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

**JOHN-034**. **THE ROCK AND THE WATER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"37. In the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried, saying, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. 38. He that believeth on Me, as the Scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water."*

*John 7:37-38*

The occasion and date of this great saying are carefully given by the Evangelist, because they throw much light on its significance and importance. It was on the last day, that great day of the Feast, that Jesus stood and cried. The Feast was that of Tabernacles, which was instituted in order to keep in mind the incidents of the desert wandering. On the anniversary of this day the Jews still do as they used to, and in many a foul ghetto and frowsy back street of European cities, you will find them sitting beneath the booths of green branches, commemorating the Exodus and its wonders. Part of that ceremonial was that on each morning of the seven, and possibly on the eighth, the last day of the Feast, a procession of white-robed priests wound down the rocky footpath from the Temple to Siloam, and there in a golden vase drew water from the spring, chanting, as they ascended and re-entered the Temple gates where they poured out the water as a libation, the words of the prophet, with joy shall ye draw water out of the wells of salvation.

Picture the scene to yourselves--the white-robed priests toiling up the pathway, the crowd in the court, the sparkling water poured out with choral song. And then, as the priests stood with their empty vases, there was a little stir in the crowd, and a Man who had been standing watching, lifted up a loud voice and cried, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me, and drink. Strange words to say, anywhere and anywhen, daring words to say there in the Temple court! For there and then they could mean nothing less than Christ's laying His hand on that old miracle, which was pointed to by the rite, when the rock yielded the water, and asserting that all which it did and typified was repeated, fulfilled, and transcended in Himself, and that not for a handful of nomads in the wilderness, but for all the world, in all its generations.

So here is one more instance to add to those to which I have directed your attention on former occasions, in which, in this Gospel, we find Christ claiming to be the fulfilment of incidents and events in that ancient covenant, Jacob's ladder, the brazen serpent, the manna, and now the rock that yielded the water. He says of them all that they are the shadow, and the substance is in Him.

**I. So then, we have to look, first, at Christ's view of humanity as set forth here.**

You remember the story of how the people in the wilderness, distressed by that most imperative of all physical cravings, thirst, turned upon Moses and Aaron and said, Why have ye brought us here to die in the wilderness, where there are neither vines nor pomegranates, but a land of thirst and death? Just as Christ, in the former instances to which we have already referred, selected and pointed to the poisoned and serpent-stricken camp as an emblem of humanity, and just as He pointed to the hunger of the men that were starving there, as an emblem, go here He says: That is the world--a congregation of thirsty men raging in their pangs, and not knowing where to find solace or slaking for their thirst. I do not need to go over all the dominant desires that surge up in men's souls, the mind craving for knowledge, the heart calling out for love, the whole nature feeling blindly and often desperately after something external to itself, which it can grasp, and in which it can feel satisfied. You know them; we all know them. Like some plant growing in a cellar, and with feeble and blanched tendrils feeling towards the light which is so far away, every man carries about within himself a whole host of longing desires, which need to find something round which they may twine, and in which they can be at rest.

The misery of man is great upon him, because, having these desires, he misreads so many of them, and stifles, ignores, atrophies to so large an extent the noblest of them. I know of no sadder tragedy than the way in which we misinterpret the meaning of these inarticulate cries that rise from the depths of our hearts, and misunderstand what it is that we are groping after, when we put out empty, and, alas! too often unclean, hands, to lay hold on our true good.

Brethren, you do not know what you want, many of you, and there is something pathetic in the endless effort to fill up the heart by a multitude of diverse and small things, when all the while the deepest meaning of aspirations, yearnings, longings, unrest, discontent is, My soul thirsteth for God, for the living God. Nothing less than infinitude will satisfy the smallest heart of the humblest and least developed man. Nothing less than to have all our treasures in one accessible, changeless Infinity will ever give rest to a human soul. You have tried a multiplicity of trifles. It takes a great many bags of coppers to make up L. 1000, and they are cumbrous to carry. Would it not be better to part with a multitude of goodly pearls, if need be, in order to have all your wealth, and the satisfaction of all your desires, in the One Pearl of great price? It is God for whom men are thirsting, and, alas! so many of us know it not. As the old prophet says, in words that never lose their pathetic power, they have hewn out for themselves cisterns--one is not enough--they need many. They are only cisterns, which hold what is put into them, and they are broken cisterns, which cannot hold it. Yet we turn to these with a strange infatuation, which even the experience that teaches fools does not teach us to be folly. We turn to these; and we turn from the Fountain; the one, the springing, the sufficient, the unfailing, the exuberant Fountain of living waters. Some of you have cisterns on the tops of your houses, with a coating of green scum and soot on them, and do you like that foul draught better than the bright blessing that comes out of the heart of the rock, flashing and pure?

But not only are these desires misread, but the noblest of them are stifled. I have said that the condition of humanity is that of thirst. Christ speaks in my text as if that thirst was by no means universal, and, alas! it is not, If any man thirst; there are some of us that do not, for we are all so constituted that, unless by continual self-discipline, and self-suppression, and self-evolution, the lower desires will overgrow the loftier ones, and kill them, as weeds will some precious crop. And some of you are so much taken up with gratifying the lowest necessities and longings of your nature, that you leave the highest all uncared for, and the effect of that is that the unsatisfied longing avenges itself, for your neglect of it, by infusing unrest and dissatisfaction into what else would satisfy the lowest. He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver, nor he that loveth abundance with increase, but he that loves God will be satisfied with less than silver, and will continue satisfied when decrease comes. If you would suck the last drop of sweetness out of the luscious purple grapes that grow on earth, you must have the appetite after the best things, recognised, and ministered to, and satisfied. And when we are satisfied with God, we shall have learnt in whatsoever state we are, therewith to be self-sufficing. But, as I say, the highest desires are neglected, and the lowest are cockered and pampered, and so the taste is depraved. Many of you have no wish for God, and no desire after high and noble things, and are perfectly contented to browse on the low levels, or to feed on the husks that the swine do eat, whilst all the while the loftiest of your powers is starving within. Brethren, before we can come to the Rock that yields the water, there must be the sense of need. Do you know what it is that you want? Have you any desire after righteousness and purity and nobleness, and the vision of God flaming in upon the pettinesses and commonplaces of this life which is sound and fury, signifying nothing, and is trivial in all its pretended greatness, unless you have learned that you need God most of all, and will never be at rest till you have Him?

**II. Secondly, note here Christ's consciousness of Himself.**

Is there anything in human utterances more majestic and wonderful than this saying of my text, If any man thirst, let him come to Me? There He claims to be separate altogether from those whose thirst He would satisfy. There He claims to be able to meet every aspiration, every spiritual want, every true desire in this complex nature of ours. There He claims to be able to do this for one, and therefore for all. There He claims to be able to do it for all the generations of mankind, right away down to the end. Who is He who thus plants Himself in the front of the race, knows their deep thirsts, takes account of the impotence of anything created to satisfy them, assumes the divine prerogative, and says, I come to satisfy every desire in every soul, to the end of time? Yes, and from that day when He stood in the Temple and cried these words, down to this day, there have been, and there are, millions who can say, We have drawn water from this fountain of salvation, and it has never failed us. Christ's audacious presentation of Himself to the world as adequate to fill all its needs, and slake all its thirst, has been verified by nineteen centuries of experience, and there are many men and women all over the world to-day who would be ready to set to their seals that Christ is true, and that He, indeed, is all-sufficient for the soul.

Brethren, I do not wish to dwell upon this aspect of our Lord's character in more than a sentence, but I beseech you to ask yourselves what is the impression that is left of the character of a man who says such things, unless He was something more than one of our race? Jesus Christ, it is as clear as day, in these words makes a claim which only divinity can warrant Him in making, or can fulfil when it is made. And I would urge you to consider what the alternative is, if you do not believe that Jesus Christ here sets Himself forth as the Incarnate Word of God, sufficient for all humanity. I am meek and lowly in heart--and His lowliness of heart is proved in a strange fashion, if He stands up before the race and says, If any man thirst, let him come unto Me and drink.

**III. Note, further, Christ's invitation.**

Let him come ... and drink--two expressions for one thing. That invitation sounds all through Scripture, and, perhaps, there was lingering in our Lord's mind, besides the reference to the rock that yielded the water, some echo of the words of the second Isaiah: Ho! every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters. Nay!said Christ, not to the waters, but to Me. And then we hear from His own lips the same invitation addressed to the woman of Samaria, with the difference that to her, an alien, He pointed only to the natural water in the well that had been Jacob's, whereas, to these people, the descendants of the chosen race, He pointed to the miracle in the desert, and claimed to fulfil that. And on the very last page of Scripture, as it is now arranged, there stands the echo again of this saying of my text, Let him that is athirst come--there must be the sense of need, as I was saying, before there is the coming--and whosoever will, let him take of the water of life freely.

Now, dear friends, beneath these two metaphorical expressions there lies one simple condition. I put it into three words, which, for the sake of being easily remembered, I cast into an alliterative form: approach Christ, appropriate Christ, adhere to Christ.

Approach Christ. You come by faith, you come by love, you come by communion. And you can come if you will, though He is now on the throne.

Appropriate Christ. It is vain that the water should be gushing from the rock there, unless you make it your own by drinking. It must pass your lips. It must become your personal possession. You must enclose a piece of the common, and make it your very own. He loved us, and gave Himself for us; well and good, but strike out the usand put in me. He loved me and gave Himself for me. The river may be flowing right past your door, yet your lips may be cracked with thirst, even whilst you hear the tinkle of its music amongst the sedges and the pebbles. Appropriate Christ. Come ... and drink.

Adhere to Christ. You were thirsty yesterday: you drank. That will not slake to-day's thirst, nor prevent its recurrence. And you must keep on drinking if you are to keep from perishing of thirst. Day by day, drop by drop, draught by draught, you must drink. According to the ancient Jewish legend, which Paul in one of his letters refers to, about this very miracle, you must have the Rock following you all through your desert pilgrimage, and you must drink daily and hourly, by continual faith, love, and communion.

**IV. We have here not only these points, but a fourth. Christ's promise.**

He that believeth on Me, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water. That is one case of the universal law that a man who trusts Christ becomes like the Christ whom he trusts. Derivatively and by impartation, no doubt, but still the man who has gone to that Rock, to the springing fountain as it pushes forth, receives into himself an inward life by the communication of Christ's divine Spirit, so that he has in him a fountain springing up into life everlasting. The Book of Proverbs says, The good man shall be satisfied from himself, but the good man is only satisfied from himself when he can say, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and from that better self he will be satisfied.

So we may have a well in the courtyard, and may be able to bear in ourselves the fountain of water, and where the divine life of Christ by His Spirit has through faith been implanted within us, it will come out from us. There is a question for you Christian people--do any rivers of living water flow out of you? If they do not, it is to be doubted whether you have drunk of the fountain. There are many professing Christians who are like the foul little rivers that pass under the pavements in Manchester, all impure, and covered over so that nobody sees them. Out of him shall flow rivers of living water--that is Christ's way of communicating the blessing of eternal life to the world--by the medium of those who have already received it. Christian men and women, if your faith has brought the life into you, see to it that approaching Christ, and appropriating Christ, and adhering to Christ, you are becoming assimilated to Christ, and in your daily life, God's grace fructifying through you to all, are become as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.