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

**JOHN-056**. **THE DISMISSAL OF JUDAS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... Then said Jesus unto Judas, That thou doest, do quickly."*

*John 13:27*

When our Lord gave the morsel, dipped in the dish, to Judas, only John knew the significance of the act. But if we supplement the narrative here with that given by Matthew, we shall find that, accompanying the gift of the sop, was a brief dialogue in which the betrayer, with unabashed front, hypocritically said, Lord! Is it I? and heard the solemn, sad answer, Thou sayest! Two things, then, appealed to him at the moment: one, the conviction that he was discovered; the other, the wonderful assurance that he was still loved, for the gift of the morsel was a token of friendliness. He shut his heart against them both; and as he shut his heart against Christ he opened it to the devil. So after the sop Satan entered into him. At that moment a soul committed suicide; and none of those that sat by, with the exception of Christ and the disciple whom He loved, so much as dreamed of the tragedy going on before their eyes.

I know not that there are anywhere words more weighty and wonderful than those of our text. And I desire to try if I can at all make you feel as I feel, their solemn signification and force. That thou doest, do quickly.

**I. I hear in them, first, the voice of despairing love abandoning the conflict.**

If I have rightly construed the meaning of the incident, this is the plain meaning of it. And you will observe that the Revised Version, more accurately and closely rendering the words of our text, begins with a Therefore. Therefore said Jesus unto him, because the die was cast; because the will of Judas had conclusively welcomed Satan, and conclusively rejected Christ; therefore, knowing that remonstrance was vain, knowing that the deed was, in effect, done, Jesus Christ, that Incarnate Charity which believeth all things, and hopeth all things, abandoned the man to himself, and said, There, then, if thou wilt thou must. I have done all I can; my last arrow is shot, and it has missed the target. That then doest, do quickly.

There is a world of solemn meaning in that one little word doest. It teaches us the old lesson, which sense is so apt to forget, that the true actor in man's deeds is the hidden man of the heart, and that when it has acted, it matters comparatively little whether the mere tool and instrument of the hands or of the other organs have carried out the behest. The thing is done before it is done when the man has resolved, with a fixed will, to do it. The betrayal was as good as in process, though no step beyond the introductory ones, which could easily have been cancelled, had yet been accomplished. Because there was a fixed purpose which could not be altered by anything now, therefore Jesus Christ regards the act as completed. It is what we think in our hearts that we are; and our fixed determinations, our inclinations of will, are far more truly our doings than the mere consequences of these, embodied in actuality. It is but a poor estimate of a man that judges him by the test of what he has done. What he has wanted to do is the true man; what he has attempted to do. It was well that it was in thine heart!saith God to the king who thought of building the Temple which he was never allowed to rear. It is ill that is in thine heart, says He by whom actions are weighed, to the sinner in purpose, though his clean hands lie idly in his lap. These hidden movements of desire and will that never come to the surface are our true selves. Look after them, and the deeds will take care of themselves. Serpent's eggs have serpents in them. And he that has determined upon a sin has done the sin, whether his hands have been put to it or no.

But, then, turn for a moment to the other thought that is suggested here--that solemn picture of a soul left to do as it will, because divine love has no other restraints which it can impose, and is bankrupt of motives that it can adduce to prevent it from its madness. Now I do not believe, for my part, that any man in this world is so all-round sold unto sinas that the seeking love of God gives him up as irreclaimable. I do not believe that there are any people concerning whom it is true that it is impossible for the grace of God to find some chink and cranny in their souls through which it can enter and change them. There are no hopeless cases as long as men are here. But, then, though there may not be so, in regard to the whole sweep of the man's nature, yet every one of us, over and over again, has known what it is to come exactly into that position in regard to some single evil or other, concerning which we have so set our teeth and planted our feet at such an angle of resistance as that God gives up dealing with us and leaves us, as He did with Balaam when He opposed his covetous inclinations to all the remonstrances of Heaven. God said at last to him Go!because it was the best way to teach him what a fool he had been in wanting to go. Thus, when we determine to set ourselves against the pleadings and the beseechings of divine love, the truest kindness is to fling the reins upon our necks, and let us gallop ourselves into a sweat and weariness, and then we shall be more amenable to the touch of the rein thereafter.

Are there any people whom God is teaching obedience to His light touch, by letting them run their course after some one specific sin? Perhaps there are. At all events, let us remember that that position of being allowed to do as we like is one to which we all tend, in the measure in which we indulge our inclinations, and shut our hearts against God's pleadings. There is such a thing as a conscience seared as with a hot iron. They used to say that there were witches marks on the body, places where, if you stuck a pin in, there was no feeling. Men cover themselves all over with marks of that sort, which are not sensitive even to the prick of a divine remonstrance, rebuke, or retribution. They wipe their mouths and say I have done no harm. You can tie up the clapper of the bell that swings on the black rock, on which, if you drift, you go to pieces. You can silence the Voice by the simple process of neglecting it. Judas set his teeth against two things, the solemn conviction that Jesus Christ knew his sin, and the saving assurance that Jesus Christ loved him still. And whosoever resists either of these two is getting perilously near to the point where, not in petulance but in pity, God will say, Very well, I have called and ye have refused. Now go, and do what you want to do, and see how you like it when it is done. What thou doest, do quickly. Do you remember the other word, If twere done when tis done, then twere well it were done quickly? But since consequences last when deeds are past, perhaps you had better halt before you determine to do them.

**II. Now, secondly, I hear in these words the voice of strangely blended majesty and humiliation.**

What thou doest, do!Judas thought he had got possession of Christ's person, and was His master in a very real sense. When lo! all at once the victim assumes the position of the Lord and commands, showing the traitor that instead of thwarting and counterworking, he was but carrying out the designs of his fancied victim; and that he was an instrument in Christ's hands for the execution of His will. And these two thoughts, how, in effect, all antagonism, all malicious hatred, all violent opposition of every sort but work in with Christ's purpose, and carry out His intention; and how, at the moments of deepest apparent degradation, He towers, in manifest Majesty and Masterhood, seem to me to be plainly taught in the word before us.

He uses his foes for the furtherance of His purpose. That has been the history of the world ever since. The floods, O Lord, have lifted up their voice. And what have they done? Smashing against the breakwater, they but consolidate its mighty blocks, and prove that the Lord on high is mightier than the noise of many waters. It has been so in the past, it is so to-day; it will be so till the end. Every Judas is unconsciously the servant of Him whom he seeks to betray; and finds out to his bewilderment that what he meant for a death-blow is fulfilling the very purpose and will of the Lord against whom he has turned.

Again, the combination here, in such remarkable juxtaposition, of the two things, a willing submission to the utmost extremity of shame, which the treasonous heart can froth out in its malice and, at the same time, a rising up in conscious majesty and lordship, are suggested to us by the words before us. That combination of utter lowliness and transcendent loftiness runs through the whole life and history of our Lord. Did you ever think how strong an argument that strange combination, brought out so inartificially throughout the whole of the Gospels, is for their historical veracity? Suppose the problem had been given to poets to create and to set in a series of appropriate scenes a character with these two opposites stamped equally upon it, neither of them impinging upon the domain of the other--viz., utter humility and humiliation in circumstance, and majestic sovereignty and elevation above all circumstances--do you think that any of them could have solved the problem, though-- Aeschylus and Shakespeare had been amongst them, as these four men that wrote these four little tracts that we call Gospels have done? How comes it that this most difficult of literary problems has been so triumphantly solved by these men? I think there is only one answer, Because they were reporters, and imagined nothing, but observed everything, and repeated what had happened. He reconciled these opposites who was the Man of Sorrows and acquainted with grief, and yet the Eternal Son of the Father; and the Gospels have solved the problem only because they are simple records of its solution by Him.

Wherever in His history there is some trait of lowliness there is by the side of it a flash of majesty. Wherever in His history there is some gleaming out from the veil of flesh of the hidden glory of divinity, there is immediately some drawing of the veil across the glory. And the two things do not contradict nor confuse, but we stand before that double picture of a Christ betrayed and of a Christ commanding His betrayer, and using his treason, and we say, The Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us.

**III. Again, I hear the voice of instinctive human weakness.**

That thou doest, do quickly. It may be doubtful, and some of you perhaps may not be disposed to follow me in my remark, but to my ear that sounds just like the utterance of that instinctive dislike of suspense and of the long hanging over us of the sword by a hair, which we all know so well. Better to suffer than to wait for suffering. The loudest thunder-crash is not so awe-inspiring as the dread silence of nature when the sky is black before the peal rolls through the clouds. Many a martyr has prayed for a swift ending of his troubles. Many a sorrowing heart, that has been sitting cowering under the anticipation of coming evils, has wished that the string could be pulled, as it were, and they could all come down in one cold flood, and be done with, rather than trickle drop by drop. They tell us that the bravest soldiers dislike the five minutes when they stand in rank before the first shot is fired. And with all reverence I venture to think that He who knew all our weaknesses in so far as weakness was not sin, is here letting us see how He, too, desired that the evil which was coming might come quickly, and that the painful tension of expectation might be as brief as possible. That may be doubtful; I do not dwell upon it, but I suggest it for your consideration.

**IV. And then I pass on to the last of the tones that I hear in these utterances--the voice of the willing Sacrifice for the sins of the world.**

That thou doest, do quickly. There is nothing more obvious throughout the whole of the latter portion of the Gospel narrative than the way in which, increasingly towards its close, Jesus seemed to hasten to the Cross. You remember His own sayings: I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished. I am come to cast fire on the earth; would it were already kindled!You remember with what a strange air--I was going to use an inappropriate word, and say, of alacrity; but, at all events, of fixed resolve--He journeyed from Galilee, in that last solemn march to Jerusalem, and how the disciples followed, astonished at the unwonted look of decision and absorption that was printed upon His countenance. If we consider His doings in that last week in Jerusalem, how he courted publicity, how He avoided no encounter with His official enemies, how He sharpened His tones, not exactly so as to provoke, but certainly so as by no means to conciliate, we shall see, I think, in it all, His consciousness that the hour had come, and His absolute readiness and willingness to be offered for the world's sin. He stretches out His hands, as it were, to draw the Cross nearer to Himself, not with any share in the weakness of a fanatical aspiration after martyrdom, but under a far deeper and more wonderful impulse.

Why was Christ so willing, so eager, if I may use the word, that His death should be accomplished? Two reasons, which at the bottom are one, answer the question. He thus hastened to His Cross because He would obey the Father's will, and because He loved the whole world--you and me and all our fellows. We were each in His heart. It was because He wanted to save thee that He said to Judas, Do it quickly, that the world's salvation and that man's salvation may be accomplished. These were the cords that bound Him to the altar. Let us never forget that Judas with his treachery, and rulers with their hostility, and Pilate with his authority, and the soldiers with their nails, and centurions with their lances, and the grim figure of Death itself with its shaft, would have been all equally powerless against Christ if it had not been his loving will to die on the Cross for each of us.

Therefore, brethren, as we hear this voice, let us discern in it the tones which warn us of the danger of yielding to inclination and stifling His rebukes, till He abandons us for the moment in despair; let us hear in it the pathetic voice of a Brother, who knows all our weaknesses and has felt our emotions; let us hear the voice of Sovereign Authority which uses its enemies for its purposes, and is never loftier than when it is most lowly, whose Cross is His throne of glory, whose exaltation is His deepest humiliation, and let us hear a love which, discerning each of us through all the ages and the crowds, went willingly to the Cross because He willed that He should be our Saviour.

And seeing that time is short, and the future precarious, and delay may darken into loss and rejection, let us take these words as spoken to us in another sense, and hear in them the warning that to-day, if we will hear His voice, we harden not our hearts, and when He says to us, in regard to repentance and faith, and Christian consecration and service, That thou doest, do quickly, let us answer, I made haste and delayed not, but made haste to keep Thy commandments.