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

**JOHN-068**. **CHRIST'S WORKS AND OURS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"12.* *Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also; and greater works than these shall he do; because I go unto My Father. 13. And whatsoever ye shall ask in My name, that will I do, that the Father may be glorified in the Son. 14. If ye shall ask any thing in My name, I will do it."*

*John 14:12-14*

I have already pointed out in a previous sermon that the key-word of this context is Believe! In three successive verses we find it, each time widening in its application. We have first the question to the single disciple: Philip! believest thou not? We have then the invitation addressed to the whole group: Believe Me!And here we have a wholly general expression referring to all who, in every generation and corner of the world, put their trust in Christ, and extending the sunshine of this great promise to whosoever believeth in Him. Our Lord has pointed to believing as the great antidote to a troubled heart, as the sure way of knowing the Father, as the better substitute for sight; and now here He opens before us still more wonderful prerogatives and effects of faith. His words carry us up into lofty and misty regions, where we can neither breathe freely nor see clearly, except as we hold to His words. Therefore He prefaces them with His Verily, verily!bidding us listen to them with sharpened attention as the disclosure of something wonderful, and receive them with unfaltering confidence, on His authority, however marvellous and otherwise undiscoverable they may be.

What is it, then, that He thus commends to our acceptance? If I may venture a paraphrase which may at least have the advantage of being cast into less familiar words, it is just this, that because of, and after, Christ's departure from earth, He will, in response to prayer, work upon faithful souls in such a fashion as that they will do what He did, and in some sense will do even more.

**I. We have here the continuous work of the exalted Lord for and through His servants.**

These disciples, of course, were trembling and oppressed with the thought that the departure of Jesus would be the end of His ceaseless activity for them, on which they had depended implicitly for so long. Henceforward, whatever distress or need might come, that Voice would be silent, and that Hand motionless, and they would be left to face every storm, uncompanioned and uncounselled. Some of us know how dreary such experience makes life, and we can understand how these men shrank from the prospect. Christ's words give strength to meet that trial, and not only tell them that after He is gone they will be able to do what they cannot do now, and what He used to do for them, but that in them He will work as well as for them, and be the power of their action, after He has departed.

For, notice the remarkable connection of the words with which we are dealing. He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do, and the ground of that is because I go to My Father, and whatsoever the believer shall ask, I will do.

So, then, there are here two very distinct paths on which Christ represents to us that His future activity will travel; the one, that of doing for us, in response to our prayers; the other that of working on us and in us, so that our acts are His and His acts are ours. We may look at these two for a moment separately.

Here, then, there is clearly stated this great thought, that Christ's removal from the world is not the end of His activity in the world and on material things, but that, absent, He still is a present power, and having passed through death, and been removed from sense, He can still operate upon the things round us, and move these according to His will. We are not to water down such words as these into any such thought as that the continuous influence of the memory and history of His past will be a present power in all ages.

That is true, gloriously and uniquely true, but that is not the truth which He speaks here. Over and above that perpetual influence of past recorded work, there is the present influence of His present work, and to-day He is working as truly as He wrought when on earth. One form of His work was finished on Calvary, as His dying breath proclaimed; but there is another work of Christ in the midst of the ages, moving the pawns on the chessboard of the world, and presiding over the fortunes of the solemn conflict, which will not be ended until that day when the angel voices shall chant, It is done! The kingdoms of the world are the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ. The living Christ works by a true forth-putting of His own present power upon material things, and amidst the providences of life. And therefore these disciples were not to be cast down as if His work for them were ended.

Now it is clear, of course, that such words as these do demand for their vindication something perfectly unique and solitary in the nature and person of Jesus Christ. All other men's work is cut in twain by death. This man, having served his generation by the will of God, fell on sleep and was gathered to his fathers, and saw corruption, that is the epitaph over the greatest thinkers, statesmen, heroes, poets, the epitaph for the tenderest and most hopeful. Father, mother, husband, wife, child, friend, all cease to act when they die, and though thunders should break, they are silent and can help no more. But Christ is living to-day, and working all around us.

Now, brethren, it is of the last importance for the joyousness of our Christian lives, and for the courage of our conflict with sorrow and sin, that we should give a very prominent place in our creeds, and our hearts, to this great truth of a living Christ. What a joyful sense of companionship it brings to the solitary, what calmness of vision in contemplating the complications and calamities of the world's history, if we grasp firmly the assurance that the living Christ is actually working by the present forth-putting of His power in the world to-day!

But that is not all. There is another path on which our Lord shows us here a glimpse of His working, not only for us, but on and in and therefore through us, so that the deeds that we do in faith that rests upon Him are in one aspect His, and in another ours.

The works that I do shall He do also; because whatsoever ye shall ask I will do it.

We have not to think only of a Lord whose activity for us, beneficent and marvellous as it is, was finished in the misty past upon the Cross, nor have we only to think of a Lord whose activity for us, mighty and comforting as it is to all the solitary and struggling, is wrought as from the heights of the heavens, but we have to think of One who is beside us and in us and knows the hidden paths that no eye sees, and no foot but His can tread, into the inmost recesses of our souls, and there can enter as King and righteousness, as life and strength. This is the deepest of the lessons that He would teach us here. I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, and through me, if I keep close to Him, will work mightily in forms that my poor manhood could never have reached. The emblem of the vine and the branches, and the other emblem of the house and its inhabitants, and the other of the head and the members, all point to this one same thing which shallow and unspiritual men call mystical, but which is the very heart of the Christian prerogative and the anchor of the Christian hope. Christ in us is our present righteousness and our hope of a future glory.

And now mark that a still more solemn and mysterious aspect of this union of Jesus Christ and the believer is given, since it is set forth as resulting in our doing Christ's works, and Christ doing ours; and therein is paralleled with the yet more wonderful and ineffable union between the Father and the Son. It is no accident that in one clause He says, I am in the Father, and the Father in Me. The words that I speak unto you I speak not of Myself, but the Father that dwelleth in Me, He doeth the works; and that in the next He says, The works that I do shall he do also; and so bids us see in that union between the Father and the Son, and in that consequent union of co-operation between Him and His Father, a pattern after which our union with Him is to be moulded, both as regards the closeness of its intimacy and as regards the resulting manifestations in life. Christ is in us and we in Christ in some measure as the Son is in the Father and the Father in the Son. And the works that we do He does in some fashion that faintly echoes and shadows the perfect co-operation of the Father and the Son in the works that the Christ did upon the earth.

All the doings of a Christian man, if done in faith, and holding by Christ, are Christ's doings, inasmuch as He is the life and the power which does them all. And Christ's deeds are reproduced and perpetuated in His humble follower, inasmuch as the life which is imparted will unfold itself according to its own kind; and he that loves Christ will be changed into His likeness, and become a partaker of His Spirit. So let us curb all self-dependence and self-will, that that mighty tide may flow into us; and let us cast from us all timidity, distrust, and gloom, and be strong in the assurance that we have a Christ living in the heavens to work for us, and living within us to work through us.

There is no record of the Ascension in John's Gospel, but these words of my text unveil to us the inmost meaning of that Ascension, and are in full accord with the great picture which one of the Evangelists has drawn--a picture in two halves, which yet are knit together into one. So then, after He had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat at the right hand of God; and they went forth and preached everywhere. What a contrast between the two--the repose above, the toil below! Yes! But the next words knit them together--The Lord also working with them, and confirming the word with signs following.

**II. Note, in the next place, the greater work of the servants on and for whom the Lord works.**

Greater works than these shall he do. Is, then, the servant greater than his Lord, and he that is sent greater than He that sent him? Not so, for whatsoever the servant does is done because the Lord is with and in him, and the contrast that is drawn between the works that Christ does on earth and the greater works that the servant is to do hereafter is, properly and at bottom, the contrast between Christ's manifestations in the time of His earthly limitation and humiliation, and His manifestations in the time of His Ascension and celestial glory.

We need not be afraid that such great words as these in any measure trench on the unique and unapproachable character of the earthly work of Christ in its two aspects, which are one--of Revelation and Redemption. These are finished, and need no copy, no repetition, no perpetuation, until the end of time. But the work of objective Revelation, which was completed when He ascended, and the work of Redemption which was finished when He rose--these require to be applied through the ages. And it is in regard to the application of the finished work of Christ to the actual accomplishment of its contemplated consequences, that the comparison is drawn between the limited sphere and the small results of Christ's work upon earth, and the worldwide sweep and majestic magnitude of the results of the application of that work by His servantswitnessing work. The wider and more complete spiritual results achieved by the ministration of the servants than by the ministration of the Lord is the point of comparison here. And I need only remind you that the poorest Christian who can go to a brother soul, and by word or life can draw that soul to a Christ whom it apprehends as dying for its sins and raised for its glorifying, does a mightier thing than it was possible for the Master to do by life or lip whilst He was here upon earth. For the Redemption had to be completed in act before it could be proclaimed in word; and Christ had no such weapon in His hands with which to draw men's souls, and cast down the high places of evil, as we have when we can say, We testify unto you that the Son of God hath died for our sins, and is raised again according to the Scriptures. Nor need I do more than remind you of the comparison, so exalting for His humility and so humbling for our self-exaltation, between the narrow sphere in which His earthly ministrations had to operate and the worldwide scope which is given to His servants. He laid His hands on a few sick folk, and healed them; and at the end of His life there were one hundred and twenty disciples in Jerusalem and five hundred in Galilee, and you might have put them all into this chapel and had ample room to spare. That was all that Jesus Christ had done; while to-day and now the world is being leavened and the kingdoms of the earth are beginning to recognise His name. Greater works than these shall he dowho lets Christ in him do all His works.

**III. Lastly, notice the conditions on which the exalted Lord works for and on His servants.**

These are two, faith and prayer.

He that believeth on Me, the works that I do shall he do also. Faith, the simple act of loving trust in Jesus Christ, opens the door of our hearts and natures for the entrance of all His solemn Omnipotence, and makes us possessors of it. It is the condition, and the only condition, and plainly the indispensable condition, of possessing this divine Christ's power, that we should trust ourselves to Him that gives it. And if we do, then we shall not trust in vain, but to us there will come power that will surpass our desire, and fill us with its own rejoicing and pure energy. Faith will make us like Christ. Faith is intensely practical. He that believeth shall do. It is no mere cold assent to a creed which is utterly impotent to operate upon men's acts, no mere hysterical emotion which is utterly impotent to energise into nobilities of service and miracles of consecration, but it is the affiance of the whole nature which spreads itself before Him and prays, Fill my emptiness and vitalise me with Thine own Spirit. That is the faith which is ever answered by the inrush of the divine power, and the measure of our capacity of receiving is the measure of His gift to us.

So if Christian individuals and Christian communities are impotent, or all but impotent, there is no difficulty in understanding why. They have cut the connection, they have shut the tap. They lack faith; and so their power is weakness. Why could we not cast him out?said they, perplexed when they had no need to be. Why could you not cast him out? Because you do not believe that I, working in you, can cast him out. That is why; and the only why. Let us learn that the secret of Christiansweakness is the weakness of their Christian faith.

And the other condition is prayer. Whatsoever ye shall ask in My name I will do it, and He repeats it, for confirmation and for greater emphasis. If ye shall ask anything in My name, or, as perhaps that clause ought to be read with some versions, If ye shall ask Me anything in My name I will do it.

Three points may be named here. Our power depends upon our prayer. God's and Christ's fullness and willingness to communicate do not depend upon our prayer. But our capacity to receive of that fullness, and so the possibility of its communication to us, do depend upon our prayer. We have not because we ask not.

The power of our prayer depends upon our conscious oneness with the revealed Christ. If ye shall ask in My name, says He. And people think they have fulfilled the condition when, in a mechanical and external manner, they say, as a formula at the end of petitions that have been all stuffed full of self-will and selfishness, for Christ's sake. Amen! and then they wonder they do not get them answered! Is that asking in Christ's name?

Christ's name is the revelation of Christ's character, and to do a thing in the name of another person is to do it as His representative, and as realising that in some deep and real sense--for the present purpose at all events--we are one with Him. And it is when we know ourselves to be united to Christ and one with Him, and representative in a true fashion of Himself, as well as when, in humble reliance on His work for us and His loving heart, we draw near, that our prayer has power, as the old divines used to say, to move the Hand that moves the world, and to bring down a rush of blessing upon our heads. Prayer in the name of Christ is hard to offer. It needs much discipline and watchfulness; it excludes all self-will and selfishness. And if, as my text tells us, the end of the Son's working is the glory of the Father, that same end, and not our own ease or comfort, must be the end and object of all prayer which is offered in His name. When we so pray we get an answer. And the reason why such multitudes of prayers never travel higher than the roof, and bring no blessings to him who prays, is because they are not prayers in Christ's name.

Prayer in His name will pass into prayer to Him. As He not obscurely teaches us here (if we adopt the reading to which I have already referred), He has an ear to hear such requests, and He wields divine power to answer. Surely it was not blasphemy nor any diversion of the worship due to God alone, when the dying martyr outside the city wall cried and said, Lord Jesus! receive my spirit. Nor is it any departure from the solemnest obligations laid upon us by the unity of the divine nature, nor are we bringing idolatrous petitions to another than the Father, when we draw near to Christ and ask Him to give us that which He gives as the Father's gift, and to work on us that which the Father that dwelleth in Him works through Him for us.

Trust yourselves to Christ, and let your desires be stilled, to listen to His voice in you, and let that voice speak. And then, dear brethren, we shall be lifted above ourselves, and strength will flow into us, and we shall be able to say, I can do all things, through the Christ that dwells in me and makes me strong. And just as the glad, sunny waters of the incoming tide fill the empty places of some oozy harbour, where all the ships are lying as if dead, and the mud is festering in the sunshine, so into the slimy emptiness of our corrupt hearts there will pour the flashing sunlit wave, the ever fresh rush of His power; and everything will live whithersoever it cometh, and we shall be able to say in all humility, and yet in glad recognition of Christ's faithfulness to this, His transcendent promise, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, because the life which I live in the flesh I live by faith of the Son of God.