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

**LUKE-082**. **GETHSEMANE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"39. And He came out, and went, as He was wont, to the mount of Olives; and His disciples also followed Him. 40. And when He was at the place, He said unto them, Pray that ye enter not into temptation. 41. And He was withdrawn from them about a stone's cast, and kneeled down, and prayed, 42. Saying, Father, If Thou be willing, remove this cup from Me; nevertheless, not My will, but Thine, be done. 43. And there appeared an angel unto Him from heaven, strengthening Him. 44. And, being in an agony, He prayed more earnestly: and His sweat was as it were great drops of blood falling down to the ground. 45. And when He rose up from prayer, and was come to His disciples, He found them sleeping for sorrow. 46. And said unto them, Why sleep ye? rise and pray, lest ye enter into temptation. 47. And while He yet spake, beheld a multitude, and he that was called Judas, one of the twelve, went before them, and drew near unto Jesus to kiss Him. 48. But Jesus said unto him, Judas, betrayest thou the Son of man with a kiss? 49. When they which were about Him saw what would follow, they said unto Him, Lord, shall we smite with the sword? 50. And one of them smote a servant of the high priest, and cut off his right ear. 51. And Jesus answered and said, Suffer ye thus far. And He touched his ear, and healed him. 52. Then Jesus said unto the chief priests, and captains of the temple, and the elders, which were come to Him, Be ye come out, as against a thief, with swords and staves? 53. When I was daily with you in the temple, ye stretched forth no hands against Me; but this is your hour, and the power of darkness."*

*Luke 22:39-53*

Put off thy shoes from off thy feet. Cold analysis is out of place here, where the deepest depth of a Saviour's sorrows is partly disclosed, and we see Him bowing His head to the waves and billows that went over Him, for our sakes. Luke's account is much condensed, but contains some points peculiar to itself. It falls into two parts--the solemn scene of the agony, and the circumstances of the arrest.

**I. We look with reverent awe and thankfulness at that soul-subduing picture of the agonising and submissive Christ which Luke briefly draws.**

Think of the contrast between the joyous revelry of the festival-keeping city and the sadness of the little company which crossed the Kedron and passed beneath the shadow of the olive-trees into the moonlit garden. Jesus needed companions there; but He needed solitude still more. So He is parted from them; but Luke alone tells us how short the distance was--as it were a stone's throw, and near enough for the disciples to see and hear something before they slept.

That clinging to and separation from His humble friends gives a wonderful glimpse into Christ's desolation then. And how beautiful is His care for them, even at that supreme hour, which leads to the injunction twice spoken, at the beginning and end of His own prayers, that they should pray, not for Him, but for themselves. He never asks for men's prayers, but He does for their love. He thinks of His sufferings as temptation for the disciples, and for the moment forgets His own burden, in pointing them the way to bear theirs. Did self-oblivious love ever shine more gloriously in the darkness of sorrow?

Luke omits the threefold withdrawal and return, but notes three things--the prayer, the angel appearance, and the physical effects of the agony. The essentials are all preserved in his account. The prayer is truly the Lord's prayer, and the perfect pattern for ours. Mark the grasp of God's fatherhood, which is at once appeal and submission. So should all prayer begin, with the thought, at all events, whether with the word Fatheror no. Mark the desire that this cupshould pass. The expression shows how vividly the impending sufferings were pictured before Christ's eye. The keenest pains of anticipation, which make so large a part of so many sorrows, were felt by Him. He shrank from His sufferings. Did He therefore falter in His desire and resolve to endure the Cross? A thousand times, no! His will never wavered, but maintained itself supreme over the natural recoil of His human nature from pain and death. If He had not felt the Cross to be a dread, it had been no sacrifice. If He had allowed the dread to penetrate to His will, He had been no Saviour. But now He goes before us in the path which all have, in their degree, to travel, and accepts pain that He may do His work.

That acceptance of the divine will is no mere If it must be so, let it be so, much as that would have been. But He receives in His prayer the true answer--for His will completely coincides with the Father's, and mineis thine. Such conformity of our wills with God's is the highest blessing of prayer and the true deliverance. The cup accepted is sweet; and though flesh may shrink, the inner self consents, and in consenting to the pain, conquers it.

Luke alone tells of the ministering angel; and, according to some authorities, the forty-third and forty-fourth verses are spurious. But, accepting them as genuine, what does the angelic appearance teach us? It suggests pathetically the utter physical prostration of Jesus. Sensuous religion has dwelt on that offensively, but let us not rush to the opposite extreme, and ignore it. It teaches us that the manhood of Jesus needed the communication of divine help as truly as we do. The difficulty of harmonising that truth with His divine nature was probably the reason for the omission of this verse in some manuscripts. It teaches the true answer to His prayer, as so often to ours; namely, the strength to bear the load, not the removal of it. It is remarkable that the renewal of the solemn agonyand the intenser earnestness of prayer follow the strengthening by the angel.

Increased strength increased the conflict of feeling, and the renewed and intensified conflict increased the earnestness of the prayer. The calmness won was again disturbed, and a new recourse to the source of it was needed. We stand reverently afar off, and ask, not too curiously, what it is that falls so heavily to the ground, and shines red and wet in the moonlight. But the question irresistibly rises, Why all this agony of apprehension? If Jesus Christ was but facing death as it presents itself to all men, His shrinking is far beneath the temper in which many a man has fronted the scaffold and the fire. We can scarcely save His character for admiration, unless we see in the agony of Gethsemane something much more than the shrinking from a violent death, and understand how there the Lord made to meet on Him the iniquity of us all. If the burden that crushed Him thus was but the common load laid on all men's shoulders, He shows unmanly terror. If it were the black mass of the world's sins, we can understand the agony, and rejoice to think that our sins were there.

**II. The arrest.**

Three points are made prominent--the betrayer's token, the disciplesresistance, the reproof of the foes, and in each the centre of interest is our Lord's words. The sudden bursting in of the multitude is graphically represented. The tumult broke the stillness of the garden, but it brought deeper peace to Christ's heart; for while the anticipation agitated, the reality was met with calmness. Blessed they who can unmoved front evil, the foresight of which shook their souls! Only they who pray as Jesus did beneath the olives, can go out from their shadow, as He did, to meet the foe.

The first of the three incidents of the arrest brings into strong prominence Christ's meek patience, dignity, calmness, and effort, even at that supreme moment, to rouse dormant conscience, and save the traitor from himself. Judas probably had no intention by his kiss of anything but showing the mob their prisoner; but he must have been far gone in insensibility before he could fix on such a sign. It was the token of friendship and discipleship, and no doubt was customary among the disciples, though we never hear of any lips touching Jesus but the penitent woman's, which were laid on His feet, and the traitor's. The worst hypocrisy is that which is unconscious of its own baseness.

Every word of Christ's answer to the shameful kiss is a sharp spear, struck with a calm and not resentful hand right into the hardened conscience. There is wistful tenderness and a remembrance of former confidences in calling Him by name. The order of words in the original emphasises the kiss, as if Jesus had said, Is that the sign you have chosen? Could nothing else serve you? Are you so dead to all feeling that you can kiss and betray?The Son of man flashes on Judas, for the last time, the majesty and sacredness against which he was lifting his hand. Betrayest thou?which comes last in the Greek, seeks to startle by putting into plain words the guilt, and so to rend the veil of sophistications in which the traitor was hiding his deed from himself. Thus to the end Christ seeks to keep him from ruin, and with meek patience resents not indignity, but with majestic calmness sets before the miserable man the hideousness of his act. The patient Christ is the same now as then, and meets all our treason with pleading, which would fain teach us how black it is, not because He is angry, but because He would win us to turn from it. Alas that so often His remonstrances fall on hearts as wedded to their sin as was Judas's!

The rash resistance of the disciple is recorded chiefly for the sake of Christ's words and acts. The anonymous swordsman was Peter, and the anonymous victim was Malchus, as John tells us. No doubt he had brought one of the two swords from the upper room, and, in a sudden burst of anger and rashness, struck at the man nearest him, not considering the fatal consequences for them all that might follow. Peter could manage nets better than swords, and missed the head, in his flurry and in the darkness, only managing to shear off a poor slave's ear. When the Church takes sword in hand, it usually shows that it does not know how to wield it, and as often as not has struck the wrong man. Christ tells Peter and us, in His word here, what His servantstrue weapons are, and rebukes all armed resistance of evil. Suffer ye thus faris a command to oppose violence only by meek endurance, which wins in the long run, as surely as the patient sunshine melts the thick ice, which is ice still, when pounded with a hammer.

If thus faras to His own seizure and crucifying was to be suffered, where can the breaking-point of patience and non-resistance be fixed? Surely every other instance of violence and wrong lies far on this side of that one. The prisoner heals the wound. Wonderful testimony that not inability to deliver Himself, but willingness to be taken, gave Him into the hands of His captors! Blessed proof that He lavishes benefits on His foes, and that His delight is to heal all wounds and stanch every bleeding heart!

The last incident here is Christ's piercing rebuke, addressed, not to the poor, ignorant tools, but to the prime movers of the conspiracy, who had come to gloat over its success. He asserts His own innocence, and hints at the preposterous inadequacy of swords and stavesto take Him. He is no robber, and their weapons are powerless, unless He wills. He recalls His uninterrupted teaching in the Temple, as if to convict them of cowardice, and perchance to bring to remembrance His words there. And then, with that same sublime and strange majesty of calm submission which marks all His last hours, He unveils to these furious persecutors the true character of their deed. The sufferings of Jesus were the meeting-point of three worlds--earth, hell, and heaven. This is your hour. But it was also Satan's hour, and it was Christ's hour, and God's. Man's passions, inflamed from beneath, were used to work out God's purpose; and the Cross is at once the product of human unbelief, of devilish hate, and of divine mercy. His sufferings were the power of darkness.

Mark in that expression Christ's consciousness that He is the light, and enmity to Him darkness. Mark, too, His meek submission, as bowing His head to let the black flood flow over Him. Note that Christ brands enmity to Him as the high-water mark of sin, the crucial instance of man's darkness, the worst thing ever done. Mark the assurance that animated Him, that the eclipse was but for an hour. The victory of the darkness was brief, and it led to the eternal triumph of the Light. By dying He is the death of death. This Jonah inflicts deadly wounds on the monster in whose maw He lay for three days. The power of darkness was shivered to atoms in the moment of its proudest triumph, like a wave which is beaten into spray as it rises in a towering crest and flings itself against the rock.