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

**LUKE-061**. **TWO KINDS OF RICHES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"10.* *He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. 11. If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? 12. And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man's, who shall give you that which is your own?"*

*Luke 16:10-12*

That is a very strange parable which precedes my text, in which our Lord takes a piece of crafty dishonesty on the part of a steward who had been embezzling his lord's money as in some sense an example for us Christian people, There are other instances in which He does the same thing, finding a soul of goodness in things evil, as, for instance, in the parable of the Unjust Judge. Similar is the New Testament treatment of war or slavery, both of which diabolical things are taken as illustrations of what in the highest sphere are noble and heavenly things.

But having delivered the parable, our Lord seems, in the verses that I have read, to anticipate the objection that the unfaithfulness of the steward can never be an example for God's stewards; and in the words before us, amongst other things, He says substantially this, that whilst the steward's using his lord's wealth in order to help his lord's debtors was a piece of knavery and unfaithfulness, in us it is not unfaithfulness, but the very acme of faithfulness. In the text we have the thought that there are two kinds of valuable things in the world, a lower and a higher; that men may be very rich in regard to the one, and very poor in regard to the other. In respect to these, There is that maketh himself rich, and yet hath nothing; there is that maketh himself poor, and yet hath great riches. More than that, the noblest use of the lower kind of possessions is to secure the possession of the highest. And so He teaches us the meaning of life, and of all that we have.

Now, there are three things in these words to which I would turn your attention--the two classes of treasure, the contrast of qualities between these two, and the noblest use of the lower.

**I. The Two Classes of Treasure.**

Now, we shall make a great mistake if we narrow down the interpretation of that word mammonin the context (which is that which is least, etc., here) to be merely money. It covers the whole ground of all possible external and material possessions, whatsoever things a man can only have in outward seeming, whatsoever things belong only to the region of sense and the present. All that is in the world, in fact, is included in the one name. And you must widen out your thoughts of what is referred to here in this prolonged contrast which our Lord runs between the two sets of treasures, so as to include, not only money, but all sorts of things that belong to this sensuous and temporal scene. And, on the other hand, there stands opposite to it, as included in, and meant by, that which is most, that which is the true riches, that which is your own; everything that holds of the unseen and spiritual, whether it be treasures of intellect and lofty thought, or whether it be pure and noble aims, or whether it be ideals of any kind, the ideals of art, the aspirations of science, the lofty aims of the scholar and the student--all these are included. And the very same standard of excellence which declares that the treasures of a cultivated intellect, of a pure mind, of a lofty purpose, are higher than the utmost of material good, and that wisdom is better than rubies, the very same standard, when applied in another direction, declares that above the treasures of the intellect and the taste are to be ranked all the mystical and great blessings which are summoned up in that mighty word salvation. And we must take a step further, for neither the treasures of the intellect, the mind, and the heart, nor the treasures of the spiritual life which salvation implies, can be realised and reached unless a man possesses God. So in the deepest analysis, and in the truest understanding of these two contrasted classes of wealth you have but the old antithesis: the world--and God. He that has God is rich, however poor he may be in reference to the other category; and he that has Him not is poor, however rich he may be. The lines are fallen to me in pleasant places, says the Psalmist; and I have a goodly heritage, because he could also say, God is the strength of my heart and my portion for ever. So there is the antithesis, the things of time and sense, the whole mass of them knit together on the one hand; the single God alone by Himself on the other. Of these two classes of valuable things our Lord goes on next to tell us the relative worth. For we have here II. The Contrast between the Two.

That contrast is threefold, as you observe, that which is least. or, perhaps better, that which is very little. and that which is much. That is a contrast in reference to degree. But degree is a shallow word, which does not cover the whole ground, nor go down to the depths. So our Lord comes next to a contrast in regard to essential nature, the unrighteous mammonand the true riches. But even these contrasts in degree and in kind do not exhaust all the contrasts possible, for there is another, the contrast in reference to the reality of our possession: that which is another's; that which is your own. Let us, then, take these three things, the contrast in degree, the contrast in kind, the contrast in regard to real possession.

**II. First, then, and briefly, mental and spiritual and inward blessings, salvation, God, are more than all externals.**

Our Lord gathers all the conceivable treasures of earth, jewels and gold and dignities, and scenes of sensuous delights, and everything that holds to the visible and the temporal, and piles them into one scale, and then He puts into the other the one name, God; and the pompous nothings fly up and are nought, and have no weight at all. Is that not true? Does it need any demonstration, any more talk about it? No!

But then comes in sense and appeals to us, and says, You cannot get beyond my judgment. These things are good. Jesus Christ does not say that they are not, but sense regards them as far better than they are. They are near us, and a very small object near us, by the laws of perspective, shuts out a mightier one beyond us. We in Manchester live in a community which is largely based on, and actuated and motived in its diligence by the lie that material good is better than spiritual good, that it is better to be a rich man and a successful merchant than to be a poor and humble and honest student; that it is better to have a balance at your bankers than to have great and pure and virginal thoughts in a clean heart; that a man has done better for himself when he has made a fortune than when he has God in his heart. And so we need, and God knows it was never more needed in Manchester than to-day, that we should preach and preach and preach, over and over again, this old-fashioned threadbare truth, which is so threadbare and certain that it has lost its power over the lives of many of us, that all that, at its mightiest, is very little, and that this, at its least, is very much. Dear brethren, you and I know how hard it is always, especially how hard it is in business lives, to keep this as our practical working faith. We say we believe, and then we go away and live as if we believed the opposite. I beseech you listen to the scale laid down by Him who knew all things in their measure and degree, and let us settle it in our souls, and live as if we had settled it, that it is better to be wise and good than to be rich and prosperous, and that God is more than a universe of worlds, if we have Him for our own.

But to talk about a contrast in degree degrades the reality, for it is no matter of difference of measurement, but it is a matter of difference of kind. And so our Lord goes on to a deeper phase of the contrast, when He pits against one another the unrighteous mammonand the true riches. Now, there is some difficulty in that contrast. The two significant terms do not seem to be precise opposites, and possibly they are not intended to be logically accurate counterparts of each other. But what is meant by the unrighteous mammon? I do not suppose that the ordinary explanation of that verse is quite adequate. We usually suppose that by so stigmatising the material good, He means to suggest how hard it is to get it--and you all know that--and how hard it is to keep it, and how hard it is to administer it, without in some measure falling into the sin of unrighteousness. But whilst I dare say that may be the signification intended, if we were to require that the word here should be a full and correct antithesis to the other phrase, the true riches, we should need to suppose that unrighteoushere meant that which falsely pretended to be what it was not. And so we come to the contrast between the deceitfulness of earthly good and the substantial reality of the heavenly. Will any fortune, even though it goes into seven figures, save a man from the miseries, the sorrows, the ills that flesh is heir to? Does a great estate make a man feel less desolate when he stands by his wife's coffin? Will any wealth minister to a mind diseased? Will a mountain of material good calm and satisfy a man's soul? You see faces just as discontented, looking out of carriage windows, as you meet in the street. Uneasy lies the head that wears a crown. There is no proportion between abundance of external good of any kind and happy hearts. We all know that the man who is rich is not happier than the poor man. And I, for my part, believe that the raw material of happiness is very equally distributed through the world, and that it is altogether a hallucination by which a poor man thinks, If I were wealthy like that other man, how different my life would be. No, it would not; you would be the same man. The rich man that fancies that because he is rich he is better off, as they say, than his poor brother, and the poor man who thinks that he would be better offif he were richer than he is now, are the same man turned inside out, so to speak; and common to both of them is that fallacy, that wealth and material good contribute much to the real blessedness and nobleness of the man who happens to own it.

**III. But then, perhaps, we have rather to regard this unrighteous mammon as so designated from another point of view.**

You will remember that all through the context our Lord has been insisting on the notion of stewardship. And I take it that what He means here is to remind us that whenever we claim any of our possessions, especially our external ones, as our own, we thereby are guilty of defrauding both God and man, and are unrighteous, and it is unrighteous thereby. Stewardship is a word which describes our relation to all that we have. Forget that, and then whatever you have becomes the unrighteous mammon. There is the point in which Christ's teaching joins hands with a great deal of unchristian teaching in this present day which is called Socialism and Communism. Christianity is not communistic. It asserts as against other men your right of property, but it limits that right by this, that if you interpret your right of property to mean the right to do what you like with your own, ignoring your stewardship to God, and the right of your fellows to share in what you have, then you are an unfaithful steward, and your mammon is unrighteous. And that principle, the true communism of Christianity, has to be worked into modern society in a way that some of us do not dream of, before modern society will be organised on Christian principles. These words of my text are no toothless words which are merely intended to urge Christian people on to a sentimental charity, and to a niggardly distribution of part of their possessions: but they underlie the whole conception of ownership, as the New Testament sets it forth. Wherever the stewardship that we owe to God, and the participation that we owe to men, are neglected in regard to anything that we have, there God's good gifts are perverted and have become unrighteous mammon.

And, then, on the other hand, our Lord sets forth here the contrast in regard to the true riches', which are such, inasmuch as they really correspond to the idea of wealth being a true good to a man, and making him rich to all the intents of bliss. He that has the treasures of a pure mind, of a lofty aim, of a quiet conscience, of a filled and satisfied and therefore calmed heart; he that has the treasure of salvation; he that has the boundless wealth of God---he has the bullion, while the poor rich people that have the material good have the scrip of an insolvent company, which is worth no more than the paper on which it is written. There are two currencies--one solid metal, the other worthless paper. The one is true riches, and the other the unrighteous mammon.

Then there is a last contrast, and that is with regard to the reality of our possession. On the one hand, that which I fondly call my own is by our Lord stamped with the proprietor's mark, of somebody else, that which is Another's. It was His before He gave it, it was His when He gave it, it is His after He has given it. My name is never to be written on my property so as to erase the name of the Owner. I am a steward; I am a trustee; it all belongs to Him. That is one rendering of this word. But the phrase may perhaps point in another direction. It may suggest how shadowy and unreal, as being merely external, and how transitory is our ownership of wealth and outward possessions. A man says, It is mine. What does he mean by that? It is not his own in any real sense. I get more good out of a rich man's pictures, or estate, if I look at them with an eye that loves them, than he does. The world belongs to the man that can enjoy it and rightly use it. And the man that enjoys it and uses it aright is the man who lives in God. Nothing is really yours except that which has entered into the substance of your soul, and become incorporated with your very being, so that, as in wool dyed in the grain, the colour will never come out. What I am, that I have; what I only have, that, in the deepest sense, I have not. Shrouds have no pockets, says the Spanish proverb. His glory will not descend after him, says the psalm. That is a poor possession which only is outward whilst it lasts, and which ends so soon. But there is wealth that comes into me. There are riches that cannot be parted from me. I can make my own a great inheritance, which is wrought into the very substance of my being, and will continue so inwrought, into whatsoever worlds or states of existence any future may carry me. So, and only so, is anything my own. Let these contrasts dominate our lives.

I see our space is gone; I must make this sermon a fragment, and leave what I intended to have made the last part of it for possible future consideration. Only let me press upon you in one closing word this, that the durable riches are only found in God, and the riches that can be found in God are brought to every one of us by Him in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge, of goodness and grace. If we will make ourselves poor, by consciousness of our need, and turn with faith to Jesus, then we shall receive from Him those riches which are greatest, which are true, which are our own in that they pass into our very being, in that they were destined for us from all eternity by the love of God; and in having them we shall be rich indeed, and for ever.