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

**LUKE-036**. **CHRIST'S CROSS AND OURS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"18. And it came to pass, as He was alone praying, His disciples were with Him; and He asked them, saying, Whom say the people that I am I 19. They answering, said, John the Baptist; but some say, Elias; and others say, that one of the old prophets is risen again. 20. He said unto them, But whom say ye that I am? Peter answering, said, The Christ of God. 21. And He straitly charged them, and commanded them to tell no man that thing; 22. Saying, The Son of man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and chief priests, and scribes, and be slain, and be raised the third day. 23. And He said to them all, If any man will come after Me. let him deny himself, and take up his cross daily, and follow Me. 24. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever will lose his life for My sake, the same shall save it. 25. For what is a man advantaged, if he gain the whole world, and lose himself, or be cast away? 26. For whosoever shall be ashamed of Me, and of My words, of him shall the Son of man be ashamed, when He shall come in His own glory, and in His Father's, and of the holy angels. 27. But I tell you of a truth, there be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the kingdom of God."*

*Luke 9:18-27*

This passage falls into three distinct but closely connected parts: the disciplesconfession of Christ by Peters mouth, the revelation to them of Christ's sufferings as necessarily involved in His Messiahship, and His extension to them of the law of suffering as necessarily involved in discipleship. Luke dwells much more lightly than Matthew on the first of these stages, omitting the eulogium and benediction on Simon Bar-Jona, and the great words about the rock on which the Church is built, but he retains the essentials, and emphasises the connection of the three parts by his very brevity in regard to the first.

**I. Luke has special interest in recording Christ's prayers, and though he does not tell us where the great confession was made, he tells what Jesus did before it was made.**

We may well suppose that His solitary thoughts had been busied with the sufferings on which He was soon to enter, and that His resolve to impart the knowledge of these to His followers was felt by Him to be a sharp trial of their loyalty. The moment was a fateful one. How should fateful moments be prepared for but by communion with the Father? No doubt the feebleness of the disciples was remembered in His petitions.

Jesusdouble question was intended, first, to make the disciples feel the gulf which separated them from the rest of the nation, and so to make them hold the faster by their unshared faith, and be ready to suffer for it, if needful, as probably it would be. It braces true men to know that they are but a little company in the midst of multitudes who laugh at their belief. That Jesus should have seen that it was safe to accentuate the disciplesisolation indicates the reality which He discerned in their faith, imperfect as it was.

Whom say ye that I am?Jesus brings them to articulate utterance of the thought that had been slowly gathering distinctness in their minds. We see our beliefs more clearly, and hold them more firmly, when we put them into definite words. The question acted like a chemical element dropped into a solution, which precipitates its solid matter. Nebulous opinions are gathered up into spheres of light by the process of speaking them. That question is all-important for us. Our conceptions of Christ's nature and office determine our relation to Him and our whole cast of life. True, we may say that He is Lord, and not be His disciples, but we are not His disciples as He would have us unless His Messiahship stands out clear and axiomatic in our thoughts of Him. The conviction must pass into feeling, and thence into life, but it must underlie all real discipleship. Doctrine is not Christianity, but it is the foundation of Christianity. The Apostolic confession here is the irreducible minimumof the Christian creed.

It does not contain more than Nathanael had said at the beginning, but here it is spoken, not as Peter's private belief, but he is the mouthpiece of all. Whether it were I or they, so webelieve. This confession summed up the previous development of the disciples, and so marked the end of one stage and the beginning of another. Christ would have them, as it were, take stock of their convictions, as preliminary to opening a new chapter of teaching.

**II. That new chapter follows at once.**

The belief in Him as Messiah is the first story of the building, and the second is next piled on it. The new lesson was a hard one for men whose hopes were coloured by Jewish dreams of a kingdom. They had to see all these vulgar visions melting away, and to face a stern, sad reality. The very fact that He was the Messiah necessarily drew after it the fact of suffering. Whence did the mustarise? From the divine purpose, from the necessities of the case, and the aim of His mission. These had shaped prophetic utterances, and hence there was yet another form of the must, namely, the necessity for the Messiah's fulfilling these predictions.

No doubt our Lord led His saddened listeners to many a prophetic saying which current expositions had smoothed over, but which had for many years set before Him His destiny. What a scene that would be--the victim calmly pointing to the tragic words which flashed ominous new meanings to the silent hearers, stricken with awe and grief as the terrible truth entered their minds! What had become of their dreams? Gone, and in their place shame and death. They had fancied a throne; the vision melted into a cross.

We note the minute particularity of Jesusdelineation, and the absolute certainty in His plain declaration of the fact and time of the Resurrection. It is not wonderful that that declaration should have produced little effect. The disciples were too much absorbed and confounded by the dismal thought of His death to have ears for the assurance of His Resurrection. Comfort coming at the end of the announcement of calamities so great finds no entrance into, nor room in, the heart. We all let a black foreground hide from us a brighter distance.

**III. The Master's feet mark the disciples path.**

If suffering was involved in Messiahship, it is no less involved in discipleship. The cross which is our hope is also our pattern. In a very real sense we have to be partakers of the sufferings of Christ, and no faith in these as substitutionary is vital unless it leads to being conformed to His death. The solemn verses at the close of this lesson draw out the law of Christian self-denial as being inseparable from true discipleship.

Verse 23 lays down the condition of following Jesus as being the daily bearing, by each, of his own cross. Mark that self-denial is not prescribed for its own sake, but simply as the means of following. False asceticism insists on it, as if it were an end; Christ treats it as a means. Mark, too, that it is selfwhich is to be denied--not this or that part of our nature, but the central self. The will is the man, and it is to be brought into captivity to Jesus, so that the true Christian says, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. That is much deeper, harder, wholesomer teaching than separate austerities or forsakings of this or that.

Verse 24 grounds this great requirement on the broad principle that to make self the main object of life is the sure way to ruin oneself, and that to slay self is the road to true life. Note that it is he who would savehis life that loses it, because the desire is itself fatal, whether carried out or not; while it is he who does losehis life for Christ that preserves it, because even if the extreme evil has been suffered, the possession of our true lives is not imperilled thereby. No doubt the words refer primarily to literal death, and threaten the cowards who sacrifice their convictions for the sake of keeping a whole skin with the failure of their efforts, while they promise the martyr dying in the arena or at the stake a crown of life. But they go far beyond that. They carry the great truth that to hug self and to make its preservation our first aim is ruinous, and the corresponding one, that to slay self for Christ's sake is to receive a better self. Self-preservation is suicide; self-immolation is not only self-preservation, but self-glorification with glory caught from Jesus. Give yourselves to Him, and He gives you back to yourselves, ennobled and transfigured.

Verse 25 urges obedience to the precept, by an appeal to reasonable self-regard and common-sense. The abnegation enjoined does not require that we should be indifferent to our own well-being. It is right to consider what will profit, and to act accordingly. The commercial view of life, if rightly taken, with regard to all a man's nature through all the duration of it, will coincide accurately with the most exalted. It paysto follow Christ. Christian morality has not the hypersensitive fear of appealing to self-interest which superfine moralists profess nowadays. And the question in verse 25 admits of only one answer, for what good is the whole world to a dead man? If our accounts are rightly kept, a world gained shows poorly on the one side, against the entry on the other of a soul lost.

Verse 26 tells in what that losing oneself consists, and enforces the original exhortation by the declaration of a future appearance of the Son of man. He of whom Christ is then ashamed loses his own soul. To live without His smile is to die, to be disowned by Him is to be a wreck. To be ashamed of Jesus is equivalent to that base self-preservation which has been denounced as fatal. If a man disavows all connection with Him, He will disavow all connection with the disavower. A man separated from Jesus is dead while he lives, and hereafter will live a living death, and possess neither the world for which he sacrificed his own soul nor the soul for which he sacrificed it.

We cannot but note the authoritative tone of our Lord in these verses. He claims the obedience and discipleship of all men. He demands that all shall yield themselves unreservedly to Him, and that, even if actual surrender of life is involved, it shall be gladly given. He puts our relation to Him as determining our whole present and future. He assumes to be our Judge, whose smile is life, whose averted face darkens the destiny of a man. Whom say ye that He who dared to speak thus conceived Himself to be? Whom say ye that He is?

Verse 27 recalls us from the contemplation of that far-off appearance to something nearer. Remembering the previous announcement of our Lord's sufferings, these words seem intended to cheer the disciples with the hope that the kingdom would still be revealed within the lifetime of some then present. Remembering the immediately preceding words, this saying seems to assure the disciples that the blessed recompense of the life of self-crucifying discipleship is not to be postponed to that future, but may be enjoyed on earth. Remembering Christ's word, Except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God, we doubt whether there is any reference here to the destruction of Jerusalem, as is commonly understood. Are not the words rather a declaration that they who are Christ's true disciples shall even here enter into the possession of their true selves, and find the Messianic hopes more than fulfilled? The future indicated will then be no more remote than the completion of His work by His death and Resurrection, or, at the farthest, the descent of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost, by which the fuller life of renewed natures was bestowed on those who were following Jesus in daily self-surrender.