ Himself made on Simon which completed the work begun by his brother. What, then, was the impression? He comes all full of wonder and awe, and he is met by a look and a sentence. The look, which is described by an unusual word, was a penetrating gaze which regarded Peter with fixed attention. It must have been remarkable, to have lived in John's memory for all these years. Evidently, as I think, a more than natural insight is implied. So, also, the saying with which our Lord received Peter seems to me to be meant to show more than natural knowledge: Thou art Simon, the son of Jonas. Christ may, no doubt, have learned the Apostle's name and lineage from his brother, or in some other ordinary way. But if you observe the similar incident which follows in the conversation with Nicodemus, and the emphatic declaration of the next chapter that Jesus knew both all men, and what was in man--both human nature as a whole, and each individual--it is more natural to see here superhuman knowledge.

So then, the first point in our Lord's self-revelation here is that He shows Himself possessed of supernatural and thorough knowledge. One remembers the many instances where our Lord read men's hearts, and the prayer addressed to Him probably, by Peter, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, and the vision which John saw of eyes like a flame of fire, and the sevenfold I know thy works.

It may be a very awful thought, Thou, God, seest me. It is a very unwelcome thought to a great many men, and it will be so to us unless we can give it the modification which it receives from the belief in the divinity of Jesus Christ, and feel sure that the eyes which are blazing with divine omniscience are dewy with divine and human love.

Do you believe it? Do you feel that Christ is looking at you, and searching you altogether? Do you rejoice in it? Do you carry it about with you as a consolation and a strength in moments of weakness and in times of temptation? Is it as blessed to you to feel Thou Christ beholdest me now, as it is for a child to feel that, when it is playing in the garden, its mother is sitting up at the window watching it, and that no harm can come? There have been men driven mad in prisons because they knew that somewhere in the wall there was a little pinhole, through which a gaoler's eye was always, or might be always, glaring down at them. And the thought of an absolute Omniscience up there, searching me to the depths of my nature, may become one from which I recoil shudderingly, and will not be altogether a blessed one unless it comes to me in this shape:--My Christ knows me altogether and loves me better than He knows. And so I will spread myself out before Him, and though I feel that there is much in me which I dare not tell to men, I will rejoice that there is nothing which I need to tell to Him. He knows me through and through. He knew me when He died for me. He knew me when He forgave me. He knew me when He undertook to cleanse me. Like this very Peter I will say, "Lord, Thou knowest all things," and, like him, I will cling the closer to His feet, because I know, and He knows, my weakness and my sin.

Another revelation of our Lord's relation to His disciples is given in the fact that He changes Simon's name. Jehovah, in the Old Testament, changes the names of Abraham and of Jacob. Babylonian kings in the Old Testament change the names of their vassal princes. Masters impose names on their slaves; and I suppose that even the marriage custom of the wife's assuming the name of the husband rests originally upon the same idea of absolute authority. That idea is conveyed in the fact that our Lord changes Peter's name, and so takes absolute possession of him, and asserts His mastery over him. We belong to Him altogether, because He has given Himself altogether for us. His absolute authority is the correlative of His utter self-surrender. He who can come to me and say, I have spared not my life for thee, and He only, has the right to come to me and say, yield yourself wholly to Me. So, Christian friends, your Master wants all your service; do you give yourselves up to Him out and out, not by half and half.

Lastly, that change of name implies Christ's power and promise to bestow a new character and new functions and honours. Peter was by no means a Peterthen. The name no doubt mainly implies official function, but that official function was prepared for by personal character; and in so far as the name refers to character, it means firmness. At that epoch Peter was rash, impulsive, headstrong, self-confident, vain, and therefore, necessarily changeable. Like the granite, all fluid and hot, and fluid because it was hot, he needed to cool in order to solidify into rock. And not until his self-confidence had been knocked out of him, and he had learned humility by falling; not until he had been beaten from all his presumption, and tamed down, and sobered and steadied by years of difficulty and responsibilities, did he become the rock that Christ meant him to be. All that lay concealed in the future, but in the change of his name, while he stood on the very threshold of his Christian career, there was preached to him, and there is preached to us, this great truth, that if you will go to Jesus Christ He will make a new man of you. No man's character is so obstinately rooted in evil but that Christ can change its set and direction. No man's natural dispositions are so faulty and low but that Christ can develop counterbalancing virtues, and out of the evil and weakness make strength. He will not make a Peter into a John, or a John into a Paul, but He will deliver Peter from the defects of his qualities, and lead them up into a higher and a nobler region. There are no outcasts in the view of the transforming Christ. He dismisses no people out of His hospital as incurable, because anybody, everybody, the blackest, the most rooted in evil, those who have longest indulged in any given form of transgression, may all come to Him; with the certainty that if they will cleave to Him, He will read all their character and all its weaknesses, and then with a glad smile of welcome and assured confidence on His face, will ensure to them a new nature and new dignities. Thou art Simon--thou shalt be Peter.

The process will be long. It will be painful. There will be a great deal pared off. The sculptor makes the marble image by chipping away the superfluous marble. Ah! and when you have to chip away superfluous flesh and blood it is bitter work, and the chisel is often deeply dyed in gore, and the mallet seems to be very cruel. Simon did not know all that had to be done to make a Peter of him. We have to thank God's providence that we do not know all the sorrows and trials of the process of making us what He wills us to be. But we may be sure of this, that if only we keep near our Master, and let Him have His way with us, and work His will upon us, and if only we will not wince from the blows of the Great Artist's chisel, then out of the roughest block He will carve the fairest statue; and He will fulfil for us at last His great promise: I will give unto him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth save he that receiveth it.