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

**JOHN-077**. **CHRIST FORESEEING HIS PASSION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me. But that the world may know that I love the Father; and as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. Arise, Let us go hence."*

*John 14:30-31*

The summons to departure which closes these verses shows that we have now reached the end of that sacred hour in the upper room. In obedience to the summons, we have to fancy the little group leaving its safe shelter, as sailors might put out from behind a breakwater into a stormy sea. They pass from its seclusion and peace into the joyous stir of the crowded streets, filled with feast-keeping multitudes, on whom the full paschal moon looked down, pure and calming. Somewhere between the upper chamber and the crossing of the brook Kedron, the divine words of the following chapters were spoken, but this discourse, closely connected as it is with them, reaches its fitting close in these penetrating, solemn words of outlook into the near future, so calm, so weighty, so resolute, so almost triumphant, with which Christ seeks finally to impart to His timorous friends some of His own peace and assurance of victory.

They lead us into a region seldom opened to our view, and never to be looked upon but with reverent awe. For they tell us what Christ thought about His sufferings, and how He felt as He went down to that cold, black river, in which He was to be baptized. Put off thy shoes from off thy feet, for the place where thou standest is holy ground. So, reverently listening to the words, sacred because of the Speaker, the theme, and the circumstances, we note in them these things: His calm anticipation of the assailant, His unveiling of the secret and motive of His apparent defeat, and His resolute advance to the conflict. Let us look at these three points.

**I. First, we have here our Lord's calm anticipation of the assailant.**

Hereafter I will not talk much with you: for the Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me. One of the other Gospels tells us, in finishing its account of our Lord's temptation in the wilderness, that when Satan had ended all these temptations he departed from Him for a season. And now we have the second and the intenser form of that assault. The first was addressed to desires, and sought to stimulate ambition and ostentation and the animal appetites, and so, through the cravings of human nature, to shake the Master's fixed faith. The second used sharper and more fatal weapons, and appealed, not to desire of enjoyment, or ease, or good, but to the natural human shrinking from pain and suffering and shame and death. He that was impervious on the side of natural necessities and more subtle spiritual desires might yet be reached through terror. And so the second form of the assault, instead of tempting the traveller by the sunshine to cast aside his cloak, tempted him by storm and tempest to fling it aside; and the one, as the other, was doomed to failure.

Note how the Master, with that clear eye which saw to the depths as well as the heights, and before which men and things were but, as it were, transparent media through which unseen spiritual powers wrought, just as He discerns the Father's will as supreme and sovereign, sees here--beneath Judas's treachery, and Phariseesand priestsenvy, and the people's stolid indifference, and the Roman soldiersimpartial scorn--the workings of a personal source and centre of all. The Prince of this world, who rules men and things when they are severed from God, cometh. Christ's sensitive nature apprehends the approach of the evil thing, as some organisations can tell when a thunderstorm is about to burst. His divine Omniscience, working as it did, even within the limits of humanity, knows not only when the storm is about to burst upon Him, but knows who it is that has raised the tempest. And so He says, The Prince of this world cometh.

But note, as yet more important, that tremendous and unique consciousness of absolute invulnerability against the assaults. He hath nothing in Me. He is the Prince of the world, but His dominion stops outside My breast. He has no rule or authority there. His writs do not run, nor is His dominion recognised, within that sacred realm.

Was there ever a man who could say that? Are there any of us, the purest and the noblest, who, standing single-handed in front of the antagonistic power of evil, and believing it to be consolidated and consecrated in a person, dare to profess that there is not a thing in us on which he can lay his black claw and say--That is mine?Is there nothing inflammable within us which the fiery darts of the wickedcan kindle? Are there any of us who bar our doors so tightly as that we can say that none of his seductions will find their way therein, and that nothing there will respond to them? Christ sets Himself here against the whole embattled and embodied power of evil, and puts Himself in contrast to the universal human experience, when He calmly declares He hath nothing in Me. It is an assertion of His absolute freedom from sinfulness, and it involves, as I take it, the other assertion--that as He is free from sin, so He is not subject to that consequence of sin, which is death, as we know it. Another part of Scripture speaks to us in strange language, which yet has in it a deep truth, of him that had the power of death, that is, the devil. Men fall under the rightful dominion of the king of evil when they sin, and part of the proof of his dominion is the fact of physical death, with its present accompaniments. Thus, in His calm anticipation, Jesus stands waiting for the enemy's charge, knowing that all its forces will be broken against the serried ranks of His immaculate purity, and that He will come from the dreadful close unwounded all, and triumphant for evermore.

But do not let us suppose that because Christ, in His anticipation of suffering and death, knew Himself invulnerable, with not even a spot on His heel into which the arrow could go, therefore the conflict was an unreal or shadowy one. It was a true fight, and it was a real struggle that He was anticipating, thus calmly in these solemn words, as knowing Himself the Victor ere He entered on the dreadful field.

**II. So note, secondly, in these words, our Lord's unveiling of the motive and aim of His apparent defeat.**

But that the world might know that I love the Father, and, as the Father gave Me commandment, even so I do. There may be some uncertainty about the exact grammatical relation of these clauses to one another, with which I need not trouble you, because it does not affect their substantial meaning. However we solve the mere grammatical questions, the fundamental significance of the whole remains unaffected, and it is this: that Christ's sufferings and death were, in one aspect, for the purpose that the world might know His love to the Father, and, in another aspect, were obedience to the Father's commandment. And if we consider these two aspects, I think we shall get some thoughts worth considering as to the way in which the Master Himself looks upon these sufferings and that death.

The first point I note in this division of my discourse is that Christ would have us regard His sufferings and His death as His own act. Note that remarkable phrase, thus I do. A strange word to be used in such a connection, but full of profound meaning. We speak, and rightly, of the solemn events of these coming days as the passion of our Lord, but they were His action quite as much as His passion. He was no mere passive sufferer. In them all He acted, or, as He says here, we may look upon them all, not as things inflicted upon Him from without by any power, however it might seem to have the absolute control of His fate, but as things which He did Himself.

There is one Man who died, not of physical necessity, but because of free choice. There is one Man who chose to be born, and who chose to die; who, in His choosing to be born, chose humiliation, and who, in choosing to die, chose yet deeper humiliation. This sacrifice was a voluntary sacrifice, or, to speak more accurately, He was both Priest and Sacrifice, when through the Eternal Spirit He offered Himself without spot unto God. The living Christ is the Lord of Life, and lives because He will; the dying Christ is the Lord of Death, and dies because He chose. He would have us learn that all His bitter sufferings, inflicted from without as they were, and traceable to a deeper source than merely human antagonism, were also self-inflicted and self-chosen, and further traceable to the Father's will in harmony with His own. Thus I do, and thus He did when He died.

Then, further, our Lord would have us regard these sufferings and that death as being His crowning act of obedience to His Father's will. That is in accordance with the whole tone of His self-consciousness, especially as set before us in this precious Gospel of John, which traces up everything to the submission of the divine Son to the divine Father, a submission which is no mere external act, but results from, and is the expression of, the absolute unity of will and the perfect oneness of mutual love. And so, because He loved the Father, therefore He came to do the Father's will, and the crowning act of His obedience was this, that He was obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross. It was a voluntary sacrifice, but that voluntariness was not self-will. It was a sacrifice in obedience to the Father's will, but that obedience was not reluctant. Christ was the embodiment of the divine purpose, formed before the ages and realised in time, when He bowed His head and yielded up the ghost. The highest proof of His filial obedience was the Cross. And to it He points us, if we would know what it is to love and obey the Father.

Now it is to be noticed that this motive of our Lord's death is not the usual one given in Scripture. And I can suppose the question being put, Why did not Jesus Christ say, in that supreme moment, that He went to the Cross because of His love to us rather than because of His love to the Father?But I think the answer is not far to seek. There are several satisfactory ones which may be given. One is that this making prominent of His love to God rather than to us, as the motive for His death, is in accordance with that comparative reticence on the part of Jesus as to the atoning aspect of His death, which I have had frequent occasion to point out, and which does not carry in it the implication that that doctrine was a new thing in the Christian preaching after Pentecost. Another reason may be drawn from the whole strain and tone of this chapter, which, as I have already said, traces up everything to the loving relations of obedience between the Father and Son. And yet another reason may be given in that the very statement of Christ's love to God, and loving obedience to the Father's commandment as the motive of His death, includes in it necessarily the other thing--love to us. For what was the Father's commandment which Christ with all His heart accepted, and with His glad will obeyed unto death? It was that the Son should come as the Ransom for the world. The Son of man was sent, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a Ransom for many. Or, as He Himself said, in one of His earliest discourses, God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish. And for what He gave that Son is clearly stated in the context itself of that passage--As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up.

To speak of Christ's acceptance of the Father's commandment, then, is but another way of saying that Christ, in all the fullness of His self-surrender, entered into and took as His own the great, eternal divine purpose, that the world should be redeemed by His death upon the Cross. The heavenward side of His love to man is His love to the Father, God.

Now there is another aspect still in which our Lord would here have us regard His sufferings and death, and that is that they are of worldwide significance.

Think for a moment of the obscurity of the speaker, a Jewish peasant in an upper room, with a handful of poor men around Him, all of them ready to forsake Him, within a few hours of His ignominious death; and yet He says, I am about to die, that the echo of it may reverberate through the whole world. He puts Himself forth as of worldwide significance, and His death as adapted to move mankind, and as one day to be known all over the world. There is nothing in history to approach to the gigantic arrogance of Jesus Christ, and it is only explicable on the ground of His divinity.

This I do that the world may know. And what did it matter to the world? Why should it be of any importance that the world should know? For one plain reason, because true knowledge of the true nature and motive of that death breaks the dominion of the Prince of this world, and sets men free from his tyranny. Emancipation, hope, victory, purity, the passing from the tyranny of the darkness into the blessed kingdom of the light--all depend on the world's knowing that Christ's death was His own voluntary act of submission to the infinite love and will of the Father, which will and love He made His own, and therefore died, the sacrifice for the world's sin.

The enemy was approaching. He was to be hoist with his own petard. He digged a pit; he digged it deep, and into the pit which he had digged he himself fell. Oh, death! I will be thy plagueby entering into thy realm. Oh, grave! I will be thy destructionby dwelling for a moment within thy dark portals and rending them irreparably as I pass from them. The Prince of this world was defeated when he seemed to triumph, and Christ's mighty words came true: Now shall the Prince of this world be cast out. He would have the world know--with the knowledge which is of the heart as well as the head, which is life as well as understanding, which is possession and appropriation--the mystery, the meaning, the motive of His death, because the world thereby ceases to be a world, and becomes the kingdom of Jesus Christ.

**III. Lastly, notice here the resolute advance to the conflict.**

Arise, let us go hence--a word of swift alacrity. Evidently He rose to His feet whilst they lay round the table. He bids them rise with Him and follow Him on the path.

But there is more in the words than the mere close of a conversation, and a summons to change of place. They indicate a kind of divine impatience to be in the fight, and to have it over. The same emotion is plainly revealed in the whole of the latter days of our Lord's life. You remember how His disciples followed amazed, as He strode up the road from Jericho, hastening to His Cross. You remember His deliberate purpose to draw upon Himself public notice during that dangerous and explosive week before the Passover, as shown in the publicity of His entry into Jerusalem, His sharp rebukes of the rulers in the Temple, and in every other incident of those days. You remember His words to the betrayer: That thou doest, do quickly. These latter hours of the Lord were strongly marked by the emotion to which He gave utterance in His earlier words: I have a baptism to be baptized with, and how am I straitened till it be accomplished!Perhaps that feeling indicated His human shrinking; for we all know how we sometimes are glad to precipitate an unwelcome thing, and how the more we dread it, the more we are anxious to get it over. But there is far more than that in it. There is the resolved determination to carry out the Father's purpose for the world's salvation, which was His own purpose, and was none the less His though He knew all the suffering which it involved.

Let us adore the steadfast will, which never faltered, though the natural human weakness was there too, and which, as impelled by some strong spring, kept persistently pressing towards the Cross that on it He might die, the world's Redeemer.

And do not let us forget that He summoned His lovers and disciples to follow Him on the road. Let us go hence. It is ours to take up our cross daily and follow the Master, to do with persistent resolve our duty, whether it be welcome or unwelcome, and to see to it that we plant no faltering and reluctant foot in our Master's footsteps. For us, too, if we have learned to flee to the Cross for our redemption and salvation, the resolve of our Redeemer and the very passion of the Saviour itself become the pattern and law of our lives. We, too, have to cast ourselves into the fight, and to take up our cross, that the world may know that we love the Father, and as the Father hath given us commandment. And if we so live, then our death, too, in some humble measure, may be like His--the crowning act of obedience to the Father's will; in which we are neither passively nor resistingly dragged under by a force that we cannot effectually resist, but in which we go down willingly into the dark valley where death makes our sacrifice complete.