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

**JOHN-073**. **WHO BRINGS CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Judas saith unto Him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that Thou wilt manifest Thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love Me he will keep My words: and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. He that loveth Me not, keepeth not My sayings: and the word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's which sent Me."*

*John 14:22-24*

This Judas held but a low place amongst the Apostles. In all the lists he is one of the last of the groups of fours, into which they are divided, and which were evidently arranged according to their spiritual nearness to the Master. His question is exactly that which a listener, with some dim, confused glimmer of Christ's meaning, might be expected to ask. He grasps at His last words about manifesting Himself to certain persons; he rightly feels that he and his brethren possess the qualification of love. He rightly understands that our Lord contemplates no public showing of Himself, and that disappoints him. It was only a day or two ago that Jesus seemed to them to have begun to do what they had always wanted Him to do, manifest Himself to the world. And now, as he thinks, something unknown to them must have happened in order to make Him change His course, and go back to the old plan of a secret communication. And so he says, Lord! what has come to pass to induce you to abandon and falter upon the course on which we entered, when you rode into Jerusalem with the shouting crowd?

His question is no better in intelligence, though it is a great deal better in spirit, than the taunt of Christ's brethren, If Thou do these things, show Thyself to the world. Judas, too, thought of the simple flashing of His Messianic glory, in some visible, vulgar form, before else blind eyes.

How sad and chilling such a question must have been to Jesus! Slow scholars we all are; and with what wonderful patience, without a word of pain, or of rebuke, He reiterates His lesson, here a little and there a little, and once more unfolds the conditions of His self-revelation, and the fullness of the blessings that He brings. He moulds His words so as to meet both the clauses of Judas's foolish question--To us, not to the world; and quietly tells them the positive conditions and the negative disqualifications for His self-revelation. So my text deals with two things, the crown of loving obedience in the possession of a fuller Christ, and the impassable barrier to His manifestation which unloving disobedience makes. Or to put it into briefer words, we have in one of the verses--first, what brings Christ and what Christ brings; and, in the other, second, what keeps away Christ and all His gifts. Now let us look at these two things.

**I. We have what brings Christ and what Christ brings.**

If a man love Me, He will keep My word (not words, as our Authorised Version has it), and My Father will love him, and We will come unto him, and make Our abode with him. Now notice how here, in the first part of this verse, our Lord subtly and significantly alters the form of the statement which He has already made. He had formerly said, If ye love Me, ye will keep My commandments, but now He casts it into a purely impersonal form, and says, If a man, anybody, not youonly, but anybody--If a man love Me, he, anybody, will keep My word. And why the change? Why, I suppose, in order to strike full and square against that complacent assumption of Judas that it was to us and not to the worldthat the showing was to take place. Our Lord, by the studiously impersonal form into which He casts the promise, proclaims its universality, and says this to His ignorant questioner, Do not suppose that you Apostles have the monopoly. You may not even have a share in My self-manifestation. Anybody may have it. And there is no "world," as you suppose, to which I do not show Myself. Anybody may have the vision if he observes the conditions.

Now I need not dwell at any length upon the earlier words of this text, because we have had to consider them in previous sermons on the former verses of this chapter. I need only remark that here, as there, our Lord brings out the thought that the very life-blood of love is the treasuring of the word of the beloved One; and that there is no joy comparable to the joy of the loving heart that yields itself to the Beloved's will. That is true about earth, and it makes the sweetest and selectest blessedness of our ordinary existence. And it is true about heaven, and it makes the liberty and the gladness of the bond that knits us to Him.

But I would like just to notice, before I come to the more immediate subject of my discourse, that remarkable expression, He will keep My word. That is more than a commandmentis it not? Christ's wordis wider than precept. It includes all His sayings, and it includes them all as in one vital unity and organic whole. We are not to go picking and choosing among them; they are one. And it includes this other thought, that every word of Christ, be it revelation of the deep things of God, or be it a promise of the great shower of blessings which, out of His full hand, He will drop upon our heads, enshrines within itself a commandment. He utters no revelations, simply that we may know. He utters no comforting words, simply that our sore hearts may be healed, but in all His utterances there is a practical bearing; and every word of His teaching, every word of His sweet, whispered assurances of love and favour to the waiting heart, has in it the imperativeness of His manifested will, and has a direct bearing upon duty. All His words are gathered into one word, and all the variety of His sayings is, in their unity, the law of our lives. So much by way of observation on the mere language of my text. And now let us look at what, as He says to us here, are the rewards and crown of loving obedience.

Christ will show Himself to the loving heart. That is true on the very lowest level. Every act of obedience to any moral truth is rewarded by additional insight. Every act of submission to His will cleanses the lenses of the telescope from some film that has gathered upon them, and so the stars look brighter and larger and nearer. All duty done opens out into a loftier conception of duty, and a clearer vision of Him. To him that hath shall be given. As we climb the hill we get a wider view. Obedience is in all things the parent of insight.

But in reference to our relation to Him, we have to do not with truths only, but with a Person. How do we learn to know people? There is only one way--that is, by loving them. Sympathy is the parent of all true knowledge of one another. They tell us in the foolish old proverb that love is blind. No! There is not such a pair of clear eyes anywhere as the eyes of love; and if we want to see into a man, the first condition is that we feel kindly towards him. Sympathy is the parent of insight into persons, as Obedience is the parent of insight into duty.

But both of these illustrations are only imperfect preparations for the great truth here, which is that our loving obedience to the discerned will of Jesus Christ has not only an operation inwards upon us, but has an effect outwards upon Him. I am afraid that Christian people in this generation have but a very imperfect belief in the actual, supernatural, and, if you like to call it so, miraculous manifestation of Jesus Christ, His very Self, to men that love Him and cleave to Him. Do you believe as a simple revealed truth, plain as a sunbeam in such words as these, that Jesus Christ Himself will do something on you, and in you, and for you, if you love Him and trust Him; that His hand will be laid on your eyes as it was laid of old; that He will indeed, in no metaphor, but in reality, show Himself to you? I may be mistaken, but I think that too commonly it is the case, that even good Christian people have a far more vivid and realising and real faith in the past work of Christ on earth than in the present work of Christ in themselves. They think the one a plain truth, and the other something like a metaphor, whereas the New Testament teaches us, as plainly as it can teach us anything, that, far above all the natural operations of truth upon our understandings, hearts, and wills, there is an actual, supernatural, continuous communication of Christ to hearts that love Him, which leads day by day, if they be faithful, to a fuller knowledge, a sweeter love, a larger possession, of a fuller Christ. And it is this that He tells us of, to fire our ambition to attain, in such words as these.

Brethren, one piece of honest, loving obedience is worth all the study and speculation of an unloving heart when the question is, How are we to see Christ?

Again, Jesus shows Himself to the obedient heart in indissoluble union with the Father. Look at the majesty, and, except upon one hypothesis, the insane presumption, of such words as these: If a man love Me, My Father will love him; as if identifying love to Christ with love to Himself. And look at that wondrous union, the consciousness of which speaks in We will come. Think of a man saying that. It is blasphemous insanity; or else the speech of Him who is conscious of union with the Father, close and indissoluble and transcending all analogies. We will come, together, hand-in-hand, if I may so say; or rather, His coming is the Father's coming. Just as in heaven so closely are they represented as united, that there is but one throne for God and the Lamb, so on earth so closely are they represented as united, that there is but one coming of the Father in the Son.

And this is the only belief, as it seems to me, that will keep this generation from despair and moral suicide. The question for this generation is, Is it possible for men to know God? Science, both of material things and of inward experiences, is more and more unanimous in its proclamation; Behold! we know not anything; and the only attitude to take before that great black vault above us is to say, We know nothing. The world has learned half of a great verse of the Gospel: No man hath seen God at any time, nor can see Him. If the world is not to go mad, if hearts are not to be tortured into despair, if morality and enthusiasm and poetry and everything higher and nobler than the knowledge of material phenomena and their sequences is not to perish from the earth, the world must learn the next half of the verse, and say, The only begotten Son which is in the bosom of the Father, He hath declared Him. Christ shows Himself in indissoluble union with the Father.

Lastly about this matter, Christ shows Himself to obedient love by a true coming. We will come and make our mansion with him. And that coming is a fact of a higher order, and not to be confounded either with the mere divine Omnipresence, by which God is everywhere, nor to be reduced to a figment of our own imaginations, or a strong way of promising increased perception on our part of Christ's fullness. That great central Sun, if I might use so violent a figure, draws nearer and nearer and nearer to the planets that move about it, and having once been far off on an almost infinitely distant horizon, approaches until planet and Sun unite.

Dear brethren, if we could only get to the attitude of simple acceptance of this as a literal truth, and believe that, in prose reality, Christ comes to every heart that loves Him, would not all the world be different to us?

That coming is a permanent residence: We will make our abode with him. Very beautiful is it to notice that our Lord here employs that same sweet and significant word, with which He began this wonderful series of encouragements, when He said, In My Father's house are many mansions. Yonder they dwell for ever with God; here God in Christ for ever dwells with the loving heart. It is a permanent abode so long as the conditions are fulfilled, but only so long. If self-will, rising in the Christian heart from its torpor and apparent death, reasserts itself and shakes off Christ's yoke, Christ's presence vanishes. In the last hours of the Holy City there was heard by the trembling priests amidst the midnight darkness the motion of departing Deity, and a great voice said: Let us depart hence; and to-morrow the shrine was empty, and the day after it was in flames. Brethren, if you would keep the Christ in whom is God, remember that He cannot be kept but by the act of loving obedience.

**II. Now, in the next place, my text gives us the negative side, and shows us what keeps away Christ and all His blessings.**

An unloving disobedience closes the eyes to the vision, and the heart against the entrance, of that dear Lord. Our Master lays down for us two principles, and leaves us to draw the conclusion for ourselves.

The first is, He that loveth Me not, keepeth not My sayings. No love, no obedience. That is plainly true, because the heart of all the commandments is love, and where that is not, disobedience to their very spirit is. It is plainly true, because there is no power that will lead men to true obedience to Christ's yoke except the power of love. His commandments are too alien from our nature ever to be kept, unless by the might of love. It was only the rising sunbeam that could draw music from the stony lips of Memnon, as he gazed out across the desert, and it is only when Christ's love shines on our faces that we open our lips in praise, and move our hands in service. Those great rocking-stones down in Cornwall stand unmoved by any tempest, but a child's finger, laid on the right place, will set them vibrating. And so the heavy, hard, stony bulk of our hearts lies torpid and immovable, until He lays His loving finger upon them, and then they rock at His will. There is no keeping of Christ's commandments without love. That makes short work of a great deal that calls itself Christianity, does it not? Reluctant obedience is no obedience; self-interested obedience is no obedience; constrained obedience is no obedience; outward acts of service, if the heart be wanting, are rubbish and dung. Morality without religion is nought. The one thing that makes a good man is love to Jesus Christ; and where that is, there, and only there, is obedience.

Talk they of morals? O Thou Bleeding Lamb!

The grand morality is love of Thee.

If a man love Me not, he will not keep My words.

Then the second principle is, disobedience to Christ is disobedience to God. The Word which ye hear is not Mine, but the Father's. Christ's consciousness of union so speaks out here as that He is quite sure that all His words are God's words, and that all God's words are spoken by Him. Paul has to say, So speak I, not the Lord. And you would not think a man a very sound or safe religious teacher who said to you, to begin with, Now, mind, everything that I say, God says. There are no errors then, no deterioration of the treasure by the vessel in which it lies. The water does not taste of the vase in which it is carried. The personality of Jesus Christ is never, through all His utterances, so separated from God but that God speaks in Him; and, listening to His voice, we hear the absolute utterance of the uncreated and eternal Wisdom.

Therefore follows the conclusion, which our Lord does not state, but leaves us to supply. If it be true that the absence of love of Him is disobedience to Him, and if it be true that disobedience to Him is disobedience to God, then it plainly follows that what keeps away Christ and all His gifts, and God in Him, is unloving obedience. What brings Him is the obedience of love; what repels Him is alienation and rebellion. If the heart be full of confusion, of the world, of self, of unbridled inclinations, of careless indifference to His bleeding love, He can but listen at the gate and hear the household jar within.

And so, dear friends, from all this there follow one or two points, which I touch very briefly. One is, that it is possible for men not to see Christ, though He stands there close before them. It is possible to grope at noonday as at midnight, to see only bracken green and cold grey stoneon the hillside, where another man sees the chariots of fire and the horses of fire. It is possible for you--and, alas! it is the condition of some of my hearers--to look upon Christ and to turn away and say, I see no beauty in Him that I should desire Him, whilst the man beside yon, looking at the same facts and the same face, can see in Him the Chief among ten thousand, and the altogether lovely.

Another thought is, that Christ's showing of Himself to men is in no sense arbitrary. It is you that determine what you shall see. You can hermetically seal your heart against Him, you can blind yourself to all His beauty. The door of your hearts is hinged to open from within, and if you do not open it, it remains shut, and Christ remains outside.

Another thought is, that you do not need to do anything to blind yourselves. Simple negation is fatal. If a man love not; that is all. The absence of love is your ruin.

And the last thought is this, that my text does not begin at the beginning. Jesus Christ has been speaking about manifestations of Himself to the loving and obedient; but there are manifestations of Himself made that we may become loving and obedient. You can build a barrier over which these sweeter revelations, of which loyal love and docile submission are the conditions, cannot rise. But you cannot build a barrier over which the prior revelations to the unthankful and disobedient cannot rise. No mountains of sin and neglect and alienation can be piled so high but that the flood of pardoning grace will rise above their crests, and pour itself into your hearts. You ask, How can I get the love and obedience of which you have been singing the praises now? There is only one answer, brethren. We know that we love Him when we know that He loves us; and we know that He loves us when we see Him dying on His Cross. So here is the ladder, that is planted in the miry clay of the horrible pit, and fastens its golden hooks on His throne. The first round is, Behold the dying Christ and His love to me. The second is, Let that love melt my heart into sweet responsive love. The third is, Let my love mould my life into obedience. And then Christ, and God in Him, will come to me and show Himself to me; and give me a fuller knowledge and a deeper love, and make His dwelling with me. And then there is only one round still to roach, and that will land us by the Throne of God, in the many mansions of the Father's house, where we shall make our abode with Him for evermore.