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

**LUKE-054**. **THE LESSONS OF A FEAST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1. And it came to pass, as He went into the house of one of the chief Pharisees to eat bread on the Sabbath day, that they watched Him. 2. And, behold, there was a certain man before Him which had the dropsy. 3. And Jesus answering spake unto the lawyers and Pharisees, saying, Is it lawful to heal on the Sabbath day? 4. And they held their peace. And He took him, and healed him, and let him go; 5. And answered them, saying, Which of you shall have an ass or an ox fallen into a pit, and will not straightway pull him out on the Sabbath day? 6. And they could not answer Him again to these things. 7. And He put forth a parable to those which were bidden, when He marked how they chose out the chief rooms; saying unto them, 8. When thou art bidden of any man to a wedding, sit not down in the highest room, lest a more honourable man than thou be bidden of him; 9. And he that bade thee and him come and say to thee, Give this man place; and thou begin with shame to take the lowest room. 10. But when thou art bidden, go and sit down in the lowest room; that when he that bade thee cometh, he may say unto thee, Friend, go up higher: then shalt thou have worship in the presence of them that sit at meat with thee. 11. For whosoever exalteth himself shall be abased; and he that humbleth himself shall be exalted. 12. Then said He also to him that bade Him, When thou makest a dinner or a supper, call not thy friends, nor thy brethren, neither thy kinsmen, nor thy rich neighbours; lest they also bid thee again, and a recompense be made thee. 13. But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind: 14. And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just."*

*Luke 14:1-14*

Jesus never refused an invitation, whether the inviter were a Pharisee or a publican, a friend or a foe. He never mistook the disposition of His host. He accepted greetings where no kindness is, and on this occasion there was none. The entertainer was a spy, and the feast was a trap. What a contrast between the malicious watchers at the table, ready to note and to interpret in the worst sense every action of His, and Him loving and wishing to bless even them! The chill atmosphere of suspicion did not freeze the flow of His gentle beneficence and wise teaching. His meek goodness remained itself in the face of hostile observers. The miracle and the two parables are aimed straight at their errors.

**I.** How came the dropsical man there? Possibly he had simply strayed in to look on at the feast, as the freedom of manners then would permit him to do. The absence of any hint that he came hoping for a cure, and of any trace of faith on his part, or of speech to him on Christ's, joined with his immediate dismissal after his cure, rather favours the supposition that he had been put as the bait of the trap, on the calculation that the sight of him would move Jesus to heal him. The setters of the snare were watchingwhether it would work, and Jesus answeredtheir thoughts, which were, doubtless, visible in their eyes. His answer has three stages--a question which is an assertion, the cure, and another affirming question. All three are met with sulky silence, which speaks more than words would have done. The first question takes the lawyerson their own ground, and in effect asserts that to heal did not break the Sabbath. Jesus challenges denial of the lawfulness of it, and the silence of the Pharisees confesses that they dare not deny. The bare fact of healing is not prohibited, they might have said, but the acts necessary for healing are. But no acts were necessary for this Healer's power to operate. The outgoing of His will had power. Their finespun distinctions of deeds lawful and unlawful were spiderswebs, and His act of mercy flew high above the webs, like some fair winged creature glancing in the sunshine, while the spider sits in his crevice balked. The broad principle involved in Jesusfirst question is that no Sabbath law, no so-called religious restriction, can ever forbid helping the miserable. The repose of the Sabbath is deepened, not disturbed, by activity for man's good.

The cure is told without detail, probably because there were no details to tell. There is no sign of request or of faith on the sufferer's part; there seems to have been no outward act on Christ's beyond takinghim, which appears simply to mean that He called him nearer, and then, by a simple exercise of His will, healed him. There is no trace of thanks or of wonder in the heart of the sufferer, who probably never had anything more to do with his benefactor. Silently he comes on the stage, silently he gets his blessing, silently he disappears. A strange, sad instance of how possible it is to have a momentary connection with Jesus, and even to receive gifts from His hand, and yet to have no real, permanent relation to Him!

The second question turns from the legal to a broader consideration. The spontaneous workings of the heart are not to be dammed back by ceremonial laws. Need calls for immediate succour. You do not wait for the Sabbath's sun to set when your ox or your ass is in a pit. (The reading soninstead of ox, as in the Revised Version margin, is incongruous.) Jesus is appealing to the instinctive wish to give immediate help even to a beast in trouble, and implies that much more should the same instinct be allowed immediate play when its object is a man. The listeners were self-condemned, and their obstinate silence proves that the arrow had struck deep.

**II.** The cure seems to have taken place before the guests seated themselves. Then came a scramble for the most honourable places, on which He looked with perhaps a sad smile. Again the silence of the guests is noticeable, as well as the calm assumption of authority by Jesus, even among such hostile company. Where He comes a guest, He becomes teacher, and by divine right He rebukes. The lesson is given, says Luke, as a parable, by which we are to understand that our Lord is not here giving, as might appear if His words are superficially interpreted, a mere lesson of proper behaviour at a feast, but is taking that behaviour as an illustration of a far deeper thing. Possibly some too ambitious guest had contrived to seat himself in the place of honour, and had had to turn out, and, with an embarrassed mien, had to go down to the very lowest place, as all the intermediate ones were full. His eagerness to be at the top had ended in his being at the bottom. That is a parable, says Jesus, an illustration in the region of daily life, of large truths in morals and religion. It is a poor motive for outward humility and self-abasement that it may end in higher honour. And if Jesus was here only giving directions for conduct in regard to men, He was inculcating a doubtful kind of morality. The devil's

darling sin,

is the pride that apes humility.

Jesus was not recommending that, but what is crafty ambition, veiling itself in lowliness for its own purposes, when exercised in outward life, becomes a noble, pure, and altogether worthy, thing in the spiritual sphere. For to desire to be exalted in the kingdom is wholly right, and to humble one's self with a direct view to that exaltation is to tread the path which He has hallowed by His own footsteps. The true aim for ambition is the honour that cometh from God only, and the true path to it is through the valley; for God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.

**III.** Unbroken silence still prevailed among the guests, but again Jesus speaks as teacher, and now to the host. A guest does not usually make remarks on the composition of the company, Jesus could make no recompenseto His entertainer, but to give him this counsel. Again, He inculcated a wide general lesson under the guise of a particular exhortation appropriate to the occasion. Probably the bulk of the guests were well-to-do people of the host's own social rank, and, as probably, there were onlookers of a lower degree, like the dropsical man. The prohibition is not directed against the natural custom of inviting one's associates and equals, but against inviting them only, and against doing so with a sharp eye to the advantages to be derived from it. That weary round of giving a self-regarding hospitality, and then getting a return dinner or evening entertainment from each guest, which makes up so much of the social life among us, is a pitiful affair, hollow and selfish. What would Jesus say--what does Jesus say--about it all? The sacred name of hospitality is profaned, and the very springs of it dried up by much of our social customs, and the most literal application of our Lord's teaching here is sorely needed.

But the words are meant as a parable, and are to be widened out to include all sorts of kindnesses and helps given in the sacred name of charity to those whose only claim is their need. They cannot recompense thee--so much the better, for, if an eye to their doing so could have influenced thee, thy beneficence would have lost its grace and savour, and would have been simple selfishness, and, as such, incapable of future reward. It is only love that is lavished on those who can make no return which is so free from the taint of secret regard to self that it is fit to be recognised as love in the revealing light of that great day, and therefore is fit to be recompensed in the resurrection of the just.