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

**JOHN-027**. **THE LIFE GIVER AND JUDGE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"17. But Jesus answered them, My Father worketh hitherto, and I work. 18. Therefore the Jews sought the more to kill Him, because He not only had broken the Sabbath, but said also that God was His Father, making Himself equal with God. 19. Then answered Jesus and said unto them, Verily, verily, I say unto you, The Son can do nothing of Himself, but what He seeth the Father do: for what things soever He doeth, these also doeth the Son likewise. 20. For the Father loveth the Son, and sheweth Him all things that Himself doeth: and He will shew Him greater works than these, that ye may marvel. 21. For as the Father raiseth up the dead, and quickeneth them; even so the Son quickeneth whom He will. 22. For the Father judgeth no man, but hath committed all judgment unto the Son: 23. That all men should honour the Son, even as they honour the Father. He that honoureth not the Son, honoureth not the Father which hath sent Him. 24. Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that heareth My word, and believeth on Him that sent Me, hath everlasting life, and shall not come into condemnation; but is passed from death unto life. 25. Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God: and they that hear shall live. 26. For as the Father hath life in Himself; so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; 27. And hath given Him authority to execute judgment also, because He is the Son of Man."*

*John 5:17-27*

The Jewswere up in arms because Jesus had delivered a man from thirty-eight years of misery. They had no human sympathies for the sufferer, whom hope deferred had made sick and hopeless, but they shuddered at the breach of the Sabbath. Sacrificewas more important in their view than mercy. They did not acknowledge that the miracle proved Christ's Messiahship, but they were quite sure that doing it on the Sabbath proved His wickedness. How formalism twists men's judgments of the relative magnitude of form and spirit!

Jesusvindication of His action roused them still farther, for He put it on a ground which seemed to them nothing short of blasphemy: My Father worketh even until now, and I work. They fastened on one point in that great saying, namely, that it claimed Sonship in a special sense, and vindicated His right to disregard the Sabbath law on that ground. God's rest is not inaction. Preservation is a continual creation. All being subsists because God is ever working. The Son co-operates with the Father, and for Him, as for the Father, the Sabbath law does not apply. The charge of breaking the Sabbath fades into insignificance before the sin, in the objectorseyes, of making such claims. Therefore our Lord proceeds to expand and justify them.

He makes, first, a general statement in verses 19 and 20, in which He sets forth the relation involved in the very idea of Fatherhood and Sonship. He, as perfect Son of God, is perfectly one with the Father in will and act, and so knit to Him in sympathy that a self-originated action is impossible, not by reason of defect of power, but by reason of unity of being. That perfect unity is expressed negatively (can do nothing) and then positively (doeth likewise). But it is not manifest in actions alone, but has its deep roots in the perfect love which flows ever from each to each, and in the Father's perfect communication to the Son, and the Son's perfect reception from the Father. Jesus claimed to stand in such a relation to the Father that He was able to do whatsoever the Father did, and in like manneras the Father did it; that He was the unique object of the Father's love, and capable of receiving complete communications as to all things that Himself doeth; that He lived in such complete unity with the Father that His every act was the result of it, and that no trace of self-will had ever tinged His perfect spirit. What man has ever made such claims and not been treated as insane? He makes them, and likewise says that He is lowly of heart; and the world listens, if not believing, at any rate reverent, as in the presence of the best man that ever lived. Strange goodness, to claim such divine prerogatives, unless the claim is valid!

It is expanded in verses 21-23 into two great classes of works, which Jesus says that He does. Both are distinctively divine works. To give life and to judge the world are equally beyond human power; they are equally His actions. These are the greater workswhich He foretells in verse 20, and they are greater than the miracle of healing which had originated the whole conversation. To give life at first, and to give it again to the dead, and not only to revivify, but to raise them, are plainly competent to no power short of the divine; and here Jesus calmly claims them.

That tremendous claim is here made in the widest sense, including both the corporeally and the spiritually dead, who are afterwards treated of separately. The Son is the fountain of life in all the aspects of that wide-reaching word; and He quickeneth whom He will, as He had spontaneously healed the impotent man. Does that assertion contradict the other, just before it, that He does nothing of Himself? No; for His will, while His, is ever harmonious with the Father's, just as His love, which is ever coincident with the Father's. Does that assertion imply His arbitrary pleasure, or make man's will a cipher? No; for His will is guided by righteous love, and wills to quicken those who comply with His conditions. But the assertion does declare that His will to quicken is omnipotent, and that His voice can pierce the dull, cold ear of death, and bring back the soul to the empty house of this tabernacle, or rouse the spirit dead in trespasses.

The other divine prerogative of judging is inseparable from that of revivifying, and in regard to it Christ's claim is still higher, for He says that it is wholly vested in Him as Son. The idea of judgment here, like that of quickening, with which it is associated, is to be taken in its more general sense (all judgment) , and therefore as including both the present judgment, for which Jesus said that He was come into the world, and which men pass on themselves by the very fact of their attitude to Him and His Gospel, and also the future final judgment, which manifests character and determines destiny. Both these has the Father given into the hands of the Son.

The purpose, so far as men are concerned, of the Son's investiture, with these solemn prerogatives, is that He may receive universal divine honour. A narrower purpose was stated in verse 20, where the persons seeing His works are only His then audience, and the effect sought to be produced is merely marvel. But wonder is meant to lead on to recognition of the meaning of His power, and of the mystery of His person, and that, again, to rendering to Him precisely the same honour as is due to the Father. No more unmistakable demand for worship, no more emphatic assertion of divinity, can be made than lie in these words. To worship Christ does not intercept the honour due to God; to worship the Son is to worship the Father; and no man honours the Father who sent Him who does not honour the Son whom He has sent.

In verses 24-27 the two related prerogatives are presented in their spiritual aspect, while in the later verses of the chapter the resurrection and quickening of the literally dead are dealt with. Mark the significant new term introduced in verse 24, He that believeth. That spiritual resurrection from the death of sin and self is wrought on whom He will, but He wills that it shall be wrought on them who believe. Similarly, in verse 25, it is they that hearwho shall live. It must be so, for there is no other way by which life from Him, who is the Life, can pass into and quicken us than by our opening our hearts by faith for its inflow. The mysteries of the Son's divinity and of His imparted life are deep, but the condition of receiving that life is plain. If we will trust Jesus, we shall live; if not, we are dead. Trusting Him is trusting the Father that sent Him, and that Father becomes accessible to our trust when we hearChrist's word.

The effects of faith are immediate, and the poor present may be enriched and clothed in celestial light for each of us, if we will. For Jesus does not point first to the mysteries of the resurrection of the dead, and the tremendous solemnities of the final judgment, but to what we may each enter upon at any moment. The believing man hath eternal life, and cometh not into judgment. That life is not reserved to be entered on in the blessed future, but is a present possession. True, it will blossom into unexampled nobleness when it is transported into its native country, like some exotic in our colder climates if it were carried back to the tropics. But it is a present possession, and heaven is not different in kind from the Christian life on earth, but differs mainly in degree and in circumstances. And he that has the life here and now is, by its moulding of his outward life, preserved from the sins which would bring him into judgment, and the merciful judgment to which he is still subject is that for which his truest self longs. And that blessed condition carries in it the pledge that, at the last great day, which is to others a day of wrath, a dreadful day, he whom Christ has quickened by His own indwelling life shall have boldness before Him.

Obviously, in these verses the present effects of faith are in view, since Jesus emphatically declares that the hour now iswhen they can be realised. Once more He states in the strongest terms, and as the reason for the assurance that faith secures to us life, His possession of the two divine prerogatives of quickening and judging. What a paradox it is to say that it is givento Him to have life in Himself! And when was that gift given? In the depths of eternity.

He sits on no precarious throne, nor borrows leave to be, and hence He can impart life and lose none. Inseparably connected with that given, and yet self-inherent, life, is the capacity for executing judgment which belongs to Him as a Son of man. It has been as the Sonof the Father that it has been considered, in the previous verses, as belonging to Him; but now it is as a true man that He is fitted to bear, and actually is clothed with, that judicial power. No doubt He is Judge of all, because by His incarnation and earthly life He presents to all the offer of eternal life, by their attitude to which offer men are judged. But the connection of thought seems rather to be that Christ's Manhood, inextricably intertwined with His divinity, is equally needed with the latter to constitute Him our Judge. He knoweth our frame, from the inside, as it were, and the participation in our nature which fits Him to be a merciful and faithful High Priestalso fits Him to be the Judge of mankind.