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

**LUKE-019**. **THREE CONDENSED PARABLES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"41. And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but perceiveth not the beam that is in thine own eye? 42. Either, how canst thou say to thy brother, Brother, let me pull out the mote that is in thine eye, when thou thyself beholdest not the beam that is in thine own eye? Thou hypocrite, cast out first the beam out of thine own eye, and then shalt thou see clearly to pull out the mote that is in thy brother's eye. 43. For a good tree bringeth not forth corrupt fruit; neither doth a corrupt tree bring forth good fruit. 44. For every tree is known by his own fruit: for of thorns men do not gather figs, nor of a bramble-bush gather they grapes. 45. A good man, out of the good treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is good; and an evil man, out of the evil treasure of his heart, bringeth forth that which is evil; for of the abundance of the heart his mouth speaketh, 46. And why call ye Me, Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say? 47. Whosoever cometh to Me, and heareth My sayings, and doeth them, I will shew you to whom he is like: 48. He is like a man which built an house, and digged deep, and laid the foundation on a rock: and when the flood arose, the stream beat vehemently upon that house, and could not shake it; for it was founded upon a rock. 49. But he that heareth, and doeth not, is like a man that, without a foundation, built an house upon the earth; against which the stream did beat vehemently, and immediately it fell; and the ruin of that house was great."*

*Luke 6:41-49*

Three extended metaphors, which may almost be called parables, close Luke's version of the Sermon on the Mount, and constitute this passage. These are the mote and the beam, the good and bad trees, the houses on the rock and on the sand. Matthew puts the first of these earlier in the sermon, and connects it with other precepts about judging others. But whichever order is the original, that adopted by Luke has a clear connection of thought underlying it which will come out as we proceed.

**I. The striking and somewhat ludicrous image of the beam and the mote is found in Rabbinical writings, and may have been familiar to Christ's hearers.**

But His use of it is deeper and more searching than the rabbiswas. He has just been speaking of blind guides and their blind followers. That parable, as Luke calls it, naturally images another defect which may attach to the eye. A man may be partly blind because some foreign body has got in. If we might suppose a tacit reference to the Pharisees in the blind guides, their self-complacent censoriousness would be in view here; but the application of the saying is much wider than to them only.

Verse 41 teaches that the accurate measurement of the magnitude of our own failings should precede our detection of our brother's. Christ assumes the commonness of the opposite practice by asking whyit is so. And we have all to admit that the assumption is correct. The keenness of men's criticism of their neighbour's faults is in inverse proportion to their familiarity with their own. It is no unusual thing to hear some one, bedaubed with dirt from head to foot, declaiming with disgust about a speck or two on his neighbour's white robes.

Satan reproving sin is not an edifying sight, but Satan criticising sin is still less agreeable. If only he that is without sin among youwould fling stones, there would be fewer reputations pelted than there are. Most men know less about their own faults than about their brother's. They use two pairs of spectacles--one which diminishes, and is put on for looking at themselves; one which magnifies, and is worn for their neighbour's benefit. But when their respective good qualities are to be looked at, the other pair is used in each case. That is men's way, all the world over.

Christ's question asks the reason for this all but universal dishonesty of having two weights and measures for faults. He would have us ponder on the cause, that we may discover the remedy. He would have us reflect, that we may get a vivid conviction of the unreasonableness of the practice. There is nothing in the fact that a fault is mine which should make it small in my judgment; nor, on the other hand, in the accident that it is another's, which should make it seem large. A fault is a fault, whoever it belongs to, and we should judge ourselves and others by the same rule. Only we should be most severe in its application to ourselves, for we cannot tell how much our brother has had, to diminish the criminality of his sin, and we can tell, if we will be honest, how much we have had, to aggravate that of ours. So the conscience of a true Christian works as Paul's did when he said Of whom I am chief, and is more disposed to make its own motes into beams than to censure its brother's.

The reason, so far as there is a reason, can only lie in our diseased selfishness, which is the source of all sin. And the blindness to our beamsis partly produced by their very presence. All sin blinds conscience. A man with a beam in his eye would not be able to see much. One device of sin, practised in order to withdraw the doer's attention from his own deed, is to make him censorious of his fellows, and to compound for the sins he is inclined to by condemning other people's.

Verse 42 teaches that the conquest of our own discovered evils must precede efficient attempts to cure other people's. To pose as a curer of them while we are ignorant of our own faults is, consciously or unconsciously, hypocrisy, for it assumes a hatred of evil, which, if genuine, would have found first a field for its working in ourselves. An oculist with diseased eyes would not be likely to be a successful operator. Physician, heal thyselfwould fit him well, and be certainly flung at him. A cleansed eye will see the brother's mote clearly, but only in order to help its extraction. It is a delicate bit of work to get it out, and needs a gentle hand.

Our discernment of othersfaults must be compassionate, not to be followed by condemnation nor self-complacency but by loving efforts to help to a cure. And such will not be made unless we have learned our own sinfulness, and can go to the wrongdoer in brotherly humility, and win him to use the eye-salvewhich our conduct shows has healed us.

**II. The second compressed parable of the two trees springs from the former naturally, as stating the general law of which verse 42 gives one case, namely, that good deeds (such as casting out the mote) can only come from a good heart (made good by confession of its own evils and their ejection).**

It is often said that Christ's teaching is unlike that of His Apostles in that He places stress on works, and says little of faith. But how does He regard works? As fruits. That is to say, they are of value in His eyes only as being products and manifestations of character. He does not tell us in this parable how the character which will effloresce in blossoms and set in fruits of goodness is produced. That comes in the next parable. But here is sufficiently set forth the great central truth of Christian ethics that the inward disposition is the all-important thing, and that deeds are determined as to their moral quality by the character from which they have proceeded.

Our actions are our self-revelations. The words are not to be pressed, as if they taught the entire goodness of one class of men, so that all their acts were products of their good character, nor the unmingled evil of another, so that no good of any kind or in any degree is in them or comes from them. They must be read as embodying a general truth which is not as yet fully exemplified in any character or conduct.

In verse 45 the same idea is presented under a different figure--that of a wealthy man who brings his possessions out of his store-house. The application of the figure is significantly varied so as to include the other great department of human activity. Speech is act. It, too, will be according to the cast of the inner life. Of course, feigned speech of all sorts is not in view. The lazy judgment of men thinks less of words than of deeds. Christ always attaches supreme importance to them. Intentional lying being excluded, speech is an even more complete self-revelation than act. When one thinks of the floods of foul or idle or malicious talk which half drown the world as being revelations of the sort of hearts from which they have gushed, one is appalled. What a black, seething fountain that must be which spurts up such inky waters!

**III. The third parable, of the two houses, shows in part how hearts may be made good. It is attached to the preceding by verse 46.**

Speech does not always come from the abundance of the heart. Many call Him Lord who do not act accordingly. Deeds must confirm words. If the two diverge, the latter must be taken as the credible self-revelation. Now the first noticeable thing here is Christ's bold assumption that His words are a rock foundation for any life. He claims to give an absolute and all-sufficient rule of conduct, and to have the right to command every man.

And people read such words and then talk about their Christianity not being the belief of His divinity, but the practice of the Sermon on the Mount! His words are the foundation for every firm, lasting life. They are the basis of all true thought about God, ourselves, our duties, our future. That rock was Christ. Every other foundation is as sand. Unless we build on Him, we build on changeable inclinations, short-lived desires, transitory aims, evanescent circumstances. Only the Christ who ever liveth, and is ever the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever, is fit to be the foundation of lives that are to be immortal.

Note the two houses built on the foundations. The metaphor suggests that each life is a whole with a definite character. Alas, how many of our lives are liker a heap of stones tilted at random out of a cart than a house with a plan. But there is a character stamped on every life, and however the man may have lived from hand to mouth without premeditation, the result has a character of its own, be it temple or pig-sty. Each life, too, is built up by slow labour, course by course. Our deeds become our dwelling-places. Like coral-insects, we live in what we build. Memory, habit, ever-springing consequences, shape by slow degrees our isolated actions into our abodes. What do we build?

One storm tries both houses. That may refer to the common trials of every life, but it is best taken as referring to the future judgment, when God will lay judgment to the line, and righteousness to the plummet; and whatever cannot stand that test will be swept away. Who would run up a flimsy structure on some windy headland in northern seas? The lighthouses away out in ocean are firmly bonded into living rock. Unless our lives are thus built on and into Christ, they will collapse into a heap of ruin. Behold I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste.