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

**LUKE-018**. **LAWS OF THE KINGDOM by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"20. And He lifted up His eyes on His disciples, and said, Blessed be ye poor: for yours is the kingdom of God, 21. Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh. 22. Blessed are ye, when men shall hate you, and when they shall separate you from their company, and shall reproach you, and cast out your name as evil, for the Son of man's sake. 23. Rejoice ye in that day, and leap for joy; for, behold, your reward is great in heaven: for in the like manner did their fathers unto the prophets. 24. But woe unto you that are rich! for ye have received your consolation. 25. Woe unto you that are full! for ye shall hunger. Woe unto you that laugh now! for ye shall mourn and weep. 26. Woe unto you when all men shall speak well of you! for so did their fathers to the false prophets. 27. But I say unto you which hear, Love your enemies, do good to them which hate you, 28. Bless them that curse you, and pray for them which despitefully use you. 29. And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek, offer also the other; and him that taketh away thy cloak, forbid not to take thy coat also. 30. Give to every man that asketh of thee; and of him that taketh away thy goods ask them not again. 31. And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise."*

*Luke 6:20-31*

Luke condenses and Matthew expands the Sermon on the Mount. The general outline is the same in both versions. The main body of both is a laying down the law for Christ's disciples. Luke, however, characteristically omits what is prominent in Matthew, the polemic against Pharisaic righteousness, and the contrast between the moral teaching of Christ and that of the law. These were appropriate in a Gospel which set forth Jesus as the crown of earlier revelation, while Luke is true to the broad humanities of his Gospel, in setting forth rather the universal aspect of Christian duty, and gathering it all into the one precept of love.

The fragment which forms the present passage falls into two parts--the description of the subjects of the kingdom and their blessedness, contrasted with the character of the rebels; and the summing up of the law of the kingdom in the all-including commandment of love.

**I. The subjects and blessedness of the kingdom, and the rebels.**

It is to be well kept in view that the discourse is addressed to His disciples. That fact remembered would have saved some critics from talking nonsense about the discrepancy between Luke and Matthew, and supposing that the former meant merely literal poverty, hunger, and tears. No doubt he omits the decisive words which appear in Matthew, who appends in spiritto poor, and after righteousnessto hunger and thirst, but there is no ground for supposing that Luke meant anything else than Matthew.

Notice that in our passage the sayings are directly addressed to the disciples, while in Matthew they are cast into the form of general propositions. In that shape, the additions were needed to prevent misunderstanding of Christ, as if He were talking like a vulgar demagogue, flattering the poor, and inveighing against the rich. Matthew's view of the force of the expressions is involved in Luke's making them an address to the disciples., Ye poorat once declares that our Lord is not thinking of the whole class of literally needy, but of such of these as He saw willing to learn of Him. No doubt, the bulk of them were poor men as regards the world's goods, and knew the pinch of actual want, and had often had to weep. But their earthly poverty and misery had opened their hearts to receive Him, and that had transmuted the outward wants and sorrows into spiritual ones, as is evident from their being disciples; and these are the characteristics which He pronounces blessed. In this democratic and socialistic age, it is important to keep clearly in view the fact that Jesus was no flatterer of poor men as such, and did not think that circumstances had such power for good or evil, as that virtue and true blessedness were their prerogatives.

The foundation characteristic is poverty of spirit, the consciousness of one's own weakness, the opposite of the delusion that we are rich and increased with goods. All true subjection to the kingdom begins with that accurate, because lowly, estimate of ourselves. Humility is life, lofty mindedness is death. The heights are barren, rivers and fertility are down in the valleys.

Luke makes hunger the second characteristic, and weeping the third, while Matthew inverts that order. Either arrangement suggests important thoughts. Desire after the true riches naturally follows on consciousness of poverty, while, on the other hand, sorrow for one's conscious lack of these may be regarded as preceding and producing longing. In fact, the three traits of character are contemporaneous, and imply each other. Outward condition comes into view, only in so far as it tends to the production of these spiritual characteristics, and has, in fact, produced them, as it had done, in some measure, in the disciples. The antithetical characteristics of the adversaries of the kingdom are, in like manner, mainly spiritual; and their riches, fullness, and laughter refer to circumstances only in so far as actual wealth, abundance, and mirth tend to hide from men their inward destitution, starvation, and misery.

But what paradoxes to praise all that flesh abhors, and to declare that it is better to be poor than rich, better to feel gnawing desire than to be satisfied, better to weep than to laugh! How little the so-called Christian world believes it! How dead against most men's theory and practice Christ goes! These Beatitudes have a solemn warning for all, and if we really believed them, our lives would be revolutionised. The people who say, Give me the Sermon on the Mount: I don't care for your doctrines, but I can understand it, have not felt the grip of these Beatitudes.

Note that the blessings and woes are based on the future issues of the two states of mind. These are not wholly in the future life, for Jesus says, Yours is the kingdom. That kingdom is a state of obedience to God, complete in that future world, but begun here. True poverty secures entrance thither, since it leads to submission of will and trust. True hunger is sure of satisfaction, since it leads to waiting on God, who will fulfil the desire of them that fear Him. Sorrow which is according to God, cannot but bring us near Him who will wipe away tears from off all faces.

On the other hand, they who in condition are prosperous and satisfied with earth, and in disposition are devoid of suspicion of their own emptiness, and draw their joys and sorrows from this world alone, cannot but have a grim awaking waiting for them. Here they will often feel that earth's goods are no solid food, and that nameless yearnings and sadness break in on their mirth; and in the dim world beyond, they will start to find their hands empty and their souls starving.

The fourth of Luke's Beatitudes contrasts the treatment received from men by the subjects and the enemies of the kingdom. Better to be Christ's martyr than the world's favourite! Alas, how few Christians wear the armour of that great saying! They would not set so much store by popularity, nor be so afraid of being on the unpopular side, if they did.

**II. The second part of the passage contains the summary of the laws of the kingdom from the lips of the King. Its keynote is love.**

The precept follows strikingly on the predictions of excommunication and hatred. The only weapon to fight hate is love. The hate of hate, the scorn of scorn, are not Christian dispositions, though Tennyson tells us that they are the poet's. So much the worse for him if they are! First, the commandment, so impossible to us unless our hearts are made Christlike by much dwelling with Christ, is laid down in the plainest terms. Enmity should only stimulate love, as a gash in some tree bearing precious balsam makes the fragrant treasure flow. Who of us has conformed to that law which in three words sums up perfection? How few of us have even honestly tried to conform to it!

But the command becomes more stringent as it advances. The sentiment is worth much, but it must bear fruit in act. So the practical manifestations of it follow. Deeds of kindness, words of blessing, and highest of all, and the best help to fulfilling the other two, prayer, are to be our meek answers to evil. Why should Christians always let their enemies settle the terms of intercourse? They are not to be mere reverberating surfaces, giving back echoes of angry voices. Let us take the initiative, and if men scowl, let us meet them with open hearts and smiles. A soft answer turneth away wrath. It takes two to make a quarrel. Frost and snow bind the earth in chains, but the silent sunshine conquers at last, and evil can be overcome with good.

Our Lord goes on to speak of another form of love--namely, patient endurance of wrong and unreasonableness. He puts that in terms so strong that many readers are fain to pare down their significance. Non-resistance is commanded in the most uncompromising fashion, and illustrated in the cases of assault, robbery, and pertinacious mendicancy. The world stands stiffly on its rights; the Christian is not to bristle up in defence of his, but rather to suffer wrong and loss. This is regarded by many as an impossible ideal. But it is to be observed that the principle involved is that love has no limits but itself. There may be resistance to wrong, and refusal of a request, if love prompts to these. If it is better for the other man that a Christian should not let him have his way or his wish, and if the Christian, in resisting or refusing, is honestly actuated by love, then he is fulfilling the precept when he says Noto some petition, or when he resists robbery. We must live near Jesus Christ to know when such limitations of the precept come in, and to make sure of our motives.

The world and the Church would be revolutionised if even approximate obedience were rendered to this commandment. Let us not forget that it is a commandment, and cannot be put aside without disloyalty.

Christ then crystallises His whole teaching on the subject of our conduct to others into the immortal words which make our wishes for ourselves the standard of our duty to others, and so give every man an infallible guide. We are all disposed to claim more from others than we give to them. What a paradise earth would be if the two measuring-lines which we apply to their conduct and to our own were exactly of the same length!