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

**LUKE-069**. **THE MAN THAT STOPPED JESUS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"40.*  *And Jesus stood, and commanded him to be brought unto Him: and when he was come near, He asked him, 41. Saying, What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?"*

*Luke 18:40-41*

This story of the man that stopped Christ is told by the three SynopticEvangelists, and it derives a special value from having occurred within a week of the Crucifixion. You remember how graphically Mark tells how the blind man hears who is passing and immediately begins to cry with a loud voice to Christ to have mercy upon him; how the officious disciples--a great deal more concerned for the Master's dignity than He was Himself--tried to silence him; and how, with a sturdy persistence and independence of externals which often goes along with blindness, he cried the more a great dealbecause they did try, and then how he won the distinction of being the man that stopped Christ. When Jesus stood still, and commanded him to be called, the crowd wheeled right round at once, and instead of hindering, encumbered him with help, and bade him to rise, and be of good cheer. Then he flings away some poor rag that he had had to cover himself sitting there, and wearing his under-garment only, comes to Christ, and Jesus asks, What do you want?A promise in the shape of a question. Bartimaeus knows what he wants, and answers without hesitation, and so he gets his request.

Now, I think in all this incident, and especially in its centre part, which I have read, there are great lessons for us. And the first of them is, I see here a wonderful revelation of Christ's quick sympathy at a moment when He was most absorbed.

I said that all this occurred within a week of our Lord's Crucifixion. If you will recall the way in which that last journey to Jerusalem is described in the Evangelists, you will see that there was something very extraordinary about the determination and tension of spirit which impelled Jesus along the road, all the way from Galilee. Mark says that the disciples followed and were amazed. There was something quite unlike what they had been accustomed to, in His face and bearing, and it was so strange to them that they were puzzled and frightened. We read, too, that their amazement and fright prevented them from going very near Him on the road; as they followed they were afraid. Then the story goes on to tell how James and John, with their arrogant wish, did draw closer to Him, the rest of them lagging behind, conscious of a certain unaccustomed distance between Him and them, which only the ambitious two dared to diminish. Further, one of the Evangelists speaks of His face being setto go to Jerusalem, the gentle lineaments fixed in a new expression of resolution and absorption. The Cross was flinging its shadow over Him. He was bracing Himself up for the last struggle. If ever there was a moment of His life when we might have supposed that He would be oblivious of externals, and especially of the individual sorrows of one poor blind beggar sitting by the roadside, it was that moment. But however plunged in great thoughts about the agonising suffering that He was going to front, and the grand work that He was going to do, and the great victory that He was going to win so soon, He had

A heart at leisure from itself

To soothe and sympathise.

Even at that supreme hour He stood still and commanded him to be called. I wonder if it is saying too much to say that in the exercise of that power of healing and helping Bartimaeus, Jesus found some relief from the pressure of impending sorrow.

Brethren, is not that a lesson for us all? It is not spiritualising, allegorising, cramming meanings into an incident that are not in it, when we say--Think of Jesus Christ as one of ourselves, knowing that He was going to His death within a week, and then think of Him turning to this poor man. Is not that a pattern for us? We are often more selfish in our sorrows than in our joys. Many of us are inclined, when we are weighed down by personal sorrows, to say, As long as I have this heavy weight lying on my heart, how can you expect me to take an interest in the affairs of others, or to do Christian work, or to rise to the calls of benevolence and the cries of need?We do not expect you to do it; but Jesus Christ did it, leaving us an example that we should follow in His steps. Next to the blessed influences of God's own Spirit, and the peace-bringing act of submission, there is no such comfort for sorrow, as to fling ourselves into othersgriefs, and to bear othersburdens. Our Lord, with His face set like a flint, on the road to the Cross, but yet sufficiently free of heart to turn to Bartimaeus, reads a lesson that rebukes us all, and should teach us all.

Further, do we not see here a beautiful concrete instance, on the lower plane, of the power of earnest desire.

No enemy could have stopped Christ on that road; no opposition could have stopped Him, no beseeching on the part of loving and ignorant friends, repeating the temptation in the wilderness--or the foolish words of Peter, This shall not be unto Thee, could have stopped Him. He would have trodden down all such flimsy obstacles, as a lion from the thickets of Jordancrashes through the bulrushes, but this cry stopped Him, Jesus, thou Son of David, have mercy on me, and the Cross and all else that He was hastening to, great as it was for the world, had to wait its turn, for something else had to be done first. There was noise enough on the road, the tramp of many feet, the clatter of many eager tongues, but the voice of one poor man sitting in the dust there by the roadside, found its way through all the noise to Christ's ears. Which things are an allegory. There is an ocean of praise always, as I might so say breaking upon Christ's Throne, but the little stream of my petitions flows distinguishable through all that sea. As one of our poets says, we may even think of Him as missing my little human praisewhen the voice of one poor boy was not heard. Surely amidst all the encouragements that we have to believe that our cry is not sent up into an empty heaven, nor into deaf ears, and that all the multitude of creatures that wait before that Throne do not prevent the individualising knowledge and the individualising love of Jesus Christ from coming straight to every one of us, this little incident is not the least instructive and precious. He that heard Bartimaeus will hear us.

In like manner, may I not say that here we have an illustration of how Christ, who has so much besides to do, would suspend other work, if it were needful, in order to do what we need? As I have said, the rest had to wait. Bartimaeus stopped Christ. And our hand, if it be the hand of faith, put out to the hem of the garment as Jesus of Nazareth passeth by, will so far stop Him as that He will do what we wish, if what we wish is in accordance with our highest good. There was another man in Jericho who stopped Christ, on that same journey; for not only the petition of Bartimaeus, but the curiosity--which was more than curiosity--of Zacchaeus, stopped Him, and He who stood still, though He had His face set like a flint to go to Jerusalem, because Bartimaeus cried, stood still and looked up into the sycamore tree where the publican was--the best fruit that ever it bore--and said, Zacchaeus; come down, I must abide at thy house. Why must He abide? Because He discerned there a soul that He could help and save, and that arrested Him on His road to the Cross.

So, dear friends, amidst all the work of administering the universe which He does, and of guiding and governing and inspiring His Church, which He does, if you ask for the supply of your need He would put that work aside for a moment, if necessary, to attend to you. That is no exaggeration; it is only a strong way of putting the plain truth that Christ's love individualises each of its objects; and lavishes itself upon each one of us; as if there were no other beings in the universe but only our two selves.

And then, remember too, that what Bartimaeus got was not taken from anyone else. Nobody suffered because Jesus paused to help him. They sat down in ranks, five thousand of them, and as they began to eat, those that were first served would be looked upon with envious eye by the last ranks, who would be wondering if the bits of bread and the two small fishes were enough to go round. But the first group was fed full and the last group had as much, and they took up of the fragments that remained, twelve baskets full.

Enough for all, enough for each,

Enough for evermore.

There is one more thought rising out of this story. It teaches a wonderful lesson as to the power which Christ puts into the hand of believing prayer.

What wilt thou that I shall do unto thee?He had asked the same question a little while before, under very different circumstances. When James and John came and tried to beguile Him into a blind promise, because they knew that It was not likely that they would get what they asked if they said it out at first. He avoided the snare with that same question, To them the question was a refusal; they had said: Master, we will that Thou wouldst do whatever we should desire; and He said: What is it that ye desire? Let Me know that first. But when blind Bartimaeus cried, Jesus smiled down upon him--though his sightless eyeballs could not see the smile, there would be a smile in the cadence of His words--and He said: What wouldst thou that I should do for thee?To this suppliant that question was a promise--I will do what you want. He puts the key of the royal treasure-house into the hand of faith, and says, Go in and help yourself. Take what you will.

Only, of course, we must remember that there are limitations in the very nature of the case, imposed not arbitrarily, but because the very nature of the truest gifts creates them, and these limitations to some of us sound as if they took all the blessedness out of the act of prayer. We know, says one of the Apostles, that if we ask anything according to His will He heareth us. Some of us think that that is a very poor kind of charter, but it sets the necessary limit to the omnipotence of faith. What wouldst thou that I should do for thee?Unless our answer always, and at bottom, is, Not my will, but Thine, we have not yet learnt the highest blessing, nor the truest meaning, of prayer. For to pray does not mean to insist, to press our wishes on God, but it means, first, to desire that our wills may be brought into harmony with His. The old Rabbis hit upon great truths now and then, and one of them said, Make God's will thy will, that He may make thy will His will. If any poor, blind Bartimaeus remembers that, and asks accordingly, he has the key to the royal treasury in his possession, and he may go in and plunge his hand up to the wrist in jewels and diamonds, and carry away bars of gold, and it will all be his.

When this man, who had no sight in his eyeballs, knew that whatever he wanted he should have, he did not need to pause long to consider what it was that he wanted most. If you and I had that Aladdin's lamp given to us, and had only to rub it for a mighty spirit to come that would fulfil our wishes, I wonder if we should be as sure of what we wanted. If we were as conscious of our need as the blind man was of his, we should pause as little in our response to the question: What wouldst thou that I should do for thee?Lord! Dost Thou not see that mine eyes are dark? What else but sight can I want?Jesus still comes to us with the same question. God grant that we may all say; Lord, how canst Thou ask us? Dost Thou not see that my soul is stained, my love wandering, my eyeballs dim? Give me Thyself!If we thus ask, then the answer will come as quickly to us as it did to this blind man: Go thy way! Thy faith hath saved thee, and that Go thy waywill not be dismissal from the Presence of our Benefactor, but our waywill be the same as Bartimaeuswas, when he received his sight, and followed Jesus in the way.