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

**LUKE-047**. **THE EQUIPMENT OF THE SERVANTS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"35. Let your loins be girded about, and your lights burning; 36. And ye yourselves like unto men that wait for their Lord."*

*Luke 12:35-36*

These words ought to stir us like the sound of a trumpet. But, by long familiarity, they drop upon dull ears, and scarcely produce any effect. The picture that they suggest, as an emblem of the Christian state, is a striking one. It is midnight, a great house is without its master, the lord of the palace is absent, but expected back, the servants are busy in preparation, each man with his robe tucked about his middle, in order that it may not interfere with his work, his lamp in his hand that he may see to go about his business and his eye ever turned to the entrance to catch the first sign of the coming of his master. Is that like your Christian life? If we are His servants that is what we ought to be, having three things--girded loins, lighted lamps, waiting hearts. These are sharp tests, solemn commandments, but great privileges, for blessedness as well as strength, and calm peace whatever happens, belong to those who obey these injunctions and have these things.

**I. The girded loins.**

Every child knows the long Eastern dress; and that the first sign that a man is in earnest about any work would be that he should gather his skirts around him and brace himself together.

The Christian service demands concentration. It needs the fixing of all a man's powers upon the one thing, the gathering together of all the strength of one's nature, and binding it with cords until its softest and loosest particles are knit together, and become strong. Why! you can take a handful of cotton-down, and if you will squeeze it tight enough, it will be as hard and as heavy as a bullet and will go as far, and have as much penetrating power and force of impact. The reason why some men hit and make no dint is because they are not gathered together and braced up by a vigorous concentration.

The difference between men that succeed and men that fail in ordinary pursuits is by no means so much intellectual as moral; and there is nothing which more certainly commands any kind of success than giving yourselves with your whole concentrated power to the task in hand. If we succeed in anything we must focus all our power on it. Only by so doing, as a burning-glass does the sun's rays, shall we set anything on fire.

And can a vigorous Christian life be grown upon other conditions than those which a vigorous life of an ordinary sort demands? Why should it be easier to be a prosperous Christian than to be a prosperous tradesman? Why should there not be the very same law in operation in the realm of the higher riches and possessions that rules in the realm of the lower? Gird up the loins of your mind, says the Apostle, echoing the Master's word here. The first condition of true service is that you shall do it with concentrated power.

There is another requirement, or perhaps rather another side of the same, expressed in the figure. One reason why a man tucked up his robe around his waist, when he had anything to do that needed all his might, was that it might not catch upon the things that protruded, and so keep him back. Concentration, and what I may call detachment, go together. In order that there shall be the one, there must be the other. They require each other, and are, in effect, but the two sides of the same thing contemplated in regard to hindrances without, or contemplated in regard to the relation of the several parts of a man's nature to each other.

Observe that Luke immediately precedes the text with:--Sell that ye have, and give alms; provide yourselves bags which wax not old, a treasure in the heavens that faileth not, where no thief approacheth, neither moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also. Let your loins be girded about. That is to say, do not let your affections go straggling anywhere and everywhere, but gather them together, and that you may gather them together tear away the robe from the briars and thorns which catch you as you pass, and gird the long flowing skirts close to yourselves in order that they may not be caught by these hindrances. There is no Christian life worth living except upon condition of wrenching oneself away from dependence upon idolatry of, or longing for, perishable things. The lesson of my text is the same as the solemn lesson which the beloved Apostle sharpened his gentle lips to pronounce when he said, If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. Gird up your loins, detach heart, desire, effort from perishable things, and lift them above the fleeting treasures and hollow delusive sparkles of earth's preciousness, and set them on the realities and eternities at God's right hand. For where the treasure is, there will the heart be also, and only that heart can never be stabbed by disappointment, nor bled to death by losses, whose treasure is as sure as God and eternal as Himself. Let your loins be girded about.

And then there is another thing suggested, which is the consequence of these two. The girding up of the loins is not only the symbol of concentration and detachment, but of that for which the concentration and the detachment are needful--viz. alert readiness for service. The servant who stands before his lord with his belt buckled tight indicates thereby that he is ready to run whenever and wherever he is bid. Our girded loins are not merely in order to give strength to our frame, but in order that, having strength given to our frame, we may be ready for all work. That which is needful for any faithful discharge of any servant's duty is most of all needful for the discharge of the highest duty and the noblest service to the Master who has the right to command all our service.

There are three emblems in Scripture to all of which this metaphor applies. The soldier, before he flings himself into the fight, takes in another hole in his leather belt in order that there may be strength given to his spine, and he may feel himself all gathered together for the deadly struggle, and the Christian soldier has to do the same thing. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth.

The traveller, before he starts upon his long road, girds himself, and gathers his robes round him; and we have to run with perseverance the race set before us; and shall never do it if our garments, however delicately embroidered, are flapping about our feet and getting in our way when we try to run.

The servant has to be succinct, girded together for his work, even as the Master, when He took upon Him the form of a servant, took a towel and girded Himself. His servants have to follow His example, to put aside the needless vesture and brace themselves with the symbol of service. So as soldiers, pilgrims, servants, the condition of doing our work is, girding up the loins.

**II. Further, there are to be the burning lamps.**

If we follow the analogy of Scripture symbolism, significance belongs to that emblem, making it quite worthy to stand by the side of the former one. You remember Christ's first exhortation in the Sermon on the Mount immediately following the Beatitudes: Ye are the salt of the earth, ye are the light of the world. Men do not light a candle, and put it under a bushel. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good deeds. If we apply that key to decipher the hieroglyphics, the burning lamps which the girded servants are to bear in the darkness are the whole sum of the visible acts of Christian people, from which there may flash the radiance of purity and kindness, So shines a good deed in a naughty world. The lamp which the Christian servant is to bear is a character illuminated from above (for it is a kindled lamp, and the light is derived), and streaming out a brilliance into the encircling murky midnight which speaks of hospitable welcome and of good cheer in the lighted hall within.

Now, what is the connection between that exhibition of a lustrous and pure Christian character and the former exhortation? Why this, if you do not gird your loins your lamp will go out. Without the concentrated effort and the continually repeated detachment and the daily renewed Lord! here am I, send me, of the alert and ready servant, there will be no shining of the life, no beauty of the character, but dimness will steal over the exhibition of Christian graces. Just as, often, in the wintry nights, a star becomes suddenly obscured, and we know not why, but some thin vaporous cloud has come between us and it, invisible in itself but enough to blur its brightness, so obscuration will befall the Christian character unless there be continual concentration and detachment. Do you want your lights to blaze? You trim them--though it is a strange mixture of metaphor--you trim them when you gird your loins.

**III. Lastly, the waiting hearts.**

An attitude of expectancy does not depend upon theories about the chronology of prophecy. It is Christ's will that, till He comes, we know neither the day nor the hour. We may, as I suppose most of us do, believe that we shall die before He comes. Be it so. That need not affect the attitude of expectance, for it comes to substantially the same thing whether Christ comes to us or we go to Him. And the certain uncertainty of the end of our individual connection with this fleeting world stands in the same relation to our hopes as the coming of the Master does, and should have an analogous effect on our lives. Whatever may be our expectation as to the literal coming of the Lord, that future should be very solid, very real, very near us in our thoughts, a habitual subject of contemplation, and ever operative upon our hearts and conduct.

Ah! if we never, or seldom, and then sorrowfully, look forward to the future, and contemplate our meeting with our Master, I do not think there is much chance of our having either our loins girt, or our lamps burning.

One great motive for concentration, detachment, and alertness of service, as well as for exhibiting the bright graces of the Christian character, is to be found in the contemplation of the two comings of the Lord. We should be ever looking back to the Cross, forward to the Throne, and upwards to the Christ, the same on them both. If we have our gathering together with Him ever in view, then we shall be willing to yield all for Him, to withdraw ourselves from everything besides for the excellency of His knowledge; and whatsoever He commands, joyfully and cheerfully to do.

The reason why such an immense and miserable proportion of professing Christians are all unbraced and loose-girt, and their lamps giving such smoky and foul-smelling and coarse radiance, is because they look little back to the Cross, and less forward to the Great White Throne. But these two solemn and sister sights are far more real than the vulgar and intrusive illusions of what we call the present. That is a shadow, they are the realities; that is but a transitory scenic display, like the flashing of the Aurora Borealis for a night in the wintry sky, these are the fixed, unsetting stars that guide our course. Therefore let us turn away from the lying present, with its smallnesses and its falsities, and look backwards to Him that died, forward to Him that is coming. And, as we nourish our faith on the twofold fact, a history and a hope, that Christ has come, and that Christ shall come, we shall find that all devotion will be quickened, and all earnestness stirred to zeal, and the dim light will flame into radiance and glory.

He comes in one of two characters which lie side by side here, as they do in fact. To the waiting servants He comes as the Master who shall gird Himself and go forth and serve them; to those who wait not, He comes as a thief, not only in the suddenness nor the unwelcomeness of His coming, but as robbing them of what they would fain keep, and dragging from them much that they ought never to have had. And it depends upon ourselves whether, we waiting and watching and serving and witnessing for Him, He shall come to us as our Joy, or as our Terror and our Judge.