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

**LUKE-009**. **THE BOY IN THE TEMPLE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And He said unto them, How is it that ye sought Me! wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?"*

*Luke 2:49*

A number of spurious gospels have come down to us, which are full of stories, most of them absurd and some of them worse, about the infancy of Jesus Christ. Their puerilities bring out more distinctly the simplicity, the nobleness, the worthiness of this one solitary incident of His early days, which has been preserved for us. How has it been preserved? If you will look over the narratives there will be very little difficulty, I think, in answering that question. Observing the prominence that is given to the parents, and how the story enlarges upon what they thought and felt, we shall not have much doubt in accepting the hypothesis that it was none other than Mary from whom Luke received such intimate details. Notice, for instance, Joseph and His mother knew not of it. They supposed Him to have been in the company. And when they, i.e. Joseph and Mary, saw Him, they were astonished; and then that final touch, He was subject to them, as if His mother would not have Luke or us think that this one act of independence meant that He had shaken off parental authority. And is it not a mother's voice that says, His mother kept all these things in her heart, and pondered all the traits of boyhood? Now it seems to me that, in these words of the twelve-year-old boy, there are two or three points full of interest and of teaching for us. There is--

**I. That consciousness of Sonship.**

I am not going to plunge into a subject on which certainly a great deal has been very confidently affirmed, and about which the less is dogmatised by us, who must know next to nothing about it, the better; viz. the inter-connection of the human and the divine elements in the person of Jesus Christ. But the context leads us straight to this thought--that there was in Jesus distinct growth in wisdom as well as in stature, and in favour with God and man. And now, suppose the peasant boy brought up to Jerusalem, seeing it for the first time, and for the first time entering the sacred courts of the Temple. Remember, that to a Jewish boy, his reaching the age of twelve made an epoch, because he then became a son of the Law, and took upon himself the religious responsibilities which had hitherto devolved upon his parents. If we will take that into account, and remember that it was a true manhood which was growing up in the boy Jesus, then we shall not feel it to be irreverent if we venture to say, not that here and then, there began His consciousness of His Divine Sonship, but that that visit made an epoch and a stage in the development of that consciousness, just because it furthered the growth of His manhood.

Further, our Lord in these words, in the gentlest possible way, and yet most decisively, does what He did in all His intercourse with Mary, so far as it is recorded for us in Scripture--relegated her back within limits beyond which she tended to advance. For she said, Thy father and I have sought Thee sorrowing, no doubt thus preserving what had been the usual form of speech in the household for all the previous years; and there is an emphasis that would fall upon her heart, as it fell upon none other, when He answered: Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?We are not warranted in affirming that the Child meant all which the Man afterwards meant by the claim to be the Son of God; nor are we any more warranted in denying that He did. We know too little about the mysteries of His growth to venture on definite statements of either kind. Our sounding-lines are not long enough to touch bottom in this great word from the lips of a boy of twelve; but this is clear, that as He grew into self-consciousness, there came with it the growing consciousness of His Sonship to His Father in heaven.

Now, dear brethren, whilst all that is unique, and parts Him off from us, do not let us forget that that same sense of Sonship and Fatherhood must be the very deepest thing in us, if we are Christian people after Christ's pattern. We, too, can be sons through Him, and only through Him. I believe with all my heart in what we hear so much about now--the universal Fatherhood of God. But I believe that there is also a special relation of Fatherhood and Sonship, which is constituted only, according to Scripture teaching in my apprehension, through faith in Jesus Christ, and the reception of His life as a supernatural life into our souls. God is Father of all men--thank God for it! And that means, that He gives life to all men; that in a very deep and precious sense the life which He gives to every man is not only derived from, but is kindred with, His own; and it means that His love reaches to all men, and that His authority extends over them. But there is an inner sanctuary, there is a better life than the life of nature, and the Fatherhood into which Christ introduces us means, that through faith in Him, and the entrance into our spirits of the Spirit of adoption, we receive a life derived from, and kindred with, the life of the Giver, and that we are bound to Him not only by the cords of love, but to obey the parental authority. Sonship is the deepest thought about the Christian life.

It was an entirely new thought when Jesus spoke to His disciples of their Father in heaven. It was a thrilling novelty when Paul bade servile worshippers realise that they were no longer slaves, but sons, and as such, heirs of God. It was the rapture of pointing to a new star flaming out, as it were, that swelled in John's exclamation: Beloved, now are we the sons of God!For even though in the Old Testament there are a few occasional references to Israel's King or to Israel itself as being God's son, as far as I remember, there is only one reference in all the Old Testament to parental love towards each of us on the part of God, and that is the great saying in the 103rd Psalm: Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. For the most part the idea connected in the Old Testament with the Fatherhood of God is authority: If I be a Father, where is Mine honour?says the last of the prophets. But when we pass into the New, on the very threshold, here we get the germ, in these words, of the blessed thought that, as His disciples, we, too, may claim sonship to God through Him, and penetrate beyond the awe of Divine Majesty into the love of our Father God. Brethren, notwithstanding all that was unique in the Sonship of Jesus Christ, He welcomes us to a place beside Himself, and if we are the children of God by faith in Him, then are we heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ.

Now the second thought that I would suggest from these words is--

**II. The sweet must of filial duty.**

How is it that ye sought Me?That means: Did you not know where I should be sure to be? What need was there to go up and down Jerusalem looking for Me? You might have known there was only one place where you would find Me. Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business?Now, the last words of this question are in the Greek literally, as the margin of the Revised Version tells us, in the things of My Father; and that idiomatic form of speech may either be taken to mean, as the Authorised Version does, about My Father's business, or, with the Revised Version, in My Father's house. The latter seems the rendering most relevant in this connection, where the folly of seeking is emphasised--the certainty of His place is more to the point than that of His occupation. But the locality carried the occupation with it, for why must He be in the Father's house but to be about the Father's business, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in His Temple?

Do people know where to find us? Is it unnecessary to go hunting for us? Is there a place where it is certain that we shall be? It was so with this child Jesus, and it should be so with all of us who profess to be His followers.

All through Christ's life there runs, and occasionally there comes into utterance, that sense of a divine necessity laid upon Him; and here is its beginning, the very first time that the word occurs on His lips, I must. There is as divine and as real a necessity shaping our lives because it lies upon and moulds our wills, if we have the child's heart, and stand in the child's position. In Jesus Christ the mustwas not an external one, but He must be about His Father's business, because His whole inclination and will were submitted to the Father's authority. And that is what will make any life sweet, calm, noble. The love of Christ constraineth us. There is a necessity which presses upon men like iron fetters; there is a necessity which wells up within a man as a fountain of life, and does not so much drive as sweetly incline the will, so that it is impossible for him to be other than a loving, obedient child.

Dear friend, have we felt the joyful grip of that necessity? Is it impossible for me not to be doing God's will? Do I feel myself laid hold of by a strong, loving hand that propels me, not unwillingly, along the path? Does inclination coincide with obligation? If it does, then no words can tell the freedom, the enlargement, the calmness, the deep blessedness of such a life. But when these pull in two different ways, as, alas! they often do, and I have to say, I must be about my Father's business, and I had rather be about my own if I durst, which is the condition of a great many so-called Christian people--then the necessity is miserable; and slavery, not freedom, is the characteristic of such Christianity. And there is a great deal of such to-day.

And now one last word. On this sweet must, and blessed compulsion to be about the Father's business, there follows:

**III. The meek acceptance of the lowliest duties.**

He went down to Nazareth, and was subject to them. That is all that is told us about eighteen years, by far the largest part of the earthly life of Christ. Legend comes in, and for once not inappropriately, and tells us, what is probably quite true, that during these years, Jesus worked in the carpenter's shop, and as one story says, made yokes, or as another tells, made light implements of husbandry for the peasants round Nazareth. Be that as it may, He was subject unto them, and that was doing the Father's will, and being about the Father's business, quite as much as when He was amongst the doctors, and learning by asking questions as well as by hearkening to their instructions. Everything depends on the motive. The commonest duty may be the Father's business, when we are doing manfully the work of daily life. Only we do not turn common duty into the Father's business, unless we remember Him in the doing of it. But if we carry the hallowing and quickening influence of that great mustinto all the pettinesses, and paltrinesses, and wearinesses, and sorrows of our daily trivial lives, then we shall find, as Jesus Christ found, that the carpenter's shop is as sacred as the courts of the Temple, and that to obey Mary was to do the will of the Father in heaven.

What a blessed transformation that would make of all lives! The psalmist long ago said: One thing have I desired of the Lord, and that will I seek after, that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life. We may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of our lives. We may be in one or other of the many mansions of the Father's house where-ever we go, and may be doing the will of the Father in heaven in all that we do. Then we shall be at rest; then we shall be strong; then we shall be pure; then we shall have deep in our hearts the joyous consciousness, undisturbed by rebellious wills, that now we are the sons of God, and the still more joyous hope, undimmed by doubts or mists, that it doth not yet appear what we shall be; but that wherever we go, it will be but passing from one room of the great home into another more glorious still. I must be about my Father's business; let us make that the motto for earth, and He will say to us in His own good time Come home from the field, and sit down beside Me in My house, and so we shall dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.