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

**JOHN-042**. **OTHER SHEEP by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear My voice; and they shall become one flock and one Shepherd."*

*John 10:16 (R.V.)*

There were many strange and bitter lessons in this discourse for the false shepherds, the Pharisees, to whom it was first spoken. But there was not one which would jar more upon their minds, and as they fancied, on their sacredest convictions, than this, that God's flock was wider than God's fold. Our Lord distinctly recognises Judaism with its middle wall of partition as a divine institution, and then as distinctly carries His gaze beyond it. To His hearers this fold, their own national polity, held all the flock. Without were dogs, a doleful land, where the wild beasts of the desert met with the wild beasts of the islands. And now this new Teacher, not content with declaring them hirelings, and Himself the only true Shepherd of Israel, breaks down the hedges and speaks of Himself as the Shepherd of men. No wonder that they said, He hath a devil and is mad.

During His earthly life our Lord, as we know, confined His own personal ministry for the most part to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. Not exclusively so, for He made at least one journey into the coasts of Tyre and Sidon, teaching and healing; a Syro-Phoenician woman held His feet, and received her request; and one of His miracles, of feeding the multitude, was wrought for hungry Gentiles. But while His work was in Israel, it was for mankind; and while this fold, generally speaking, circumscribed His toils, it did not confine His love nor His thoughts. More than once world-wide declarations and promises broke from His lips, even before the final universal commission, Preach the Gospel to every creature. I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto Me. I am the Light of the world. These and other similar sayings give us His lofty consciousness that He has received the heathen for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession. Parallel with them in substance are the words before us, which, for our present purpose, we may regard as containing lessons from our Lord Himself of how He looked and would have us look on the heathen world, on His work and ours, and on the certain issues of both.

**I. We have here Christ teaching us how to think of the heathen world.**

Observe that His words are not a declaration that all mankind are His sheep. The previous verses have distinctly defined a class of men as possessing the name, and the succeeding ones reiterate the definition, and with equal distinctness exclude another class. Ye believe not, because ye are not My sheep as I said unto you. His sheep are they who know Him and are known of Him. Between Him and them there is a communion of love, a union of life, and a consequent reciprocal knowledge, which transcends the closest intimacies of earthly life, and finds its only analogue in that deep and mysterious oneness which subsists between the Father, who alone knoweth the Son, and the only begotten Son, who being ever in the bosom of the Father, alone knoweth Him and revealeth Him to us. I know My sheep and am known of Mine; as the Father knoweth Me and I know the Father. They hear My voice and follow Me, and I give unto them eternal life. Such are the characteristics of that relation between Christ and men by which they become His sheep. It is such souls as these whom our Lord beholds in the wasteful wilderness. He is speaking not of a relation which all men bear to Him by virtue of their creation, but of one which they bear to Him who believe in His name.

Now this interpretation of the words does by no means contradict, but rather presupposes and rests upon the truth that all mankind come within the love of the divine heart, that He died for all, that all may be the subjects of His mediatorial kingdom, recipients of the offered mercy of God in Christ, and committed to the stewardship of the missionary Church. Resting upon these truths, the words of our text advance a step further and contemplate those who shall hereafter believe on Me. Whether they be few or many is not the matter in hand. Whether at any future time they shall include all the dwellers upon earth is not the matter in hand. That every soul of man is included in the adaptation and intention and offer of the Gospel is not the matter in hand. But this is the matter in hand, that Jesus Christ in that moment of lofty elevation when He looked onwards to giving His life for the sheep, looked outwards also, far afield, and saw in every nation and people souls that He knew were His, and would one day know Him, and be led by Him in green pastures and beside still waters.

But where or what were they when He spoke? He does not mean that already they had heard His voice and were following His steps, and knew His love, and had received eternal life at His hand. This He cannot mean, for the plain reason that He goes on to speak of His bringingthem and of their hearing, a work yet to be done. It can only be, then, that He speaks of them thus in the fullness of that divine knowledge which calls things that are not as though they were. It is then a prophetic word which He speaks here.

We have only to think of the condition of the civilised heathendom of Christ's own day in order to feel the force of our text in its primary application. While the work of salvation was being prepared for the world in the life and death of our Lord, the world was being prepared for the tidings of salvation. Everywhere men were losing their faith in their idols, and longing for some deliverer. Some had become weary of the hollowness of philosophical speculation, and, like Pilate, were asking What is truth?whilst, unlike Him, they waited for an answer, and will believe it when it comes from the lips of the Incarnate wisdom. Such were the Magi who were led by their starry science to His cradle, and went back to the depths of the Eastern lands with a better light than had guided them thither. Such were not a few of the early Christian converts, who had long been seeking hopelessly for goodly pearls, and had so been learning to know the worth of the One when it was offered to them. There were men who had been long sickening with despair amidst the rottenness of decaying mythologies and corrupting morals, and longing for some breath from heaven to blow health to themselves and to the world, and had so been learning to welcome the rushing mighty windwhen it came in power. There were simple souls, without as well as within the chosen people, waiting for the Consolation, though they knew not whence it was to come. There were many who had already learned to believe that salvation is of the Jews, though they had still to learn that salvation is in Jesus. Such were that Aethiopian statesman who was poring over Isaiah when Philip joined him, the Roman centurion at Caesarea whose prayers and alms came up with acceptance before God, these Greeks of the West who came to His cross as the Eastern sages to His cradle, and were in Christ's eyes the advance guard and first scattered harbingers of the flocks who should come flying for refuge to Him lifted on the Cross, like doves to their windows. The whole world showed that the fullness of time had come; and the history of the early years of the Church reveals in how many souls the process of preparation had been silently going on. It was like the flush of early spring, when all the buds that had been maturing and swelling in the cold, burst, and the tender flowers that had been reaching upwards to the surface in all the hard winter laugh out in beauty, and a green veil covers all the hedges at the first flash of the April sun.

Not only these were in our Lord's thoughts when He saw His sheep in heathen lands. There were many who had no such previous preparation, but were plunged in all the darkness, nor knew that it was dark. Not only those wearied of idolatry, and dissatisfied with creeds outworn, but the barbarous people of Illyricum, the profligates of Corinth, hard rude men like the jailer at Philippi, and many more were before His penetrating eye. He who sees beneath the surface, and beyond the present, beholds His sheep where men can only see wolves. He sees an Apostle in the blaspheming Saul, a teacher for all generations in the African Augustine while yet a sensualist and a Manichee, a reformer in the eager monk Luther, a poet-evangelist in the tinker Bunyan. He sees the future saint in the present sinner, the angel's wings budding on many a shoulder where the world's burdens lie heavy, and the new name written on many a forehead that as yet bears but the mark of the beast, and the number of His name.

And the sheep whom He sees while He speaks are not only the men of that generation. These mighty words are world-wide and world-lasting. The whole of the ages are in His mind. All nations are gathered before His prophetic vision, even as they shall one day be gathered before His judgment throne, and in all the countless mass His hand touches and His love clasps those who to the very end of time shall come to His call with loving faith, shall follow His steps with glad obedience.

Thus does Christ look out upon the world that lay beyond the fold. I cannot stay to do more than refer in passing to the spirit which the words of our text breathe. There is the lofty consciousness that He is the Leader and Guide, the Friend and Helper of all, that He stands solitary in His power to bless. There is the full confidence that the earth is His to its uttermost border. There is the clear vision of the sorrowful condition of these heathen people, without a shepherd and without a fold, wandering on every high mountain and dying in every thirsty land where there is no water. There are the tenderest pity and yearning love for them in their extremity. There is the clear assurance that they will come and be blessed in Him. I pass by all the other thoughts, which naturally found themselves on these words, in order to urge the one which is most appropriate to our present engagement. Let us, dear brethren, take Christ as our pattern in our contemplations of the heathen world.

He has set us the example of an outgoing look directed far beyond the limits of the existing churches, far beyond the point of present achievement. We are but too apt to circumscribe our operative thoughts and our warm sympathies within the circle of our sight, or of our own personal associations. Our selfishness and our indolence affect the objects of our contemplations quite as much as they do the character of our work. They vitiate both, by making ourselves the great object of both, and by weakening the force of both in a ratio that increases rapidly with the increasing distance from that favourite centre. It is but a subtle form of the same disease which keeps our thoughts penned within the bounds of any fold, or limited by the progress already achieved. For us the whole world is the possession of our Lord, who has died to redeem us. By us the whole ought to be contemplated with that same spirit of prophetic confidence which filled Him when He said, Other sheep I have which are not of this fold. To press onwards, forgetting the things that are behind, and reaching forth to those which are before, is the only fitting attitude for Christian men, either in regard to the gradual purifying of their own characters, or in regard to the gradual winning of the world for Christ. We ought to make all past successes stepping-stones to nobler things. The true use of the present is to reach up from it to a loftier future. The distance beckons; well for us if it do not beckon us in vain. We have yet to learn the first lesson of our Master's spirit, as expressed in these words, if we have not become familiar with the pitying contemplation of the wastes beyond the fold, nor fixed deep in our minds the faith that the amplitude of its walls will have to be widened with growing years till it fills the world. The cry echoes to us from of old, Lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes, for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left. We take the first step to respond to the summons when we make the regions beyondone of the standing subjects of our devout thoughts, and take heed of supposing that the Church as we know it, has the same measurement which the man with the golden rod has measured for the eternal courts of Jerusalem, that shall be the joy of the whole earth. The very genius of the Gospel is aspiring. It is content with nothing short of universality for the sweep, and eternity for the duration, and absolute completeness for the measure, of its bestowments on man. We should be like men on a voyage of discovery, whose task is felt to be incomplete until headland after headland that fades in the dim distance has been rounded and surveyed, and the flag of our country planted upon it. After each has been passed another arises from the water, onwards we must go. There is no pause for our thoughts, none for our sympathy, none for our work, till our keels have visited, and the shout of a Kinghas been heard on every shore that fills the breadth of Thy land, O Emmanuel!The limits of the visible community of Christ's Church to-day are far within the borders to which it must one day stretch. It is for us, taught by His words, to understand that we are yet as it were but encamped by Jericho, and at the beginning of the campaign. Ai and Bethhoron, and many a fight more are before us yet. The camp of the invaders, when they lay around the city of palm-trees, with the mountains in front and the Jordan behind, was not more unlike the settled order of the nation when it filled the land, than the ranks of Christ's army to-day are to the mighty multitudes that shall one day name His name, and follow His banner. Let us live in the future, and lay strongly hold on the distant; for both are our Lord's, and by so doing we shall the better do our Master's work in the present, and at hand.

He has set us the example of a penetrating gaze into heathenism, which reveals beneath its monotonous miseries, the souls that are His. We ought to look on every field of Christian effort with the assurance that in it there are some who will hear His voice. As it was when He came, so it is ever and everywhere. The world is being prepared for the Gospel. In some broad regions, faith in idolatry is dying out, and the moral condition of the people is undergoing a slow elevation. Individuals are being weaned from their gods, they know not how, and they will not know why till they hear of Christ. He sees in every land where the Gospel is being taken a people prepared for the Lord. He sees the gold gleaming in the crevices of the caves, the gems, rough and unpolished, lying in the matrix. He looks not merely on the great mass of idolaters, but He sees the single souls who shall hear. It is for us to look on the same mass with confidence caught from His. Neither apathetic indifference nor faint-hearted doubt should be permitted to weaken our hands. The prospect may seem very dark, the power of the enemy very great, our resources very inadequate; but let us look with Christ's eye, we shall know that everywhere we may hope to find a response to our message. Who they may be, we know not. How many they may be, we know not. How they may be guided by Him, they know not. But He knows all. We may know that they are there. And as we cannot tell who they are but only that they are, we are bound to cherish hopes for all--the most degraded and outcast of our race. We have no right to give up any field or any man as hopeless. Christ's sheep will be found coming out of the midst of wolves and goats. Darkness may cover the earth, and gross darkness the people; but if we look upon it as Christ did, and as He would have us to look, we shall see lights flickering here and there in the obscurity, which shall burst out into a blaze. The prophetic eye, the boundlessly hopeful heart, the strong confidence that in every land where He is preached there will be those who shall hear--these are what He gives us when He says, Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.

There is one other thought connected with these words which may be briefly referred to. It is that even now, in all lands where the Gospel has been preached, there are those whom Christ has received, although they have no connection with His visible Church.

There are many goats within the fold. There are many sheep without it. Even in lands where the Gospel has long been preached, we do not venture to identify profession by Church fellowship with living union with Christ. Much more is this true of our missionary efforts, and the apparent converts whom they make. The results that appear are no measure of the results that have actually been accomplished. We often hear of men who had caught up some stray word in a Bengali market-place, or received a tract by the roadside from some passing missionary, and who, having carried away the seed in their hearts, had long been living as Christians remote from all churches and unknown by any. We can easily conceive that timidity in some cases, and distance in others, swell the ranks of these secret disciples. Though they follow not the footsteps of the flock, the Shepherd will lead them in their solitude. There will be many more names in the Lamb's book of life, depend upon it, than ever are written on the roll-calls of our churches, or in missionary statistics. The shooting-stars that yearly fill our sky are visible to us for a moment, when their orbit passes into the lighted heavens, and then they disappear in the shadow of the earth. But astronomers tell us that they are always there though to us they seem to blaze but for a moment. We cannot see them, but they move on their darkling path and have a sun round which they circle. So be sure that in many heathen lands there are believing souls, seen by us but for an instant and then lost, who yet fill their unseen place, and move obedient round the Sun of Righteousness. Their names on earth are dark, but when the manifestation of the sons of God shall come, they shall shine as the brightness of the firmament, and as the stars for ever and ever. Our work has results beyond our knowledge now. When the Church, the Lamb's wife, shall lift up her eyes at the end of the days, prophecy tells us that she shall wonder to see her thronging children, whom she had never known till then, and will say, Who hath begotten me these? Behold I was left alone. These, where had they been?These were God's hidden ones, nourished and brought up beyond the pale of the outward Church, but brought at last to share her triumph, and to abide at her side. Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.

What confidence then, what tender pity, what hope should fill our minds when we look on the heathen world! We must never be contented with present achievements. We are committed to a task which cannot end till all the world hears the joyful sound and is blessed by walking in the light of His countenance. When the great Roman Catholic missionary, the Apostle of the East, was lying on his dying bed among the barbarous people whom he loved, his passing spirit was busy about his work, and, even in the article of death, while the glazing eye saw no more clearly and the ashen lips had begun to stiffen into eternal silence, visions of further conquests flashed before him, and his last word was Amplius--Onward! It ought to be the motto of the missionary work of us, who boast a purer faith, to carry to the heathen and to fire our own souls. If ever we are tempted to repose, to despondency, to rest and be thankful when we number up our work and our converts, let us listen to His voice as it speaks in that supreme hour when He beheld the vision of the Cross, and beyond it that of a gathered world: Other sheep I have, which are not of this fold.

We have here--

**II. Christ teaching us how to think of His work and ours.**

Them also I must bring. A necessity is laid upon Him, which springs at once from that divine work which is the law of His life, and from His own love and pity. The means for accomplishing this necessary work are implied in the context, as in other parallel Scriptural sayings, to be His propitiatory death. The instrumentality employed is not only His own personal agency on earth, nor only His throned rule on the right hand of God with power over the Spirit of holiness, but also the work of His Church, and His work through them. Of that He is mainly speaking when He says, Them also I must bring. Here, then, are some truths which ought to underlie and shape as well as animate our efforts for heathenism.

And first, remember that the same sovereign necessity which was laid on Him presses on us.

The Spirit of lifewhich was in Christ had its law, which was the will of God. That shaped all His being, and He set us the example of perfectly clear recognition of, and perfect obedience to it, from the first moment when He said, I must be about My Father's business, to the last, when He sighed forth, Father, into Thy hands I commit My spirit. Hence the frequent sayings setting forth His work as determined by an imperative must, which, whether it be alleged in reference to some apparently small or to some manifestly great thing in His life, is always equally imperative, and whether it seem to be based on the need for the fulfilment of some prophetic word, or on the proprieties and congruities of sonship, reposes at last on the will of God. His final words on the Passover night, before he went out to Gethsemane in the moonlight, contain the influence which moulded His whole earthly life, As the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do.

And this divine will constitutes for Him the deepest ground of the necessity in the case before us. The eternal counsels of God had willed that all the ends of the earth should see the salvation of the Lord; therefore, whatever the toils and the pains, the loss and the death, He, whose meat and drink was to do the will of Him that sent Him, must give Himself to the task, nor rest till, one by one, the weary wanderers are brought back on His shoulders and folded in His love.

In all which, let us remember, Jesus Christ is our pattern, not in His work for the salvation of men, but in the spirit in which He did His work. The solemn law of duty before which He bowed His head is a law for us also. The authoritative imperative which He obeyed has power over us. If we would have our lives holy and strong, wise and good, we must have the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus, making us free from the law of sin and death, for the obedience to the higher law enfranchises from slavery to the lower, and all other authority ceases over us when we are Christ's men. We are bound to service directed to the same end as His--even the salvation of the world. The same voice which says to Him, I will give Thee for a light to the Gentiles, says to us, Ye are My witnesses, and My servant whom I have chosen. The same Will which hath constituted Him the anointed Prophet, says of us, Touch not Mine anointed and do My prophets no harm. We are redeemed that we may show forth God's praises. Not for ourselves alone, nor for purposes terminating in our own personal acceptance with God, or the perfecting of our own characters, priceless as these are, but for ends which affect the world has God had mercy on us. We are bought with a price that we may be the servants of God. We have received that we may give forth,

God doth with us, as we with torches do,

Not light them for themselves.

Arise, shine, for thy light is come.

This missionary work of ours, then, is not one that can be taken up and laid down at our own pleasure. It is no excrescence, or accidental outgrowth of the Church's life. We are all too apt to think of it as an extra, a kind of work of supererogation, which those may engage in who have a liking that way, and which those who do not care about it may leave alone, and no harm done. When shall we come to feel deeply, constantly, practically, that it must be done, and that we are sinning when we neglect it? Dear brethren, have we laid on our hearts and consciences the solemn weight of that necessity which moulded His life? Have we felt the awful power of God's plainly spoken will, driving us to this task? Do we know anything of that spirit which hears ever-pealing in our ears that awful commandment, Go, go to all the world, preach, preach the Gospel to every creature?God commands us to take the trumpet, and if we would not soil our souls with gross and palpable sin, we must set it to our lips and sound an alarm, that by His grace shall wake the sleepers, and make the hoary walls of the robber-city that has afflicted the earth for so many weary millenniums, rock to their fall, that the redeemed of the Lord may pass over and set the captives free.

If we felt this as we ought, surely our consecration would be more complete, and our service more worthy. A clear conviction of God's will pointing the path for us, is, in all things, a wondrous help to vigorous action, to calmness of heart, and thus to success. In this mighty work, it would brace us for larger efforts, and fit us for larger results. It would simplify and deepen our motives, and thus evolve from them nobler deeds and purer sacrifices. To all objections from so-called prudence, to all calculations from sparse results, to all cavils of onlookers who may carp and seek to hinder, we should have one all-sufficient answer. It is not for us to bandy arguments on such points as these. We care nothing for difficulties, for discouragements, for cost. We may think about these till we lose all the manly chivalry of Christian character, like the Apostle who gazed on the white crests of the angry breakers flashing in the pale moonlight, till he forgot who stood on the storm, and began to sink in his great fear. A nobler spirit ought to be ours. The toil is sore, the sacrifices many, and the yield seems small. Be it so! To all such thoughts we have one answer--Oh! that we felt more its solemn power!--such is the will of God. We are doing as we are bid, and we mean to go on. Them also must I bring, says the Master. Necessity is laid upon me, yea, woe is me if I preach not the Gospel, echoes the Apostle. Let us, in the consecration of resolved hearts, and in trembling obedience to the divine will, add our choral Amen, and in the face of all the paralysing suggestions of our own selfishness, and all the tempting voices of worldly wisdom and unbelieving scornfulness that would stay our enterprise, let us fling back the grand old answer, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye, for we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

We must not forget, however, that it was no abhorrent toil to which Christ reluctantly consented. But in this case, as always with Him, the words of prophecy were true, I delight to do Thy will. The schism between law and choice had no existence for Him; and when He says that He must bring the wandering sheep into the fold, He means not more because of God's will than because of His own yearning desire to pour out the treasures of His mercy.

So it ought to be with us. Our missionary work should not be degraded beneath the level of duty indeed, but neither should it be left on that level. We ought not only to be led to it by a power without, but impelled by an energy within. If we would be like our Master, we must know the necessity arising from our own heart's promptings, which leads us to work for Him. He has very imperfectly caught the spirit of the Gospel who has never felt the word as a fire in his bones, making him weary of forbearing. If we only take to this work because we are bid, and without sympathy for men, and longing desire to bring them all to Him who has blessed us, we may almost as well leave it alone. We shall do very little good to anybody, to ourselves little, to the world less. That our own hearts may teach us this necessity, we must live near our Master, and know His grace for ourselves. In proportion as we do, we shall be eager to proclaim it, and not stand idling in a corner of the market-place, till some unmistakable order sends us into the vineyard, but go for the relief of our own feelings. This is a day of good tidings, and we cannot hold our peace, said the poor lepers in the camp to one another. The same feeling that we must tell the good news just because we know it, and it will make our brethren glad, is part of the Christian character. A blessed necessity, then, is laid upon us. A blessed work is given us, which brings with it at once the joy of obedience to our Father's will, and the joy of gratifying a deep instinct of our nature. Them also must I bring, said the Saviour, because He loved men. To me who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches, echoes the Apostle. Let us live in the light of our Lord's eye, and drink deep of His spirit, till the talk becomes a grace and privilege, not a burden, and till silence and idleness in His cause shall be felt to be impossible, because it would be violence to our own feelings, and the loss of a great joy as well as sin against our Father's will.

Consider again, by what means the sheep are to be brought to Christ? The context distinctly answers the question. There His propitiatory death is emphatically set forth as the power by which it is to be accomplished. The verse before our text says, I lay down My life for the sheep; that after our text says, Therefore doth My Father love Me, because I lay down My life. It is the same connection of means and end as appears in the wonderful words with which He received the Greeks who came up to the feast, and heard the great truth, for want of which their philosophy and art came to nothing. Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die it abideth alone--I, if I be lifted up from the earth will draw all men unto Me.

Yes, brethren! the Cross of Christ, and it alone, gathers men into a unity; for it alone draws men to Christ. His death, as our propitiation, effects such a change in the aspects of the divine government, and in the incidence of the divine justice, that we who were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ. His death, as the constraining motive of life in the hearts which receive it, draws them away from their own ways by the cords of love, and binds them to Him. His death is His purchase of the gifts of that divine Spirit for the rebellious, who now convinces the world and endows the Church, till we all come unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ. The First Begotten from the dead is therefore the prince of all the kings of the earth, and He so rides among the nations as to bring the world to Himself. The philosophy of history lies in the words, Other sheep I have, them also I must bring.

Christian missions abundantly prove that the Cross and the proclamation of the Cross have this power, and that nothing else has. It is not the ethics of Christianity, nor the abstract truths which may be deduced from its story, but it is the story of the suffering Redeemer that gives it its power over human hearts, in all conditions, and climates, and stages of culture. The magnetism of the Cross alone is mighty enough to overcome the gravitation of the soul to sin and the world. We hear much nowadays about a new reformation which is to be effected on Christianity, by purifying it of its historical facts and of its repulsive sacrificial aspect. When this is done, and the pure spiritual ideas are disengaged from their fleshly garb, then, we are told, will be the apotheosis and glorification of Christ. This will be the real lifting up from the earth; this will draw all men. Aye, and when this is done what will be left? Christianity will be purified back again into a vague Deism, which one would have thought had proved itself toothless and impotent, centuries ago. Spiritualising will turn out to be very like evaporating, the residuum will be a miserably unsatisfactory something, near akin to nothing, and certainly incapable either of firing its disciples with a desire to spread their faith, if we may call it so by courtesy, or of drawing men to itself. A Christianity without a Sacrifice on the altar will be a Christianity without worshippers in the Temple. The King of Kings who rides forth conquering is clothed in a vesture dipped in blood. The Christian Emperor saw in the heavens the Cross, with the legend: In this sign thou shalt conquer!It is an emblem true for all time. The Cross is the power unto salvation. The races scattered on the earth have often sought to make for themselves a rallying-point, and their attempts at union have become Babels, centres of repulsion and confusion. God has given us the Centre, the Tree of life in the midst. The crucified Saviour is the Root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign for the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek, and resting beneath the shadow of the Cross be at peace. I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me.

Once more our Lord teaches us here to identify the work of the Church with His own. What His servants do for Him He does, for from Him they derive the power to do it, and from Him comes the blessing which makes it effectual. He works in us, He works with us, He works for us. He works in us. We have the grace of His Spirit to touch our hearts and sanctify us for service. He puts it into the wills and desires of His Church to consecrate themselves to the task. He teaches them sympathy and self-devotion. He breathes world-wide aspirations into them. He raises up men to go forth. He works with us, helping our weakness, enlightening our ignorance, directing our steps, giving power to the student at his dry task of grammar and dictionary, being mouth and wisdom to them that speak in His name, touching the hearts of them that hear. In our basket He puts the seed-corn; the furrows of the field He makes soft with showers, and when it is sown He blesses the springing thereof. He works for us, opening doors among the nations, ordering the courses of providence, and holding His hand around His servants, so that they are immortal till their work is done; and can ever lift up thankful voices to Him who leads them joyful captives at His own triumphal car, as it rolls on its stately march, scattering the sweet odours of His name wherever the long procession sweeps through the world. We neither go a warfare at our own charges, nor in our own might. He will fight with us, and He will pay us liberally at the last. When we count up our own resources, do not we often leave Christ out of the reckoning? Do we not measure our strength against the enemies', and forget that one weak man, plus Christ, is always in the majority? It is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of My Father which speaketh in you. I laboured, yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me. So helped, so inspired, we are wrong to despond; we are wrong not to expect great things and attempt great things; we are wrong not to dare, we are wrong to do the work of the Lord negligently. Let us feel that Christ's work is ours, and we shall be bowed beneath the solemnity of the thought, shall accept joyfully the necessity. Let us feel that our work is Christ's, and we shall rejoice in infirmity that His power may rest upon us, shall bid adieu to faint-hearted fears, and be sure that then it must prosper. Arise, O Lord! plead Thine own cause. Not unto us, O Lord! not unto us, but to Thy name give glory.

The Lord ascended into Heaven and sat on the right hand of God, and they went everywhere preaching the word. It seems a strange contrast between the rest of the Lord, sitting in sublime expectancy of conscious power til His enemies become His footstool, and the toils of His scattered disciples. It is like that moment which the genius of the great painter has caught in an immortal work, when Jesus in rapt communion with the mighty dead, and crowned with the accepting word from Heaven, floated transfigured above the Holy Mount, while below His disciples wrestled impotently with the demon that would not be cast out. But it is not really contrast. He has not so parted the toils as that His are over ere ours begin. He has not left His Church militant to bear the brunt of the battle while the Captain of the Lord's host only watches the current of the heady fight--like Moses from the safe mountain. The Evangelist goes on to tell us that the Lord also was working with them and sharing their toils, lightening their burdens, preparing for them successes on earth, and a rest like His when He shall gird Himself and serve them. Thus, the first time that the heavens opened again to mortal eyes after they closed on His ascending form, was to show Him to the martyr in the council chamber, not sitting careless or restful, but standing at the right hand of God, to intercede for, to strengthen, to receive and glorify His dying servant. He goes with us where we go, and through our works and gifts and prayers, through our proclamation of the Cross, He worketh His will, and shall finally accomplish that great necessity laid upon Him by the Father's counsels, and upon us by His commandment, and to be effected by His death, that He should die, not for that nation only, but also that He should gather together in one the children of God who are scattered abroad.

We have here--

**III. Our Lord teaching us how to think of the certain issues of His work and ours.**

They shall hear My voice, and there shall be one fold and one Shepherd. We may regard these words as embracing two things; a nearer issue, namely, the response that will always attend His call; and a more remote, namely, the completion of His work. There is, of course, a very blessed sense in which the latter words are true now, and have been ever since Paul could say to those who had been aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, He hath made both one. Now, therefore, ye are no more foreigners but fellow-citizens with the saints. But the fold which now exists, limited in numbers, with its members but partially conscious of their unity, and surrounded by those who follow hireling shepherds, does not exhaust these great words. They shall not be accomplished till that far-off future have come.

But for the present we have the predictions of the former clause, They shall hear My voice. What manner of expectations does it teach us to cherish? It seems to speak not of universal reception of Christ's message, but of some as hearing and some as forbearing. It teaches us to look for divers results attending our missionary work. There will always be a Dionysius the Areopagite, the woman Lydia, the kindly barbarians, the conscience-stricken jailer. There will always be the scoffers, who mock when they hear of Jesus and the resurrection; the hesitating who compound with conscience by promising to hear again of this matter, the fierce opponents who invoke constituted authorities or mob violence to crush the message.

Again, the words seem to contemplate a long task. There is nothing about the rate at which His Kingdom shall spread, not a syllable to answer inquiries as to when the end shall come. The whole tone of the language suggests the idea that bringing back the sheep is to take a long time, and to cost many a tedious journey into the wilderness. Not a sudden outburst, but a slow kindling of the flame, is what our Lord teaches us here to expect.

But while thus calm in tone and moderate in expectation, the words breathe a hope as confident as it is calm, as clear as it is moderate. There will always be a response. His voice shall never be lifted up in the snow-storm or lonely hillsides only to be blown back into His own ears, unheard and unheeded. Be they few or many, they shall hear. Be the toil longer or shorter, more or less severe, it shall not be in vain.

And to these expectations we shall do wisely if we attune ours. Omit from your hopes what your Lord has omitted from His promises; do not ask what He has not told. Do not wonder if you encounter what He met, for the disciple is not greater than his Master, and only if they have kept My saying will they keep yours also. But, on the other hand, expect as much as He has prophesied; accept it when it comes as the fruit of His work, not of yours, and build a firm faith that your labour shall not be in vain on these calm and prescient words.

So much for the course of the kingdom. And what of the end? One by one the sheep have been brought, at last they are all gathered in, not a hoof left behind. The stars steal singly into their places in the heavens as the darkness deepens, and He bringeth them forth by number, until at the noon of night the sky is crowded with their lights, and for that He is great in power, not one faileth. What expectations are we here taught to cherish then of the final issue?

Mark, to begin with, that there is implied the ultimate universality of His dominion and sole supremacy of His throne. There is to be but one Shepherd, and over all the earth a great unity of obedience to Him. Here is the knell of all authority that does not own Him, and the subordination of all that does. The hirelings, the blind guides, that have misled and afflicted humanity for so many weary ages, shall be all sunk in oblivion. The false gods shall be discrowned, and lie shattered on their temple-sill, and there shall be no worshippers to care for or to try to repair their discomfiture. Bow your heads before Him, thinkers who have led men on devious paths and spoken but a partial truth and a wisdom all confused with foolishness! Lower your swords before Him, warriors who have builded your cities on blood and led men like sheep to the slaughter! He is more glorious and excellent than the mountains of prey. Cast your crowns before Him, princes and all judges of the earth, for He is King by right of the crown of thorns! This is the Lord of all--Teacher, Leader, Ruler of all men. All other names shall be forgotten but His shall abide. If they have been shepherds who would not come in by the door, a ransomed world shall rejoice over their fall with the ancient hymn, Other gods beside Thee have had dominion over us; they are dead, they shall not live, Thou hast destroyed them, and made all their memory to perish. If they have been subject to the chief Shepherd and ensamples to the flock, they will rejoice to decrease before His increase, and having helped to bring the Bride to the Bridegroom, will gladly stand aside and be forgotten in the perfect love that enters into full fruition at the last. Then when none contest nor intercept the reverential obedience that the whole world brings to Him, shall be fulfilled the firm promise which declared long ago: I will set up one Shepherd over them, and He will feed them and be their Shepherd.

Mark again the blessed nature of the relation between Christ and all men which is here foretold. From of old, the shepherd has been in all nations the emblem of kingly power, of leadership of every sort. How often the fact has contradicted the symbol let history tell. But with Jesus the reality does not only contradict, but even transcends, the tender old comparison. He rules with a gentle sway. His sceptre is no rod of iron, but the shepherd's crook, and the inmost meaning of its use is that it may comfortus, as David learned to feel. There gather round the metaphor all thoughts of merciful guidance, of tender care, of a helping arm when we are weak, of a loving bosom where we are carried when we are weary. It speaks of a seeking love that roams over every high hill till it finds, and of a strong shoulder that bears us back when He has found. It tells of sweet hours of rest in the hot noontide by still waters, of ample provision for all the soul's longings in green pastures. It speaks of footsteps that go before, in which men may follow and find them ways of pleasantness. It speaks of gentle callings by name which draw the heart. It speaks of defence when lion and bear come ravening down, and of safe couching by night when the silent stars behold the sleeping sheep and the wakeful shepherd. He Himself gives its highest significance to the emblem, in the words of this great discourse, when He fixes on His knowledge, His calling of His sheep, His going before them, His giving His life for them. Such are the gracious blessings which here He teaches us to think of as possessed in the happy days that shall be, by all the world.

And, on the other hand, the symbol speaks of confiding love in the hearts of men, of a great peacefulness of meek obedience stilling and gladdening their wills, of the consciousness of His perfect love, and the knowledge of all His gracious character, of sweet answering communion with Him, of safety from all enemies, of freedom, of familiar passage in and out to God. Thus knit together shall be the one fold and the one Shepherd. They shall feed in the ways, and their pastures shall be in all high places. They shall not hunger nor thirst, neither shall the heat nor sun smite them, for He that hath mercy on them shall feed them, even by the springs of water shall He guide them.

Mark again what a vision is here given of the relations of men with one another.

They are to be all gathered into a peaceful unity. They are to be one because they all hearken to one voice. It is to be observed that our Lord does not say, as our English Bible makes Him say, that there is to be one fold. He drops that word of set purpose in the latter clause of our text, and substitutes for it another, which may perhaps be best rendered flock. Why this change in the expression? Because, as it would seem, he would have us learn that the unity of that blessed future time is not to be like the unity of the Jewish Church, a formal and external one. That ancient polity was a fold. It held its members together by outward bonds of uniformity. But the universal Church of the future is to be a flock. It is to be really and visibly one. But it is to be so, not because it is hemmed in by one enclosure, but because it is to be gathered round one Shepherd. The more closely they are drawn to Him, the more near will they be to each other. The centre in which all the radii meet keeps them all in their places. We being many are one bread, for we are all partakers of that one bread. In the ritual of the Old Covenant, the great golden candlestick with its seven branches stood in the court of the Temple, emblem of the formal oneness of the people, which was meant to be the light of the Lord to a dark world. In the vision of the New Covenant, the seer in Patmos beheld not the one lamp with its branches, but the seven golden candlesticks, which were made into a holier and a freer unity because the Son of Man walked in their midst--emblem of the oneness in diversity of the peoples, who were sometimes darkness, but shall one day be light in the Lord. There may continue to be national distinctions. There may or there may not be any external unity. But at all events our Lord turns away our thoughts from the outward to the inward, and bids us be sure that though the folds be many the flock shall be one, because they shall all hear and follow Him.

The words, however, suggest for us the blessed thought of the peaceful relations that shall then subsist among men. The tribes of the earth shall couch beside each other like the quiet sheep in the fold, and having learned of His great meekness, they shall no more bite nor devour one another. Alas! alas! the words seem too good to be true. They seem long, long of coming to pass. Ever since they were spoken the old bloody work has been going on, and the old lusts of the human heart have been busy sowing the dragon's teeth that shall spring up in wars and fightings. In savage lands warfare rages on, ceaseless, ignoble, unrecorded, and seemingly purposeless as that of animalcules in a drop of water. On civilised soil, men, who love the same Christ and worship Him in the same tongue, are fronting each other at this hour. The war of actual swords, and the war of conflicting creeds, and the jostling of human selfishness in the rough road of life, are all around us, and their seeds are within ourselves. The race of men do not live like folded sheep, rather like a flock of wolves, who first run over and then devour their weaker fellows.

But here is a fairer hope, and it will be fulfilled when all evil thoughts, and all selfish desires, and all jealous grudgings shall vanish from men's hearts, as unclean spirits at cockcrow, and shall leave them, self-forgetful, yielding of their own prerogatives, desirous of no other man's, abhorrent of inflicting, and patient of receiving wrong. There will be no fuel then to blow into sulphurous flame, though all the blasts from hell were to fan the embers. But peace and concord shall be in all men, for Christ shall be in all. National distinctions may abide, but national enmities--the oldest and deepest, shall disappear. There shall still be Assyria, and Egypt, and Israel, but their former relation will be replaced by a bond of amity in their common possession of Him who is our peace. In that day shall Israel be the third with Egypt, and with Assyria, even a blessing in the midst of the land, whom the Lord shall bless, saying, Blessed be Egypt my people, and Assyria the work of my hands, and Israel mine inheritance. God be thanked! that though we see, and our fathers have seen, so much that seems to contradict our hopes of a peaceful world, and though to-day the hell-hounds of war are baying over the earth, and though nowhere can we see signs even of the approach of the halcyon time, yet we can wait for the vision, knowing that it will come at the appointed time, when

No war or battle's sound

Is heard the world around,

The idle spear and shield are high uphung;

The trumpet speaks not to the armed throng,

And Kings sit still, with awful eye,

As if they surely knew their Sovereign Lord was by.

Such are the thoughts which our Lord would teach us as to the present and as to the future of our missionary work. For the one, moderate expectations of success, not unchequered by disappointment, and a brave patience in long toil. For the other, hopes which cannot be too glowing, and a faith which cannot be too obstinate. The one is being fulfilled in our own and our brethren's experience even now; we may be therefore all the more sure that the other will be so in due time. If we look with Christ's eyes, we shall not be depressed by the apparent unbroken surface of heathenism but see, as He did, everywhere souls that belong to Him, who may and must be won; we shall joyfully embrace the work which He has given us to do; we shall arm ourselves against the discouragements of the present, by living much in the past at the foot of the Cross, till we catch the true image of the Saviour's love, and much in the future in the midst of the ransomed flock, till we too behold the roses blossoming in the wilderness, the bright waters covering all the dry places in the desert, and the families of men sitting, clothed and in their right mind, at the feet of Jesus.

Our missionary work is the pure and inevitable result of a belief in these words of my text. Can a man believe that Christ has other sheep for whom He died because He must bring them in, whom He will bring in because He died, and not work according to his power in the line of the divine purposes? The missionary spirit is but the Christian spirit working in one particular direction. Missionary societies are but one of the authentic outcomes of Christian principles, as natural as holiness of life, or the act of prayer.

To secure, then, a more vigorous energy in such work, we need chiefly what we need for all Christian growth--namely, more and deeper communion with Christ, a more vivid realisation of His grace and love for ourselves. And then we need that, under the double stimulus of His love and of His commandment--which at bottom are one--our minds should be more frequently occupied with this subject of Christian missions. Most of us know too little about the matter to feel very much. And then we need that we should more seriously reflect upon the facts in relation to our own personal responsibility and duty. You complain of the triteness of such appeals as this sermon. Brethren, have you ever tried that recipe for freshening up well-worn truths, namely, thinking about them in connection with the simplest, most important of all questions--what, then, ought I to do in view of these truths? Am I exaggerating when I say, that not one-half of the professing Christians of our day give an hour in the year to pondering that question, with reference to missionary work? Oh! dear friends, see to it that you live in Christ for yourselves, and then see to it that you think His thoughts about the heathen world, till your pity is stirred and your mind braced to the firm resolve that you too will work the works of Christ and bring in the wanderers.

We have had as large results as Christ has led us to expect, and far larger than we deserved. Christian missions are yet in their infancy--alas! that it should be so. But in these seventy years since they may be said to have begun, what wonderful successes have been achieved. We are often told that we have done nothing. Is it so? The plant has been got together, methods of working have been systematised, mistakes in some measure corrected. We have spent much of our time in learning how to work, and that process is by no means over yet. But with all these deductions, which ought fairly to be made, how much has been accomplished? The Bible has been put into the languages of seven hundred millions of men. The beginnings of a Christian literature have been supplied for five-sixths of the world. Half a million of professed converts have been gathered in, or as many as there were at the end of the first century, after about the same number of years of labour, and with apostles for missionaries and miracles for proof. And if these still bear on their ankles the marks of the fetters, and limp as they walk, or cannot see very clearly at first, it is no more than might be expected from their long darkness in the prison-house, and it is no more than Paul had to contend with at Ephesus and Corinth.

Every church that has engaged in the toil has shared in the blessing, and has its own instances of special prosperity. We have had Jamaica; the London Missionary Society, Madagascar, and the South Seas; the Wesleyans, Fiji; the Episcopal Societies, Tinnevelly; the American brethren, Burmah, and the Karens. Some of the ruder mythologies have been so utterly extirpated that the children of idolaters have seen the gods whom their fathers worshipped for the first time in the British Museum. While over those more compact and scientific systems which lie like an incubus on mighty peoples, there has crept a sickening consciousness of a coming doom, and they already half own their conqueror in the Stronger One than they.

They feel from Judah's land

The dreaded Infant's hand.

Bel boweth down, Nebo stoopeth, the idols are upon the beasts. Surely God has granted us success enough for our thankful confidence, more than enough for our deserts. I repeat it, it is as much as He promised, as much as we had any right to expect, and it is a vast deal more than any other system of belief or of no belief, any of your spiritualised Christianities, or still more intangible creeds has ever managed, or ever thought of trying. To those who taunt us with no success, and who perhaps would not dislike Christian missions so much if they disliked Christian truth a little less, we may very fairly and calmly answer--This rod has budded at all events; do you the same with your enchantments.

But the past is no measure of the future. From the very nature of the undertaking the ratio of progress increases at a rapid rate. The first ten years of labour in India showed twenty-seven converts, the seventh ten showed more than twenty-seven thousand. The preparation may be as slow as the solemn gathering of the thunder-clouds, as they noiselessly steal into their places, and slowly upheave their grey billowing crests; the final success may be as swift as the lightning which flashes in an instant from one side of the heavens to the other. It takes long years to hew the tunnel, to make the crooked straight, and the rough places plain, and then smooth and fleet the great power rushes along the rails. To us the cry comes, Prepare ye in the desert an highway for our God. The toil is sore and long, but the glory of the Lord shall be revealed, and all flesh shall see it together. The Alpine summits lie white and ghastly in the spring sunshine, and it seems to pour ineffectual beams on their piled cold; but by slow degrees it is silently loosening the bands of the snow, and after a while a goat's step, as it passes along a rocky ledge, or a breath of wind will move a tiny particle, and in an instant its motion spreads over a mile of mountain side, and the avalanche is rushing swifter and mightier at every foot down to the valley below, where it will all turn into sweet water, and ripple glancing in the sunshine. Such is our work. It may seem very hopeless, and be mostly unobservable in surface results, but it is very real for all that. The conquering impulse, for which our task may have been to prepare the way, will be given, and then we shall wonder to see how surely the kingdom was coming, even when we observed it not.

Ye have need of patience, and to feed your patience, ye have need of fellowship with Christ, of faith in His promises, of sympathy with His mind. God has given us, dear brethren, special reason for renewed consecration to this service in the blessings which have during the year terminated our anxieties and crowned our work for our own Society. But let us not dwell upon what has been done. These successes are brooks by the way at which we may drink--nothing more. We ought to be like shepherds in the lonely mountain glens, who see in the fast-falling snow and the bitter blast a summons to the hillside, and there all the night long wherever the drift lies deepest and the wind bites the most sharply, search the most eagerly for the poor half-dead creatures, and as they find each, bear it back to the safe shelter, nor stay behind to count the rescued, nor to rest their weariness, for all the bright light in the cottage and the blackness without, but forth again on the same quest, till all the Master's sheep have been rescued from the white death that lay treacherous around, and are sleeping at peace in His folds. A mighty Voice ought ever to be sounding in our ears, Other sheep I have, and the answer of our hearts and of our lives should be, Them also, O Lord! will I try to bring. Not till the far-off issue is accomplished shall we have a right to rest, and then we, with all those He has helped us to gather to His side, shall be among that flock, whom He who is at once Lamb and Shepherd, our Brother and our Lord, our Sacrifice and King, shall feed and lead by living fountains of waters, in the sweet pastures of the upper world, where there are no ravening wolves, nor false guides to terrify and bewilder His flock any more at all for ever.

[This Sermon was preached before the Baptist Missionary Society.]