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

**LUKE-048**. **THE SERVANT LORD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Verily I say unto you, that He shall gird Himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth, and serve them."*

*Luke 12:37*

No one would have dared to say that except Jesus Christ. For surely, manifold and wonderful as are the glimpses that we get in the New Testament of the relation of perfect souls in heaven to Him, none of them pierces deeper, rises higher, and speaks more boundless blessing, than such words as these. Well might Christ think it necessary to preface them with the solemn affirmation which always, upon His lips, points, as it were, an emphatic finger to, or underlines that which He is about to proclaim. Verily I say unto you, if we had not His own word for it, we might hesitate to believe. And while we have His own word for it, and do not hesitate to believe, it is not for us to fathom or exhaust, but lovingly and reverently and humbly, because we know it but partially, to try to plumb the unfathomable depth of such words. He shall gird Himself, and cause them to sit down to meat; and come forth and serve them.

**I. Then we have, first of all, the wonderful revelation of the Servant-Lord.**

For the name of dignity is employed over and over again in the immediate context, and so makes more wonderful the assumption here of the promise of service.

And the words are not only remarkable because they couple so closely together the two antagonistic ideas, as we fancy them, of rule and service, authority and subordination, but because they dwell with such singular particularity of detail upon all the stages of the menial office which the Monarch takes upon Himself. First, the girding, assuming the servant's attire; then the leading of the guests, wondering and silent, to the couches where they can recline; then the coming to them as they thus repose at the table, and the waiting upon their wants and supplying all their need. It reminds us of the wonderful scene, in John's Gospel, where we have coupled together in the same intimate and interdependent fashion the two thoughts of dignity and of service--Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand, and that He came from God and went to God, made this use of His consciousness and of His unlimited and universal dominion, that He laid aside His garments, and took a towel, and girded Himself, and washed the disciplesfeet; thus teaching what our text teaches in still another form, that the highest authority means the lowliest service, that the purpose of power is blessing, that the very sign and mark of dignity is to stoop, and that the crown of the Universe is worn by Him who is the Servant of all.

But beyond that general idea which applies to the whole of the divine dealings and especially to the earthly life of Him who came, not to be ministered unto, but to minister, the text sets forth special manifestations of Christ's ministering love and power, which are reserved for heaven, and are a contrast with earth. The Lord who is the Servant girds Himself. That corresponds with the commandment that went before, Let your loins be girded, and to some extent covers the same ground and suggests the same idea. With all reverence, and following humbly in the thoughts that Christ has given us by the words, one may venture to say that He gathers all His powers together in strenuous work for the blessing of His glorified servants, and that not only does the metaphor express for us His taking upon Himself the lowly office, but also the employment of all that He is and has there in the heavens for the blessing of the blessed ones that sit at His table.

Here upon earth, when He assumed the form of a Servant in His entrance into humanity, it was accompanied with the emptying Himself of His glory. In the symbolical incident in John's Gospel, to which I have already referred, He laid aside His garments before He wrapped around Him the badge of service. But in that wondrous service by the glorified Lord there is no need for divesting ere He serves, but the divine glories that irradiate His humanity, and by which He, our Brother, is the King of kings and the Lord of the Universe, are all used by Him for this great, blessed purpose of gladdening and filling up the needs of the perfected spirits that wait, expectant of their food, upon Him. His girding Himself for service expresses not only the lowliness of His majesty and the beneficence of His power, but His use of all which He has and is for the blessing of those whom He keeps and blesses.

I need not remind you, I suppose, how in this same wonderful picture of the Servant-Lord there is taught the perpetual--if we may so say, the increased--lowliness of the crowned Christ. When He was here on earth, He was meek and holy; exalted in the heavens, He is, were it possible, meeker and more lowly still, because He stoops from a loftier elevation. The same loving, gentle, gracious heart, holding all its treasures for its brethren, is the heart that now is girded with the golden girdle of sovereignty, and which once was girt with the coarse towel of the slave. Christ is for ever the Servant, because He is for ever the Lord of them that trust in Him. Let us learn that service is dominion; that he that is chiefest among usis thereby bound to be the servantand the helper of all.

**II. Notice, the servants who are served and serve.**

There are two or three very plain ideas, suggested by the great words of my text, in regard to the condition of those whom the Lord thus ministers to, and waits upon. I need not expand them, because they are familiar to us all, but let me just touch them. He shall make them to sit down to meat. The word, as many of you know, really implies a more restful attitude--He shall make them recline at meat. What a contrast to the picture of toil and effort, which has just been drawn, in the command, Let your loins be girded about, and your lamps burning, and ye yourselves as men that wait for their Lord!Here, there must be the bracing up of every power, and the careful tending of the light amid the darkness and the gusts that threaten to blow it out, and every ear is to be listening and every eye strained, for the coming of the Lord, that there may be no unpreparedness or delay in flinging open the gates. But then the tension is taken off and the loins ungirded, for there is no need for painful effort, and the lamps that burn dimly and require tending in the mephitic air are laid aside, and they need no candle, for the Lord is the light thereof; and there is no more intense listening for the first foot-fall of One who is coming, for He has come, and expectation is turned into fellowship and fruition. The strained muscles can relax, and instead of effort and weariness, there is repose upon the restful couches prepared by Him. Threadbare and old as the hills as the thought is, it comes to us toilers with ever new refreshment, like a whiff of fresh air or the gleam of the far-off daylight at the top of the shaft to the miner, cramped at his work in the dark. What a witness the preciousness of that representation of future blessedness as rest to us all bears to the pressure of toil and the aching, weary hearts which we all carry! The robes may flow loose then, for there is neither pollution to be feared from the golden pavement, nor detention from briars or thorns, nor work that is so hard as to be toil or so unwelcome as to be pain. There is rest from labour, care, change, and fear of loss, from travel and travail, from tired limbs and hearts more tired still, from struggle and sin, from all which makes the unrest of life.

Further, this great promise assures us of the supply of all wants that are only permitted to last long enough to make a capacity for receiving the eternal and all-satisfying food which Christ gives the restful servants. Though they hunger no more, they shall always have appetite. Though they thirst no more, they shall ever desire deeper draughts of the fountain of life. Desire is one thing, longing is another. Longing is pain, desire is blessedness; and that we shall want and know ourselves to want, with a want which lives but for a moment ere the supply pours in upon it and drowns it, is one of the blessednesses to which we dare to look forward. Here we live, tortured by wishes, longings, needs, a whole menagerie of hungry mouths yelping within us for their food. There we wait upon the Lord, and He gives a portion in due season.

The picture in the text brings with it all festal ideas of light, society, gladness, and the like, on which I need not dwell. But let me just remind you of one contrast. The ministry of Christ, when He was a servant here upon earth, was symbolised by His washing His disciplesfeet, an act which was part of the preparation of the guests for a feast. The ministry of Christ in heaven consists, not in washing, for he that is washed is clean every whitthere, and for ever more--but in ministering to His guests that abundant feast for which the service and the lustration of earth were but the preparation. The servant Christ serves us here by washing us from our sins in His own blood, both in the one initial act of forgiveness and by the continual application of that blood to the stains contracted in the miry ways of life. The Lord and Servant serves His servants in the heavens by leading them, cleansed to His table, and filling up every soul with love and with Himself.

But all that, remember, is only half the story. Our Lord here is not giving us a complete view of the retributions of the heavens, He is only telling us one aspect of them. Repose, society, gladness, satisfaction, these things are all true. But heaven is not lying upon couches and eating of a feast. There is another use of this metaphor in this same Gospel, which, at first sight, strikes one as being contradictory to this. Our Lord said: Which of you, having a servant ploughing or feeding cattle, will say unto him by and by, when he is come from the field, go and sit down to meat, and will not rather say unto him, make ready wherewith I may sup, and gird thyself, and serve me, till I have eaten and drunken; and afterward thou shalt eat and drink. These two representations are not contradictory. Put the two halves together like the two pictures in a stereoscope and, as you look, they will go together into one solid image, of which the one part is the resting at the table of the feast, and the other part is that entrance into heaven is not cessation, but variation, of service. It was dirty, cold, muddy work out there in the field ploughing, and when the man comes back with his soiled, wet raiment and his weary limbs a change of occupation is rest. It is better for him to be set to make ready wherewith I may eat and drink, than to be told to sit down and do nothing.

So the servants are served, and the servants serve. And these two representations are not contradictory, but they fill up the conception of perfect blessedness. For remember, if we may venture to say so, that the very same reason which makes Christ the Lord serve His servants makes the servants serve Christ the Lord. For love, which underlies their relationship, has for its very life-breath doing kindnesses and good to its objects, and we know not whether it is more blessed to the loving heart to minister to, or to be ministered to by, the heart which it loves. So the Servant-Lord and the servants, serving and served, are swayed in both by the same motive and rejoice in the interchange of offices and tokens of love.

**III. Mark the earthly service which leads to the heavenly rest.**

I have already spoken about Christ's earthly service, and reminded you that there is needed, first of all, that we should partake in His purifying work through His blood and His Spirit that dwells in us, ere we can share in His highest ministrations to His servants in the heavens. But there is also service of ours here on earth, which must precede our receiving our share in the wonderful things promised here. And the nature of that service is clearly stated in the preceding words, Blessed are those servants whom the Lord when He cometh shall find--doing what? Trying to make themselves better? Seeking after conformity to His commandments? No! Whom the Lord when He cometh shall find watching. It is character rather than conduct, and conduct only as an index of character--disposition rather than deeds--that makes it possible for Christ to be hereafter our Servant-Lord. And the character is more definitely described in the former words. Loins girded, lights burning, and a waiting which is born of love. The concentration and detachment from earth, which are expressed by the girded loins, the purity and holiness of character and life, which are symbolised by the burning lights, and the expectation which desires, and does not shrink from, His coming in His Kingdom to be the Judge of all the earth--these things, being built upon the acceptance of Christ's ministry of washing, fit us for participation in Christ's ministry of the feast, and make it possible that even we shall be of those to whom the Lord, in that day, will come with gladness and with gifts. Blessed are the servants whom the Lord shall find so watching.