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

**LUKE-053**. **CHRIST'S MESSAGE TO HEROD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"32. And he said unto them, Go ye, and tell that fox, Behold, I cast out devils, and I do cures to-day and to-morrow, and the third day I shall be perfected. 33. Nevertheless I must walk to-day, and to-morrow, and the day following: for it cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem."*

*Luke 13:32-33*

Even a lamb might be suspicious if wolves were to show themselves tenderly careful of its safety. Pharisees taking Christ's life under their protection were enough to suggest a trick. These men came to Christ desirous of posing as counterworking Herod's intention to slay Him. Our Lord's answer, bidding them go and tell Herod what He immediately communicates to them, shows that He regarded them as in a plot with that crafty, capricious kinglet. And evidently there was an understanding between them. For some reason or other, best known to his own changeable and whimsical nature, the man who at one moment was eagerly desirous to see Jesus, was at the next as eagerly desirous to get Him out of his territories; just as he admired and murdered John the Baptist. The Pharisees, on the other hand, desired to draw Him to Jerusalem, where they would have Him in their power more completely than in the northern district. If they had spoken all their minds they would have said, Go hence, or else we cannot kill Thee. So Christ answers the hidden schemes, and not the apparent solicitude, in the words that I have taken for my text. They unmask the plot, they calmly put aside the threats of danger. They declare that His course was influenced by far other considerations. They show that He clearly saw what it was towards which He was journeying. And then, with sad irony, they declare that it, as it were, contrary to prophetic decorum and established usage that a prophet should be slain anywhere but in the streets of the bloody and sacred city.

There are many deep things in the words, which I cannot touch in the course of a single sermon; but I wish now, at all events, to skim their surface, and try to gather some of their obvious lessons.

**I. First, then, note Christ's clear vision of His death.**

There is some difficulty about the chronology of this period with which I need not trouble you. It is enough to note that the incident with which we are concerned occurred during that last journey of our Lord's towards Jerusalem and Calvary, which occupies so much of this Gospel of Luke. At what point in that fateful journey it occurred may be left undetermined. Nor need I enter upon the question as to whether the specification of time in our text, to-day, and to-morrow, and the third day, is intended to be taken literally, as some commentators suppose, in which case it would be brought extremely near the goal of the journey; or whether, as seems more probable from the context, it is to be taken as a kind of proverbial expression for a definite but short period. That the latter is the proper interpretation seems to be largely confirmed by the fact that there is a slight variation in the application of the designation of time in the two verses of our text, the third dayin the former verse being regarded as the period of the perfecting, whilst in the latter verse it is regarded as part of the period of the progress towards the perfecting. Such variation in the application is more congruous with the idea that we have here to deal with a kind of proverbial expression for a limited and short period. Our Lord is saying in effect, My time is not to be settled by Herod. It is definite, and it is short. It is needless for him to trouble himself; for in three days it will be all over. It is useless for him to trouble himself, or for you Pharisees to plot, for until the appointed days are past it will not be over, whatever you and he may do. The course He had yet to run was plain before Him in this last journey, every step of which was taken with the Cross full in view.

Now the worst part of death is the anticipation of death; and it became Him who bore death for every man to drink to its dregs that cup of trembling which the fear of it puts to all human lips. We rightly regard it as a cruel aggravation of a criminal's doom if he is carried along a level, straight road with his gibbet in view at the end of the march. But so it was that Jesus Christ travelled through life.

My text comes at a comparatively late period of His history. A few months or weeks at the most intervened between Him and the end. But the consciousness which is here so calmly expressed was not of recent origin. We know that from the period of His transfiguration He began to give His death a very prominent place in His teaching, but it had been present with Him long before He thus laid emphasis upon it in His communications with His disciples. For, if we accept John's Gospel as historical, we shall have to throw back His first public references to the end to the very beginning of His career. The cleansing of the Temple, at the very outset of His course, was vindicated by Him by the profound words, Destroy this Temple, and in three days I will raise it up. During the same early visit to the capital city He said to Nicodemus, As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up. So Christ's career was not like that of many a man who has begun, full of sanguine hope as a possible reformer and benefactor of his fellows, and by slow degrees has awakened to the consciousness that reformers and benefactors need to be martyrs ere their ideals can be realised. There was no disillusioning in Christ's experience. From the commencement He knew that He came, not only to minister, but also to give His life a ransom for the many. And it was not a mother's eye, as a reverent modern painter has profoundly, and yet erroneously, shown us in his great work in our own city gallery--it was not a mother's eye that first saw the shadow of the Cross fall on her unconscious Son, but it was Himself that all through His earthly pilgrimage knew Himself to be the Lamb appointed for the sacrifice. This Isaac toiled up the hill, bearing the wood and the knife, and knew where and who was the Offering.

Brethren, I do not think that we sufficiently realise the importance of that element in our conceptions of the life of Jesus Christ. What a pathos it gives to it all! What a beauty it gives to His gentleness, to His ready interest in others, to His sympathy for all sorrow, and tenderness with all sin! How wonderfully it deepens the significance, the loveliness, and the pathos of the fact that the Son of Man came eating and drinking, remembering everybody but Himself, and ready to enter into all the cares and the sorrows of other hearts, if we think that all the while there stood, grim and certain, before Him that Calvary with its Cross! Thus, through all His path, He knew to what He was journeying.

**II. Then again, secondly, let me ask you to note here our Lord's own estimate of the place which His death holds in relation to His whole work.**

Notice that remarkable variation in the expression in our text. The third day I shall be perfected... . It cannot be that a prophet perish out of Jerusalem. Then, somehow or other, the perishingis perfecting. There may be a doubt as to the precise rendering of the word translated by perfecting; but it seems to me that the only meaning congruous with the context is that which is suggested by the translation of our Authorised Version, and that our Lord does not mean to say on the third day I shall complete My work of casting out devils and curing diseases, but that He masses the whole of His work into two great portions--the one of which includes all His works and ministrations of miracles and of mercy; and the other of which contains one unique and transcendent fact, which outweighs and towers above all these others, and is the perfecting of His work, and the culmination of His obedience, service, and sacrifice.

Now, of course, I need not remind you that the perfectingthus spoken of is not a perfecting of moral character or of individual nature, but that it is the same perfecting which the Epistle to the Hebrews speaks about when it says, Being made perfect, He became the Author of eternal salvation to all them which obey Him. That is to say, it is His perfecting in regard to office, function, work for the world, and not the completion or elevation of His individual character. And this perfectingis effected in His perishing.

Now I want to know in what conceivable sense the death of Jesus Christ can be the culmination and crown of His work, without which it would be a torso, an incomplete fragment, a partial fulfilment of the Father's design, and of His own mission, unless it be that that death was, as I take it the New Testament with one voice in all its parts declares it to be, a sacrifice for the sins of the world. I know of no construing of the fact of the death on the Cross which can do justice to the plain words of my text, except the old-fashioned belief that therein He made atonement for sin, and thereby, as the Lamb of God, bore away the sins of the world.

Other great lives may be crowned by fair deaths, which henceforward become seals of faithful witness, and appeals to the sentiments of the heart, but there is no sense that I know of in which from Christ's death there can flow a mightier energy than from such a life, unless in the sense that the death is a sacrifice.

Now I know there has been harm done by the very desire to exalt Christ's great sacrifice on the Cross; when it has been so separated from His life as that the life has not been regarded as a sacrifice, nor the death as obedience. Rather the sacrificial element runs through His whole career, and began when He became flesh and tabernacled amongst us; but yet as being the apex of it all, without which it were all-imperfect, and in a special sense redeeming men from the power of death, that Cross is set forth by His own word. For Him to perishwas to be perfected. As the ancient prophet long before had said, When His soul shall make an offering for sin, then, paradoxical as it may seem, the dead Man shall see, and shall see His seed. Or, as He Himself said, If a corn of wheat fall into the ground it abideth alone, but if it die it bringeth forth much fruit.

I do not want to insist upon any theories of Atonement. I do want to insist that Christ's own estimate of the significance and purpose and issue of His death shall not be slurred over, but that, recognising that He Himself regarded it as the perfecting of His work, we ask ourselves very earnestly how such a conception can be explained if we strike out of our Christianity the thought of the sacrifice for the sins of the world. Unless we take Paul's gospel, How that He died for our sins according to the Scriptures, I for one do not believe that we shall ever get Paul's results, Old things are passed away; all things are become new. If you strike the Cross off the dome of the temple, the fires on its altars will soon go out. A Christianity which has to say much about the life of Jesus, and knows not what to say about the death of Christ, will be a Christianity that will neither have much constraining power in our lives, nor be able to breathe a benediction of peace over our deaths. If we desire to be perfected in character, we must have faith in that sacrificial death which was the perfecting of Christ's work.

**III. And so, lastly, notice our Lord's resolved surrender to the discerned Cross.**

There is much in this aspect in the words of my text which I cannot touch upon now; but two or three points I may briefly notice.

Note then, I was going to say, the superb heroism of His calm indifference to threats and dangers. He will go hence, and relieve the tyrant's dominions of His presence; but He is careful to make it plain that His going has no connection with the futile threatenings by which they have sought to terrify Him. Nevertheless--although I do not care at all for them or for him--nevertheless I must journey to-day and tomorrow! But that is not because I fear death, but because I am going to My death; for the prophet must die in Jerusalem. We are so accustomed to think of the gentle Jesus, meek and mildthat we forget the strong Son of God. If we were talking about a man merely, we should point to this calm, dignified answer as being an instance of heroism, but we do not feel that that word fits Him. There are too many vulgar associations connected with it, to be adapted to the gentleness of His fixed purpose that blenched not, nor faltered, whatsoever came in the way.

Light is far more powerful than lightning. Meekness may be, and in Him was, wedded to a will like a bar of iron, and a heart that knew not how to fear. If ever there was an iron hand in a velvet glove it was the hand of Christ. And although the perspective of virtues which Christianity has introduced, and which Christ exhibited in His life, gives prominence to the meek and the gentle, let us not forget that it also enjoins the cultivation of the wrestling thews that throw the world. Quit you like men; be strong; let all your deeds be done in charity.

Then note, too, the solemn law that ruled His life. I must walk. That is a very familiar expression upon His lips. From that early day when He said, Wist ye not that I must be about My Father's business, to that last when He said, The Son of Man must be lifted up, there crops out, ever and anon, in the occasional glimpses that He allows us to have of His inmost spirit, this reference of all His actions to a necessity that was laid upon Him, and to which He ever consciously conformed. That necessity determined what He calls so frequently My time; My hour; and influenced the trifles, as they are called, as well as the great crises, of His career. It was the Father's will which made the Son's must. Hence His unbroken communion and untroubled calm.

If we want to live near God, and if we want to have lives of peace amidst convulsions, we, too, must yield ourselves to that all encompassing sovereign necessity, which, like the great laws of the universe, shapes the planets and the suns in their courses and their stations; and holds together two grains of dust, or two motes that dance in the sunshine. To gravitation there is nothing great and nothing small. God's must covers all the ground of our lives, and should ever be responded to by our I will.

And that brings me to the last point, and that is, our Lord's glad acceptance of the necessity and surrender of the Cross. What was it that made Him willing to take that mustas the law of His life? First, a Son's obedience; second, a Brother's love. There was no point in Christ's career, from the moment when in the desert He put away the temptation to win the kingdoms of the world by other than the God-appointed means, down to the last moment when on His dying ears there fell another form of the same temptation in the taunt, Let Him come down from the cross, and we will believe on Him; when He could not, if He had chosen to abandon His mission, have saved Himself. No compulsion, no outward hand impelling Him, drove Him along that course which ended on Calvary; but only that He would save others, and therefore Himself He cannot save.

True, there were natural human shrinkings, just as the weight and impetus of some tremendous billow buffeting the bows of the ship makes it quiver; but this never affected the firm hand on the rudder, and never deflected the vessel from its course. Christ's soul was troubled, but His will was fixed, and it was fixed by His love to us. Like one of the men who in after ages died for His dear sake, He may be conceived as refusing to be bound to the stake by any bands, willing to stand there and be destroyed because He wills. Nothing fastened Him to the Cross but His resolve to save the world, in which world was included each of us sitting listening and standing speaking, now. Oh, brethren! shall not we, moved by such love, with like cheerfulness of surrender, give ourselves to Him who gave Himself for us?