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

**JOHN-046**. **THE SEVENTH MIRACLE IN JOHN'S GOSPEL - THE RAISING OF LAZARUS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"43.* *And when Jesus thus had spoken, He cried with a loud voice, Lazarus, Come forth. 44. And he that was dead came forth, bound hand and foot with grave-clothes; and his face was bound about with a napkin."*

*John 11:43-44*

The series of our Lord's miracles before the Passion, as recorded in this Gospel, is fitly closed with the raising of Lazarus. It crowns the whole, whether we regard the greatness of the fact, the manner of our Lord's working, the minuteness and richness of the accompanying details, the revelation of our Lord's heart, the consolations which it suggests to sorrowing spirits, or the immortal hopes which it kindles.

And besides all this, the miracle is of importance for the development of the Evangelist's purpose, in that it makes the immediate occasion of the embittered hostility which finally precipitates the catastrophe of the Cross. Therefore the great length to which the narrative extends.

Of course it is impossible for us to attempt, even in the most cursory manner, to go over the whole. We must content ourselves with dealing with one or two of the salient points. And there are three things in this narrative which I think well worthy of our notice. There is the revelation of Christ as our Brother, by emotion and sorrow. There is the revelation of Christ as our Lord by His consciousness of divine power. There is the revelation of Christ as our Life by His mighty life-giving word. And to these three points I ask you to turn briefly.

**I. First, then, we have here a revelation of Christ as our Brother, by emotion and sorrow.**

This miracle stands alone in the whole majestic series of His mighty works by the fact that it is preceded by a storm of emotion, which shakes the frame of the Master, which He is represented by the Evangelist not so much as suppressing as fostering, and which diverges and parts itself into the two feelings expressed by His groans and by His tears. The word which is rendered in our version He groaned in the spirit, and which is twice repeated in the narrative, is, according to the investigations of the most careful philological commentators, expressive not only of the outward sign of an emotion, but of the nature of it. And the nature of the emotion is not merely the grief and the sympathy which distilled in tears, but it is something deeper and other than that. The word contains in it at least a tinge of the passion of indignation(as it is expressed in the margin of the Revised Version). What caused the indignation? Cannot we fancy how there rose up, as in pale, spectral procession before His vision, the whole long series of human sorrows and losses, of which one was visible there before Him? He saw, in the one individual case, the whole genus. He saw the whole mass represented there, the ocean in the drop, and He looked beyond the fact and linked it with its cause. And as there rose before Him the reality of man's desolation through sin, and the thought that all this misery, loss, pain, parting, death, was a contradiction of the divine purpose, and an interruption of God's order, and that it had all been pulled down upon men's desperate heads by their own evil and their own folly, there rose in His heart the anger which is part of the perfectness of humanity when it looks upon sorrow linked by adamantine chains with sin.

But the lightning of the wrath dissolved soon into the rain of pity and of sorrow, and, as we read, Jesus wept. Looking upon the weeping Mary and the lamenting crowd, and Himself feeling the pain of the parting from the friend whom He loved, the tears, which are the confession of human nature that it is passing through an emotion too deep for words, came to His all-seeing eyes.

Oh! brethren, surely--surely in this manifestation, or call it better, this revelation of Christ the Lord, expressed in these two emotions--surely there are large and blessed lessons for us! On them I can only touch in the lightest manner. Here, for one thing, is the blessed sign and proof of His true brotherhood with us. This Evangelist, to whom it was given to tell the Church and the world more than any of the others had imparted to them of the divine uniqueness of the Master's person, had also given to him in charge the corresponding and complementary message--to insist upon the reality and the verity of His manhood. His proclamation was the Word was made flesh, and he had to dwell on both parts of that message, showing Him as the Word and showing Him as flesh. So he insists upon all the points which emerge in the course of his narrative that show the reality of Christ's corporeal manhood.

He joins with the others, who had no such lofty proclamation entrusted to them, in telling us how He was bone of our bone, and flesh of our flesh, in that He hungered and thirsted and slept, and was wearied; how He was man, reasonable soul and human spirit, in that He grieved and rejoiced, and wondered and desired, and mourned and wept. And so we can look upon Him, and feel that this in very deed is One of ourselves, with a spirit participant of all human experiences, and a heart tremulously vibrating with every emotion that belongs to man.

Here we are also taught the sanction and the limits of sorrow. Christianity has nothing to do with the false Stoicism and the false religion which is partly pride and partly insincerity, that proclaims it wrong to weep when God smites. But just as clearly and distinctly as the story before us says to us, Weep for yourselves and for the loved ones that are gone, so distinctly does it draw the limits within which sorrow is sacred and hallowing, and beyond which it is harmful and weakening. Set side by side the grief of these two poor weeping sisters, and the grief of the weeping Christ, and we get a large lesson. They could only repine that something else had not happened differently which would have made all different. If Thou hadst been here, my brother had not died. One of the two sits with folded arms in the house, letting her sorrow flow over her pained head. Martha is unable, by reason of her grief, to grasp the consolation that is held out to her; her sorrow has made the hopes of the future seem to her very dim and of small account, and she puts away Thy brother shall rise againwith almost an impatient sweep of her hand. I know that he will rise in the resurrection at the last day. But oh! that is so far away, and what I want is present comfort. Thus oblivious of duty, murmuring with regard to the accidents which might have been different, and unfitted to grasp the hopes that fill the future, these two have been hurt by their grief, and have let it overflow its banks and lay waste the land. But this Christ in His sorrow checks His sorrow that He may do His work; in His sorrow is confident that the Father hears; in His sorrow thinks of the bystanders, and would bring comfort and cheer to them. A sorrow which makes us more conscious of communion with the Father who is always listening, which makes us more conscious of power to do that which He has put it into our hand to do, which makes us more tender in our sympathies with all that mourn, and swifter and readier for our work--such a sorrow is doing what God meant for us; and is a blessing in so thin a disguise that we can scarcely call it veiled at all.

And then, still further, there are here other lessons on which I cannot touch. Such, for instance, is the revelation in this emotion of the Master's, of a personal love that takes individuals to His heart, and feels all the sweetness and the power of friendship. That personal love is open to every one of us, and into the grace and the tenderness of it we may all penetrate. The disciple whom Jesus lovedis the Evangelist who, without jealousy, is glad to tell us that the same loving Lord took into the same sanctuary of His pure heart, Mary and Martha, and her brother. That which was given to them was not taken from him, and they each possessed the whole of the Master's love. So for every one of us that heart is wide open, and you and I, brethren, may contract such personal relations to the Master that we shall live with Christ as a man with his friend, and may feel that His heart is all ours.

So much for the lessons of the emotions whereby Christ is manifested to us as our Brother.

**II. And now turn, in the next place, and that very briefly, to what lies side by side with this in the story, and at first sight may seem strangely contradictory of it, but in fact only completes the idea, viz. the majesties, calm consciousness of divine power by which He is revealed as our Lord.**

At one step from the agitation and the storm of feeling there comes, Take ye away the stone. And in answer to the lamentations of the sister are spoken the great and wonderful words, Said I not unto thee that if thou wouldst believe, thou shouldst see the glory of God?And He looks back there to the message that had been sent to the sisters in response to their unspoken hope that He would come, This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified thereby. And He shows us that from the first moment, with the spontaneousness which, as I have already remarked in previous sermons on these signs, characterises all the miracles of John's Gospel, He Himself knew what He would do, and in the consciousness of His divine power had resolved that the dead Lazarus should be the occasion for the manifestation, the flashing out to the world, of the glory of God in the life-giving Son.

And then, in the same tone of majestic consciousness, there follows that thanksgiving prior to the miracle as for the accomplished miracle. I thank Thee that Thou hast heard Me, and I knew that Thou hearest Me always: but because of the people which stand by I said it, that they may believe that Thou hast sent Me. The best commentary upon these words, the deepest and the fullest exposition of the large truths that lie in them concerning the co-operation of the Father and the Son, is to be found in the passage from the fifth chapter of this Gospel, wherein there is set forth, drawn with the firmest hand, the clearest lines of truth upon this great and profound subject. The Son does nothing of Himself, but whatsoever the Father doeth, that doeth the Son likewise. A consciousness of continual co-operation with the Almighty Father, a consciousness that His will continually coincides with the Father's will, that unto Him there comes the power ever to do all that Omnipotence can do, and that though we may speak of a gift given and a power derived, the relation between the giving Father and the recipient Son is altogether different from, and other than the relation between, the man that asks and the God that bestows. Poor Martha said, I know that even now, whatsoever Thou askest of God He will give Thee. She thought of Him as a good Man whose prayers had power with Heaven. But up into an altogether other region soars the consciousness expressed in these words as of a divine Son whose work is wholly parallel with the Father's work, and of whom the two things that sound contradictory can both be said. His omnipotence is His own; His omnipotence is the Father's: As the Father hath lifeand therefore power in Himself, so hath He given--there is the one half of the paradox--so hath He given to the Son to have life in Himself; there is the other. And unless you put them both together you do not think of Christ as Christ has taught us to think.

**III. Lastly, we have here the revelation of Christ as our Life in His mighty, life-giving word.**

The miracle, as I have said, stands high in the scale, not only by reason of what to us seems the greatness of the fact, though of course, properly speaking, in miracles there is no distinction as to the greatness of the fact, but also by reason of the manner of the working. The voice thrown into the cave reaches the ears of the sheeted dead: Lazarus, come forth!And then, in words which convey the profound impression of awfulness and solemnity which had been made upon the Evangelist, we have the picture of the man with the graveclothes wrapped about his limbs, stumbling forth; and loving hands are bidden to take away the napkin which covered his face. Perhaps the hand trembled as it was put forth, not knowing what awful sight the veil might cover.

With tenderest reticence, no word is spoken as to what followed. No hint escapes of the joy, no gleam of the experiences which the traveller brought back with him from that bournewhence he had come. Surely some draught of Lethe must have been given him, that his spirit might be lulled into a wholesome forgetfulness, else life must have been a torment to him.

But be that as it may, what we have to notice is the fact here, and what it teaches us as a fact. Is it not a revelation of Jesus Christ as the absolute Lord of Life and Death, giving the one, putting back the other? Death has caught hold of his prey. Shall the prey be taken from the mighty, and the lawful captive delivered? Yea, the prey shall be taken from the mighty. His bare word is divinely operative. He says to that grisly shadow Come!and he cometh; He says to him Go!and he goeth. And as a shepherd will drive away the bear that has a lamb between his bloody fangs, and the brute retreats, snarling and growling, but dropping his prey, so at the Lord's voice Lazarus comes back to life, and disappointed Death skulks away to the darkness.

The miracle shows Him as Lord of Death and Giver of Life. And it teaches another lesson, namely, the continuous persistency of the bond between Christ and His friend, unbroken and untouched by the superficial accident of life or death. Wheresoever Lazarus was he heard the voice, and wheresoever Lazarus was he knew the voice, and wheresoever Lazarus was he obeyed the voice. And so we are taught that the relationship between Christ our life, and all them that love and trust Him, is one on which the tooth of death that gnaws all other bonds in twain hath no power at all. Christ is the Life, and, therefore, Christ is the Resurrection, and the thing that we call death is but a film which spreads on the surface, but has no power to penetrate into the depths of the relationship between us and Him.

Such, in briefest words, are the lessons of the miracle as a fact, but before I close I must remind you that it is to be looked at not only as a fact, but as a prophecy and as a parable.

It is a prophecy in a modified sense, telling us at all events that He has the power to bid men back from the dust and darkness, and giving us the assurance which His own words convey to us yet more distinctly: The hour is coming when all that are in the graves shall hear His voice and shall come forth. My brother! there be two resurrections in that one promise: the resurrection of Christ's friends and the resurrection of Christ's foes. And though to both His voice will be the awakening, some shall rise to joy and immortality and some to shame and everlasting contempt. You will hear the voice; settle it for yourselves whether when He calls and thou answerest thou wilt say, Lo! here am I, joyful to look upon Him; or whether thou wilt rise reluctant, and call upon the rocks and the hills to cover thee, and to hide thee from the face of Him that sitteth upon the Throne.

And this raising is a parable as well as a prophecy; for even as Christ was the life of this Lazarus, so, in a deeper and more real sense, and not in any shadowy, metaphorical, mystical sense, is Jesus Christ the life of every spirit that truly lives at all. We are dead in trespasses and sins. For separation from God is death in all regions, death for the body in its kind, death for the mind, for the soul, for the spirit in their kinds; and only they who receive Christ into their hearts do live. Every Christian man is a miracle. There has been a true coming into the human of the divine, a true supernatural work, the infusion into a dead soul of the God-life which is the Christ-life.

And you and I may have that life. What is the condition? They that hear shall live. Do you hear? Do you welcome? Do you take that Christ into your hearts? Is He your Life, my brother?

It is possible to resist that voice, to stuff your ears so full of clay, and worldliness, and sin, and self-reliance as that it shall not echo in your hearts. The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of Man, and they that hear shall live, and obtain to-day a better resurrectionthan the resurrection of the body. If you do not hear that voice, then you will remain in the congregation of the dead.