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

**JOHN-053**. **A PARTING WARNING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Jesus therefore said unto them, Yet a little while is the light among you. Walk while ye have the light, that darkness overtake you not: and he that walketh in the darkness knoweth not whither he goeth. While ye have the light, believe on the light, that ye may become sons of light."*

*John 12:35, 36 (R.V.)*

These are the last words of our Lord's public ministry. He afterwards spoke only to His followers in the sweet seclusion of the sympathetic home at Bethany, and amid the sanctities of the upper chamber. Yet a little while am I with you; --the sun had all but set. Two days more, and the Cross was reared on Calvary, but there was yet time to turn to the light. And so His divine charity hoped all things, and continued to plead with those who had so long rejected Him. As befits a last appeal, the words unveil the heart of Christ. They are solemn with warning, radiant with promise, almost beseeching in their earnestness. He loves too well not to warn, but He will not leave the bitterness of threatening as a last savour on the palate, and so the lips, into which grace is poured, bade farewell to His enemies with the promise and the hope that even they may become the sons of light.

The solemnity of the occasion, then, gives great force to the words; and the remembrance of it sets us on the right track for estimating their significance. Let us see what lessons for us there may be in Christ's last words to the world.

**I. There is, first, a self-revelation.**

It is no mere grammatical pedantry that draws attention to the fact that four times in this text does our Lord employ the definite article, and speak of the light. And that that is no mere accident is obvious from the fact that, in the last clause of our text, where the general idea of light is all that is meant to be emphatic, the article is omitted. Yet a little while is the light with you; walk while ye have the light ... . While ye have the light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light.

So then, most distinctly here, in His final appeal to the world, He draws back the curtain, as it were, takes away the shade that had covered the lamp, and lets one full beam stream out for the last impression that He leaves. Is it not profoundly significant and impressive that then, of all times, over and over again, in the compass of these short verses, this Galilean peasant makes the tremendous assertion that He is what none other can be, in a solitary and transcendent sense, the Light of Mankind? Undismayed by universal rejection, unfaltering in spite of the curling lips of incredulity and scorn, unbroken by the near approach of certain martyrdom, He presents Himself before the world as its Light. Nothing in the history of mad, fanatical claims to inspiration and divine authority is to be compared with these assertions of our Lord. He is the fontal Source, He says, of all illumination; He stands before the whole race, and claims to be the Master-Light of all our seeing. Whatsoever ideas of clearness of knowledge, of rapture of joy, of whiteness of purity, are symbolised by that great emblem, He declares that He manifests them all to men. Others may shine; but they are, as He said, lights kindled, and therefore burning. Others may shine, but they have caught their radiance from Him. All teachers, all helpers, all thinkers draw their inspiration, if they have any, from Him, in whom was life, and the Life was the Light of men.

There has been blazing in the heavens of late a new star, that burst upon astonished astronomers in a void spot; but its brilliancy, though far transcending that of our sun, soon began to wane, and before long, apparently, there will be blackness again where there was blackness before. So all lights but His are temporary as well as derived, and men willing for a season to rejoicein the fleeting splendours, and to listen to the teacher of a day, lose the illumination of his presence and guidance of his thoughts as the ages roll on. But the Light is not for an age, but for all time.

Now, brethren, this is Christ's estimate of Himself. I dwell not on it for the purpose of seeking to exhaust its depth of significance. In it there lies the assertion that He, and He only, is the source of all valid knowledge of the deepest sort concerning God and men, and their mutual relations. In it lie the assertion that He, and He only, is the source of all true gladness that may blend with our else darkened lives, and the further assertion that from Him, and from Him alone, can flow to us the purity that shall make us pure. We have to turn to that Man close by His Cross, on whom while He spoke the penumbra of the eclipse of death was beginning to show itself, and to say to Him what the Psalmist said of old to the Jehovah whom he knew, and whom we recognise as indwelling in Jesus: With Thee is the fountain of life. Thou makest us to drink of the river of Thy pleasures. In Thy light shall we see light.

So Christ thought of Himself; so Christ would have as to think of Him. And it becomes a question for us how, if we refuse to accept that claim of a solitary, underived, eternal, and universal power of illuminating mankind, we can save His character for the veneration of the world. We cannot go picking and choosing amongst the Master's words, and say This is historical, and that mythical. We cannot select some of them, and leave others on one side. You must take the whole Christ if you take any Christ. And the whole Christ is He who, within sight of Calvary, and in the face of all but universal rejection, lifted up His voice, and, as His valediction to the world, declared, I am the Light of the world. So He says to us. Oh that we all might cast ourselves before Him, with the cry, Lighten our darkness, O Lord, we beseech Thee!

**II. Secondly, we have here a double exhortation.**

Walk in the light; believe in the light. These two sum up all our duties; or rather, unveil for us the whole fullness of the possible privileges and blessings of which our relation to that light is capable. It is obvious that the latter of them is the deeper in idea, and the prior in order of sequence. There must be the beliefin the light before there is the walkin the light. Walking includes the ideas of external activity and of progress. And so, putting these two exhortations together, we get the whole of Christianity considered as subjective. Believe in the light; trust in the light, and then walkin it. A word, then, about each of these branches of this double exhortation.

Trust in the light. The figure seems to be dropped at first sight; for it wants little faith to believe in the sunshine at midday; and when the light is pouring out, how can a man but see it? But the apparent incongruity of the metaphor points to something very deep in regard to the spiritual side. We cannot but believe in the light that meets the eye when it meets it, but it is possible for a man to blind himself to the shining of this light. Therefore the exhortation is needed--Believe in the light, for only by believing it can you see it. Just as the eye is the organ of sight, just as its nerves are sensitive to the mysterious finger of the beam, just as on its mirroring surface impinges the gentle but mighty force that has winged its way across all the space between us and the sun, and yet falls without hurting, so faith, the inward eye which makes the blissof the solitary soul, is the one organ by which you and I can see the light. Seeing is believing, says the old proverb. That is true in regard to the physical. Believing is seeing, is much rather the way to put it in regard to the spiritual and divine.

Only as we trust the light do we see the light. Unless you and I put our confidence in Jesus Christ, the Son of God and Son of Man, we have no adequate knowledge of Him and no clear vision of Him. We must know that we may love; but we must love that we may know. We must believe that we may see. True, we must see that we may believe, but the preliminary vision which precedes belief is slight and dim as compared with the solidity and the depth of assurance with which we apprehend the reality and know the lustre of Him whom our faith has grasped. You will never know the glory of the light, nor the sweetness with which it falls upon the gazing eye, until you turn your face to that Master, and so receive on your susceptible and waiting heart the warmth and the radiance which He only can bestow. Believe in the light. Trust it; or rather, trust Him who is it. He cannot deceive. This light from heaven can never lead astray. Absolutely we may rely upon it; unconditionally we must follow it. Lean upon Him--to take another metaphor--with all your weight. His arm is strong to bear the burden of our weaknesses, sorrows, and, above all, our sins. While ye have light, trust the light.

But then that is not enough. Man, with his double relations, must have an active and external as well as an inward and contemplative life. And so our Lord, side by side with the exhortation on which I have been touching, puts the other one, Walk in the light. Our inward emotions, however deep and precious, however real the affiance, however whole-hearted the love, are maimed and stunted, and not what the light requires, unless there follows upon them the activity of the walk. What do we get the daylight for? To sit and gaze at it? By no means; but that it may guide us upon our path and help us in all our work. And so all Christian people need ever to remember that Jesus Christ has indissolubly bound together these two phases of our relation to Him as the light of life-inward and blessed contemplation by faith and outward practical activity. To walk is, of course, the familiar metaphor for the external life of man, and all our deeds are to be in conformity with the Light, and in communion with Him. This is the deepest designation, perhaps, of the true character of a Christian life in its external aspect--that it walks in Christ, doing nothing but as His light shines, and ever bearing along with it conscious fellowship with Him who is thus the guiding and irradiating and gladdening and sanctifying life of our lives, Walk in the light as He is in the light. Our days fleet and change; His are stable and the same. For, although these words which I have quoted, in their original application refer to God the Father, they are no less true about Him who rests at the right hand of God, and is one light with Him. He is in the light. We may approximate to that stable and calm radiance, even though our lives are passed through changing scenes, and effort and struggle are their characteristics. And oh! how blessed, brother, such a life will be, all gladdened by the unsetting and unclouded sunshine that even in the shadiest places shines, and turns the darkness of the valley of the shadow of death into solemn light; teaching gloom to glow with a hidden sun!

But there is not only the idea of activity here, there is the further notion of progress. Unless Christian people to their faith add work, and have both their faith and their consequent work in a continual condition of progress and growth, there is little reason to believe that they apprehend the light at all. If you trust the light you will walk in it; and if your days are not in conformity nor in communion with Him, and are not advancing nearer and nearer to the central blaze, then it becomes you to ask yourselves whether you have verily seen at all, or trusted at all, the Light of life.

**III. Thirdly, there is here a warning.**

Walk whilst ye have the light, lest the darkness come upon you. That is the summing up of the whole history of that stiff-necked and marvellous people. For what has all the history of Israel been since that day but groping in the wilderness without any pillar of fire? But there is more than that in it. Christ gives us this one solemn warning of what falls on us if we turn away from Him. Rejected light is the parent of the densest darkness, and the man who, having the light, does not trust it, piles around himself thick clouds of obscurity and gloom, far more doleful and impenetrable than the twilight that glimmers round the men who have never known the daylight of revelation. The history of un-Christian and anti-Christian Christendom is a terrible commentary upon these words of the Master, and the cries that we hear all round us to-day from men who will not follow the light of Christ, and moan or boast that they dwell in agnostic darkness, tell us that, of all the eclipses that can fall upon heart and mind, there is none so dismal or thunderously dark as that of the men who, having seen the light of Christ in the sky, have turned from it and said, It is no light, it is only a mock sun. Brethren, tempt not that fate.

And if Christian men and women do not advance in their knowledge and their conformity, like clouds of darkness will fall upon them. None is so hopeless as the unprogressive Christian, none so far away as those who have been brought nigh and have never come any nigher. If you believe the light, see that you growingly trust and walk in it, else darkness will come upon you, and you will not know whither you go.

**IV. And lastly, there is here a hope and a promise.**

That ye may be the sons of light.

Faith and obedience turn a man into the likeness of that in which he trusts. If we trust Jesus we open our hearts to Him; and if we open our hearts to Him He will come in. If you are in a darkened room, what have you to do in order to have it filled with glad sunshine? Open the shutters and pull up the blinds, and the light will do all the rest. If you trust the light, it will rush in and fill every crevice and cranny of your hearts. Faith and obedience will mould us, by their natural effect, into the resemblance of that on which we lean. As one of the old German mystics said, What thou lovest, that thou dost become. And it is blessedly true. The same principle makes Christians like Christ, and makes idolaters like their gods. They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them, says one of the Psalms. They followed after vanity and are become vain, says the chronicler of Israel's defections. We with unveiled faces beholding--or mirroring--the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image. Trust the light and you become sons of the light.

And so, dear friends, all of us may hope that by degrees, as the reward of faith and of walking, we still may bear the image of the heavenly, even here on earth. While as yet we only believe in the light, we may participate in its transforming power, like some far-off planet on the utmost bounds of some solar system, that receives faint and small supplies of light and warmth, through a thick atmosphere of vapour, and across immeasurable spaces. But we have the assurance that we shall be carried nearer our centre, and then, like the planets that are closer to the sun than our earth is, we shall feel the fuller power of the heat, and be saturated with the glory of the light. We shall see Him as He is; and then we too shall blaze forth like the sun in the kingdom of our Father.