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

**LUKE-046**. **STILLNESS IN STORM by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... Neither be ye of doubtful mind."*

*Luke 12:29*

I think that these words convey no very definite idea to most readers. The thing forbidden is not very sharply defined by the expression which our translators have employed, but the original term is very picturesque and precise.

The word originally means to be elevated, to be raised as a meteor, and comes by degrees to mean to be raised in one special way--namely, as a boat is tossed by a tough sea. So there is a picture in this prohibition which the fishermen and folk dwelling by the Sea of Galilee with its sudden squalls would understand: Be not pitched about; now on the crest, now in the trough of the wave.

The meaning, then, is substantially identical with that of the previous words, Take no thought for your life, with this difference, that the figures by which the thing prohibited is expressed are different, and that the latter saying is wider than the former.

The former prohibits taking thought, by which our Lord of course means not reasonable foresight, but anxious foreboding. And the word which He uses, meaning at bottom as it does, to be distracted or rent asunder, conveys a striking picture of the wretched state to which such anxiety brings a man. Nothing tears us to pieces like foreboding care. Then our text forbids the same anxiety, as well as other fluctuations of feeling that come from setting our hopes and hearts on aught which can change; and its figurative representation of the misery that follows on fastening ourselves to the perishable, is that of the poor little skiff, at one moment high on the crest of the billow, at the next down in the trough of the sea.

So both images point to the unrest of worldliness, and while the unrest of care is uppermost in the one, the other includes more than simply care, and warns us that all occupation with simply creatural things, all eager seeking after what ye shall eat or what ye shall drinkor after more refined forms of earthly good, brings with it the penalty and misery of for ever tossing on the tossing wave. Whosoever launches out on to that sea is sure to be buffeted about. Whoso sets his heart on the uncertainty of anything below the changeless God will without doubt be driven from hope to fear, from joy to sorrow, and his soul will be agitated as his idols change, and his heart will be desolate when his idols perish.

Our Lord, we say, forbids our being thus tossed about. He seems to believe that it is in our own power to settle whether we shall be or no. That sounds strange; one can fancy the answer: What is the use of telling a man not to be buffeted about by storm? Why, he cannot help it. If the sea is running high the little boat cannot lie quiet as if in smooth water. Do not talk to me about not being moved, unless you can say to the tumbling sea of life, "Peace, be still!" and make it

quite forget to rave,

while birds of peace sit,

brooding on the charmed wave.

The objection is sound after a fashion. Change there must be, and fluctuation of feeling. But there is such a thing as peace subsisting at the heart of endless agitation. You may remember the attempt that was made some years ago to build a steamer in which the central saloon was to hang perfectly still while the outer hull of the ship pitched and rolled with the moving sea. It was a failure, but the theory was sound and looked practicable. At any rate, it is a parable of what may be in our lives. If I might venture, without seeming irreverence, to modernise and so to illustrate this command of our Lord's, I would say, that He here bids us do for our life's voyage across a stormy sea, exactly what the Bessemership was an attempt to do in its region--so to poise and control the oscillations of the central soul that however the outward life may be buffeted about, there may be moveless rest within. He knows full well that we must have rough weather, but He would have us counteract the motion of the sea, and keep our hearts in stillness. In the world ye shall have tribulation, but in Him ye may have peace.

He does not wish us to be blind to the facts of life, but to take all the facts into our vision. A partial view of the so-called facts certainly will lead to tumultuous alternations of hope and fear, of joy and sorrow. But if you will take them all into account, you can be quiet and at rest. For here is a fact as real as the troubles and changes of life: Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. Ah! the recognition of that will keep our inmost hearts full of sweet peace, whatever may befall the outward life. Only take all the facts of your condition, and accept Christ's word for that greatest and surest of all--the loving Father's knowledge of your needs, and it will not be hard to obey Christ's command, and keep yourself still, because fixed on Him.

But now consider the teachings here as to the true source of the agitation which our Lord forbids. The precept itself affords no light on that subject, but the context shows us the true origin of the evil.

The first point to observe is how remarkably our Lord identifies this anxiety and restlessness which He forbids with what at first sight seems its exact opposite, namely a calmness and peace which he also condemns as wholly bad. The whole series of warnings of which our text is part begins with the story of the rich man whose ground brought forth plentifully. His fault was not that he was tossed about with care and a doubtful mind, but the very opposite. His sin was in saying, Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.

Notice, then, that our Lord begins by pointing out the great madness and the great sin of being thus at rest, and trusting in earthly possessions: and then with a Therefore, I say unto you, He turns to the opposite pole of worldly feeling, and shows us how, although opposite, it is yet related. The warning, Take no thought for your lifefollows as an inference from the picture of the folly of the man that lays up treasure for himself and is not rich towards God.

That is to say, the two faults are kindred and in some sense the same. The rich fool stretching himself out to rest on the pile of his possessions, and the poor fool tossing about on the billows of unquiet thought, are at bottom under the influence of the same folly, though their circumstances are opposite, and their moods seem to be so too.

The one man is just the other turned inside out. When he is rich and has got plenty of outward goods, he has no anxiety, because he thinks that they are supreme and all-sufficient. When he is poor and has not got enough of them, he has no rest, because he thinks that they are supreme and all-sufficient. Anxious care and satisfied possession are at bottom the very same thing. The man who says, My mountain stands strong, because he has got a quantity of money or the like; and the man who says, Oh, dear me, what is going to become of me?because he thinks he has not got enough, only need to exchange circumstances and they will exchange cries.

The same figure is concave or convex according to the side from which you look at it. From one it swells out into rounded fullness; from the other it gapes as in empty hungriness. So the rich fool of the preceding parable and the anxious, troubled man of my text are the same man looked at from opposite sides or set in opposite circumstances. The root of both the rest of the one and of the anxiety of the other is the over-estimate of outward good.

Then, still further, notice how our Lord here brands this forbidden fluctuation of feeling as being at bottom pure heathenism. Most significant double reasons for our text follow it, introduced by a double for. The first reason is, For all these things do the nations of the world seek after; the second is, For your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. The former points the lesson of the contradiction between such trouble of mind and the position of disciples. For pure heathens it is all natural; for men who do not know that they have a Father in heaven, there is nothing strange or anomalous in care and anxiety, nor in the race after riches. But for you, it is in diametrical contradiction to all your professions, in flagrant inconsistency with all your belief, in flat denial of that mighty truth that you have a Father who cares for you, and that His love is enough. Every time you yield to such cares or thoughts you are going down to the level of pure heathenism. That is a sharp saying. Our Lord's steady hand wields the keen dissecting-knife here, and lays bare with unsparing cuts the ugly growth. We give the thing condemned a great many honourable names, such as laying up for a rainy day, or taking care for the future of my children, or providing things honest in the sight of all men, and a host of others, with which we gloss and gild over unchristian worldly-mindedness.

There are actions and feelings which are rightly described by such phrases, that are perfectly right, and against them Jesus Christ never said a word.

But much of what we deceive ourselves by calling reasonable foresight is rooted distrust of God, and much practical heathenism creeps into our lives under the guise of proper prudence. The ordinary maxims of the world christen many things by names of virtues and yet they remain vices notwithstanding.

I do not know that there is any region in which Christian men have more to be on their guard, lest they be betrayed into deadening inconsistencies, than this of the true limits of care for material wealth, and of provision for the future outward life.

Those of us, especially, who are engaged in business, and who live in our great commercial cities, have hard work to keep from dropping down to the heathen level which is adopted on all sides. It is not easy for such a man to resist the practical belief that money is the one thing needful, and he the happy man who has made a fortune. The false estimate of worldly good is in the air about us, and we have to be on our guard, or else, before we know where we are, we shall have breathed the stupefying poison and feel its narcotic influence slackening the pulses and dimming the eye of our spirits. We need special watchfulness and prayer, or we shall not escape this subtle danger, which is truly for many of us the pestilence that walketh in darkness.

So be not tossed about by these secularities, for the root of them all is heathenish distrust of your Father in heaven.

Then, finally, we have the cure for all agitation. Christ here puts in our own hands, in that thought, Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things, the one weapon with which we can conquer. There is the true anchorage for tempest-tossed spirits, the land-locked haven where they can ride, whatever winds blow and waves break outside the bar.

I remarked that our Lord here seemed to give an injunction which the facts of life would prevent our obeying, and so it would be, had He not pointed us to that firm truth, which, if we believe it, will keep us unmoved. There is no more profitless expenditure of breath than the ordinary moralist's exhortations to, or warnings against, states of feeling and modes of mind. Our emotions are very partially under our direct control. Life cannot be calm by willing to be so. But what we can do is to think of a truth which will sway our moods. If you can substitute some other thought for the one which breeds the emotion you condemn, it will fall silent of itself, just as the spindles will stop if you shut off steam, or the mill-wheel if you turn the stream in another direction. So Christ gives us a great thought to cherish, knowing that if we let it have fair play in our minds, we shall be at rest: Your Father knoweth that ye have need of these things. Surely that is enough for calmness. Why should, or how can we be, troubled if we believe that?

He knows. What a wonderful confidence in His heart and resources is silently implied in that word! If He knows that you need, you may be quite sure that you will not want. He knows; and His fatherly heart is our guarantee that to know and to supply our need, are one and the same thing with Him; and His deep treasure of exhaustless good is our guarantee that our need can never go beyond His fullness, nor He ever, like us, see a sorrow He cannot comfort, a want that He cannot meet.

Enough that He knows; the rest goes without saying. The whole burden of solicitude is shifted off our shoulders, if once we get into the light of that great truth. A man is made restful in the midst of all the changes and storms of life, not by trying to work himself into tranquillity, not by mere dint of coercing his feelings through sheer force of will, not by ignoring any facts, but simply by letting this truth stand before his mind. It scatters cares, as the silent moon has power, by her mild white light, to clear away a whole skyful of piled blacknesses.

One other word of practical advice, as to how to carry out this injunction, is suggested by the context, which goes on, Seek ye first the kingdom of God.

A boat will roll most when, from lack of a strong hand at the helm, she has got broadside to the run of the sea. There she lies rocking about just as the blow of the wave may fall, and drifting wherever the wind may take her. There are two directions in which she will be comparatively steady; one, when her head is kept as near the wind as may be, and the other when she runs before it. Either will be quieter than washing about anyhow. May we make a parable out of that? If you want to have as little pitching and tossing as possible on your voyage, keep a good strong hand on the tiller. Do not let the boat lie in the trough of the sea, but drive her right against the wind, or as near it as she will sail. That is to say, have a definite aim to which you steer, and keep a straight course for that. So Christ says to us here. Be not filled with agitations, but seek the Kingdom. The definite pursuit of the higher good will deaden the lower anxieties. The active energies called out in the daily efforts to bring my whole being under the dominion of the sovereign will of God, will deliver me from a crowd of tumultuous desires and forebodings. I shall have neither leisure nor inclination to be anxious about outward things, when I am engaged and absorbed in seeking the kingdom. So bear up and steer right onward, and it will be smooth sailing.

Sometimes, too, we shall have to try the other tack, and run before the storm, which again will give us the minimum of commotion. That, being translated, is, Let the winds and the waves sometimes have their way. Yield to them in the sweetness of submission and the strength of resignation. Even when all the stormy winds strive on the surface sea, recognise them as God's messengers fulfilling His word. Submission is not rudderless yielding to the gale, that tosses us on high and sinks us again, as the waves list. This frees us from their power, even while they roll mountains high.

Then keep firm trust in your Father's knowledge; strenuously seek the kingdom. In quietness accept the changeful methods of his unchanging providence. Thus shall your hearts be kept in peace amidst the storm of life, with the happy thought, So He bringeth them unto their desired haven.