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

**JOHN-063**. **FAITH IN GOD AND CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Let not your heart be troubled ... believe in God, believe also in Me."*

*John 14:1*

The twelve were sitting in the upper chamber, stupefied with the dreary, half-understood prospect of Christ's departure. He, forgetting His own burden, turns to comfort and encourage them. These sweet and great words most singularly blend gentleness and dignity. Who can reproduce the cadence of soothing tenderness, soft as a mother's hand, in that Let not your heart be troubled? And who can fail to feel the tone of majesty in that Believe in God, believe also in Me?

The Greek presents an ambiguity in the latter half of the verse, for the verb may be either indicative or imperative, and so we may read four different ways, according as we render each of the two believesin either of these two fashions. Our Authorised and Revised Versions concur in adopting the indicative Ye believein the former clause and the imperative in the latter. But I venture to think that we get a more true and appropriate meaning if we keep both clauses in the same mood, and read them both as imperatives: Believe in God, believe also in Me. It would be harsh, I think, to take one as an affirmation and the other as a command. It would be irrelevant, I think, to remind the disciples of their belief in God. It would break the unity of the verse and destroy the relation of the latter half to the former, the former being a negative precept: Let not your heart be troubled; and the latter being a positive one: Instead of being troubled, believe in God, and believe in Me. So, for all these reasons, I venture to adopt the reading I have indicated.

**I. Now in these words the first thing that strikes me is that Christ here points to Himself as the object of precisely the same religious trust which is to be given to God.**

It is only our familiarity with these words that blinds us to their wonderfulness and their greatness. Try to hear them for the first time, and to bring into remembrance the circumstances in which they were spoken. Here is a man sitting among a handful of His friends, who is within four-and-twenty hours of a shameful death, which to all appearance was the utter annihilation of all His claims and hopes, and He says, Trust in God, and trust in Me! I think that if we had heard that for the first time, we should have understood a little better than some of us do the depth of its meaning.

What is it that Christ asks for here? Or rather let me say, What is it that Christ offers to us here? For we must not look at the words as a demand or as a command, but rather as a merciful invitation to do what it is life and blessing to do. It is a very low and inadequate interpretation of these words which takes them as meaning little more than Believe in God, believe that He is; believe in Me, believe that I am. But it is scarcely less so to suppose that the mere assent of the understanding to His teaching is all that Christ is asking for here. By no means; what He invites us to goes a great deal deeper than that. The essence of it is an act of the will and of the heart, not of the understanding at all. A man may believe in Him as a historical person, may accept all that is said about Him here, and yet not be within sight of the trust in Him of which He here speaks. For the essence of the whole is not the intellectual process of assent to a proposition, but the intensely personal act of yielding up will and heart to a living person. Faith does not grasp a doctrine, but a heart. The trust which Christ requires is the bond that unites souls with Him; and the very life of it is entire committal of myself to Him in all my relations and for all my needs, and absolute utter confidence in Him as all-sufficient for everything that I can require. Let us get away from the cold intellectualism of beliefinto the warm atmosphere of trust, and we shall understand better than by many volumes what Christ here means and the sphere and the power and the blessedness of that faith which Christ requires.

Further, note that, whatever may be this believing in Him which He asks from us or invites us to render, it is precisely the same thing which He bids us render to God. The two clauses in the original bring out that idea even more vividly than in our version, because the order of the words in the latter clause is inverted; and they read literally thus: Believe in God, in Me also believe. The purpose of the inversion is to put these two, God and Christ, as close together as possible; and to put the two identical emotions at the beginning and at the end, at the two extremes and outsides of the whole sentence. Could language be more deliberately adopted and moulded, even in its consecution and arrangement, to enforce this thought, that whatever it is that we give to Christ, it is the very same thing that we give to God? And so He here proposes Himself as the worthy and adequate recipient of all these emotions of confidence, submission, resignation, which make up religion in its deepest sense.

That tone is by no means singular in this place. It is the uniform tone and characteristic of our Lord's teaching. Let me remind you just in a sentence of one or two instances. What did He think of Himself who stood up before the world and, with arms outstretched, like that great white Christ in Thorwaldsen's lovely statue, said to all the troop of languid and burdened and fatigued ones crowding at His feet: Come unto Me all ye that are weary and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest? That surely is a divine prerogative. What did He think of Himself who said, All men should honour the Son even as they honour the Father? What did He think of Himself who, in that very Sermon on the Mount (to which the advocates of a maimed and mutilated Christianity tell us they pin their faith, instead of to mystical doctrines) declared that He Himself was the Judge of humanity, and that all men should stand at His bar and receive from Him according to the deeds done in their body? Upon any honest principle of interpreting these Gospels, and unless you avowedly go picking and choosing amongst His words, accepting this and rejecting that, you cannot eliminate from the scriptural representation of Jesus Christ the fact that He claimed as His own the emotions of the heart to which only God has a right and only God can satisfy.

I do not dwell upon that point, but I say, in one sentence, we have to take that into account if we would estimate the character of Jesus Christ as a Teacher and as a Man. I would not turn away from Him any imperfect conceptions, as they seem to me, of His nature and His work--rather would I foster them, and lead them on to a fuller recognition of the full Christ--but this I am bound to say, that for my part I believe that nothing but the wildest caprice, dealing with the Gospels according to one's own subjective fancies, irrespective altogether of the evidence, can strike out from the teaching of Christ this its characteristic difference. What signalises Him, and separates Him from all other religious teachers, is not the clearness or the tenderness with which He reiterated the truths about the divine Father's love, or about morality, and justice, and truth, and goodness; but the peculiarity of His call to the world is, Believe in Me. And if He said that, or anything like it, and if the representations of His teaching in these four Gospels, which are the only source from which we get any notion of Him at all, are to be accepted, why, then, one of two things follows. Either He was wrong, and then He was a crazy enthusiast, only acquitted of blasphemy because convicted of insanity; or else--or else--He was God, manifest in the flesh. It is vain to bow down before a fancy portrait of a bit of Christ, and to exalt the humble sage of Nazareth, and to leave out the very thing that makes the difference between Him and all others, namely, these either audacious or most true claims to be the Son of God, the worthy Recipient and the adequate Object of man's religious emotions. Believe in God, in Me also believe.

**II. Now, secondly, notice that faith in Christ and faith in God are not two, but one.**

These two clauses on the surface present juxtaposition. Looked at more closely they present interpenetration and identity. Jesus Christ does not merely set Himself up by the side of God, nor are we worshippers of two Gods when we bow before Jesus and bow before the Father; but faith in Christ is faith in God, and faith in God which is not faith in Christ is imperfect, incomplete, and will not long last. To trust in Him is to trust in the Father; to trust in the Father is to trust in Him.

What is the underlying truth that is here? How comes it that these two objects blend into one, like two figures in a stereoscope; and that the faith which flows to Jesus Christ rests upon God? This is the underlying truth, that Jesus Christ, Himself divine, is the divine Revealer of God. I need not dwell upon the latter of these two thoughts: how there is no real knowledge of the real God in the depth of His love, the tenderness of His nature or the lustrousness of His holiness; how there is no certitude; how the God that we see outside of Jesus Christ is sometimes doubt, sometimes hope, sometimes fear, always far-off and vague, an abstraction rather than a person, a stream of tendencywithout us, that which is unnameable, and the like. I need not dwell upon the thought that Jesus Christ has showed us a Father, has brought a God to our hearts whom we can love, whom we can know really though not fully, of whom we can be sure with a certitude which is as deep as the certitude of our own personal being; that He has brought to us a God before whom we do not need to crouch far off, that He has brought to us a God whom we can trust. Very significant is it that Christianity alone puts the very heart of religion in the act of trust. Other religions put it in dread, worship, service, and the like. Jesus Christ alone says, the bond between men and God is that blessed one of trust. And He says so because He alone brings us a God whom it is not ridiculous to tell men to trust.

And, on the other hand, the truth that underlies this is not only that Jesus Christ is the Revealer of God, but that He Himself is divine. Light shines through a window, but the light and the glass that makes it visible have nothing in common with one another. The Godhead shines through Christ, but He is not a mere transparent medium. It is Himself that He is showing us when He is showing us God. He that hath seen Me hath seen--not the light that streams through Me--but hath seen, in Me, the Father. And because He is Himself divine and the divine Revealer, therefore the faith that grasps Him is inseparably one with the faith that grasps God. Men could look upon a Moses, an Isaiah, or a Paul, and in them recognise the eradiation of the divinity that imparted itself through them, but the medium was forgotten in proportion as that which it revealed was beheld. You cannot forget Christ in order to see God more clearly, but to behold Him is to behold God.

And if that be true, these two things follow. One is that all imperfect revelation of God is prophetic of, and leads up towards, the perfect revelation in Jesus Christ. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews gives that truth in a very striking fashion. He compares all other means of knowing God to fragmentary syllables of a great word, of which one was given to one man and another to another. God spoke at sundry times and in manifold portions to the fathers by the prophets; but the whole word is articulately uttered by the Son, in whom He has spoken unto us in these last times. The imperfect revelation, by means of those who were merely mediums for the revelation leads up to Him who is Himself the Revelation, the Revealer, and the Revealed.

And in like manner, all the imperfect faith that, laying hold of other fragmentary means of knowing God, has tremulously tried to trust Him, finds its climax and consummate flower in the full-blossomed faith that lays hold upon Jesus Christ. The unconscious prophecies of heathendom; the trust that select souls up and down the world have put in One whom they dimly apprehended; the faith of the Old Testament saints; the rudimentary beginnings of a knowledge of God and of a trust in Him which are found in men to-day, and amongst us, outside of the circle of Christianity--all these things are as manifestly incomplete as a building reared half its height, and waiting for the corner-stone to be brought forth, the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ, and the intelligent and full acceptance of Him and faith in Him.

And another thing is true, that without faith in Christ such faith in God as is possible is feeble, incomplete, and will not long last. Historically a pure theism is all but impotent. There is only one example of it on a large scale in the world, and that is a kind of bastard Christianity--Mohammedanism; and we all know what good that is as a religion. There are plenty of people amongst us nowadays who claim to be very advanced thinkers, and who call themselves Theists, and not Christians. Well, I venture to say that that is a phase that will not last. There is little substance in it. The God whom men know outside of Jesus Christ is a poor, nebulous thing; an idea, not a reality. He, or rather It, is a film of cloud shaped into a vague form, through which you can see the stars. It has little power to restrain. It has less to inspire and impel. It has still less to comfort; it has least of all to satisfy the heart. You will have to get something more substantial than the far-off god of an unchristian Theism if you mean to sway the world and to satisfy men's hearts.

And so, dear brethren, I come to this--perhaps the word may be fitting for some that listen to me--Believe in God, and that you may, believe also in Christ. For sure I am that when the stress comes, and you want a god, unless your god is the God revealed in Jesus Christ, he will be a powerless deity. If you have not faith in Christ, you will not long have faith in God that is vital and worth anything.

**III. Lastly, this trust in Christ is the secret of a quiet heart.**

It is of no use to say to men, Let not your hearts be troubled, unless you finish the verse and say, Believe in God, believe also in Christ. For unless we trust we shall certainly be troubled. The state of man in this world is like that of some of those sunny islands in southern seas, around which there often rave the wildest cyclones, and which carry in their bosoms, beneath all their riotous luxuriance of verdant beauty, hidden fires, which ever and anon shake the solid earth and spread destruction. Storms without and earthquakes within--that is the condition of humanity. And where is the restto come from? All other defences are weak and poor. We have heard about pills against earthquakes. That is what the comforts and tranquillising which the world supplies may fairly be likened to. Unless we trust we are, and we shall be, and should be, troubled.

If we trust we may be quiet. Trust is always tranquillity. To cast a burden off myself on othersshoulders is always a rest. But trust in Jesus Christ brings infinitude on my side. Submission is repose. When we cease to kick against the pricks they cease to prick and wound us. Trust opens the heart, like the windows of the Ark tossing upon the black and fatal flood, for the entrance of the peaceful dove with the olive branch in its mouth. Trust brings Christ to my side in all His tenderness and greatness and sweetness. If I trust, all is right that seems most wrong. If I trust, conscience is quiet. If I trust, life becomes a solemn scorn of ills. If I trust, inward unrest is changed into tranquillity, and mad passions are cast out from him that sits clothed and in his right mindat the feet of Jesus.

The wicked is like the troubled sea which cannot rest. But if I trust, my soul will become like the glassy ocean when all the storms sleep, and birds of peace sit brooding on the charmed wave. Peace I leave with you. Let not your hearts be troubled. Trust in God; trust also in Me.

Help us, O Lord! to yield our hearts to Thy dear Son, and in Him to find Thyself and eternal rest.