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

**JOHN-066**. **THE WAY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And whither I go ye know, and the way ye know. Thomas saith unto Him, Lord, we know not whither Thou goest; and how can we know the way? Jesus saith unto him, I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life: no man cometh unto the Father, but by Me. If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also: and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him."*

*John 14:4-7*

Our Lord has been speaking of His departure, of its purpose, of His return as guaranteed by that purpose, and of His servantseternal and perfect reunion with Him. But even these cheering and calming thoughts do not exhaust His consolations, as they did not satisfy all the disciplesneeds. They might still have said, Yes; we believe that You will come back again, and we believe that we shall be together; but what about the parenthesis of absence?And here is the answer, or at least part of it: Whither I go ye know, and the way ye know; or, if we adopt the shortened form which the Revised Version gives us, Whither I go ye know the way.

When you say to a man, You know the way, you mean Come. And in these words there lie, as it seems to me, a veiled invitation to the disciples to come to Him before He came back for them, and the assurance that they, though separated, might still find and tread the road to the Father's house, and so be with Him still. They are not left desolate. The Christ who is absent is present as the path to Himself. And so the parenthesis is bridged across. Now in these verses we have several large and important lessons which I think may best be drawn by simply seeking to follow their course.

**I. Observe the disciples unconscious knowledge.**

Jesus Christ says: Ye know the way and ye know the goal. One of them ventures flatly to contradict Him, and to traverse both assertions with a brusque and thorough-going negative. We do not know whither Thou goest, says Thomas; how can we know the way?He is the same man in this conversation that we find him in the interview before our Lord's journey to raise Lazarus, and in the interview after our Lord's resurrection. In all three cases he appears as mainly under the dominion of sense, as slow to apprehend anything beyond its limits, as morbidly melancholy and disposed to take the blackest possible view of things--a practical pessimist--and yet with a certain kind of frank outspokenness which half redeems the other characteristics from blame. He could not understand all the Lord's deep words just spoken. His mind was befogged and dimmed, and he blurts out his ignorance, knowing that the best place to carry it to is to the Illuminator who can make it light.

We know not whither Thou goest, and how can we know the way?Was Jesus right? was Thomas right? or were they both right? The fact is that Thomas and all his fellows knew, after a fashion, but they did not know that they knew. They had heard much in the past as to where Christ was going. Plainly enough it had been rung in their ears over and over again. It had made some kind of lodgment in their heads, and, in that sense, they did know. It is this unused and unconscious knowledge of theirs to which Christ appeals, and which He tries to draw out into consciousness and power when He says, You know whither I am going, and you know the road. Is not that exactly what a patient teacher will do with some flustered child when he says to it: Take time! You know it well enough if you will only think? So the Master says here: Do not be agitated and troubled in heart. Reflect, remember, overhaul your stores, and think what I have told you over and over again, and you will find that you do know whither I am going, and that you do know the way.

The patient gentleness of the Master with the slowness of the scholars is beautifully exemplified here, as is also the method, which He lovingly and patiently adopts, of sending men back to consult their own consciousness as illuminated by His teaching, and to see whether there is not lying somewhere, unrecked of and unemployed in some dusty corner of their mind, a truth that only needs to be dragged out and cleaned in order to show itself for what it is, the all-sufficient light and strength for the moment's need.

The dialogue is an instance of what is true about us all, that we have in our possession truths given to us by Jesus Christ, the whole sweep and bearing of which, the whole majesty and power and illuminating capacity of which, we do not dream of yet. How much in our creeds lies dim and undeveloped! Time and circumstances and some sore agony of spirit are needed in order to make us realise the riches that we possess, and the certitudes to which our troubled spirits may cling; and the practice of far more patient, honest, profound meditation and reflection than finds favour with the average Christian man is needed, too, in order that the truths possessed may be possessed, and that we may know what we know, and understand the things that are given to us of God.

In all your creeds, there are large tracts that you, in some kind of a fashion, do believe; and yet they have no vitality in your consciousness nor power in your lives. And the Master here does with these disciples exactly what He is trying to do day by day with us, namely, fling us back on ourselves, or rather upon His revelation in us, and get us to fathom its depths and to walk round about its magnitudes, and so to understand the things that we say we believe.

All our knowledge is ignorance. Ignorance that confesses itself to Him is in the way of becoming knowledge. His light will touch the smoke and change it into red spires of flame. If you do not know, go to Him and say, Lord! I do not. An accurate understanding of where the darkness lies is the first step to the light. We are meant to carry all our inadequate and superficial realisations of His truth into His presence, that, from Him, we may gain deeper knowledge, a firmer faith, and a more joyous certitude in His inexhaustible lessons. In every article and item of the Christian faith there is a transcendent element which surpasses our present comprehension. Let us be confident that the light will break; and let us welcome the new illumination when it comes, sure that it comes from God. Be not puffed up with the conceit that you know all. Be sure of this, that, according to the good old metaphor, we are but as children on the shore of the great ocean, gathering a few of the shells that it has washed to our feet, itself stretching boundless, and, thank God, sunlit, before us. Ye know the way. Master, we know not the way.

**II. Observe here, in the second place, our Lord's great self-revelation which meets this unconscious knowledge.**

Jesus saith unto him: I am the Way, the Truth, and the Life; no man cometh unto the Father but by Me. Now it is quite plain, I think, from the whole strain of the context and the purpose of these words that the main idea in them is the first--I am the Way. And that is made more certain because of the last words of the verse, which, summing up the force of the three preceding assertions, dwell only upon the metaphor of the Way; No man cometh unto the Father but by Me. So that of these three great words, the Way, the Truth, the Life, we are to regard the second and the third as explanatory of the first. They are not co-ordinate, but the first is the more general, and the other two show how the first comes to be true. I am the Waybecause I am the Truth and the Life.

There are no words of the Master, perhaps, to which my previous remarks are more necessary to be applied than these. We know; and yet oh! what an overplus of glory and of depth is here that we do not know and never can know. The most fragmentary and inadequate grasp of them with heart and mind will bring light to the mind and quietness and peace to the heart; but the whole meaning of them goes beyond men and angels. We can only skim the surface and seek to shift back the boundaries of our knowledge a little further, and to embrace within its limits a little more of the broad land into which the words bring us. So just take a thought or two which may tend in that direction.

Note, then, as belonging to all three of these clauses that remarkable I am. We show a way, Christ is it. We speak truth, Christ is it. Parents impart life, which they have received, Christ is Life. He separates Himself from all men by that representation that He is not merely the communicator or the teacher or the guide, but that He Himself is, in His own personal Being, Way, Truth, Life. He said that, when Calvary was within arm's-length. What did He think about Himself, and what should we think of Him?

And then note, further, that He sets forth His unique relation to the truth as being one ground on which He is the Way to God. He is the Truth in reference to the divine nature. That Truth, then, is not a mere matter of words. It is not only His speech that teaches us, but Himself that shows us God. His whole life and character, His personality, are the true representation within human conditions of the Invisible God; and when He says, I am the Way and the Truth, He is saying substantially the same thing as the great prologue of this Gospel says when it calls Him the Word and the Light of men, and as Paul says when he names Him the Image of the Invisible God. There is all the difference between talking about God and showing Him. Men reveal God by their words; Christ reveals Him by Himself and the facts of His life. The truest and highest representation of the divine nature that men can ever have is in the face of Jesus Christ.

I need only remind you in a sentence about other and lower applications of this great saying, which do not, as I think, enter into the purpose of the context. He is the Truth, inasmuch as, in the life and historical manifestation of Jesus Christ as recorded in the Scriptures, men find foundation truths of a moral and spiritual sort. Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are noble, whatsoever things are lovely and of good report, He is these, and all true ethics is but the formulating into principles of all the facts of the life and character of Jesus Christ.

Further, my text says He is the Way because He is the Life. On the one side God is brought to all hearts, and in some real sense to our comprehension, by the life of Jesus Christ, and so He is the Way. But that is not enough. There must be an action upon us as well as an action having reference to the divine nature. God is brought to men by the manifestation in Christ; and we, the dead, are quickened by the communication of the Life. The one phrase points to all His work as a Revealer, the other points to all His work upon us as life-giving Spirit, a Quickener and an Inspirer. Dead men cannot walk a road. It is of no use to make a path if it starts from a cemetery. Christ taught that men apart from Him are dead, and that the only life that they can have by which they can be knit to God is the divine life which was in Himself, and of which He is the source and the principle for the whole world. He does not tell us here what yet is true, and what He abundantly tells in other parts of this great conversation, that the only way by which the life which He brings can be diffused and communicated is by His death. Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone. He is the Life, and--paradox of mystery and yet fact which is the very heart and centre of His Gospel--His only way of giving His life to us is by giving up His physical life for us. He must die that He may be the life-spring for the world. The alabaster box must be broken if the ointment and its fragrance are to be poured out; and death is the gate of lifein a deeper than the ordinary sense of the saying, inasmuch as the death of the Life which is Christ is the life of the death which we are.

And so, because, on the one hand, He brings a God to our hearts that we can love and trust, and because, on the other, He communicates to our spirits, dead in the only true death which is the separation from God by sin, the life by which we are knit to God, He is the Way to the Father.

And what about people that never heard of Him, to whom that Way has been closed, to whom that Truth has never been manifested, to whom that Life has never been brought? Ah! Christ has other ways of working than through His historical manifestation, for there is no truth more plainly taught in this great fourth Gospel than this, that that Light lighteth every man that cometh into the world. The eternal Word works through all the earth, in ways beyond our ken, and wherever any man has, however imperfectly, felt after and grasped the thought of a Father in the heavens, there the Word, which is the Light of men, has wrought.

But for us to whom this Book has come, for what people call in bitter irony Christendom, the law of my text rigidly applies, and it is being worked out all round us to-day. No man cometh unto the Father but by Me. And here we are, in this England of ours, and in our sister nations on the continent of Europe and in America, face to face as I believe with this alternative--either Jesus Christ the Revealer of God and the Life of men, or an empty Heaven. And for you, individually, it is either--take Christ for the Way, or wander in the wilderness and forget your Father. It is either--take Christ for the Truth, or be given over to the insufficiencies of mere natural, political, and intellectual truths, and the shows and illusions of time and sense. It is either--take Christ for your Life, or remain in your deadness, separate from God.

**III. Lastly, we have here the disciples' ignorance and the new vision which dispels it.**

If ye had known Me, ye should have known My Father also, and from henceforth ye know Him, and have seen Him. Our Lord accepts for the moment Thomas's standpoint. He supplements His former allegation of the disciplesknowledge with the admission of the ignorance which went with it as its shadow, and was only too sadly and plainly shown by their failure to discern in Him the manifestation of the Father. He has just told them that they did know what they thought they knew not; He now tells them that they did not know what they thought they knew so well, after so many years of companionship--even Himself. The proof that they did not is that they did not know the Father as revealed in Him, nor Him as revealing the Father. If they missed that, they missed everything; and for all they had known of His graciousness, were strangers to His truest Self. Their ignorance would turn out knowledge, if they would think, and their supposed knowledge would turn out ignorance.

The lesson for us is that the true test of the completeness and worth of our knowledge of Christ lies in its being knowledge of God the Father, brought near to us by Him. This saying puts a finger on the radical deficiency of all merely humanitarian views of Christ's person, however clearly they may see and admiringly extol the beauty of His character and the sweet reasonablenessof His wisdom. They all break down here, and are arraigned as so shallow and incomplete that they do not deserve to be called knowledge of Him at all. If you know anything about Jesus Christ rightly, this is what you know about Him, that in Him you see God. If you have not seen God in Him, you have not got to the heart of the mystery. The knowledge of Christ which stops with the Man and the Martyr, and the Teacher and the beautiful, gentle Brother, is knowledge so partial that even He cannot venture to call it other than ignorance. Oh! brethren, do our conceptions of Him meet this test which He Himself has laid down, and can we say that, seeing Him, we see in Him God?

And then our Lord passes on to another thought, the new vision which at the moment was being granted to this unconscious ignorance that was passing into conscious knowledge. From henceforth ye know Him and have seen Him. We must give that from henceforth, as a note of time, a somewhat liberal interpretation, and apply it to the whole series of utterances and deeds of which the words of our text are but a portion. And, if so, we come to this--it was in the wisdom, and the gentleness, and the deep truths of that upper chamber; it was in the agony and submission of Gethsemane; it was in the meek patience before the judges, and the silent acceptance of ignominy and shame; it was in the willing, loving endurance of the long hours upon the Cross, that Christ inaugurated the new stage in His revelation of God and in His life-giving to the world. And it is from thenceforth and thereby that in the man Jesus, men know and see the Fatheras they never did before. The Cross and the Passion of Christ are the unveiling to the world of the heart of God; and by the side of that new vision the fairest and the loftiest and the sweetest of Christ's former manifestations and utterances sink into comparative insignificance. It is the dying Christ that reveals the living God.

So, dear friends, He is your way to God. See that ye seek the Father by Him alone. He is your Truth; grapple Him to your hearts, and by patient meditation and continual faithfulness enrich yourselves with all the communicated treasures that you have already received in Him. He is your Life; cleave to Him, that the quick Spirit that was in Him may pass into you and make you victors over all deaths, temporal and eternal. Know Him as a Friend, not as a mere historical person, or with mere head-knowledge, for to know a friend is something far deeper than to know a truth. Acquaint thyself with Him and be at peace. This is life eternal, to know, with the knowledge which is life and possession, Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent.