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

**JOSHUA-007. THE SIEGE OF JERICHO by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"10. And Joshua had commanded the people, saying, Ye shall not shout, nor make any noise with your voice, ... until the day I bid you shout; then shall ye shout. 11. So the ark of the Lord compassed the city, going about it once: and they came into the camp, and lodged in the camp."*

*Joshua 6:10-11*

The cheerful uniform obedience of Israel to Joshua stands in very remarkable contrast with their perpetual murmurings and rebellions under Moses. Many reasons probably concurred in bringing about this change of tone. For one thing the long period of suspense was over; and to average sense-bound people there is no greater trial of faith and submission than waiting, inactive, for something that is to come. Now they are face to face with their enemies, and it is a great deal easier to fight than to expect; and their courage mounts higher as dangers come nearer. Then there were great miracles which left their impression upon the people, such as the passage of the Jordan, and so on.

So that the Epistle to the Hebrews is right when it says, By faith the walls of Jericho fell down after they were compassed about seven days. And that faith was as manifest in the six days march round the city, as on the seventh day of victorious entrance. For, if you will read the narrative carefully, you will see that it says that the Israelites were not told what was to be the end of that apparently useless and aimless promenade. It was only on the morning of the day of the miracle that it was announced. So there are two stages in this instance of faith. There is the protracted trial of it, in doing an apparently useless thing; and there is the victory, which explains and vindicates it. Let us look at these two points now.

**I. Consider that strange protracted trial of faith.**

The command comes to the people, through Joshua's lips, unaccompanied by any explanation or reasons. If Moses had called for a like obedience from the people in their wilderness mood, there would have been no end of grumbling. But whatever some of them may have thought, there is nothing recorded now but prompt submission. Notice, too, the order of the procession. First come the armed men, then seven white-robed priests, blowing, probably, discordant music upon their ram's horn trumpets; then the Ark, the symbol and token of God's presence; and then the rereward. So the Ark is the centre; and it is not only Israel that is marching round the city, but rather it is God who is circling the walls. Very impressive would be the grim silence of it all. Tramp, tramp, tramp, round and round, six days on end, without a word spoken (though no doubt taunts in plenty were being showered down from the walls), they marched, and went back to the camp, and subsided into inactivity for another four-and-twenty hours, until they turned out for the procession once more.

Now, what did all that mean? The blast of the trumpet was, in the Jewish feasts, the solemn proclamation of the presence of God. And hence the purpose of that singular march circumambulating Jericho was to declare Here is the Lord of the whole earth, weaving His invisible cordon and network around the doomed city. In fact the meaning of the procession, emphasised by the silence of the soldiers, was that God Himself was saying, in the long-drawn blasts of the priestly trumpet, Lift up your heads, O ye gates! even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of Glory shall come in. Now, whatever Jericho and its people thought about that, Israel, according to the commentary of the New Testament, had to some extent, at all events, learnt the lesson, and knew, of course very rudimentarily and with a great deal of mere human passion mingled with it, but still knew, that this was God's summons, and the manifestation of God's presence. And so round the city they went, and day by day they did the thing in which their faith apprehended its true meaning, and which, by reason of their faith, they were willing to do. Let us take some lessons from that.

Here is a confidence in the divine presence, manifested by unquestioning obedience to a divine command.

Theirs not to make reply,

Theirs not to reason why.

Joshua had spoken; God had spoken through him. And so here goes! up with the Ark and the trumpets, and out on to the hot sand for the march! It would have been a great deal easier to have stopped in the tents. It was disheartening work marching round thus. The sceptical spirit in the host--the folk of whom there are many great-grandchildren living to-day, who always have objections to urge when disagreeable duties are crammed up against their faces--would have enough to say on that occasion, but the bulk of the people were true, and obeyed. Now, we do not need to put out the eyes of our understanding in order to practise the obedience of faith. And we have to exercise common-sense about the things that seem to us to be duties.

But this is plain, that if once we see a thing to be, in Christian language, the will of our Father in heaven, then everything is settled; and there is only one course for us, and that is, unquestioning submission, active submission, or, what is as hard, passive submission.

Then here again is faith manifesting itself by an obedience which was altogether ignorant of what was coming. I think that is quite plain in the story, if you will read it carefully, though I think that it is not quite what people generally understand as its meaning. But it makes the incident more in accordance with God's uniform way of dealing with us that the host should be told on the morning of the first day of the week that they were to march round the city, and told the same on the second day, and on the third the same, and so on until the sixth; and that not until the morning of the seventh, were they told what was to be the end of it all. That is the way in which God generally deals with us. In the passage of the Jordan, too, you will find, if you will look at the narrative carefully, that although Joshua was told what was coming, the people were not told till the morning of the day, when the priests feet were dipped in the brink of the water. We, too, have to do our day's march, knowing very little about tomorrow; and we have to carry on all through life doing the duty that lies nearest us, entirely ignorant of the strange issues to which it may conduct. Life is like a voyage down some winding stream, shut in by hills, sometimes sunny and vine-clad, like the Rhine, sometimes grim and black, like an American canon. As the traveller looks ahead he wonders how the stream will find a passage beyond the next bend; and as he looks back, he cannot trace the course by which he has come. It is only when he rounds the last shoulder that he sees a narrow opening flashing in the sunshine, and making a way for his keel. So, seeing that we know nothing about the issues, let us make sure of the motives; and seeing that we do not know what to-morrow may bring forth, nor even what the next moment may bring, let us see that we fill the present instant as full as it will hold with active obedience to God, based upon simple faith in Him. He does not open His whole hand at once; He opens a finger at a time, as you do sometimes with your children when you are trying to coax them to take something out of the palm. He gives us enough light for the moment, He says, March round Jericho; and be sure that I mean something. What I do mean I will tell you some day. And so we have to put all into His hands.

Then here, again, is faith manifesting itself by persistency. A week was not long, but it was a long while during which to do that one apparently useless thing and nothing else. It would take about an hour or so to march round the city, and there were twenty-three hours of idleness. Little progress in reducing Jericho was made by the progress round it, and it must have got rather wearisome about the sixth day. Familiarity would breed monotony, but notwithstanding the deadly influences of habit, the obedient host turned out for their daily round. Let us not be weary in well-doing, for there is a time for everything. There is a time for sowing and for reaping, and in the season of the reaping we shall reap, if we faint not. Dear brethren! we all get weary of our work. Custom presses upon us, with a weight heavy as frost, and deep almost as life. It is easy to do things with a spurt, but it is the keeping on at the monotonous, trivial, and sometimes unintelligible duties that is the test of a man's grit, and of his goodness too. So, although it is a very, very threadbare lesson --one that you may think it was not worth while for me to bring you all here to receive--I am sure that there are few things needed more by us all, and especially by those of us who are on the wrong side of middle life, as people call it--though I think it is the right side in many respects--than that old familiar lesson. Keep on as you have begun, and for the six weary days turn out, however hot the sun, however comfortable the carpets in the tent, however burning the sand, however wearisome and flat it may seem to be perpetually tramping round the same walls of the same old city; keep on, for in due season the trumpet will sound and the walls will fall.

**II. So that brings me to the second stage--viz., the sudden victory which vindicates and explains the protracted trial of faith.**

I do not need to tell the story of how, on the seventh day, the host encompassed the city seven times, and at last they were allowed to break the long silence with a shout. You will observe the prominence given to the sacred seven, both in the number of days, of circuits made, and the number of the priests trumpets. Probably the last day was a Sabbath, for there must have been one somewhere in the week, and it is improbable that it was one of the undistinguished days. That was a shout, we may be sure, by which the week's silence was avenged, and all the repressed emotions gained utterance at last. The fierce yell from many throats, which startled the wild creatures in the hills behind Jericho, blended discordantly with the trumpets clang which proclaimed a present God; and at His summons the fortifications toppled into hideous ruin, and over the fallen stones the men of Israel clambered, each soldier, in all that terrible circle of avengers that surrounded the doomed city, marching straight forward, and so all converging on the centre.

Now, we can discover good reasons for this first incident in the campaign being marked by miracle. The fact that it was the first is a reason. It is a law of God's progressive revelation that each new epoch is inaugurated by miraculous works which do not continue throughout its course. For instance, it is observable that, in the Acts of the Apostles, the first example of each class of incidents recorded there, such as the first preaching, the first persecution, the first martyrdom, the first expansion of the Gospel beyond Jews, its first entrance into Europe, has usually the stamp of miracle impressed on it, and is narrated at great length, while subsequent events of the same class have neither of those marks of distinction. Take, for example, the account of Stephen, the first martyr. He saw the heavens opened and the Son of Man standing at the right hand of God. We do not read that the heavens opened when Herod struck off the head of James with the sword. But was Jesus any the less near to help His servant? Certainly not.

In like manner it was fitting that the first time that Israel crossed swords with these deadly and dreaded enemies should be marked by a miraculous intervention to hearten God's warriors. But let us take care that we understand the teaching of any miracle. Surely it does not secularise and degrade the other incidents of a similar sort in which no miracle was experienced. The very opposite lesson is the true one to draw from a miracle. In its form it is extraordinary, and presents God's direct action on men or on nature, so obviously that all eyes can see it. But the conclusion to be drawn is not that God acts only in a supernatural manner, but that He is acting as really, though in a less obvious fashion, in the natural order. In these turning-points, the inauguration of new stages in revelation or history, the cause which always produces all nearer effects and the ultimate effects, which are usually separated or united (as one may choose to regard it) by many intervening links, are brought together. But the originating power works as truly when it is transmitted through these many links as when it dispenses with them. Miracle shows us in abbreviated fashion, and therefore conspicuously, the divine will acting directly, that we may see it working when it acts indirectly. In miracle God makes bare His arm, that we may be sure of its operation when it is draped and partially hid, as by a vesture, by second causes.

We are not to argue that, because there is no miracle, God is not present or active. He was as truly with Israel when there was no Ark present, and no blast of the trumpet heard. He was as truly with Israel when they fought apparently unhelped, as He was when Jericho fell. The teaching of all the miracles in the Old and the New Testaments is that the order of the universe is maintained by the continual action of the will of God on men and things. So this story is a transient revelation of an eternal fact. God is as much with you and me in our fights as He was with the Israelites when they marched round Jericho, and as certainly will He help. If by faith we endure the days of often blind obedience, we shall share the rapture of the sudden victory.

Now, I have said that the last day of this incident was probably a Sabbath day. Does not that suggest the thought that we may take this story as a prophetic symbol? There is for us a week of work, and a seventh day of victory, when we shall enter, not into the city of confusion which has come to nought, but into the city which hath the foundations, whose builder and maker is God. The old fathers of the Christian Church were not far wrong, when they saw in this story a type of the final coming of the Lord. Did you ever notice how St. Paul, in writing to the Thessalonians about that coming, seems to have his mind turned back to the incident before us? Remember that in this incident the two things which signalised the fall of the city were the trumpet and the shout. What does Paul say? The Lord Himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God. Jericho over again! And then, Babylon is fallen, is fallen! And I saw the new Jerusalem coming down out of heaven, like a bride adorned for her husband.