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

**LUKE-074**. **TENANTS WHO WANTED TO BE OWNERS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"9. Then began He to speak to the people this parable; A certain man planted a vineyard, and let it forth to husbandmen, and went into a far country for a long time. 10. And at the season he sent a servant to the husbandmen, that they should give him of the fruit of the vineyard: but the husbandmen beat him, and sent him away empty. 11. And again he sent another servant: and they beat him also, and entreated him shamefully, and sent him away empty. 12. And again he sent a third: and they wounded him also, and cast him out. 13. Then said the lord of the vineyard, What shall I do? I will send my beloved son: it may be they will reverence him when they see him. 14. But when the husbandmen saw him, they reasoned among themselves, saying, This is the heir: come, let us kill him, that the inheritance may be ours. 15. So they cast him out of the vineyard, and killed him. What therefore shall the lord of the vineyard do unto them? 16. He shall come and destroy these husbandmen, and shall give the vineyard to others. And when they heard it, they said, God forbid. 17. And he beheld them, and said, what is this then that is written, The stone which the builders rejected, the same is become the head of the corner? 18. Whosoever shall fall upon that stone shall be broken; but on whomsoever it shall fall, it will grind him to powder. 19. And the chief priests and the scribes the same hour sought to lay hands on Him; and they feared the people: for they perceived that He had spoken this parable against them."*

*Luke 20:9-19*

As the crisis came near, Jesus increased His severity and plainness of speech. This parable, which was spoken very near the end of the protracted duel with the officials in the Temple, is transparent in its application, and hit its mark immediately. The rulers at once perceived that it was directed against them. The cap fitted too well not to be put on. But it contains prophecy as well as history, and the reference to Jesusimpending fate is almost as transparent as the indictment of the rulers, while the prediction of the transference of the vineyard to others is as easy of translation as either of the other points.

Such plain speaking was fitting for last words. The urgency of Christ's pleading love, as much as the intensity of His moral indignation, made them plain.

**I. We note, first, the vineyard, its lord and its tenants.**

The metaphor was familiar, for Isaiah had sung a song touchingIsrael as God's vineyard, and other prophets had caught up the emblem, so that it had become a commonplace, known by all. The parable distinctly alludes to Isaiah's words, and almost reproduces them. Matthew's version enlarges on details of the appliances provided by the owner, which makes the parallel with Isaiah still more noticeable. But Luke summarises these into the simple planted. That covers the whole ground.

God had given Israel a system of revelation, law, and worship, which was competent to produce in those who received it, the fruit of obedience and thankfulness. The husbandmen are primarily the rulers, as the scribes and chief priests perceived; but the nation which endorsed, by permitting their action, is included. The picture drawn applies to us as truly as to the Jews. The transference of the vineyard to another set of tenants, which Christ threatened at the close of the parable, has been accomplished, and so we, by our possession of the Gospel, are entrusted with the vineyard, and are responsible for rendering the fruits of holy living and love.

The owner let it out, and went into another country for a long time. That is a picturesque way of saying that we have apparent possession, and are left free to act, God not being manifestly close to us. He stands off, as it were, from the creatures whom He has made, and gives them room to do as they will. But all our possessions, as well as the revelation of Himself in Christ, are only let to us, and we have rent to pay.

The collectors sent for the fruit are, of course, the series of prophets. Luke specifies three--a round number, indicating completeness. He says nothing about the times between their missions, but implies that the three covered the whole period till the sending of the son. Their treatment was uniform, as the history of Israel proved. The habit of rejecting the prophets was hereditary.

There is such a thing as national solidarity stretching through ages. The bold charge made by Stephen was only an echo of this parable, when he cried, As your fathers did, so do ye. Which of the prophets did not your fathers persecute?Each generation made the ancestral sin its own, and staggered under a heavier burden of guilt, till, at last, came a generation which had to bear the penalty of all the blood of prophets shed from the beginning. Nations live, though their component atoms die, and only national repudiation of bequeathed sins can avert the crash which, sooner or later, avenges them.

The husbandmen treated the messengers with increasing contumely and cruelty. Content with beating the first, they added shameful treatment in the second case, and proceeded to wounding in the third. If God's repeated appeals do not melt, they harden, the heart. The persistence of His messengers leads to fiercer hatred, if it does not produce yielding love. There is no bitterness equal to that of the man who has often stiffened conscience against the truth.

**II. So far, no doubt could be entertained of the meaning of the scathing parable.**

There was probably as little about that of the next part. We cannot but notice the broad distinction which Jesus draws between Himself and the mightiest of the prophets. They were the owner's slaves; He was His beloved Son. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews begins his letter with the same contrast, which he may have learned from the parable. It is a commonplace for us, but let us ponder how it must have sounded to that hostile, eager crowd, and ask ourselves how such assumptions can be reconciled with the sweet reasonablenessof Jesus if he belonged to the same category as an Isaiah or a Micah.

The yearning of divine love for the fruit of reverence and obedience is wonderfully expressed by the bold putting of an uncertain hope into the owner's mouth. He must have known that he was running a risk in sending his son, but he so much desires to bring the dishonest workmen back to their duty that he is willing to run it. The highly figurative expression is meant to emphasise God's longing for men's hearts, and His patient love which hopeth all thingsand will not cease from effort to win us so long as an arrow remains in His quiver.

**III. Our Lord now passes to prophecy.**

Deep sadness is in His tone as He tells how the only effect of His coming had been to stir up opposition. They saw Himand were they touched? No, they only gripped their privileges the tighter, and determined more fiercely to assert their ownership.

Nothing is more remarkable in the parable than the calmness of Jesus in announcing His impending fate. He knows it all, and His voice has no tremor, as He tells it as though He were speaking of another. The very announcement that He penetrated the murderous designs hidden in many of the hearershearts would tend to precipitate their execution of these; but He is ready for the Cross, and its nearness has no terror, not because He was impassive, or free from the shrinking proper to flesh, but because He was resolved to save. Therefore He was resolved to suffer.

The husbandmen's reasonings with one another bring into plain words thoughts which probably were not consciously held by any even of the rulers. They open the question as to how far the rulers knew the truth of Christ's claims. They at least knew what these were, and they had fought down dawning convictions which, fairly dealt with, would have broadened into daylight. They would not have been so fiercely antagonistic if they had not been pricked by an uneasy doubt whether, after all, perhaps there was something in these claims.

Nothing steels men against admitting a truth so surely as the suspicion that, if they were to inquire a little farther, they might find themselves believing it. Knowledge and ignorance blended in these rulers as in us all. If they had not known at all, they would not have needed the Saviour's dying prayer for their forgiveness; if they had known fully, its very ground would have been taken away.

The motive put into their mouths is the wish to seize the vineyard for their own; and was not the very soul of the rulershostility the determination to keep hold of the prerogatives of their offices, while priests and people alike were deaf to Jesus, because they wished to be no more troubled by being reminded of their obligations to render obedience to God? The root of all rejection of Christ is the desire of self-will to reign supreme. Men resent being reminded that they are tenants, and are determined to assert ownership.

Jesus carries the hearers beyond the final crime which filled the measure of sin, and exhausted the resources of God. The sharp turn from narrative to question, in verse 15, not only is like the sudden thrust of a spear, but marks the transition from the present and immediate future to a more distant day. The slaying of the heir was the last act of the vine-dressers. The owner would act next. Luke, like Mark, puts the threatening of retribution into Christ's lips, while Matthew makes it the answer of the rulers to his question. Luke alone gives the exclamation, God forbid!The ready answer in Matthew, and the pious interjection in Luke, have the same purpose,--to blunt the application of the parable to themselves by appearing to be unconcerned.

Their levity and reluctance to take home the lesson moved our Lord to sternness, which burned in His steadfast eyes as He looked on them, and must have been remembered by some disciple whose memory has preserved that look for us. It was the prelude to a still less veiled prophecy of the fall of Israel. Jesus lays His hand on the ancient prophecy of the stone rejected by the builders, and applies it to Himself. He is the sure foundation of which Isaiah had spoken. He is the stone rejected by Israel, but elevated to the summit of the building, and there joining two diverging walls.

The solemn warning closing the parable had its special meaning in regard to Israel, but its dread force extends to us. To fall on the stone while it lies lowly on the earth is to lame one's self, but to have it fall on a man when it rushes down from its elevation is ruin utter and irremediable. If they escaped not who refused Him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaketh from heaven.