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

**JOHN-109**. **CHRIST'S FINISHED AND UNFINISHED WORK by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Jesus ... said, It is finished."*

*John 19:30*

*"He said unto me, It is done."*

*Revelation 21:6*

One of these sayings was spoken from the Cross, the other from the Throne. The Speaker of both is the same. In the one, His voice then shook the earth, as the rending rocks testified; in the other, His voice will shake not the earth only but also heaven; for new heavens and a new earthaccompanied the proclamation. In the one, like some traveller ready to depart, who casts a final glance over his preparations, and, satisfied that nothing is omitted, gives his charioteer the signal and rolls away, Jesus Christ looked back over His life's work, and, knowing that it was accomplished, summoned His servant Death, and departed. In the other, He sets His seal to the closed book of the world's history, and ushers in a renovated universe. The one masks the completion of the work on which the world's redemption rests, the other marks the completion of the age-long process by which the world's redemption is actually realised. The one proclaims that the foundation is laid, the other that the headstone is set on the finished building. The one bids us trust in a past perfected work; the other bids us hope in the perfect accomplishment of the results of that work. Taken singly, these sayings are grand; united, they suggest thoughts needed always, never more needful than to-day.

**I. We see here the work which was finished on the Cross.**

The Evangelist gives great significance to the words of my first text, as is shown by his statement in a previous verse: Jesus, knowing that all things were now accomplished, said, I thirst, and then--It is finished. That is to say, there is something in that dying voice a great deal deeper and more wonderful than the ordinary human utterance with which a dying man might say, It is all over now. I have done, for this utterance came from the consciousness that all things had been accomplished by Him, and that He had done His life's work.

Now, there, taking the words even in their most superficial sense, we come upon the strange peculiarity which marks off the life of Jesus Christ from every other life that was ever lived. There are no loose ends left, no unfinished tasks drop from His nerveless hands, to be taken up and carried on by others. His life is a rounded whole, with everything accomplished that had been endeavoured, and everything done that had been commanded. His hands have laid the foundation; His hands shall also finish. He alone of the sons of men, in the deepest sense, completed His task, and left nothing for successors. The rest of us are taken away when we have reared a course or two of the structure, the dream of building which brightened our youth. The pen drops from paralysed hands in the middle of a sentence, and a fragment of a book is left. The painter's brush falls with his palette at the foot of his easel, and but the outline of what he conceived is on the canvas. All of us leave tasks half done, and have to go away before the work is completed. The half-polished columns that lie at Baalbec are but a symbol of the imperfection of every human life. But this Man said, It is finished, and gave up the ghost. Now, if we ponder on what lies in that consciousness of completion, I think we find, mainly, three things.

Christ rendered a complete obedience. All through His life we see Him, hearing with the inward ear the solemn voice of the Father, and responding to it with that I mustwhich runs through all His days, from the earliest dawning of consciousness, when He startled His mother with I must be about My Father's business, until the very last moments. In that obedience to the all-present necessity which He cheerfully embraced and perfectly discharged, there was no flaw. He alone of men looks back upon a life in which His clear consciousness detected neither transgression nor imperfection. In the midst of His career He could front His enemies with Which of you convinceth Me of sin? and no man then, and no man in all the generations that have elapsed since--though some have been blind enough to try it, and malicious enough to utter their attempts,--has been able to answer the challenge. In the midst of His career He said, I do always the things that please Him; and nobody then or since has been able to lay his finger upon an act of His in which, either by excess or defect, or contrariety, the will of God has not been fully represented. At the beginning of His career He said, in answer to the Baptist's remonstrance, It becometh us to fulfil all righteousness, and at the end of His career He looked back, and knowing that He had thus done what became Him--namely, fulfilled it all--He said, It is finished!

The utterance further expresses Christ's consciousness of having completed the revelation of God. Jesus Christ has made known the Father, and the generations since have added nothing to His revelation. The very people, to-day, that turn away from Christianity, in the name of higher conceptions of the divine nature, owe their conceptions of it to the Christ from whom they turn. Not in broken syllables; not at sundry times and in divers manners, but with the one perfect, full-toned name of God on His lips, and vocal in His life, He has declared the Father unto us. In the course of His career He said, He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father; and, looking back on His life of manifestation of God, He proclaimed, It is finished!And the world has since, with all its thinking, added nothing to the name which Christ has declared.

The utterance farther expresses His consciousness of having made a completed, atoning Sacrifice. Remember that the words of my first text followed that awful cry that came from the darkness, and as by one lightning flash, show us the waves and billows rolling over His head. My God! My God! why hast Thou forsaken Me?In that infinitely pathetic and profound utterance, to the interpretation of which our powers go but a little way, Jesus Christ blends together, in the most marvellous fashion, desolation and trust, the consciousness that God is His God, and the consciousness that He is bereft of the light of His presence. Brethren! I know of no explanation of these words which does justice to both the elements that are intertwined so intimately in them, except the old one, which listens to Him as they come from His quivering lip, and says, The Lord hath made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all.

Ah, brethren! unless there was something a great deal more than the physical shrinking from physical death in that piteous cry, Jesus Christ did not die nearly as bravely as many a poor, trembling woman who, at the stake or the block, has owed her fortitude to Him. Many a blood-stained criminal has gone out of life with less tremor than that which, unless you take the explanation that Scripture suggests of the cry, marred the last hours of Jesus Christ. Having drained the cup, He held it up inverted when He said It is finished!and not a drop trickled down the edge. He drank it that we might never need to drink it; and so His dying voice proclaimed that by one offering for sin for ever, He obtained eternal redemptionfor us.

**II. Now, secondly, note the work which began from the Cross.**

Between my two texts lie untold centuries, and the whole development of the consequences of Christ's death, like some great valley stretching between twin mountain-peaks on either side, which from some points of view will be foreshortened and invisible, but when gazed down upon, is seen to stretch widely leagues broad, from mountain ridge to mountain ridge. So my two texts, by the fact that millenniums have to interpose between the time when It is finished!is spoken, and the time when It is done!can be proclaimed from the Throne, imply that the interval is filled by a continuous work of our Lord's, which began at the moment when the work on the Cross ended.

Now it has very often been the case, as I take leave to think, that the interpretation of the former of these two texts has been of such a kind as to distort the perspective of Christian truth, and to obscure the fact of that continuous work of our Lord's. Therefore it may not be out of place if, in a sentence or two, I recall to you the plain teaching of the New Testament upon this matter. It is finished!Yes; and as the lower course of some great building is but the foundation for the higher, when finishedit is but begun. The work which, in one aspect, is the close, in another aspect is the commencement of Christ's further activity. What did He say Himself, when He was here with His disciples? I will not leave you comfortless, I will come to you. What was the last word that came fluttering down, like an olive leaf, into the bosoms of the men as they stood with uplifted faces gazing upon Him as He disappeared? Lo! I am with you alway, even to the end of the ages. What is the keynote of the book which carries on the story of the Gospels in the history of the militant Church? The former treatise have I made... of all that Jesus began both to do and to teach, until the day in which He was taken up--and, being taken up, continued, in a new form, both the doing and the teaching. Thus that book, misnamed the Acts of the Apostles, sets Him forth as the Worker of all the progress of the Church. Who is it that adds to the Church daily such as were being saved?The Lord. Who is it that opened the hearts of the hearers to the message? The Lord. Who is it that flings wide the prison-gates when His persecuted servants are in chains? The Lord. Who is it that bids one man attach himself to the chariot of the eunuch of Ethiopia, and another man go and bear witness in Rome? The Lord. Through the whole of that book there runs the keynote, as its dominant thought, that men are but the instruments, and the hand that wields them is Christ's, and that He who wrought the finished work that culminated on Calvary is operating a continuous work through the ages from His Throne.

Take that last book of Scripture, which opens with a view of the ascended Christ walking in the midst of the seven candlesticks, and holding the stars in His right hand;which further draws aside the curtains of the heavenly sanctuary, and lets us see the Lamb in the midst of the Throne, opening the seven seals--that is to say, setting loose for their progress through the world the forces that make the history of humanity, and which culminates in the vision of the final battle in which the Incarnate Word of God goes forth to victory, with all the armies of heaven following Him. Are not its whole spirit and message that Jesus Christ, the Lamb who is the Antagonist of the Beast, is working through all the history of the world, and will work till its kingdoms are become the kingdoms of our God and of His Christ?

Now, that continuous operation of Jesus Christ in the midst of men is not to be weakened down to the mere continued influence of the truths which He proclaimed, or the Gospel which He brought. There is something a great deal more than the diminishing vibrations of a force long since set in operation, and slowly ceasing to act. Dead teachers do still rule our spirits from their urns; but it is no dead Christ who, by the influence of what He did when He was living, sways the world and comforts His Church; it is a living Christ who to-day is working in His people, by His Spirit. Further, He works on the world through His people by the Word; they plant and water, He gives the increase. And He is working in the world, for His Church and for the world, by His wielding of all power that is given to Him, in heaven and on earth. So that the work that is done upon earth He doeth it all Himself; and Christian people unduly limit the sphere of Christ's operations when they look back only to the Cross, and talk about a finished workthere, and forget that that finished work there is but the vestibule of the continuous work that is being done to-day.

Christian people! The present work of Christ needs working servants. We are here in order to carry on His work. The Apostle ventured to say that he was appointed to fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ; we may well venture to say that we are here mainly to apply to the world the benefits resulting from the finished work upon the Cross. The accomplishment of redemption, and the realisation of the accomplished redemption, are two wholly different things. Christ has done the one. He says to us, You are honoured to help Me to do the other. According to the accurate rendering of a great saying of the Old Testament, Take no rest, and give Him no rest, till He establish and make Jerusalem a praise in the earth, Christ's work is finished; there is nothing for us to do with it but trust it. Christ's work is going on; come to His help. Ye are fellow-labourers with and to the Incarnate Truth.

**III. I need not say more than a word about the third thought, suggested by these texts--viz., the completion of the work which began on the Cross.**

It is done!That lies, no man knows how far, ahead of us. As surely as astronomers tell us that all this universe is hastening towards a central point, so surely that far-off divine eventis that to which the whole creation moves. It is the blaze of light which fills the distant end of the dim vista of human history. Its elements are in part summed up in the context--the tabernacle of God with men, the perfected fellowship of the human with the divine, the housing of men in the very home and heart of God; a new heaven and a new earth, a renovated universe; the removal of all evil, suffering, sorrow, sin, and tears. These things are to be, and shall be, when He says It is done!

Brethren! nothing else than such an issue can be the end of Creation, for nothing else than such is the purpose of God for man, and God is not going to be beaten by the world and the devil. Nothing else than such can be the issue of the Cross; for He shall see of the travail of His soul, and shall be satisfied, and Christ is not going to labour in vain, and spend His life, and give His breath and His blood for nought.

Nothing but the work finished on the Cross guarantees the coming of that perfected issue. I know not where else there is hope for mankind, looking on the history of humanity, except in that great message, that Jesus Christ, the Son of God, has come, has died, lives for ever, and is the world's King and Lord.

So for ourselves, in regard to the one part of the work, let us listen to Him saying It is finished!abandon all attempts to eke it out by additions of our own, and cast ourselves on the finished Revelation, the finished Obedience, the finished Atonement, made once for all on the Cross. But as for the continuous work going on through the ages, let us cast ourselves into it with earnestness, self-sacrifice, consecration, and continuity, for we are fellow-workers with Christ, and Christ will work in, with, and for us if we will work for Him.