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

**LUKE-008**. **SIMEON'S SWAN SONG by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"*29. *Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: 30. For mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."*

*Luke 2:29-30*

That scene, when the old man took the Infant in his withered arms, is one of the most picturesque and striking in the Gospel narrative. Simeon's whole life appears, in its later years, to have been under the immediate direction of the Spirit of God. It is very remarkable to notice how, in the course of three consecutive verses, the operation of that divine Spirit upon him is noted. It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost that he should not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came by the Spirit into the Temple. I suppose that means that some inward monition, which he recognised to be of God, sent him there, in the expectation that at last he was to see the Lord's Christ. He was there before the Child was brought by His parents, for we read He came by the Spirit into the Temple, and when the parents brought in the Child Jesus ... he took Him in his arms. Think of the old man, waiting there in the Sanctuary, told by God that he was thus about to have the fulfilment of his life-long desire, and yet probably not knowing what kind of a shape the fulfilment would take. There is no reason to believe that he knew he was to see an infant; and he waits. And presently a peasant woman comes in with a child in her arms, and there arises in his soul the voice Anoint Him! for this is He!And so, whether he expected such a vision or no, he takes the Child in his arms, and says, Lord! Now, now !--after all these years of waiting--lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace.

Now, it seems to me that there are two or three very interesting thoughts deducible from this incident, and from these words. I take three of them. Here we have the Old recognising and embracing the New; the slave recognising and submitting to his Owner; and the saint recognising and welcoming the approach of death.

**I. The Old recognising and embracing the New.**

It is striking to observe how the description of Simeon's character expresses the aim of the whole Old Testament Revelation. All that was meant by the preceding long series of manifestations through all these years was accomplished in this man. For hearken how he is described--just and devout, that is the perfection of moral character, stated in the terms of the Old Testament; waiting for the Consolation of Israel, that is the ideal attitude which the whole of the gradual manifestation of God's increasing purpose running through the ages was intended to make the attitude of every true Israelite--an expectant, eager look forwards, and in the present, the discharge of all duties to God and man. And the Holy Ghost was upon him; that, too, in a measure, was the ultimate aim of the whole Revelation of Israel. So this man stands as a bright, consummate flower which had at last effloresced from the roots; and in his own person, an embodiment of the very results which God had patiently sought through millenniums of providential dealing and inspiration. Therefore in this man's arms was laid the Christ for whom he had so long been waiting.

And he exhibits, still further, what God intended to secure by the whole previous processes of Revelation, in that he recognises that they were transcended and done with, that all that they pointed to was accomplished when a devout Israelite took into his arms the Incarnate Messiah, that all the past had now answered its purpose, and like the scaffolding when the top stone of a building is brought forth with shouting, might be swept away and the world be none the poorer. And so he rejoices in the Christ that he receives, and sings the swan-song of the departing Israel, the Israel according to the Spirit. And that is what Judaism was meant to do, and how it was meant to end, in an euthanasia, in a passing into the nobler form of the Christian Church and the Christian citizenship.

I do not need to remind you how terribly unlike this ideal the reality was, but I may, though only in a sentence or two, point out that that relation of the New to the Old is one that recurs, though in lees sharp and decisive forms, in every generation, and in our generation in a very special manner. It is well for the New when it consents to be taken in the arms of the Old, and it is ill for the Old when, instead of welcoming, it frowns upon the New, and instead of playing the part of Simeon, and embracing and blessing the Infant, plays the part of a Herod, and seeks to destroy the Child that seems to threaten its sovereignty. We old people who are conservative, if not by nature, by years, and you young people who are revolutionary and innovating by reason of your youth, may both find a lesson in that picture in the Temple, of Simeon with the Infant Christ in his arms.

**II. Further, we have here the slave recognising and submitting to his Owner.**

Now the word which is here employed for Lordis one that very seldom occurs in the New Testament in reference to God; only some four or five times in all. And it is the harshest and hardest word that can be picked out. If you clip the Greek termination off it, it is the English word despot, and it conveys all that that word conveys to us, not only a lord in the sense of a constitutional monarch, not only a lord in the polite sense of a superior in dignity, but a despot in the sense of being the absolute owner of a man who has no rights against the owner, and is a slave. For the word slaveis what logicians call the correlative of this word despot, and as the latter asserts absolute ownership and authority, the former declares abject submission. So Simeon takes these two words to express his relation and feeling towards God. Thou art the Owner, the Despot, and I am Thy slave. That relation of owner and slave, wicked as it is, when subsisting between two men--an atrocious crime, the sum of all villainies, as the good old English emancipators used to call it--is the sum of all blessings when regarded as existing between man and God. For what does it imply? The right to command and the duty to obey, the sovereign will that is supreme over all, and the blessed attitude of yielding up one's will wholly, without reserve, without reluctance, to that infinitely mighty, and--blessed be God!--infinitely loving Will Absolute authority calls for abject submission.

And again, the despot has the unquestioned right of life and death over his slave, and if he chooses, can smite him down where he stands, and no man have a word to say. Thus, absolutely, we hang upon God, and because He has the power of life and death, every moment of our lives is a gift from His hands, and we should not subsist for an instant unless, by continual effluence from Him, and influx into us, of the life which flows from Him, the Fountain of life.

Again, the slave-owner has entire possession of all the slave's possessions, and can take them and do what he likes with them. And so, all that I call mine is His. It was His before it became mine; it remains His whilst it is mine, because I am His, and so what seems to belong to me belongs to Him, no less truly. What, then, do you do with your possessions? Use them for yourselves? Dispute His ownership? Forget His claims? Grudge that He should take them away sometimes, and grudge still more to yield them to Him in daily obedience, and when necessary, surrender them? Is such a temper what becomes the slave? What reason has he to grumble if the master comes to him and says, This little bit of ground that I have given you to grow a few sugar-canes and melons on, I am going to take back again. What reason have we to set up our puny wills against Him, if He exercises His authority over us and demands that we should regard ourselves not only as sons but also as slaves to whom the owner of it and us has given a talent to be used for Him?

Now, all that sounds very harsh, does it not? Let in one thought into it, and it all becomes very gracious. The Apostle Peter, who also once uses this word despot, does so in a very remarkable connection. He speaks about men's denying the despot that bought them. Ah, Peter! you were getting on very thin ice when you talked about denial. Perhaps it was just because he remembered his sin in the judgment hall that he used that word to express the very utmost degree of degeneration and departure from Jesus. But be that as it may, he bases the slave-owner's right on purchase. And Jesus Christ has bought us by His own precious blood; and so all that sounds harsh in the metaphor, worked out as I have been trying to do, changes its aspect when we think of the method by which He has acquired His rights and the purpose for which He exercises them. As the Psalmist said, Oh, Lord! truly I am Thy slave. Thou hast loosed my bonds.

**III. So, lastly, we have here the saint recognising and welcoming the approach of death.**

Now, it is a very singular thing, but I suppose it is true, that somehow or other, most people read these words, Lord! now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, as being a petition; Lord! now let Thy servant depart. But they are not that at all. We have here not a petition or an aspiration, but a statement of the fact that Simeon recognises the appointed token that his days were drawing to an end, and it is the glad recognition of that fact. Lord! I see now that the time has come when I may put aside all this coil of weary waiting and burdened mortality, and go to rest. Look how he regards approaching death. Thou lettest Thy servant departis but a feeble translation of the original, which is better given in the version that has become very familiar to us all by its use in a musical service, the Nunc Dimittis; Now Thou dost send awayIt is the technical word for relieving a sentry from his post. It conveys the idea of the hour having come when the slave who has been on the watch through all the long, weary night, or toiling through all the hot, dusty day, may extinguish his lantern, or fling down his mattock, and go home to his little hut. Lord! Thou dost dismiss me now, and I take the dismission as the end of the long watch, as the end of the long toil.

But notice, still further, how Simeon not only recognises, but welcomes the approach of death. Thou lettest Thy servant depart in peace. Yes, there speaks a calm voice tranquilly accepting the permission. He feels no agitation, no fluster of any kind, but quietly slips away from his post. And the reason for that peaceful welcome of the end is for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation. That sight is the reason, first of all, for his being sure that the curfew had rung for him, and that the day's work was done. But it is also the reason for the peacefulness of his departure. He went in peace, because of what? Because the weary, blurred, old eyes had seen all that any man needs to see to be satisfied and blessed. Life could yield nothing more, though its length were doubled to this old man, than the sight of God's salvation.

Can it yield anything more to us, brethren? And may we not say, if we have seen that sight, what an unbelieving author said, with a touch of self-complacency not admirable, I have warmed both hands at the fire of life, and I am ready to depart. We may go in peace, if our eyes have seen Him who satisfies our vision, whose bright presence will go with us into the darkness, and whom we shall see more perfectly when we have passed from the sentry-box to the home above, and have ceased to be slaves in the far-off plantation, and are taken to be sons in the Father's house. Thou lettest Thy servant depart in peace.