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

**JOHN-093**. **THE JOYS OF THAT DAY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"These things have I spoken unto you in proverbs: but the time cometh, when I shall no more speak unto you in proverbs, but I shall show you plainly of the Father. At that day ye shall ask in My Name: and I say not unto you, that I will pray the Father for you: For the Father Himself loveth you, because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God."*

*John 16:25-27*

The stream which we have been tracking for so long in these discourses has now nearly reached its close. Our Lord, in these all but final words, sums up the great salient features which He has already more than once specified, of the time when His followers shall live with an absent and yet present Christ. He reiterates here substantially just what He has been saying before, but in somewhat different connection, and with some slight expansion. And this reiteration of the glad features of the day which was about to dawn suggests how much the disciples needed, and how much we need, to have repeated over and over again the blessed and profound lessons of these words.

What a sublime self-repression there was in the Master! Not one word escapes from His lips of the personal pain and agony into which He had to plunge and be baptized, before that day could dawn. All that was crushed down and kept back, and He only speaks to the disciples and to us of the joy that comes to them, and not at all of the bitter sorrow by which it is bought. There are set forth in these words, as it seems to me, especially three characteristics which belong to the whole period between the ascension of Jesus Christ and His coming again for judgment. It is a day of continual and clearer teaching by Him. It is a day of desires in His name. It is a day of filial experience of a Father's love. These are the characteristics of the Christian period, and they ought to be the characteristics of our individual Christian life. My brother! are they the characteristics of yours?

Let us note them in order.

**I. First, our Lord tells us that the whole period of the Christian life upon earth is to be a period of continuous and clearer teaching by Himself.**

Hitherto I have spoken to you in proverbs, or parables. The word means, not only a comparison or parable, but also, and perhaps primarily, a mysterious and enigmatical saying. The reference is, of course, directly to the immediately preceding thoughts, in which His departure and the sorrow that accompanied it and was to merge into joy, were described under that touching figure of the woman in travail. But the reference must be extended very much farther than that. It includes not only this discourse, but the whole of His teaching by word whilst He was here upon earth.

Now the first thing that strikes me here is this strange fact. Here is a man who knew Himself to be within four-and-twenty hours of His death, and knew that scarcely another word of instruction was to come from His lips upon earth, calmly asserting that, for all the subsequent ages of the world's history, He is to continue its Teacher. We know how the wisest and profoundest of earthly teachers have their lips sealed by death, so as that no counsel can come from them any more, and their disciples long in vain for responses from the silenced oracle, which is dumb whatever new problems may arise. But Jesus Christ calmly poses before the world as not having His teaching activity in the slightest degree suspended by that fact which puts a conclusive and complete close to all other teacherswords. Rather He says that after death He will, more clearly than in life, be the Teacher of the world.

What does He mean by that? Well, remember first of all the facts which followed this saying--the Cross, the Grave, Olivet, the Heavens, the Throne. These were still in the future when He spoke. And have not these--the bitter passion, the supernatural resurrection, the triumphant ascension, and the everlasting session of the Son at the right hand of God--taught the whole world the meaning of the Father's name, and the love of the Father's heart, and the power of the Father's Son, as nothing else, not even the sweetest and tenderest of His utterances, could have taught them? When, then, He declares the continuance of His teaching functions unbroken through death and beyond it, He refers partly to the future facts of His earthly manifestation, and still more does He refer to that continuous teaching which, by that divine Spirit whom He sends, is granted to every believing soul all through the ages.

This great truth, which recurs over and over again in these discourses of our Lord, is far too much dropped out of the consciousness and creeds of the modern Christian Church. We call ourselves Christ's disciples. If there be disciples, there must be a Master. His teaching is by no means merely the effect of the recorded facts and utterances of the Lord, preserved here in the Book for us, and to be pondered upon by ourselves, but it is also the hourly communication, to waiting hearts and souls that keep themselves near the Lord, of deeper insight into His will, of larger views of His purposes, of a firmer grasp of the contents of Scripture, and a more complete subjection of the whole nature to the truth as it is in Jesus. Christian men and women! do you know anything about what it is to learn of Christ in the sense that He Himself, and no poor human voice like mine, nor even merely the records of His past words and deeds as garnered in these Gospels and expounded by His Apostles, is the source of your growing knowledge of Him? If we would keep our hearts and minds clearer than we do of the babble of earthly voices, and be more loyal and humble and constant and patient in our sitting on the benches in Christ's school till the Master Himself came to give us His lessons, these great words of my text would not, as they so often do in the mass of professing Christians, lack the verification of experience and the assurance that it is so with us. Have you sat in Christ's school, and do you know the secret and illuminative whispers of His teaching? If not, there is something wrong in your Christian character, and something insincere in your Christian profession.

Notice, still further, that our Lord here ranks that subsequent teaching before all that He said upon earth, great and precious as it was. Now I do not mean for one moment to allege that fresh communications of truth, uncontained in Scripture, are given to us in the age-long and continuous teaching of Jesus Christ. That I do not suppose to be the meaning of the great promises before us, for the facts of revelation were finished when He ascended, and the inspired commentary upon the facts of revelation was completed with these writings which follow the Gospels in our New Testament. But Christ's teaching brings us up to the understanding of the facts and of the commentary upon them which Scripture contains, so that what was parable or proverb, dimly apprehended, mysterious and enigmatical when it was spoken, and what remains mysterious and enigmatical to us until we grow up to it, gradually becomes full of significance and weighty with a plain and certain meaning. This is the teaching which goes on through the ages--the lifting of His children to the level of apprehending more and more of the inexhaustible and manifold wisdom which is stored for us in this Book. The mine has been worked on the surface, but the deeper it goes the richer is the lode; and no ages will exhaust the treasures that are hid in Christ Jesus our Lord.

He uses the new problems, the new difficulties, the new circumstances of each successive age, and of each individual Christian, in order to evolve from His word larger lessons, and to make the earlier lessons more fully and deeply understood. And this generation, with all its new problems, with all its uneasiness about social questions, with all its new attitude to many ancient truths, will find that Jesus Christ is, as He has been to all past generations,--the answer to all its doubts, using even these doubts as a means of evolving the deeper harmonies of His Word, and of unveiling in the ancient truth more than former generations have seen in it. Brethren, I write unto you no new commandment. Again, a new commandment I write unto you. The inexhaustible freshness of the old word taught us anew, with deeper significance and larger applications, by the everlasting Teacher of the Church, is the hope that shines through these words. I commend to you, dear brethren, the one simple, personal question, Have I submitted myself to that Teacher, and said to men and systems and preachers and books and magazines, and all the rest of the noisy and clamorous tongues that bewilder under pretence of enlightening this generation--have I said to them all, Hold your peace! and let me, in the silence of my waiting soul, hear the Teacher Himself speak to me. Speak, Lord! for Thy servant heareth. Teach me Thy way and lead me, for Thou art my Master, and I the humblest of Thy scholars?

**II. In the next place, another of the glad features of this dawning day is that it is to be a day of desires based upon Christ, and Christlike.**

In that day ye shall ask in My name. Our translators have wisely put a colon at the end of that clause, in order that we may not hurry over it too quickly in haste to get to the next one. For there is a substantial blessing and privilege wrapped up in it. Our Lord has just been saying the same thing in the previous verses, but He repeats it here in order to emphasise it, and to set it by the subsequent words in a somewhat different light. But I dwell upon it for a very simple, practical purpose. I have already explained in former sermons the full, deep meaning of that phrase, asking in Christ's name, and have suggested to you that it implies two things--the one, that our desires should all be based upon His great work as the only ground of our acceptance with God; and the other, that our desires should all be such as represent His heart and His mind. When we ask in His namewe ask, first, for His sake, and, second, as in His person. And such desires, resting their hopes of answer solely upon His mighty sacrifice and all-sufficient merit, and shaped accurately and fully after the pattern of the wishes that are dear to His heart, are to be the prerogative and the joy of His servants, in the new daythat is about to dawn.

Note how beautifully this thought, of wishes moulded into conformity with Jesus Christ, and offered in reliance upon His great sacrifice, follows upon that other thought, I will tell you plainly of the Father. The Master's voice speaks, revealing the paternal heart, the scholar's voice answers with desires kindled by the revelation. Longings and aspirations humbly offered for His sake, and after the pattern of His own, are our true response to His teaching voice. As the astronomer, the more powerful his telescope, though it may resolve some of the nebulae that resisted feebler instruments, only has his bounds of vision enlarged as he looks through it, and sees yet other and mightier star-clouds lying mysterious beyond its ken--so each new influx and tidal wave of knowledge of the Father, which Christ gives to His waiting child, leads on to enlarged desires, to longings to press still further into the unexplored mysteries of that magnificent and boundless land, and to nestle still closer into the infinite heart of God. He declares to us the Father, and the answer of the child to the declaration of the Father is the cry, Abba! Father! show me yet more of Thy heart. Thus aspiration and fruition, longing and satisfaction in unsatiated and inexhaustible and unwearying alternation, are the two blessed poles between which the life of a Christian may revolve in smoothness and music.

My friend! is that anything like the transcript of our experience, that the more we know of God, the more we long to know of, and to possess, Him? and the more we long to know of, and to possess, Him, the more full, gracious, confidential, tender, and continuous are the teachings of our Master? Is not this a far higher level of Christian life than that we live upon? And why so? Is Christ's word faithless? Hath He forgotten to be gracious? Was this promise of His idle wind? Or is it that you and I have never grasped the fulness of privileges that He bestows upon us?

**III. Note, lastly, that that day is to be a day of filial experience of a Father's love.**

I say not unto you that I will pray the Father for you, for the Father Himself loveth you because ye have loved Me, and have believed that I came out from God. Jesus Christ does not deny His intercession. He simply does not bring it into evidence here. To deny it would have been impossible, for soon afterwards we find Him saying, I pray for them which Thou hast given Me, for they are Thine. But He does not emphasise it here, in order that He may emphasise another blessed source of solace--viz., that to those who listen to the Master's teaching, and have their desires moulded into harmony with His, and their wishes and hopes all based upon His sacrifice and work, the divine Father's love directly flows. There is no need of any intercession to turn Him to be merciful. Men sometimes caricature the thought of the intercession of Christ, as if it meant that He, by His prayer, bent the reluctant will of the Father in heaven. All such horrible misconceptions Christ sweeps out of the field here, even whilst there remains, in the fact that the prayers of which He is speaking are offered in His name, the substance and reality of all that we mean by the intercession of Jesus Christ.

And now note that God loves the men who love Jesus Christ. So completely does the Father identify Himself with the Son, that love to Christ is love to Him, and brings the blessed answer of His love to us. Whosoever loves Christ loves God.

Whosoever loves Christ must do so, believing that He came forth from God. There are the two characteristics of a Christian disciple,--faith in the divine mission of the Son, and love that flows from faith. Now, of course, it does not follow from the words before us, that this divine love which comes down upon the heart which loves Christ is the original and first flow of that love towards that heart. We love Him because He first loved us. Christ is not here tracking the stream to its source, but is pointing to it midway in its flow. If you want to go up to the fountain-head you have to go up to the divine Father's heart, who loved when there was no love in us; and, because He loved, sent the Son. First comes the unmotived, spontaneous, self-originated, undeserved, infinite love of God to sinners and aliens and enemies; then the Cross and the mission of Jesus Christ; then the faith in His divine mission; then the love which is the child of faith, as it grasps the Cross and recognises the love that lies behind it; and then, after that, the special, tender, and paternal love of God falling upon the hearts that love Him in His Son. There is nothing here in the slightest degree to conflict with the grand universal truth that God loves enemies and sinners and aliens. But there is the truth, as precious as the other, that they who have known and believed the love that God hath to uslive under the selectest influences of His loving heart, and have a place in its tenderness which it is impossible that any should have who do not so love. And that sweet commerce of a divine love answering a human, which itself is the answer to a prior divine love, brings with it the firm confidence that prayers in His name shall not be prayers in vain.

So, dear friends, growing knowledge, an ever-present Teacher, the peace of calm desires built upon Christ's Cross and fashioned after Christ's Spirit, and the assurance in my quiet and filial heart that my Father in the heavens loves me, and will neither give me serpentswhen I ask for them, thinking them to be fishes, nor refuse breadwhen I ask for it--these things ought to mark the lives of all professing Christians. Are they our experience? If not, why are they not, but because we do not believe that Thou art come forth from God, nor love Thee as we ought?