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

**JOHN-110**. **CHRIST OUR PASSOVER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"These things were done, that the Scripture should be fulfilled, A bone of Him shall not be broken."*

*John 19:36*

The Evangelist, in the words of this text, points to the great Feast of the Passover and to the Paschal Lamb, as finding their highest fulfilment, as he calls it, in Jesus Christ. For this purpose of bringing out the correspondence between the shadow and the substance he avails himself of a singular coincidence concerning a perfectly unimportant matter--viz., the abnormally rapid sinking of Christ's physical strength in the crucifixion, by which the final indignity of breaking the bones of the sufferers was avoided in His case. John sees, in that entirely insignificant thing, a kind of fingerpost pointing to far more important, deeper, and real correspondences. We are not to suppose that he was so purblind, and attached so much importance to externals, as that this outward coincidence exhausted in his conception the correspondence between the two. But It was a trifle that suggested a greater matter. It was a help aiding gross conceptions and common minds to grasp the inward relation between Jesus and that Passover rite. But just as our Lord would have fulfilled the prophecy about the King coming meek, and having salvation, though He had never ridden on a literal ass into the literal Jerusalem, so our Lord would have fulfilledthe shadow of the Passover with the substance of His own sacrifice if there had never been this insignificant correspondence, in outward things, between the two.

But whilst my text is the Evangelist's commentary, the question arises, How did he come to recognise that our Lord was all which that Passover signified? And the answer is, he recognised it through Christ's own teaching. He does not record the institution of the Lord's Supper. It did not fall into his scheme to deal with external events of that sort, and he knew that it had been sufficiently taught by the three earlier Gospels, to which his is a supplement. But though he did not narrate the institution, he takes it for granted in the words of my text, and his vindication of his seeing the fulfilment of A bone of Him shall not be brokenin the incident to which I have referred, lies in this, that Jesus Christ Himself swept away the Passover and substituted the memorial feast of the Lord's Supper. This do in remembrance of Me, said at the table where the Paschal lamb had been eaten, sufficiently warrants John's allusion here.

So then, marking the fact that our Evangelist is but carrying out the lesson that he had learned in the upper room, we may fairly take the identification of the Paschal lamb with the crucified Christ as being the last instance in which our Lord Himself laid His hand upon Old Testament incidents and said, They all mean Me. And it is from that point of view, and not merely for the purpose of dealing with the words that I have read as our starting-point, that I wish to speak now.

**I. Now then, the first thing that strikes me is that in this substitution of Himself for the Passover we have a strange instance of Christ's supreme authority.**

Try to fling yourself back in imagination to that upper room, where Jesus and a handful of Galileans were sitting, and remember the sanctity which immemorial usage had cast round that centre and apex of the Jewish ritual, established at the Exodus by a solemn divine appointment, intended to commemorate the birth of the nation, venerable by antiquity and association with the most vehement pulsations of national feeling, the centre point of Jewish religion. Christ said: Put it all away; do not think about the Exodus; do not think about the destroying Angel; do not think about the deliverance. Forget all the past; do this in remembrance of Me. Take into account that the Passover had a double sacredness, as a religious festival, and also as commemorating the birthday of the nation, and then estimate what a strange sense of His own importance the Man must have had who said: That past is done with, and it is Me that you have to think of now. If I might venture to take a very modern illustration without vulgarising a great thing, suppose that on the other side of the Atlantic somebody were to stand up and say, I abrogate the Fourth of July and Independence Day. Do not think about Washington and the establishment of the United States any more. Think about me!That is exactly what Jesus Christ did. Only instead of a century there were millenniums of observance which He thus laid aside. So I say that is a strange exercise of authority.

What does it imply? It implies two things, and I must say a word about each of them. It implies that Christ regarded the whole of the ancient system of Judaism, its history, its law, its rites of worship, as pointing onwards to Himself, that He recognised in it a system the whole raison d'etre of which was anticipatory and preparatory of Himself. For Him the Decalogue was given, for Him priests were consecrated, for Him kings were anointed, for Him prophets spake, for Him sacrifices smoked, for Him festivals were appointed, and the nation and its history were all one long proclamation: The King cometh! go ye forth to meet Him. You cannot get less than that out of the way in which He handled, as is told in this Gospel, Jacob's ladder, the Serpent in the wilderness, the Manna that fell from Heaven, the Pillar of Cloud that led the people, the Rock that gushed forth water, and now, last of all, the Passover, which was the very shining apex of the whole sacrificial and ritual system.

And remember, too, that this way of dealing with all the institutions of the nation as meaning, in their inmost purpose, Himself, is exactly parallel to His way of dealing with the sacred words of Mosaic commandment and prohibition in the Sermon on the Mount, where He set side by side as of equal--I was going to say, and I should have been right in saying, identical--authority what was said to them of old timeand what I say unto you. Amidst the dust of our present controversies as to the processes by which, and the times at which, the Old Testament books assumed their present form, there is grave danger that the essential thing about the whole matter should be obscured. The way in which what is called Higher Criticism may finally locate the origins and dates of the various parts of that ancient record and that ancient system does not in the slightest degree affect the outstanding characteristic of the whole, that it is the product of the divine hand, working (if you will) through men who had more freedom of action whilst they were its organs than our grandfathers thought. Be it so; but still that divine Hand shaped the whole in order that, besides its educational effects upon the generations that received it, there should shine through it all the expectation of the coming King. And I venture to say that, however grateful we may be to modern investigation for light upon these other points to which I have referred, the ignorant reader that reads Jesus Christ into all the Old Testament may be very uncritical and mistaken in regard to details, but he has got hold of the root of the matter, and is nearer to the apprehension of the essence and spirit and purpose of the ancient Revelation than the most learned critic who does not see that it is the preparation for, and the prophecy of, Jesus Christ Himself. And the vindication of such a position lies in this, among other facts, that He in the upper room, in harmony with, and in completion of, all that He had previously spoken about His relation to the Old Testament, claimed the Passover as the prophecy of Himself, and said, I am the Lamb of God.

I need not dwell, I suppose, on the other consideration that is involved in this strange exercise of authority--viz., the naturalness, as without any sense of doing anything presumptuous or extraordinary, with which Christ assumes His right to handle divine appointments with the most perfect freedom, to modify them, to reshape them, to divert them from their first purpose, and to enjoin them with an authority equal to that with which the Lord said unto Moses, Keep ye this day through your generations. There is only one supposition on which I, for my part, can understand that conduct--that He was the possessor of authority the same as the Authority that had originally instituted the rite.

And so, dear brethren! when our Lord said, Do this in remembrance of Me, I pray you to ask yourselves, What did that involve in regard to His nature and the source of His authority over us? And what did it involve in regard to His relation to that ancient Revelation?

**II. And now another point that I would suggest is--we have, in this substitution of the new rite for the old, our Lord's clear declaration of what was the very heart of His work in the world.**

This do in remembrance of Me. What is it, then, to which He points? Is it to the wisdom, the tenderness, the deep beauty, the flashing moral purity that gleamed and shone lambent in His words? No! Is it to the gracious self--oblivion, the gentle accessibility, the loving pity, the leisurely heart always ready to help, the eye ready to fill with tears, the hand ever outstretched and ever laden with blessings? No! It is the death on the Cross which He, if I might so say, isolates, at least which He underscores with red lines, and which He would have us remember, as we remember nothing else. Brethren, rites are insignificant in many aspects, but are often of enormous importance as witnesses to truths. And I point to the Lord's Supper, the one rite of the Christian Church, which is to be repeated over and over and over again, and see in it the great barrier which has rendered it impossible, and will render it impossible, as I believe, for evermore, that a Christianity, which obscures the atoning sacrifice of Christ on the Cross, should ever pose as the full representation of the Master's mind, or as the full expression of the Saviour's word.

What do men and churches that falter in their allegiance to the truth of Christ's redemptive death do with the Lord's Supper? Nothing! For the most part they ignore it, or if they retain it, do not, for the life of them, know how to explain it, or why it should be there. The explanation of why it is there is the great truth, of which it is the clear utterance and the strong defence, the truth that Jesus Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, and that the Son of Man came... to give His life a ransom for the many.

What did that Passover say? Two things it said, the blood that was sprinkled on the lintels and on the door-posts was the token to the destroying Angel, as with his broad, silent pinions he swept through the land, bringing a blacker night into Egyptian darkness, and leaving behind him no house in which there was not one dead. All the houses of which the occupants had put the ruddy mark on the lintels and on the doorposts, and were wise enough not to go forth from behind the shelter of that mark on the door, were safe when the morning dawned. And so to us all who, by our sinfulness, have brought down upon our heads exposedness to that retribution, which, in a righteously governed universe, must needs follow sin, and to that death which the separation from God--the necessary result of sin--most surely is, there is proffered in that great Sacrifice shelter from the destroying sword.

But that is not all. Whilst the blood on the posts meant security, the Lamb on the table meant emancipation. So they who find in the dying Christ their exemption from the last consequences of transgression, find, in partaking of the Christ whose sacrifice is their pardon, the communication of a new power, which sets them free from a worse than Egyptian bondage, and enables them to shake from their emancipated limbs the fetters of the grimmest of the Pharaohs that have wielded a tyrannous dominion over them. Pardon and freedom, the creation of a nation subject only to the law of Jehovah Himself--these were the facts that the Passover festival and the Passover lamb signified, and these are the facts which, in nobler fashion, are brought to us by Jesus Christ. So, I beseech you, let Him teach you what His work in the world is, as He lays His own hand on that highest of the ancient festivals, and endorses the Baptist's declaration, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world!

**III. Now, lastly, let me ask you to notice how, in this regal and authoritative dealing by our Lord with that ancient festival, there lies a loving provision for our weakness.**

Surely we may venture to say that Jesus Christ desired to be remembered, even by that handful of poor people, and by us, not only for our sakes, but because His heart, too, craved that He should not be forgotten by those whom He was leaving. As you may remember, the dying king turned to the bishop standing by him, with the enigmatical word which no one understood but the receiver of it--Remember!so did Jesus Christ. He appeals to our thankfulness, He appeals to our affections, He lets us see that He wishes to live in our memories, because He delights in it, as well as because it is for our profit.

The Passover was purely and simply a rite of remembrance. I venture to believe that the Lord's Supper is nothing more. I know how people talk about the bare, bald, Zwinglian ideas of the Communion. They do look very bald and bare by the side of modern notions and mediaeval notions resuscitated. Well, I had rather have the bareness than I would have it overlaid by coverings under which there is room for abundance of vermin to lurk. Christ puts the Lord's Supper in the place of the Passover. The Passover was a purely memorial rite. You Christian people will understand the spirituality of the whole Gospel system, and the nature of the only bond which unites men to Jesus and brings spiritual blessings to them--viz. faith--all the better, the more you cling, in spite of all that is going on round us to-day, to that simple, intelligible, Scriptural notion that we commemorate the Sacrifice, not offer the Sacrifice. Jesus Christ said that the Lord's Supper was to be observed in remembrance of Me. That was His explanation of its purpose, and I for one am content to take as the expounder of the laws of the feast, the feast's own Founder.

Now one more word. In the Passover men fed on the Sacrifice. Jesus Christ presents Himself to each of us as at once the Sacrifice for our sins and the Food of our souls. If you will keep your minds in touch with the truth about Him, and with Him whom the truth about Him reveals to you, if you will keep your hearts in touch with that great and unspeakable sign of God's love, if you will keep your wills in submission to His authority, if you will let His blood, which is the life, or as you may otherwise word it, His Spirit, come into your lives, and be your spirit, your motive, then you will go out from the table, not like the disciples to flee, and deny, and forget, nor like the Israelites to wander in a wilderness, but strengthened for many a day of joyous service and true communion, and will come at last to what He has promised us: Ye shall sit with Me at My table in My Kingdom, whence we shall go no more out.