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

**LUKE-014**. **A SABBATH IN CAPERNAUM by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"33. And in the synagogue there was a man which had a spirit of an unclean devil, and cried out with a loud voice, 34. Saying, Let us alone; what have we to do with Thee, thou Jesus of Nazareth? art Thou come to destroy us? I know Thee who Thou art; the Holy One of God. 35. And Jesus rebuked him, saying, Hold thy peace, and come out of him. And when the devil had thrown him in the midst, he came out of him, and hurt him not. 36. And they were all amazed, and spake among themselves, saying, What a word is this! for with authority and power He commandeth the unclean spirits, and they come out. 37. And the fame of Him went out into every place of the country round about. 38. And He arose out of the synagogue, and entered into Simon's house: and Simon's wife's mother was taken with a great fever; and they besought Him for her. 39. And He stood over her, and rebuked the fever; and it left her: and immediately she arose and ministered unto them. 40. Now, when the sun was setting, all they that had any sick with divers diseases brought them unto Him; and He laid His hands on every one of them, and healed them. 41. And devils also came out of many, crying out, and saying, Thou art Christ, the Son of God. And He, rebuking them, suffered them not to speak: for they knew that He was Christ. 42. And when it was day, He departed, and went into a desert place; and the people sought Him, and came unto Him, and stayed Him, that He should not depart from them. 43. And He said unto them, I must preach the kingdom of God to other cities also: for therefore am I sent. 44. And He preached in the synagogues of Galilee."*

*Luke 4:33-44*

There are seven references to Christ's preaching in the synagogues in this chapter, and only two in the rest of this Gospel. Probably our Lord somewhat changed His method, and Luke, as the Evangelist of the gospel for Gentile as well as Jew, emphasises the change, as foreshadowing and warranting the similar procedure in Paul's preaching. This lesson takes us down from the synagogue at Nazareth, among its hills, to that at Capernaum, on the lakeside, where Jesus was already known as a worker of miracles. The two Sabbaths are in sharp contrast. The issue of the one is a tumult of fury and hate; that of the other, a crowd of suppliants and an eager desire to keep Him with them. The story is in four paragraphs, each showing a new phase of Christ's power and pity.

**I. Verses 33-37 present Christ as the Lord of that dark world of evil.**

The hushed silence of the synagogue, listening to His gentle voice, was suddenly broken by shrieks of rage and fear, coming from a man who had been sitting quietly among the others. Possibly his condition had not been suspected until Christ's presence roused his dreadful tyrant. The man's voice is at the demon's service, and only Jesus recognises who speaks through the wretched victim. We take for granted the reality of demoniacal possession, as certified for all who believe Jesus, by His words and acts in reference to it, as well as forced on us, by the phenomena themselves, which are clearly distinguishable from disease, madness, or sin. The modern aversion to the supernatural is quite as much an unreasonable prejudice as any old woman's belief in witchcraft and Professor Huxley, making clumsy fun of the pigs at Gadara, is holding opinions in the same sublime indifference to evidence of facts as the most superstitious object of his narrow-visioned scorn.

Napoleon called impossiblea beast of a word. So it is in practical life,--and no less so when glibly used to discredit well-attested facts. We neither aspire to the omniscience which pronounces that there can be no possession by evil spirits, nor venture to brush aside the testimony of the Gospels and the words of Christ, in order to make out such a contention.

Note the rage and terror of the demon. The presence of purity is a sharp pain to impurity, and an evil spirit is stirred to its depths when in contact with Jesus. Monstrous growths that love the dark shrivel and die in sunshine. The same presence which is joy to some may be a very hell to others. We may approach even here that state of feeling which broke out in these shrieks of malignity, hatred, and dread. It is an awful thing when the only relief is to get away from Jesus, and when the clearest recognition of His holiness only makes us the more eager to disclaim any connection with Him. That is the hell of hells. In its completeness, it makes the anguish of the demon; in its rudiments, it is the misery of some men.

Observe too, the unclean spirit's knowledge, not only of the birthplace and name, but of the character and divine relationship of Jesus. That is one of the features of demoniacal possession which distinguish it from disease or insanity, and is quite incapable of explanation on any other ground. It gives a glimpse into a dim region, and suggests that the counsels of Heaven, as effected on earth, are keenly watched and understood by eyes whose gleam is unsoftened by any touch of pity or submission. It is most natural, if there are such spirits, that they should know Jesus while men knew Him not, and that their hatred should keep pace with their knowledge, even while by the knowledge the hatred was seen to be vain.

Observe Christ's tone of authority and sternness. He had pity for men, who were capable of redemption, but His words and demeanour to the spirits are always severe. He accepts the most imperfect recognition from men, and often seems as if labouring to evoke it, but He silences the spiritsclear recognition. The confession which is unto salvationcomes from a heart that loves, not merely from a head that perceives; and Jesus accepts nothing else. He will not have His name soiled by such lips.

Note, still further, Christ's absolute control of the demon. His bare word is sovereign, and secures outward obedience, though from an unsubdued and disobedient will. He cannot make the foul creature love, but He can make him act. Surely Omnipotence speaks, if demons hear and obey. Their king had been conquered, and they knew their Master. The strong man had been bound, and this is the spoiling of his house. The question of the wondering worshippers in the synagogue goes to the root of the matter, when they ask what they must think of the whole message of One whose word gives law to the unclean spirits; for the command to them is a revelation to us, and we learn His Godhead by the power of His simple word, which is but the forth-putting of His will.

We cannot but notice the lurid light thrown by the existence of such spirits on the possibility of undying and responsible beings reaching, by continued alienation of heart and will from God, a stage in which they are beyond the capacity of improvement, and outside the sweep of Christ's pity.

**II. Verses 38 and 39 show us Christ in the gentleness of His healing power, and the immediate service of gratitude to Him.**

The scene in the synagogue manifested authority and power, and was prompted by abhorrence of the demon even more than by pity for his victim; but now the Lord's tenderness shines unmingled with sternness. Mark gives details of this cure, which, no doubt, came from Peter--such as his joint ownership of the house with his brother, the names of the companions of Jesus, and the infinitely tender action of taking the sick woman by the hand and helping her to rise. But Luke, the physician, is more precise in his description of the case: holden by a great fever. He traces the cure to the word of rebuke, which, no doubt, accompanied the clasp of the hand.

Here again Christ puts forth divine power in producing effects in the material sphere by His naked word. He spake and it was done. That truly divine prerogative was put forth at the bidding of His own pity, and that pity which wielded Omnipotence was kindled by the beseechings of sorrowing hearts. Is not this miracle, which shines so lustrously by the side of that terrible scene with the demon, a picture in one case, and that the sickness of one poor and probably aged woman, of the great truth that heartens all our appeals to Him? He who moves the forces of Deity still from His throne lets us move His heart by our cry.

Luke is especially struck with one feature in the case--the immediate return of usual strength. The woman is lying, the one minute, pinned down and helpless with great fever, and the next is bustling about her domestic duties. No wonder that a physician should think so abnormal a case worthy of note. When Christ heals, He heals thoroughly, and gives strength as well as healing. What could a woman, with no house of her own, and probably a poor dependant on her son-in-law, do for her healer? Not much. But she did what she could, and that without delay. The natural impulse of gratitude is to give its best, and the proper use of healing and new strength is to minister to Him. Such a guest made humble household cares worship; and all our poor powers or tasks, consecrated to His praise and become the offerings of grateful hearts, are lifted into greatness and dignity. He did not despise the modest fare hastily dressed for Him; and He still delights in our gifts, though the cattle on a thousand hills are His. I will sup with him, says He, and therein promises to become, as it were, a guest at our humble tables.

**III. Verses 40 and 41 show us the all-sufficiency of Christ's pity and power.**

The synagogue worship would be in the early morning, and the healing of the woman immediately after, and the meal she prepared the midday repast. The news had time to spread; and as soon as the sinking sun relaxed the Sabbatical restrictions, a motley crowd came flocking round the house, carrying all the sick that could be lifted, all eager to share in His healing. The same kind of thing may be seen yet round many a traveller's tent. It did not argue real faith in Him, but it was genuine sense of need, and expectation of blessing from His hand; and the measure of faith was the measure of blessing. They got what they believed He could give. If their faith had been larger, the answers would have been greater.

But men are quite sure that they want to be well when they are ill, and bodily healing will be sought with far more earnestness and trouble than soul-healing. Crowds came to Jesus as Physician who never cared to come to Him as Redeemer. Offer men the smaller gifts, and they will run over one another in their scramble for them; but offer them the highest, and they will scarcely hold out a languid hand to take them.

But the point made prominent by Luke is the inexhaustible fullness of pity and power, which met and satisfied all the petitioners. The misery spoke to Christ's heart; and so as the level rays of the setting sun cast a lengthening shadow among the sad groups, He moved amidst them, and with gentle touch healed them all. To-day, as then, the fountain of His pity and healing power is full, after thousands have drawn from it, and no crowd of suppliants bars our way to His heart or His hands. He has enough for all, enough for each, enough for ever more.

The reference to demoniacs adds nothing to the particulars in the earlier verses except the evidence it gives of the frequency of possession then.

**IV. Verses 42-44 show us Jesus seeking seclusion, but willingly sacrificing it at men's call. He withdraws in early morning, not because His store of power was exhausted, or His pity had tired, but to renew His communion with the Father.**

He needed solitude and silence, and we need it still more. No work worth doing will ever be done for Him unless we are familiar with some quiet place, where we and God alone together can hold converse, and new strength be poured into our hearts. Our Lord is here our pattern, also, of willingly leaving the place of communion when duty calls and men implore. We must not stay on the Mount of Transfiguration when demoniac boys are writhing on the plain below, and heart-broken fathers wearying for our coming. A great, solemn mustruled His life, as it should do ours, and the fulfilment of that for which He was sentever was His aim, rather than even the blessedness of solitary communion or repose of the silent hour of prayer.