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

**JOHN-049**. **A NEW KIND OF KING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"On the next day much people that were come to the feast, when they heard that Jesus was coming to Jerusalem, took branches of palm-trees, and went forth to meet Him, and cried, Hosanna: Blessed is the King of Israel that cometh in the name of the Lord. And Jesus, when He had found a young ass, sat thereon; as it is written, Fear not, daughter of Sion: behold, thy King cometh, sitting on an ass's colt. These things understood not His disciples at the first: but when Jesus was glorified, then remembered they that these things were written of Him, and that they had done these things unto Him. The people therefore that was with Him when He called Lazarus out of his grave, and raised him from the dead, bare record. For this cause the people also met Him, for that they heard that He had done this miracle. The Pharisees therefore said among themselves, Perceive ye how ye prevail nothing! behold, the world is gone after Him. And there were certain Greeks among them that came up to worship at the feast: The same came therefore to Philip, which was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and desired him, saying, Sir, we would see Jesus. Philip cometh and telleth Andrew: and again Andrew and Philip tell Jesus, and Jesus answered them, saying, The hour is come, that the Son of Man should be glorified. Verily, verily, I say unto you, except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. He that loveth his life shall lose it; and he that hateth his life in this world shall keep it unto life eternal. If any man serve Me, let him follow Me; and where I am, there shall also My servant be: if any man serve Me, him will My Father honour."*

*John 12:12-26*

The difference between John's account of the entry into Jerusalem and those of the Synoptic Gospels is very characteristic. His is much briefer, but it brings the essentials out clearly, and is particular in showing its place as a link in the chain that drew on the final catastrophe, and in noting its effect on various classes.

The next dayin verse 12 was probably the Sunday before the crucifixion. To understand the events of that day we must try to realise how rapidly, and, as the rulers thought, dangerously, excitement was rising among the crowds who had come up for the Passover, and who had heard of the raising of Lazarus. The Passover was always a time when national feeling was ready to blaze up, and any spark might light the fire. It looked as if Lazarus were going to be the match this time, and so, on the Saturday, the rulers had made up their minds to have him put out of the way in order to stop the current that was setting in, of acceptance of Jesus as the Messiah.

They had already made up their minds to dispose of Jesus, and now, with cynical contempt for justice, they determined to put Lazarus also to death. So there were to be two men who were to die for the people. Keeping all this wave of popular feeling in view, it might have been expected that Jesus would, as hitherto, have escaped into privacy, or discouraged the offered homage of a crowd whose Messianic ideal was so different from His.

John is mainly concerned in bringing out two points in his version of the incident. First, he tells us what we should not have gathered from the other Evangelists, that the triumphal procession began in Jerusalem, not in Bethany. It was the direct result of the ebullition of enthusiasm occasioned by the raising of Lazarus. The course of events seems to have been that the common people of the Jewscame streaming out to Bethany on the Sunday to gape and gaze at the risen man and Him who had raised him, that they and some of those who had been present at the raising went back to the city and carried thither the intelligence that Jesus was coming in from Bethany next day, and that then the procession to meet Him was organised.

The meaning of the popular demonstration was plain, both from the palm branches, signs of victory and rejoicing, and from the chant, which is in part taken from Psalm cxviii. The Messianic application of that quotation is made unmistakable by the addition, even the King of Israel. In the Psalm, he that cometh in the name of Jehovah, means the worshipper drawing near to the Temple, but the added words divert the expression to Jesus, hail Him as the King, and invoke Him as Saviour. Little did that shouting crowd understand what sort of a Saviour He was. Deliverance from Rome was what they were thinking of.

We must remember what gross, unspiritual notions of the Messiah they had, and then we are prepared to feel how strangely unlike His whole past conduct Jesusaction now was. He had shrunk from crowds and their impure enthusiasm; He had slipped away into solitude when they wished to come by force to make Him a King, and had in every possible way sought to avoid publicity and the rousing of popular excitement. Now He deliberately sets Himself to intensify it. His choice of an ass on which to ride into Jerusalem was, and would be seen by many to be, a plain appropriation to Himself of a very distinct Messianic prophecy, and must have raised the heat of the crowd by many degrees. One can fancy the roar of acclaim which hailed Him when He met the multitude, and the wild emotion with which they strewed His path with garments hastily drawn off and cast before Him.

Why did He thus contradict all His past, and court the smoky enthusiasm which He had hitherto damped? Because He knew that His hourhad come, and that the Cross was at hand, and He desired to bring it as speedily as might be, and thus to shorten the suffering that He would not avoid, and to finish the work which He was eager to complete. The impatience, as we might almost call it, which had marked Him on all that last journey, reached its height now, and may indicate to us for our sympathy and gratitude both His human longing to get the dark hour over and His fixed willingness to die for us.

But even while Jesus accepted the acclamations and deliberately set Himself to stir up enthusiasm, He sought to purify the gross ideas of the crowd. What more striking way could He have chosen of declaring that all the turbulent passions and eagerness for a foot-to-foot conflict with Rome which were boiling in their breasts were alien to His purposes and to the true Messianic ideal, than that choosing of the meek, slow-pacing ass to bear Him? A conquering king would have made his triumphal entry in a chariot or on a battle-horse. This strange type of monarch is throned on an ass. It was not only for a verbal fulfilment of the prophecy, but for a demonstration of the essential nature of His kingdom, that He thus entered the city.

John characteristically takes note of the effects of the entry on two classes, the disciples and the rulers. The former remembered with a sudden flash of enlightenment the meaning of the entry when the Cross and the Resurrection had taught them it. The rulers marked the popular feeling running high with bewilderment, and were, as Jesus meant them to be, made more determined to take vigorous measures to stop this madness of the mob.

The second incident in this passage contrasts remarkably with the first, and yet is, in one aspect, a continuation of it. In the former, Jesus brought into prominence the true nature of His rule by His choosing the ass to carry Him, so declaring that His dominion rested, not on conquest, but on meekness. In the latter, He reveals a yet deeper aspect of His work, and teaches that His influence over men is won by utter self-sacrifice, and that His subjects must tread the same path of losing their lives by which He passes to His glory. The details of the incident are of small importance as compared with that great and solemn lesson; but we may note them in a few words. The desire of a few Greeks to see Him was probably only a reflection of the popular enthusiasm, and was prompted mainly by curiosity and the characteristic Greek eagerness to see any new thing. The addressing of the request to Philip is perhaps explained by the fact that he was of Bethsaida of Galilee, and had probably come into contact with these Greeks in the neighbouring Decapolis, on the other side of the lake. Philip's consultation of his fellow-townsman, Andrew, who is associated with him in other places, probably implies hesitation in granting so unprecedented a request. They did not know what Jesus might say to it. And what He did say was very unlike anything that they could have anticipated.

The trivial request was as a narrow window through which Jesusyearning spirit saw a great expanse--nothing less than the coming to Him of myriads of Gentiles, the much fruitof which He immediately speaks, the other sheepwhom He must bring. The thought must have been ever present to Him, or it would never have leaped to utterance on such an occasion. The little window shows us, too, what was habitually in His mind and heart. He, as it were, hears the striking of the hour of His glorification; in which expression the ideas of His being glorified by drawing men to the knowledge of His love, and of the Cross being not the lowest depth of His humiliation, but the highest apex of His glory--as it is always represented in this Gospel--seemed to be fused together.

The seed must die if a harvest is to spring from it. That is the law for all moral and spiritual reformations. Every cause must have its martyrs. No man can be fruit-bearing unless he sacrifices himself. We shall not quickenour fellows unless we die, either literally or by the not less real martyrdom of rigid self-crucifixion and suppression.

But that necessity is not only for Apostles or missionaries of great causes; it is the condition of all true, noble life, and prescribes the path not only for those who would live for others, but for all who would truly live their own lives. Self-renunciation guards the way to the tree of life. That lesson was specially needed by Greeks, for ignorance of it was the worm that gnawed the blossoms of their trees, whether of art or of literature. It is no less needed by our sensuously luxurious and eagerly acquisitive generation. The world's war-cries to-day are two--Get!Enjoy!Christ's command is, Renounce!And in renouncing we shall realise both of these other aims, which they who pursue them only, never attain.

Christ's servant must be Christ's follower: indeed service is following. The Cross has aspects in which it stands alone, and is incapable of being reproduced and makes all repetition needless. But it has also an aspect in which it not only may, but must, be reproduced in every disciple. And he who takes it for the ground of his trust only, and not as the pattern of his life, has need to ask himself whether his trust in it is genuine or worth anything. Of course they who follow a leader will arrive where the leader has gone, and though our feet are feeble and our progress devious and slow, we have here His promise that we shall not be lost in the desert, but, sustained by Him, will reach His side, and at last be where He is.