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

**LUKE-040**. **CHRIST'S MESSENGERS: THEIR EQUIPMENT AND WORK by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. After these things, the Lord appointed other seventy also, and sent them two and two before His face into every city and place whither He Himself would come. 2. Therefore said He unto them, The harvest truly is great, but the labourers are few: pray ye therefore the Lord of the harvest, that He would send forth labourers into His harvest. 3. Go your ways: behold, I send you forth as lambs among wolves. 4. Carry neither purse, nor scrip, nor shoes; and salute no man by the way. 5. And into whatsoever house ye enter, first say, Peace be to this house. 6. And if the son of peace be there, your peace shall rest upon it: if not, it shall turn to you again. 7. And in the same house remain, eating and drinking such things as they give: for the labourer is worthy of his hire. Go not from house to house. 8. And into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you, eat such things as are set before you: 9. And heal the sick that are therein; and say unto them, The kingdom of God is come nigh unto you. 10. But into whatsoever city ye enter, and they receive you not, go your ways out into the streets of the same, and say, 11. Even the very dust of your city, which cleaveth on us, we do wipe off against you: notwithstanding, be ye sure of this, that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you.... 17. And the seventy returned again with joy, saying, Lord, even the devils are subject unto us through Thy name. 18. And He said unto them, I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven. 19. Behold, I give unto you power to tread on serpents and scorpions, and over all the power of the enemy; and nothing shall by any means hurt you. 20. Notwithstanding in this rejoice not, that the spirits are subject unto you; but rather rejoice, because your names are written in heaven."*

*Luke 10:1-11; 17-20*

The mission of the Seventy is clearly distinguished from and contrasted with that of the Twelve by the word othersin verse 1, which points back to Luke 9:1. The Twelve were prohibited from going beyond Jews; the Seventy were under no such restriction, and were probably sent to the half-Gentile districts on the east of Jordan. The number of twelve had reference to the number of the tribes; that of seventy may have referred to the number of the elders, but it has also been suggested that its reference is to the supposed number of the nations. The appointment of the Twelve was to a permanent office; that of the Seventy to a transitory mission. Much of the charge given to either is given to both, as is most natural, since they had the same message, and both were sent to prepare for Christ's personal ministry. But though the Seventy were sent out but for a short time, permanent principles for the guidance, not only of Christian workers, but of all Christian lives, are embodied in the charge which they received.

We note, first, that all personal service should be preceded by intense realisation of the immense field, and of the inadequacy, of Christian effort, which vision will culminate in prayer for more toilers to be sent forth. The word implies a certain measure of compulsion, for an overmastering impulse is always needed to overcome human reluctance and laziness. No man has ever done large service for God who has not felt that, like the prophet, he was laid hold of by the Spirit, and borne away, whether he would or no. I must speak, is felt by every true messenger of God. The prayer was answered by the sending of the prayers, as it often is. Note how Jesus implies that He is Lord of the harvest, in that His sending them is the answer to the petition. Note, too, the authority which He claims to exercise supreme sovereignty over the lives of men. He has the right to fling them into deadly peril for no other purpose than to proclaim His name. Lambs, ringed round by wolves with white, gleaming teeth, have little chance of life. Jesus gives His servants full warning of dangers, and on the very warning builds an exhortation to quiet confidence; for, if the sentence ends with lambs in the midst of wolves, it begins with I send you forth, and that is enough, for He will defend them when He seeth the wolf coming. Not only so, but He will also provide for all their needs, so they want no baggage nor money, nor even a staff. A traveller without any of these would be in poor case, but they are not to carry such things, because they carry Jesus. He who sends them forth goes with them whom He sends. Now, this precept, in its literal form, was expressly abolished afterwards (Luke xxii. 36), but the spirit of it is permanent. If Christ sends us, we may trust Him to take care of us as long as we are on His errands.

Energetic pursuit of their work, unimpeded by distractions of social intercourse, is meant by the prohibition of saluting by the way. That does not mean churlish isolation, but any one who has ever seen two Easterns salutingknows what a long-drawn-out affair it is. How far along the road one might have travelled while all that empty ceremony was being got through! The time for salutations is when the journey is over. They mean something then. The great effect of the presence of Christ's servants should be to impart the peace which they themselves possess. We should put reality into conventional courtesies. All Christians are to be peacemakers in the deepest sense, and especially in regard to men's relations with God. The whole scope of our work may be summed up as being to proclaim and bring peace with God, with ourselves, with all others, and with circumstances. The universality of our message is implied in the fact that the salutation is to be given in every house entered, and without any inquiry whether a son of peaceis there. The reflex blessedness of Christian effort is taught in the promise that the peace, vainly wished for those who would not receive it, is not wasted like spilt water, but comes back like a dove, to the hand of its sender. If we do no other person good, we bless ourselves by all work for others.

The injunctions as to conduct in the house or city that receives the messengers carry two principles of wide application. First, they demand clear disinterestedness and superiority to vulgar appetites. Christ's servants are not to be fastidious as to their board and lodging. They are not to make demands for more refined diet than their hosts are accustomed to have, and they are not to shift their quarters, though it were from a hovel to a palace. The suspicion that a Christian worker is fond of good living and sensuous delights robs his work of power. But the injunction teaches also that there is no generosity in those who hear the message giving, and no obligation laid on those who deliver it by their receiving, enough to live and work on. The less we obviously look for, the more shall we probably receive. A high-minded man need not scruple to take the hire; a high-minded giver will not suppose that he has hired the receiver to be his servant.

The double substance of the work is next briefly stated. The order in which its two parts stands is remarkable, for the healing of the sick is put first, and the proclamation of the nearness of the kingdom second. Possibly the reason is that the power to heal was a new gift. Its very priority in mention may imply that it was but a means to an end, a part of the equipment for the true and proper work of preaching the coming of the kingdom and its King. At all events, let us learn that Jesus wills the continual combination of regard to the bodily wants and sicknesses, and regard to the spiritual needs of men.

The solemn instructions as to what was to be done in the case of rejection breathe a spirit the reverse of sanguine. Jesus had no illusions as to the acceptance of the message, and He will send no man out to work hiding from him the difficulties and opposition probably to be encountered. Much wisdom lies in deciding when a field of labour or a method of work should be abandoned as hopeless--for the present and for the individual worker, at all events. To do it too soon is cowardice; to delay it too long is not admirable perseverance, but blindness to plain providences. To shake off the dust is equivalent to severing all connection. The messenger will not bring away the least thing belonging to the city. But whatever men's unbelief, it does not affect the fact, but it does affect their relation to the fact. The gracious message was at first that the kingdom of God is come nigh unto you, but the last shape of it leaves out unto you: for rejection of the word cuts off from beneficial share in the word, and the kingdom, when it comes, has no blessing for the unbelieving soul.

The return of the Seventy soon followed their being sent forth. They came back with a childish, surprised joy, and almost seem to have thought that Jesus would be as much astonished and excited as they were with the proof of the power of His name. They had found that they could not only heal the sick, but cast out demons. Jesusanswer is meant to quiet down their excitement by teaching them that He had known what they were doing whilst they were doing it. When did He behold Satan fall from heaven? The context seems to require that it should be at the time when the Seventy were casting out demons. The contest between the personal Source of evil and Jesus was fought out by the principals, not by their subordinates, and it is already victoriously decided in Christ's sight. Therefore, as the sequel of His victory, He enlarges His gifts to His servants, couching the charter in the words of a psalm (Ps. xci.). Nothing can harm the servant without the leave of the Master, and if any evil befall him in his work, the evil in the evil, the poison on the arrow-head, will be wiped off and taken away. But great as are the gifts to the faithful servant, they are less to be rejoiced in than his personal inclusion among the citizens of heaven. Gifts and powers are good, and may legitimately be rejoiced in; but to possess eternal life, and to belong to the mother-city of us all, the New Jerusalem, is better than all gifts and all powers.