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

**LUKE-084**. **IN THE HIGH PRIEST'S PALACE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"54. Then took they Him, and led Him, and brought Him into the high priest's house. And Peter followed afar off. 55. And when they had kindled a fire in the midst of the hall, and were set down together, Peter sat down among them. 56. But a certain maid beheld him as he sat by the fire, and earnestly looked upon him, and said, This man was also with Him. 57. And he denied Him, saying, Woman, I know Him not. 58. And, after a little while, another saw him, and said, Thou art also of them. And Peter said, Man, I am not. 59. And about the space of one hour after another confidently affirmed, saying, Of a truth this fellow also was with Him; for he is a Galilean. 60. And Peter said, Man, I know not what thou sayest. And immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. 61. And the Lord turned, and looked upon Peter: and Peter remembered the word of the Lord, how He had said unto him, Before the cock crow, thou shalt deny Me thrice. 62. And Peter went out, and wept bitterly. 63. And the men that held Jesus mocked Him and smote Him. 64. And when they had blindfolded Him, they struck Him on the face, and asked Him, saying, Prophesy, who is it that smote Thee? 65. And many other things blasphemously spake they against Him. 66. And as soon as it was day, the elders of the people, and the chief priests, and the scribes, came together, and led Him into their council, 67. Saying, Art Thou the Christ? tell us. And He said unto them, If I tell you, ye will not believe: 68. And If I also ask you, ye will not answer Me, nor let Me go. 69. Hereafter shall the Son of man sit on the right hand of the power of God. 70. Then said they all, Art Thou then the Son of God? And He said unto them, Ye say that I am. 71. And they said, What need we any further witness? for we ourselves have heard of His own mouth."*

*Luke 22:54-71*

The present passage deals with three incidents, each of which may be regarded either as an element in our Lord's sufferings or as a revelation of man's sin. He is denied, mocked, and formally rejected and condemned. A trusted friend proves faithless, the underlings of the rulers brutally ridicule His prophetic claims, and their masters vote Him a blasphemer for assenting His divinity and Messiahship.

**I. We have the failure of loyalty and love in Peter's denials.**

I may observe that Luke puts all Peter's denials before the hearing by the council, from which it is clear that the latter was later than the hearing recorded by Matthew and John. The first denial probably took place in the great hall of the high priest's official residence, at the upper end of which the prisoner was being examined, while the hangers--on huddled round the fire, idly waiting the event.

The morning air bit sharply, and Peter, exhausted, sleepy, sad, and shivering, was glad to creep near the blaze. Its glinting on his face betrayed him to a woman's sharp eye, and her gossiping tongue could not help blurting out her discovery. Curiosity, not malice, moved her; and there is no reason to suppose that any harm would have come to Peter, if he had said, as he should have done, Yes, I am His disciple. The day for persecuting the servants was not yet come, but for the present it was Jesus only who was aimed at.

No doubt, cowardice had a share in the denials, but there was more than that in them. Peter was worn out with fatigue, excitement, and sorrow. His susceptible nature would be strongly affected by the trying scenes of the last day, and all the springs of life would be low. He was always easily influenced by surroundings, and just as, at a later date, he was carried awayby the presence at Antioch of the Judaisers, and turned his back on the liberal principles which he had professed, so now he could not resist the current of opinion, and dreaded being unlike even the pack of menials among whom he sat. He was ashamed of his Master and hid his colours, not so much for fear of bodily harm as of ridicule. Was there not a deeper depth still in his denials, even the beginnings of doubt whether, after all, Jesus was what he had thought Him? Christ prayed that Peter's faithshould not failor be totally eclipsed, and that may indicate that the assault was made on his faithand that it wavered, though it recovered steadfastness.

If he had been as sure of Christ's work and nature as when he made his great confession, he could not have denied Him. But the sight of Jesus bound, unresisting, and evidently at the mercy of the rulers, might well make a firmer faith stagger. We have not to steel ourselves to bear bodily harm if we confess Christ; but many of us have to run counter to a strong current flowing around us, and to be alone in the midst of unsympathising companions ready to laugh and gibe, and some of us are tempted to waver in our convictions of Christ's divinity and redeeming power, because He still seems to stand at the bar of the wise men and leaders of opinion, and to be treated by them as a pretender. It is a wretched thing to be persecuted out of one's Christianity in the old-fashioned fire and sword style; but it is worse to be laughed out of it or to lose it, because we breathe an atmosphere of unbelief. Let the doctors at the top of the hall and the lackeys round the fire who take their opinions from them say what they like, but let them not make us ashamed of Jesus.

Peter slipped away to the gateway, and there, apparently, was again attacked, first by the porteress and then by others, which occasioned the second denial, while the third took place in the same place, about an hour afterwards. One sin makes many. The devil's hounds hunt in packs. Consistency requires the denier to stick to his lie. Once the tiniest wing tip is in the spider's web, before long the whole body will be wrapped round by its filthy, sticky threads.

If Peter had been less confident, he would have been more safe. If he had said less about going to prison and death, he would have had more reserve fidelity for the time of trial. What business had he thrusting himself into the palace? Over-reliance on self leads us to put ourselves in the way of temptations which it were wiser to avoid. Had he forgotten Christ's warnings? Apparently so. Christ predicts the fall that it may not happen, and if we listen to Him, we shall not fall.

The moment of recovery seems to have been while our Lord was passing from the earlier to the later examination before the rulers. In the very floodtide of Peter's oaths, the shrill cock-crow is heard, and at the sound the half-finished denial sticks in his throat. At the same moment he sees Jesus led past him, and that look, so full of love, reproof, and pardon, brought him back to loyalty, and saved him from despair. The assurance of Christ's knowledge of our sins against Him melts the heart, when the assurance of His forgiveness and tender love comes with it. Then tears, which are wholly humble but not wholly grief, flow. They do not wash away the sin, but they come from the assurance that Christ's love, like a flood, has swept it away. They save from remorse, which has no healing in it.

**II. We have the rude taunts of the servants.**

The mockery here comes from Jews, and is directed against Christ's prophetic character, while the later jeers of the Roman soldiers make a jest of His kingship. Each set lays hold of what seems to it most ludicrous in His pretensions, and these servants ape their masters on the judgment seat, in laughing to scorn this Galilean peasant who claimed to be the Teacher of them all. Rude natures have to take rude ways of expression, and the vulgar mockery meant precisely the same as more polite and covert scorn means from more polished people; namely, rooted disbelief in Him. These mockers were contented to take their opinions on trust from priests and rabbis. How often, since then, have Christ's servants been objects of popular odium at the suggestion of the same classes, and how often have the ignorant people been misled by their trust in their teachers to hate and persecute their true Master!

Jesus is silent under all the mockery, but then, as now, He knows who strikes Him. His eyes are open behind the bandage, and see the lifted hands and mocking lips. He will speak one day, and His speech will be detection and condemnation. Then He was silent, as patiently enduring shame and spitting for our sakes. Now He is silent, as long-suffering and wooing us to repentance; but He keeps count and record of men's revilings, and the day comes when He whose eyes are as a flame of fire will say to every foe, I know thy works.

**III. We have the formal rejection and condemnation by the council.**

The hearing recorded in verses 66 to 71 took place as soon as it was day, and was apparently a more formal official ratification of the proceedings of the earlier examination described by Matthew and John. The ruler's question was put simply in order to obtain material for the condemnation already resolved on. Our Lord's answer falls into two parts, in the first of which He in effect declines to recognise the bona fides of His judges and the competency of the tribunal, and in the second goes beyond their question, and claims participation in divine glory and power. If I tell you, ye will not believe; therefore He will not tell them.

Jesus will not unfold His claims to those who only seek to hear them in order to reject, not to examine, them. Silence is His answer to ingrained prejudice masquerading as honest inquiry. It is ever so. There is small chance of truth at the goal if there be foregone conclusions or biased questions at the starting-point. If I ask you, ye will not answer. They had taken refuge in judicious but self-condemning silence when He had asked them the origin of John's mission and the meaning of the One Hundred and Tenth Psalm, and thereby showed that they were not seeking light. Jesus will gladly speak with any who will be frank with Him, and let Him search their hearts; but He will not unfold His mission to such as refuse to answer His questions. But while thus He declines to submit Himself to that tribunal, and in effect accuses them of obstinate blindness and a fixed conclusion to reject the claims which they were pretending to examine, He will not leave them without once more asserting an even higher dignity than that of Messiah. As a prisoner at their bar, He has nothing to say to them; but as their King and future Judge, He has something. They desire to find materials for sentence of death, and though He will not give these in the character of a criminal before His judges, He also desires that the sentence should pass, and He will declare His divine prerogatives and fall possession of divine power in the hearing of the highest court of the nation.

It was fitting that the representatives of Israel, however prejudiced, should hear at that supreme moment the full assertion of full deity. It was fitting that Israel should condemn itself, by treating that claim as blasphemy. It was fitting that Jesus should bring about His death by His twofold claim--that made to the Sanhedrim, of being the Son of God, and that before Pilate, of being the King of the Jews.

The whole scene teaches us the voluntary character of Christ's Death, which is the direct result of this tremendous assertion. It carries our thoughts forward to the time when the criminal of that morning shall be the Judge, and the judges and we shall stand at His bar. It raises the solemn question, Did Jesus claim truly when He claimed divine power? If truly, do we worship Him? If falsely, what was He? It mirrors the principles on which He deals with men universally, answering him that cometh, according to the multitude of his idols, and meeting hypocritical pretences of seeking the truth about Him with silence, but ever ready to open His heart and the witness to His claims to the honest and docile spirits who are ready to accept His words, and glad to open their inmost secrets to Him.