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

**JOHN-084**. **THE WORLD'S HATRED, AS CHRIST SAW IT by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"But all these things will they do unto you for My name's sake, because they know not Him that sent Me. If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. He that hateth Me, hateth My Father also. If I had not done among them the works which none other man did, they had not had sin: but now have they both seen and hated both Me and My Father. But this cometh to pass, that the word might be fulfilled that is written in their law, They hated Me without a cause."*

*John 15:21-25*

Our Lord has been speaking of the world's hostility to His followers, and tracing that to its hostility to Himself. In these solemn words of our text He goes still deeper, and parallels the relation which His disciples bear to Him and the consequent hostility that falls on them, with the relation which He bears to the Father and the consequent hostility that falls on Him: They hate you because they hate Me. And then His words become sadder and pierce deeper, and with a tone of wounded love and disappointed effort and almost surprise at the world's requital to Him, He goes on to say, They hate Me, because they hate the Father.

So, then, here we have, in very pathetic and solemn words, Christ's view of the relation of the world to Him and to God.

**I. The first point that He signalises is the world's ignorance.**

These things they will do unto you, and they will do them for My name's sake; they will do them because they know not Him that sent Me.

The world, in Christ's language, is the aggregate of godless men. Or, to put it a little more sharply, our Lord, in this context, gives in His full adhesion to that narrow view which divides those who have come under the influence of His truth into two portions. There is no mincing of the matter in the antithesis which Christ here draws; no hesitation, as if there were a great central mass, too bad for a blessing perhaps, but too good for a curse; which was neither black nor white, but neutral grey. No! however it may be with the masses beyond the reach of the dividing and revealing power of His truth, the men that come into contact with Him, like a heap of metal filings brought into contact with a magnet, mass themselves into two bunches, the one those who yield to the attraction, and the other those who do not. The one is My disciples, and the other is the world. And now, says Jesus Christ, all that mass that stands apart from Him, and, having looked upon Him with the superficial eye of those men round about Him at that day, or of the men who hear of Him now, have no real love to Him--have, as the underlying motive of their conduct and their feelings, a real ignorance of God, They know not Him that sent Me.

Our Lord assumes that He is so completely the Copy and Revealer of the divine nature as that any man that looks upon Him has had the opportunity of becoming acquainted with God, and that any man who turns away from Him has lost that opportunity. The God that the men who do not love Jesus Christ believe in, is not the Father that sent Him. It is a fragment, a distorted image tinted by the lens. The world has its conception of God; but outside of Jesus Christ and His manifestation of the whole divine nature, the world's God is but a syllable, a fragment, a broken part of the perfect completeness. The Father of an infinite majesty, and of as infinite a tenderness, the stooping God, the pitying God, the forgiving God, the loving God is known only where Christ is accepted. In other hearts He may be dimly hoped for, in other hearts He may be half believed in, in other hearts He may be thought possible; but hopes and anticipations and fears and doubts are not knowledge, and they who see not the light in Christ see but the darkness. Out of Him God is not known, and they that turn away from His beneficent manifestation turn their faces to the black north, from which no sun can shine. Brother, do you know God in Christ? Unless you do, you do not know the God who is.

But there is a deeper meaning in that word than simply the possession of true thoughts concerning the divine nature. We know God as we know one another; because God is a Person, as we are persons, and the only way to know persons is through familiar acquaintance and sympathy. So the world which turns away from Christ has no acquaintance with God.

This is a surface fact. Our Lord goes on to show what lies below it.

**II. His second thought here is--the world's ignorance in the face of Christ's light is worse than ignorance; it is sin.**

Mark how He speaks: If I had not come and spoken unto them, they had not had sin: but now they have no cloke for their sin. And then again: If I had not done amongst them the works which none other men did, they had not had sin. So then He puts before us two forms of His manifestation of the divine nature, by His words and His works. Of these two He puts His words foremost, as being a deeper and more precious and brilliant revelation of what God is than are His miracles. The latter are subordinate, they come as a second source of illumination. Men who will not see the beauty and listen to the truth that lie in His word may perchance be led by His deed. But the word towers in its nature high above the work, and the miracle to the word is but like the picture in the child's book to the text, fit for feeble eyes and infantile judgments, but containing far less of the revelation of God than the sacred words which He speaks. First the words, next the miracles.

But notice, too, how decisively, and yet simply and humbly and sorrowfully, our Lord here makes a claim which, on the lips of any but Himself, would have been mere madness of presumption. Think of any of us saying that our words made all the difference between innocent ignorance and criminality! Think of any of us saying that to listen to us, and not be persuaded, was the sin of sins! Think of any of us pointing to our actions and saying, In these God is so manifest that not to see Him augurs wickedness, and is condemnation! And yet Jesus Christ says all this. And, what is more wonderful, nobody wonders that He says it, and the world believes that He is saying the truth when He says it.

How does that come? There is only one answer; only one. His words were the illuminating manifestation of God, and His deeds were the plain and unambiguous operation of the divine hand then and there, only because He Himself was divine, and in Him God was manifested in the flesh.

But passing from that, notice how our Lord here declares that in comparison with the sin of not listening to His words, and being taught by His manifestation, all other sins dwindle into nothing. If I had not spoken, they had not had sin. That does not mean, of course, that these men would have been clear of all moral delinquency; it does not mean that there would not have been amongst them crimes against their own consciences, crimes against the law written on their own hearts, crimes against the law of revelation. There were liars, impure men, selfish men, and men committing all the ordinary forms of human transgression amongst them. And yet, says Christ, black and bespattered as these natures are, they are white in comparison with the blackness of the man who, looking into His face, sees nothing there that he should desire. Beside the mountain belching out its sulphurous flame the little pimple of a molehill is nought. And so, says Christ, heaven heads the count of sins with this--unbelief in Me.

Ah, brother, as light grows responsibility grows, and this is the misery of all illumination that comes through Jesus Christ, that where it does not draw a man into His sweet love, and fill him with the knowledge of God which is eternal life, it darkens his nature and aggravates his condemnation, and lays a heavier burden upon his soul. The truth that the measure of light is the measure of guilt has many aspects. It turns a face of alleviation to the dark places of the earth; but just in the measure that it lightens the condemnation of the heathen, it adds weight to the condemnation of you men and women who are bathed in the light of Christianity, and all your days have had it streaming in upon you. The measure of the guilt is the brightness of the light. No shadows are so black as those which the intense sunshine of the tropics casts. And you and I live in the very tropical regions of divine revelation, and if we turn away from Him that spoke on earth and speaketh from heaven, of how much sorer punishment, think you, shall we be thought worthythan those who live away out in the glimmering twilight of an unevangelised paganism, or who stood by the side of Jesus Christ when they had only His earthly life to teach them?

**III. The ignorance which is sin is the manifestation of hatred.**

Our Lord has sorrowfully contemplated the not knowing God, which in the blaze of His light can only come from wilful closing of the eyes, and is therefore the very sin of sins. But that, sad as it is, is not all which has to be said about that blindness of unbelief in Him. It indicates a rooted alienation of heart and mind and will from God, and is, in fact, the manifestation of an unconscious but real hatred. It is an awful saying, and one which the lips into which grace was pouredcould not pronounce without a sigh. But it is our wisdom to listen to what it was His mercy to say.

Observe our Lord's identification of Himself with the Father, so as that the feelings with which men regard Him are, ipso facto, the feelings with which they regard the Father God. He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. He that hath loved Me hath loved the Father. He that hath hated Me hath hated the Father. An ugly word--a word that a great many of us think far too severe and harsh to be applied to men who simply are indifferent to the divine love. Some say, I am conscious of no hatred. I do not pretend to be a Christian, but I do not hate God. Take the ordinary run of people round about us in the world; if you say God is not in all their thoughts, I agree with you; but if you say that they hate God, I do not believe it.

Well, what do you think the fact that men go through their days and weeks and months and years, and have not God in all their thoughts, indicates as to the central feeling of their hearts towards God? Granted that there is not actual antagonism, because there is no thought at all, do you think it would be possible for a man who loved God to go on for a twelvemonth and never think of, or care to please, or desire to be near, the object that he loved? And inasmuch as, deep down at the bottom of our moral being, there is no such thing possible as indifference and a perfect equipoise in reference to God, it is clear enough, I think, that--although the word must not be pressed as if it meant conscious and active antagonism,--where there is no love there is hate.

If a man does not love God as He is revealed to him in Jesus Christ, he neither cares to please Him nor to think about Him, nor does he order his life in obedience to His commands. And if it be true that obedience is the very life-breath of love, disobedience or non-obedience is the manifestation of antagonism, and antagonism towards God is the same thing as hate.

Dear friends, I want some of my hearers to-day who have never honestly asked themselves the question of what their relation to God is, to go down into the deep places of their hearts and test themselves by this simple inquiry: Do I do anything to please Him? Do I try to serve Him? Is it a joy to me to be near Him? Is the thought of Him a delight, like a fountain in the desert or the cool shadow of a great rock in the blazing wilderness? Do I turn to Him as my Home, my Friend, my All? If I do not, am I not deceiving myself by fancying that I stand neutral?There is no neutrality in a man's relation to God. It is one thing or other. Ye cannot serve God and Mammon. The friendship of the world is enmity against God.

**IV. And now, lastly, note how our Lord here touches the deep thought that this ignorance, which is sin, and is more properly named hatred, is utterly irrational and causeless.**

All this will they do that it might be fulfilled which is written in their law, They hated Me without a cause. One hears sighing through these words the Master's meek wonder that His love should be so met, and that the requital which He receives at men's hands, for such an unexampled and lavish outpouring of it, should be such a carelessness, reposing upon a hidden basis of such a rooted alienation.

Without a cause; yes! that suggests the deep thought that the most mysterious and irrational thing in men's whole history and experience is the way in which they recompense God in Christ for what He has done for them. Be astonished, O ye heavens! and wonder, O ye earth!said one of the old prophets; the mystery of mysteries, which can give no account of itself to satisfy reason, which has no apology, excuse, or vindication, is just that when God loves me I do not love Him back again; and that when Christ pours out the whole fullness of His heart upon me, nay dull and obstinate heart gives back so little to Him who has given me so much.

Without a cause. Think of that Cross; think, as every poor creature on earth has a right to think, that he and she individually were in the mind and heart of the Saviour when He suffered and died, and then think of what we have brought Him for it. Do we not stand ashamed at--if I might use so trivial a word,--the absurdity as well as at the criminality of our requital? Causeless love on the one side, occasioned by nothing but itself, and causeless indifference on the other, occasioned by nothing but itself, are the two powers that meet in this mystery-men's rejection of the infinite love of God.

My friend, come away from the unreasonable people, come away from the men who can give no account of their attitude. Come away from those who pay benefits by carelessness, and a Love that died by an indifference that will not cast an eye upon that miracle of mercy, and let His love kindle the answering flame in your hearts. Then you will know God as only they who love Christ know Him, and in the sweetness of a mutual bond will lose the misery of self, and escape the deepening condemnation of those who see Christ on the Cross and do not care for the sight, nor learn by it to know the infinite tenderness and holiness of the Father that sent Him.