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

**JOHN-064**. **MANY MANSIONS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"In My Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you."*

*John 14:2*

Sorrow needs simple words for its consolation; and simple words are the best clothing for the largest truths. These eleven poor men were crushed and desolate at the thought of Christ's going; they fancied that if He left them they lost Him. And so, in simple, childlike words, which the weakest could grasp, and in which the most troubled could find peace, He said to them, after having encouraged their trust in Him, There is plenty of room for you as well as for Me where I am going; and the frankness of our intercourse in the past might make you sure that if I were going to leave you I would have told you all about it. Did I ever hide from you anything that was painful? Did I ever allure you to follow Me by false promises? Should I have kept silence about it if our separation was to be eternal?So, simply, as a mother might hush her babe upon her breast, He soothes their sorrow. And yet, in the quiet words, so level to the lowest apprehension, there lie great truths, far deeper than we yet have appreciated, and which will enfold themselves in their majesty and their greatness through eternity. In My Father's house are many mansions; if it were not so, I would have told you.

**I. Now note in these words, first, the Father's house, and its ample room.**

There is only one other occasion recorded in which our Lord used this expression, and it occurs in this same Gospel near the beginning; where in the narrative of the first cleansing of the Temple we read that He said, Make not My Father's house a house of merchandise. The earlier use of the words may help to throw light upon one aspect of this latter employment of it, for there blend in the image the two ideas of what I may call domestic familiarity, and of that great future as being the reality of which the earthly Temple was intended to be the dim prophecy and shadow. Its courts, its many chambers, its ample porches with room for thronging worshippers, represented in some poor way the wide sweep and space of that higher house; and the sense of Sonship, which drew the Boy to His Father's house in the earliest hours of conscious childhood, speaks here.

Think for a moment of how sweet and familiar the conception of heaven as the Father's house makes it to us. There is something awful, even to the best and holiest souls, in the thought of even the glories beyond. The circumstances of death, which is its portal, our utter unacquaintance with all that lies behind the veil, the terrible silence and distance which falls upon our dearest ones as they are sucked into the cloud, all tend to make us feel that there is much that is solemn and awful even in the thought of eternal future blessedness. But how it is all softened when we say, My Father's house. Most of us have long since left behind us the sweet security, the sense of the absence of all responsibility, the assurance of defence and provision, which used to be ours when we lived as children in a father's house here. But we may all look forward to the renewal, in far nobler form, of these early days, when the father's house meant the inexpugnable fortress where no evil could befall us, the abundant home where all wants were supplied, and where the shyest and timidest child could feel at ease and secure. It is all coming again, brother, and amidst the august and unimaginable glories of that future the old feeling of being little children, nestling safe in the Father's house, will fill our quiet hearts once more.

And then consider how the conception of that Future as the Father's house suggests answers to so many of our questions about the relationship of the inmates to one another. Are they to dwell isolated in their several mansions? Is that the way in which children in a home dwell with each other? Surely if He be the Father, and heaven be His house, the relation of the redeemed to one another must have in it more than all the sweet familiarity and unrestrained frankness which subsists in the families of earth. A solitary heaven would be but half a heaven, and would ill correspond with the hopes that inevitably spring from the representation of it as my Father's house.

But consider further that this great and tender name for heaven has its deepest meaning in the conception of it as a spiritual state of which the essential elements are the loving manifestation and presence of God as Father, the perfect consciousness of sonship, the happy union of all the children in one great family, and the derivation of all their blessedness from their Elder Brother.

The earthly Temple, to which there is some allusion in this great metaphor, was the place in which the divine glory was manifested to seeking souls, though in symbol, yet also in reality, and the representation of our text blends the two ideas of the free, frank intercourse of the home and of the magnificent revelations of the Holy of holies. Under either aspect of the phrase, whether we think of my Father's houseas temple or as home, it sets before us, as the main blessedness and glory of heaven, the vision of the Father, the consciousness of sonship, and the complete union with Him. There are many subsidiary and more outward blessednesses and glories which shine dimly through the haze of metaphors and negations, by which alone a state of which we have no experience can be revealed to us; but these are secondary. The heaven of heaven is the possession of God the Father through the Son in the expanding spirits of His sons. The sovereign and filial position which Jesus Christ in His manhood occupies in that higher house, and which He shares with all those who by Him have received the adoption of sons, is the very heart and nerve of this great metaphor.

But I think we must go a step further than that, and recognise that in the image there is inherent the teaching that that glorious future is not merely a state, but also a place. Local associations are not to be divorced from the words; and although we can say but little about such a matter, yet everything in the teaching of Scripture points to the thought that howsoever true it may be that the essence of heaven is condition, yet that also heaven has a local habitation, and is a place in the great universe of God. Jesus Christ has at this moment a human body, glorified. That body, as Scripture teaches us, is somewhere, and where He is there shall also His servant be. In the context He goes on to tell us that He goes to prepare a place for us, and though I would not insist upon the literal interpretation of such words, yet distinctly the drift of the representation is in the direction of localising, though not of materialising, the abode of the blessed. So I think we can say, not merely that what He is that shall also His servants be, but that where He is there shall also His servants be. And from the representation of my text, though we cannot fathom all its depths, we can at least grasp this, which gives solidity and reality to our contemplations of the future, that heaven is a place, full of all sweet security and homelike repose, where God is made known in every heart and to every consciousness as a loving Father, and of which all the inhabitants are knit together in the frankest fraternal intercourse, conscious of the Father's love, and rejoicing in the abundant provisions of His royal House.

And then there is a second thought to be suggested from these words, and that is of the ample room in this great house. The original purpose of the words of my text, as I have already reminded you, was simply to soothe the fears of a handful of disciples.

There was room where Christ went for eleven poor men. Yes, room enough for them! but Christ's prescient eye looked down the ages, and saw all the unborn millions that would yet be drawn to Him uplifted on the Cross, and some glow of satisfaction flitted across His sorrow, as He saw from afar the result of the impending travail of His soul in the multitudes by whom God's heavenly house should yet be filled. Many mansions!the thought widens out far beyond our grasp. Perhaps that upper room, like most of the roof-chambers in Jewish houses, was open to the skies, and whilst He spoke, the innumerable lights that blaze in that clear heaven shone down upon them, and He may have pointed to these. The better Abraham perhaps looked forth, like His prototype, on the starry heavens, and saw in the vision of the future those who through Him should receive the adoption of sonsand dwell for ever in the house of the Lord, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the seashore innumerable.

Ah! brethren, if we could only widen our measurement of the walls of the New Jerusalem to the measurement of that golden rod which the man, that is the angel, as John says, applied to it, we should understand how much bigger it is than any of these poor sects and communities of ours here on earth. If we would lay to heart, as we ought to do, the deep meaning of that indefinite manyin my text, it would rebuke our narrowness. There will be a great many occupants of the mansions in heaven that Christian men here on earth--the most Catholic of them--will be very much surprised to see there, and thousands will find their entrance there that never found their entrance into any communities of so-called Christians here on earth.

That one word manyshould deepen our confidence in the triumphs of Christ's Cross, and it may be used to heighten our own confidence as to our own poor selves. A chamber in the great Temple waits for each of us, and the question is, Shall we occupy it, or shall we not? The old Rabbis had a tradition which, like a great many of their apparently foolish sayings, covers in picturesque guise a very deep truth. They said that, however many the throngs of worshippers who came up to Jerusalem at the passover, the streets of the city and the courts of the sanctuary were never crowded. And so it is with that great city. There is room for all. There are throngs, but no crowds. Each finds a place in the ample sweep of the Father's house, like some of the great palaces that barbaric Eastern kings used to build, in whose courts armies might encamp, and the chambers of which were counted by the thousand. And surely in all that ample accommodation, you and I may find some corner where we, if we will, may lodge for evermore.

I do not dwell upon subsidiary ideas that may be drawn from the expressions. Mansionsmeans places of permanent abode, and suggests the two thoughts, so sweet to travellers and toilers in this fleeting, labouring life, of unchangeableness and of repose. Some have supposed that the variety in the attainments of the redeemed, which is reasonable and scriptural, might be deduced from our text, but that does not seem to be relevant to our Lord's purpose.

One other suggestion may be made without enlarging upon it. There is only one other occasion in this Gospel in which the word here translated mansionsis employed, and it is this: We will come and make our abode with him. Our mansion is in God; God's dwelling-place is in us. So ask yourselves, Have you a place in that heavenly home? When prodigal children go away from the father's house, sometimes a broken-hearted parent will keep the boy's room just as it used to be when he was young and pure, and will hope and weary through long days for him to come back and occupy it again. God is keeping a room for you in His house; do you see that you fill it.

**II. In the next place, note here the sufficiency of Christ's revelation for our needs.**

If it were not so I would have told you. He sets Himself forward in very august fashion as being the Revealer and Opener of that house for us. There is a singular tone about all our Lord's few references to the future--a tone of decisiveness; not as if He were speaking, as a man might do, that which he had thought out, or which had come to him, but as if He was speaking of what he had Himself beheld, We speak that we do know, and testify that we have seen. He stands like one on a mountain top, looking down into the valleys beyond, and telling His comrades in the plain behind Him what He sees. He speaks of that unseen world always as One who had been in it, and who was reporting experiences, and not giving forth opinions. His knowledge was the knowledge of One who dwelt with the Father, and left the house in order to find and bring back His wandering brethren. It was His own calm home, His habitation from eternity, and therefore He could tell us with decisiveness, with simplicity, with assurance, all which we need to know about the geography of that unknown land--the plan of that, by us unvisited, house. Very remarkable, therefore, is it, that with this tone there should be such reticence in Christ's references to the future. The text implies the rationale of such reticence. If it were not so I would have told you. I tell you all that you need, though I tell you a great deal less than you sometimes wish.

The gaps in our knowledge of the future, seeing that we have such a Revealer as we have in Christ, are remarkable. But my text suggests this to us--we have as much as we need. I know, and many of you know, by bitter experience, how many questions, the answers to which would seem to us to be such a lightening of our burdens, our desolated and troubled hearts suggest about that future, and how vainly we ply heaven with questions and interrogate the unreplying Oracle. But we know as much as we need. We know that God is there. We know that it is the Father's house. We know that Christ is in it. We know that the dwellers there are a family. We know that sweet security and ample provision are there; and, for the rest, if we I needed to have heard more, He would have told us.

My knowledge of that life is small,

The eye of faith is dim;

But tis enough that Christ knows all;

And I shall be with Him.

Let the gaps remain. The gaps are part of the revelation, and we know enough for faith and hope.

May we not widen the application of that thought to other matters than to our bounded and fragmentary conceptions of a future life? In times like the present, of doubt and unrest, it is a great piece of Christian wisdom to recognise the limitations of our knowledge and the sufficiency of the fragments that we have. What do we get a revelation for? To solve theological puzzles and dogmatic difficulties? to inflate us with the pride of quasi-omniscience? or to present to us God in Christ for faith, for love, for obedience, for imitation? Surely the latter, and for such purposes we have enough.

So let us recognise that our knowledge is very partial. A great stretch of wall is blank, and there is not a window in it. If there had been need for one, it would have been struck out. He has been pleased to leave many things obscure, not arbitrarily, so as to try our faith--for the implication of the words before us is that the relation between Him and us binds Him to the utmost possible frankness, and that all which we need and He can tell us He does tell--but for high reasons, and because of the very conditions of our present environment, which forbid the more complete and all-round knowledge.

So let us recognise our limitations. We know in part, and we are wise if we affirm in part. Hold by the Central Light, which is Jesus Christ. Many things did Jesus which are not written in this book, and many gaps and deficiencies from a human point of view exist in the contexture of revelation. But these are written that ye may believe that Jesus is the Christ, for which enough has been told us, and that, believing, ye may have life in His name. If that purpose be accomplished in us, God will not have spoken, nor we have heard, in vain. Let us hold by the Central Light, and then the circumference of darkness will gradually retreat, and a wider sphere of illumination be ours, until the day when we enter our mansion in the Father's house, and then in Thy Light shall we see light; and we shall know even as we are known.

Let your Elder Brother lead you back, dear friend, to the Father's bosom, and be sure that if you trust Him and listen to Him, you will know enough on earth to turn earth into a foretaste of Heaven, and will find at last your place in the Father's house beside the Brother who has prepared it for you.