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

**LUKE-025**. **A GLUTONOUS MAN AND A WINEBIBBER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The Son of man is come eating and drinking; and ye say, Behold a gluttonous man, and a winebibber, a friend of publicans and sinners!"*

*Luke 7:34*

Jesus Christ very seldom took any notice of the mists of calumny that drifted round Him. When He was reviled He reviled not again. If ever He did allude to them it was for the sake of the people who were harming themselves by uttering them. So here, without the slightest trace of irritation, He quotes a malignant charge which was evidently in the popular mouth, and of which we should never have known if He had not repeated it; not with anger, but simply in order that He might point to the capricious inconsistency of finding fault with John and Himself on precisely opposite grounds. The former did not suit because he came neither eating nor drinking. Well, if His asceticism did not please, surely the geniality of a Christ who comes doing both will be hailed. But He is rejected like the other. What is the cause of this dislike that can look two different ways at once? Not the traits that it alleges, but something far deeper, a dislike to the heavenly wisdom of which John and Jesus were messengers. The children of wisdom would see that there was right in both courses; the children of folly would condemn them both. If the message is unwelcome, nothing that the messenger can say or do will be right.

The same kind of thing is common to-day. Never mind consistency, find fault with Christianity on all its sides, and with all its preachers, though you have to contradict yourself in doing so. Object to this man that he is too learned and doctrinal; to that one that he is too illiterate, and gives no food for thought; to this one that he is always thundering condemnation; to that one that he is always running over with love; to this one that he is perpetually harping upon duties; to that other one that he is up in the clouds, and forgets the tasks of daily life; to this one that he is sensational; to that one that he is dull; and so on, and so on. The generation that liked neither piping nor mourning has its representatives still.

But my business now is not with the inconsistency of the objectors to John and Jesus, but simply with this caricature which He quotes from them of some of His characteristics. It is a distorted refraction of the beam of light that comes from His face, through the muddy, thick medium of their prejudice. And if we can, I was going to say, pull it straight again, we shall see something of His glories. I take the two clauses of my text separately because they are closely connected with our design, and cover different ground.

**I. I ask you to note, first, the enemies attestation to Christ's genial participation in the joys and necessities of common life.**

The Son of man came eating and drinking. There is nothing that calumny, if it be malignant enough, cannot twist into an accusation; and out of glorious and significant facts, full of lessons and containing strong buttresses of the central truth of the Gospel, these people made this charge, a winebibber and gluttonous. The facts were facts; the inferences were slanders.

Notice how precious, how demonstrative of the very central truth of Christianity, is that plain fact, The Son of man came eating and drinking. Then that pillar of all our hope, the Incarnation of the word of God, stands irrefragable. Sitting at tables, hungering in the wilderness, faint by the well, begging a draught of water from a woman, and saying on His Cross I thirst!--He is the Incarnation of Deity, the manifestation of God in the flesh. Awe and mystery and reverence and hope and trust clasp that fact, in which prejudice and dislike could only find occasion for a calumny.

By eating and drinking He declared that forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, He Himself likewise took part in the same. If it is true that every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God, then it is true that no miracle in His life, nor any of the supernatural glories which we are accustomed to regard as evidences of His majesty, are more blessed, or more important as revelations of His nature, than the fact that the Son of man came eating and drinking.

But, still further, mark how the truth which gave colour to the slander attests that Jesus Christ presents to the world the highest type of manhood. The ideal for life is not the suppression, but the consecration, of material satisfactions and pleasures of appetite. And they are likest to the Master who, like the Master, come eating and drinking, and yet ever hold all appetites and desires rigidly under control, and subordinate them all to loftier purposes. John the Baptist could be an ascetic; the Pattern Man must not be.

The highest type of religion, as it is shown to us in His perfect life, includes the acceptance of all pure material blessings. Asceticism is second best; the religion that can take and keep secondary all outward and transitory sources of enjoyment, and can hallow common life, is loftier than all pale hermits and emaciated types of sanctity, who preserve their purity only by avoiding things which it were nobler to enjoy and to subdue.

There is nothing more striking about the Old Testament than the fact that its heroes and saints were kindly with their kind, and took part in common life, accepting, enjoying its blessings. They were warriors, statesmen, shepherds, vinedressers; they bought, they sold, they planted, they builded; they married and were given in marriage, and all the while they were the saints of God. That was a nobler type of religion than the one that came after it, into which Jesus Christ was born. When devotion cools it crusts; and the crust is superstition and formalism and punctilious attention to the proprieties of worship and casuistry, instead of joyful obedience to a law, and abstinence from, instead of sanctification of, earthly delights and supplies.

So, protesting against all that, and showing the more excellent way, and hallowing the way because He trod it, the Son of man came eating and drinking. Hence-forward every table may be a communion table, and every meal may be a sacrament, eaten in obedience to His dying injunction: This do in remembrance of Me. If we can feel that Christ sits with us at the feast, the feast will be pure and good. If it is of such a sort as that we dare not fancy Him keeping us company there, it is no place for us. Wherever Jesus Christ went the consecration of His presence lingers still; whatever Jesus Christ did His servants may do, if in the same spirit and in the same manner.

He hallowed infancy when He lay an infant in His mother's arms; He hallowed childhood when, as a boy, He was obedient to His parents; He hallowed youth during all those years of quiet seclusion and unnoticed service in Nazareth; He hallowed every part of human life and experience by bearing it. Love is consecrated because He loved; tears are sacred because He wept; life is worship, or may be made so, because He passed through it; and death itself is ennobled and sanctified because He has died.

Only let us remember that, if we are to exercise this blessed hallowing of common things, of which He has set us the example, we must use them as He did; that is, in such sort as that our communion with God shall not be broken thereby, and that nothing in them shall darken the vision and clip the wings of the aspiring and heavenward-gazing spirit. Brethren! the tendency of this day--and one rejoices, in many respects, that it is so--is to revolt against the extreme of narrowness in the past that prescribed and proscribed a great many arbitrary and unnecessary abstinences and practices as the sign of a Christian profession. But whilst I would yield to no man in my joyful application of the principle that underlies that great fact that He came eating and drinking, I do wish at this point to put in a caveat which perhaps may not be so welcome to some of you as the line of thought that I have been pursuing. It is this: it is an error to quote Christ's example as a cover for luxury and excess, and grasping at material enjoyments which are not innocent in themselves, or are mixed up with much that is not innocent. There is many a table spread by so-called Christian people where Jesus Christ will not sit. Many a man darkens his spirit, enfeebles his best part, blinds himself to the things beyond, by reason of his taking the liberty, as he says, which Christianity, broadly and generously interpreted, gives, of participating in all outward delights. I have said that asceticism is not the highest, but it is sometimes necessary. It is better to enjoy and to subdue than to abstain and to suppress, but abstinence and suppression are often essential to faithfulness and noble living. If I find that my enjoyment of innocent things harms me, or is tending to stimulate cravings beyond my control; or if I find that abstinence from innocent things increases my power to help a brother, and to fight against a desolating sin; or if things good and innocent in themselves, and in some respects desirable and admirable, like the theatre, for instance, are irretrievably intertwisted with evil things, then Christ's example is no plea for our sharing in such. It is better for us to cut off the offending hand, and so, though maimed, to enter into life, than to keep two hands and go into the darkness of death. Jesus Christ came eating and drinking, and therefore the highest and the best thing is that Christian people should innocently, and with due control, and always keeping themselves in touch with God, enjoy all outward blessings, only subject to this law, whether ye eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, to do all to the glory of God, and remembering this warning, He that soweth to the flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption.

**II. Now, secondly, notice the enemies witness that Christ is the Friend of outcasts.**

As I said about the other charge, so I say of this, the facts were facts, the inferences were errors. The slanderers saw, as nobody could help seeing, that there was a strange kind of mutual attraction between Jesus and publicans and sinners; that harlots as well as little children seemed to be drawn to Him; and that He obviously delighted in the company of those at whose presence, partly from pride, partly from national enmity, partly from heartless self-righteousness, Pharisaism gathered its dainty skirts around itself in abhorrence, lest a speck should fall upon their purity. That being the fact, low natures, who always misunderstand lofty ones, because they can only believe in motives as low as their own, said of Jesus, Ah! you can tell what sort of a man He is by the company He keeps. He is the friend of publicans because He is a bad Jew; the friend of sinners because He likes their wicked ways.

There was a mysterious sense of sympathy which drew Jesus Christ to these poor people and drew them to Him. It would have been a long while before any penitent woman would have come in and wept over the feet of Gamaliel and his like. It would have been a long while before any sinful men would have found their way, with tears and yet with trust, to these self-righteous hypocrites. But perfect purity somehow draws the impure, though assumed sanctity always repels them. And it is a sign, not that a man is bad, but that he is good in a Christlike fashion, if the outcasts that durst not come near your respectable people find themselves drawn to Him. Oh! if there were more of us liker Jesus Christ in our purity, there would be more of us who would deserve the calumny which is praise--the friend of sinners.

It was an attestation of His love, as I need not remind you. I suppose there is nothing more striking in the whole wonderful and unique picture of Jesus Christ drawn in the Gospels than the way in which two things, which we so often fancy to be contradictory, blend in the most beautiful harmony in Him--viz. infinite tenderness and absolute condemnation of transgression. To me the fact that these two characteristics are displayed in perfect harmony in the life of Jesus Christ as written in these Gospels, is no small argument for believing the historical veracity of the picture there drawn. For I do not know a harder thing for a dramatist, or a romancer, or a legend-monger to effect than to combine, in one picture--without making the combination monstrous-these two things, perfect purity and perfect love for the impure.

But, dear brethren, remember, that if we are to believe Jesus Christ's own words, that strange love of His, which embraced in its pure clasp the outcasts, was not only the love of a perfect Man, but it was the love of God Himself. He that hath seen Me hath seen the Father. When we see Jesus Christ looking across the valley to the city, with tears in His sad and gentle eyes; and when we see harlots and sinners coming near Him with new hope, and a strange consciousness of a fascination which He wields; and when we see Him opening His heart to all the impure, just as He laid His clean hand on the leper's ulcers, let us rejoice to believe that the Friend of publicans and sinners is God manifest in the flesh.

Then, still further, this wondrous, seeking love of His for all the outcasts is the sign to us of His boundless hopefulness concerning the most degraded.

The world talks of races too low to be elevated, of men too hardened to be softened. Jesus Christ walks through the hospitals of this world, and nowhere sees incurables. His hope is boundless, because, first of all, He sees the dormant possibilities that slumber in the most degraded; and because, still more, He knows that He bears in Himself a power that will cleanse the foulest and raise the most fallen. There are some metals that resist all attempts to volatilise them by the highest temperature producible in our furnaces. Carry them up into the sun and they will all pass into vapour. No man or woman who ever lived, or will live, is so absolutely besotted, and held by the chains of his or her sins, as that Jesus cannot set them free. His hope for outcasts is boundless, because He knows that every sin can be cleansed by His precious blood. Therefore, Christianity should know nothing of desperate cases. There should be no incurables in our estimate of the world, but our hope should be as boundless as the Master's, who drew to Himself the publicans and sinners, and made them saints.

I need not remind you how this is the unique glory of Christ and of Christianity. Men have been asking the question whether Christianity is played out or not. What has been the motive power of all the great movements for the elevation of mankind that have occurred for the last nineteen centuries? What was it that struck the fetters of the slaves? What is it that sends men out amongst savage tribes? Has there ever been found a race of men so degraded that the message of Christ's love could not find its way into their hearts? Did not Darwin subscribe to the Patagonian Mission--a mission which takes in hand perhaps the lowest types of humanity in the world--and did he not do it because his own eyes had taught him that in this strange superstition that we call the Gospel there is a power that, somehow or other, nothing else can wield? Brethren! if the Church begins to lose its care for, and its power of drawing, outcasts and sinners, it has begun to lose its hold on Christ. The sooner such a Church dies the better, and there will be few mourners at its funeral.

The Friend of publicans and sinners has set the example to all of us His followers. God be thanked that there are signs to-day that Christian people are more and more waking up to the consciousness of their obligations in regard to the outcasts in their own and other lands. Let them go to them, as Jesus Christ did, with no false flatteries, but with plain rebukes of sin, and yet with manifest outgoing of the heart, and they will find that the same thing which drew these poor creatures to the Master will draw others to the feeblest, faintest reflection of Him in His servants.

And, last of all, dear friends, let each think that Jesus Christ is my Friend, and your Friend, because He is the Friend of sinners, and we are sinners. If He did not love sinners there would be nobody for Him to love. The universality of sin, however various in its degrees and manifestations, makes more wonderful the universal sweep of His friendship.

How do I know that He is my Friend? Greater love hath no man than this, that a man lay down his life for his friends, and when we were yet enemies He was our Friend, and died for us. How shall we requite that love? Ye are my friends if ye do whatsoever I command you to do. All over the Eastern world to this day the name by which the Patriarch Abraham is known is the Friendor the Companion. Well for us, for time and for eternity, if, knowing that Jesus is our Friend, we yield ourselves, in faith and love, to become His friends!