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

**JOHN-085**. **OUR ALLY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"But when the Comforter Is come, whom I will send unto you from the Father, even the Spirit of truth, which proceedeth from the Father, He shall testify of Me: And ye also shall bear witness, because ye have been with Me from the beginning."*

*John 15:26, 27*

Our Lord has been speaking of a world hostile to His followers and to Him. He proceeds, in the words which immediately follow our text, to paint that hostility as aggravated even to the pitch of religious murder. But here He lets a beam of light in upon the darkness. These forlorn Twelve, listening to Him, might well have said, Thou art about to leave us; how can we alone face this world in arms, with which Thou dost terrify us? And here He lets them see that they will not be left alone, but have a great Champion, clad in celestial armour, who, coming straight from God, will be with them and put into their hands a weapon, with which they may conquer the world, and turn it into a friend, and with which alone they must meet the world's hate.

So, then, we have three things in this text; the great promise of an Ally in the conflict with the world; the witness which that Ally bears, to fortify against the world; and the consequent witness with which Christians may win the world.

**I. Now consider briefly the first of these points, the great promise of an Ally in the conflict with the world.**

I may touch, very lightly, upon the wonderful designation of this Champion-Friend whom Christ sends, because on former occasions in this course of sermons we have had to deal with the same thoughts, and there will be subsequent opportunities of recurring to them. But I may just emphasise in a few sentences the points which our Lord here signalises in regard to the Champion whom He sends. There is a double designation of that Spirit, the Comforterand the Spirit of truth. There is a double description of His mission, as being sentby Jesus, and as proceeding from the Father, and there is a single statement as to the position from which He comes to us. A word about each of these things.

I have already explained in former sermons that the notion of Comforter, as it is understood in modern English, is a great deal too restricted and narrow to cover the whole ground of this great and blessed promise. The Comforter whom Christ sends is no mere drier of men's tears and gentle Consoler of human sorrows, but He is a mightier Spirit than that, and the word by which He is described in our text, which means one who is summoned to the side of another, conveys the idea of a helper who is brought to the man to be helped, in order to render whatever aid and succour that man's weakness and circumstances may require. The verses before our text suggest what sort of aid and succour the disciples will need. They are to be as sheep in the midst of wolves. Their defenceless purity will need a Protector, a strong Shepherd. They stand alone amongst enemies. There must be some one beside them to fight for them, to shield and to encourage them, to be their Safety and their Peace. And that Paraclete, who is called to our side, comes for the special help which these special circumstances require, and is a strong Spirit who will be our Champion and our Ally, whatever antagonism may storm against us, and however strong and well-armed may be the assaulting legions of the world's hate.

Then, still further, the other designation here of this strong Succourer and Friend is the Spirit of truth, by which is designated, not so much His characteristic attribute, as rather the weapon which He wields, or the material with which He works. The truthis His instrument; that is to say, the Spirit of God sent by Jesus Christ is the Strengthener, the Encourager, the Comforter, the Fighter for us and with us, because He wields that great body of truth, the perfect revelation of God, and man, and duty, and salvation, which is embodied in the incarnation and work of Jesus Christ our Lord. The truth is His weapon, and it is by it that He makes us strong.

Then, still further, there is a twofold description here of the mission of this divine Champion, as sentby Christ, and proceeding from the Father.

In regard to the former, I need only remind you that, in a previous part of this wonderful discourse, our Lord speaks of that divine Spirit as being sent by the Father in His name and in answer to His prayer. The representation here is by no means antagonistic to, or diverse from, that other representation, but rather the fact that the Father and the Son, according to the deep teaching of Scripture, are in so far one as that whatsoever the Son seeth the Father do that also the Son doeth likewise, makes it possible to attribute to Him the work which, in another place, is ascribed to the Father. In speaking of the Persons of the Deity, let us never forget that that word is only partially applicable to that ineffable Being, and that whilst with us it implies absolute separation of individuals, it does not mean such separation in the case of its imperfect transference to the mysteries of the divine nature; but rather, the Son doeth what the Father doeth, and therefore the Spirit is sent forth by the Father, and also the Son sends the Spirit.

But, on the other hand, we are not to regard that divine Spirit as merely a Messenger sent by another. He proceeds from the Father. That word has been the battlefield of theological controversy, with which I do not purpose to trouble you now. For I do not suppose that in its use here it refers at all to the subject to which it has been sometimes applied, nor contains any kind of revelation of the eternal depths of the divine Nature and its relations to itself. What is meant here is the historical coming forth into human life of that divine Spirit. And, possibly, the word proceedsis chosen in order to contrast with the word sent, and to give the idea of a voluntary and personal action of the Messenger, who not only is sent by the Father, but of Himself proceeds on the mighty work to which He is destined.

Be that as it may, mark only, for the last thought here about the details of this great promise, that wonderful phrase, twice repeated in our Lord's words, and emphasised by its verbal repetition in the two clauses, which in all other respects are so different--from the Father. The word translated fromis not the ordinary word so rendered, but rather designates a position at the side of than an origin from, and suggests much rather the intimate and ineffable union between Father, Son, and Spirit, than the source from which the Spirit comes. I touch upon these things very lightly, and gather them up into one sentence. Here, then, are the points. A Person who is spoken of as He--a divine Person whose home from of old has been close by the Father's side--a Person whose instrument is the revealed truth ensphered and in germ in the facts of Christ's incarnation and life--a divine Person, wielding the truth, who is sent by Christ as His Representative, and in some sense a continuance of His personal Presence--a divine, personal Spirit coming from the Father, wielding the truth, sent by Christ, and at the side of all the persecuted and the weak, all world-hated and Christian men, as their Champion, their Combatant, their Ally, their Inspiration, and their Power. Is not that enough to make the weakest strong? Is not that enough to make us more than conquerors through Him that loved us? All nations have legends of the gods fighting at the head of their armies, and through the dust of battle the white horses and the shining armour of the celestial champions have been seen. The childish dream is a historical reality. It is not we that fight, it is the Spirit of God that fighteth in us.

**II. And so note, secondly, the witness of the Spirit which fortifies against the world.**

He shall bear witness of Me. Now we must especially observe here that little phrase, unto you. For that tells us at once that the witness which our Lord has in mind here is something which is done within the circle of the Christian believers, and not in the wide field of the world's history or in nature. Of course it is a great truth that long before Jesus Christ, and to-day far beyond the limits of His name and knowledge, to say nothing of His faith and obedience, the Spirit of God is working. As of old He brooded over the chaotic darkness, ever labouring to turn chaos into order, and darkness into light, and deformity into beauty; so today, all over the field of humanity, He is operating. Grand as that truth is, it is not the truth here. What is spoken of here is something that is done in and on Christian men, and not even through them on the world, but in them for themselves. He shall testify of Meto you.

Now it is to be noted, also, that the first and special application of these words is to the little group listening to Him. Never were men more desolate and beaten down than these were, in the prospect of Christ's departure. Never were men more utterly bewildered and dispirited than these were, in the days between His crucifixion and His resurrection. Think of them during His earthly life, their narrow understandings, their manifold faults, moral as well as intellectual. How little perception they had of anything that He said to them, as their own foolish questions abundantly show! How little they had drunk in His spirit, as their selfish and ambitious janglings amongst themselves abundantly show! They were but Jews like their brethren, believing, indeed, that Jesus Christ was the Messiah, but not knowing what it was that they believed, or of what kind the Messiah was in whom they were thus partially trusting. But they loved Him and were led by Him, and so they were brought into a larger place by the Spirit whom Christ sent.

What was it that made these dwarfs into giants in six weeks? What was it that turned their narrowness into breadth; that made them start up all at once as heroes, and that so swiftly matured them, as the fruits and flowers are ripened under tropical sunshine? The resurrection and ascension of Jesus Christ had a great deal to do with the change; but they were not its whole cause. There is no explanation of the extraordinary transformation of these men as we see them in the pages of the Gospels, and as we find them on the pages of the Acts of the Apostles, except this--the resurrection and the ascension of Jesus Christ as facts, and the Spirit on Pentecost as an indwelling Interpreter of the facts. He came, and the weak became strong, and the foolish wise, and the blind enlightened, and they began to understand--though it needed all their lives to perfect the teaching,--what it was that their ignorant hands had grasped and their dim perceptions had seen, when they touched the hands and looked upon the face of Jesus Christ. The witness of the Spirit of God working within them, working upon what they knew of the historical facts of Christ's life, and interpreting these to them, was the explanation of their change and growth. And the New Testament is the product of that change. Christ's life was the truth which the Spirit used, and a product of His teaching was these Epistles which we have, and which for us step into the place which the historical facts held for them, and become the instrument with which the Spirit of God will deepen our understanding of Christ and enlarge our knowledge of what He is to us.

So, dear friends, whilst here we have a promise which specially applies, no doubt, to these twelve Apostles, and the result of which in them was different from its result in us, inasmuch as the Spirit's teaching, recorded in the New Testament, becomes for us the authoritative rule of faith and practice, the promise still applies to each of us in a secondary and modified sense. For there is nothing in these great valedictory words of our Lord's which has not a universal bearing, and is not the revelation of a permanent truth in regard to the Christian Church. And, therefore, here we have the promise of a universal gift to all Christian men and women, of an actual divine Spirit to dwell with each of us, to speak in our hearts.

And what will He speak there? He will teach us a deeper knowledge of Jesus Christ. He will help us to understand better what He is. He will show us more and more of the whole sweep of His work, of the whole infinite truth for morals and religion, for politics and society, for time and for eternity, about men and about God, which is wrapped up in that great saying which we first of all, perhaps under the pressure of our own sense of sin, grasp as our deliverance from sin: God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life. That is the sum of truth which the Spirit of God interprets to every faithful heart. And as the days roll on, and new problems rise, and new difficulties present themselves, and new circumstances emerge in our personal life, we find the truth, which we at first dimly grasped as life and salvation, opening out into wisdom and depth and meaning that we never dreamed of in the early hours. A Spirit that bears witness of Christ and will make us understand Him better every day we live, if we choose, is the promise that is given here, for all Christian men and women.

Then note that this inward witness of Christ's depth and preciousness is our true weapon and stay against a hostile world. A little candle in a room will make the lightning outside almost invisible; and if I have burning in my heart the inward experience and conviction of what Jesus Christ is and what He has done and will do for me--Oh! then, all the storm without may rage, and it will not trouble me.

If you take an empty vessel and bring pressure to bear upon it, in go the sides. Fill it, and they will resist the pressure. So with growing knowledge of Christ, and growing personal experience of His sweetness in our souls, we shall be able, untouched and undinted, to throw off the pressure which would otherwise have crushed us.

Therefore, dear friends, here is the true secret of tranquillity, in an age of questioning and doubt. Let me have that divine Voice speaking in my heart, as I may have, and no matter what questions may be doubtful, this is sure--We know in whom we have believed; and we can say, Settle all your controversies any way you like: one thing I know, and that divine Voice is ever saying it to me in my deepest consciousness--the Son of God is come and hath given us an understanding that we may know Him that is true; and we are in Him that is true. Labour for more of this inward, personal conviction of the preciousness of Jesus Christ to strengthen you against a hostile world.

And remember that there are conditions under which this Voice speaks in our souls. One is that we attend to the instrument which the Spirit of God uses, and that is the truth. If Christians will not read their Bibles, they need not expect to have the words of these Bibles interpreted and made real to them by any inward experience. If you want to have a faith which is vindicated and warranted by your daily experience, there is only one way to get it, and that is, to use the truth which the Spirit uses, and to bring yourself into contact, continual and reverent and intelligent, with the great body of divine truth that is conveyed in these authoritative words of the Spirit of God speaking through the first witnesses.

And there must be moral discipline too. Laziness, worldliness, the absorption of attention with other things, self-conceit, prejudice, and, I was going to say, almost above all, the taking of our religion and religious opinions at secondhand from men and teachers and books--all these stand in the way of our hearing the Spirit of God when He speaks. Come away from the babble and go by yourself, and take your Bibles with you, and read them, and meditate upon them, and get near the Master of whom they speak, and the Spirit which uses the truth will use it to fortify you.

**III. And, lastly, note the consequent witness with which the Christian may win the world.**

And ye also shall bear witness of Me, because ye have been with Me from the beginning. That alsohas, of course, direct reference to the Apostleswitness to the facts of our Lord's historical appearance, His life, His death, His resurrection, and His ascension; and therefore their qualification was simply the companionship with Him which enabled them to say, We saw what we tell you; we were witnesses from the beginning.

But then, again, I say that there is no word here that belongs only to the Apostles; it belongs to us all, and so here is the task of the Christian Church in all its members. They receive the witness of the Spirit, and they are Christ's witnesses in the world.

Note what we have to do--to bear witness; not to argue, not to adorn, but simply to attest. Note what we have to attest--the fact, not of the historical life of Jesus Christ, because we are not in a position to be witnesses of that, but the fact of His preciousness and power, and the fact of our own experience of what He has done for us. Note, that that is by far the most powerful agency for winning the world. You can never make men angry by saying to them, We have found the Messias. You cannot irritate people, or provoke them into a controversial opposition when you say, Brother, let me tell you my experience. I was dark, sad, sinful, weak, solitary, miserable; and I got light, gladness, pardon, strength, companionship, and a joyful hope. I was blind--you remember me when my eyes were dark, and I sat begging outside the Temple; I was blind, now I see--look at my eyeballs. We can all say that. This is the witness that needs no eloquence, no genius, no anything except honesty and experience; and whosoever has tasted and felt and handled of the Word of Life may surely go to a brother and say, Brother, I have eaten and am satisfied. Will you not help yourselves?We can all do it, and we ought to do it. The Christian privilege of being witnessed to by the Spirit of God in our hearts brings with it the Christian duty of being witnesses in our turn to the world. That is our only weapon against the hostility which godless humanity bears to ourselves and to our Master. We may win men by that; we can win them by nothing else. Ye are My witnesses, saith the Lord, and My servants whom I have chosen. Christian friend, listen to the Master, who says, Him that confesseth Me before men, him will I also confess before My Father in heaven.