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

**LUKE-085**. **CHRIST'S LOOK by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter."*

*Luke 22:61*

All four Evangelists tell the story of Peter's threefold denial and swift repentance, but we owe the knowledge of this look of Christ's to Luke only. The other Evangelists connect the sudden change in the denier with his hearing the cock crow only, but according to Luke there were two causes co-operating to bring about that sudden repentance, for, he says, Immediately, while he yet spake, the cock crew. And the Lord turned and looked upon Peter. And we cannot doubt that it was the Lord's look enforcing the fulfilment of His prediction of the cock-crow that broke down the denier.

Now, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to weave a consecutive whole out of the four versions of the story of Peter's triple denial. But this at least is clear from them all, that Jesus was away at the upper, probably the raised, end of the great hall, and that if any of the three instances of denial took place within that building, it was at such a distance that neither could the words be heard, nor could a look from one end of it to the other have been caught. I think that if we try to localise, and picture the whole scene ourselves, we are obliged to suppose that that look, which smote Peter into swift collapse of penitence, came as the Lord Jesus was being led bound down the hall out through the porch, past the fire, and into the gloomy archway, on His road to further suffering. As He was thus brought for a moment close to him, the Lord turned and looked upon Peter, and then He passed from his sight for ever, as he would fear.

I wish, then, to deal--although it must be very imperfectly and inadequately--with that look that changed this man. And I desire to consider two things about it: what it said, and what it did.

**I. What it said.--It spoke of Christ's knowledge, of Christ's pain, of Christ's love.**

Of Christ's knowledge--I have already suggested that we cannot suppose that the Prisoner at one end of the hall, intensely occupied with the questionings and argumentation of the priests, and with the false witnesses, could have heard the denial, given in tones subdued by the place, at the other end. Still less could He have heard the denials in louder tones, and accompanied with execrations, which seemed to have been repeated in the porch without. But as He passed the Apostle that look said: I heard them all--denials and oaths and passion; I heard them all. No wonder that after the Resurrection, Peter, with that remembrance in his mind, fell at the Master's feet and said, Lord! Thou knowest all things. Thou didst know what Thou didst not hear, my muttered recreancy and treason, and my blurted out oaths of denial. Thou knowest all things. No wonder that when he stood up amongst the Apostles after the Resurrection and the Ascension, and was the mouthpiece of their prayers, remembering this scene as well as other incidents, he began his prayer with Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men. But let us remember that this--call it, if you like, supernatural--knowledge which Jesus Christ had of the denial, is only one of a great body of facts in His life, if we accept these Gospels, which show that, as one of the Evangelists says, at almost the beginning of his history, He needed not that any man should testify of man, for He knew what was in man. It is precisely on the same line, as His first words to Peter, whom He greeted as he came to Him with Thou art Simon; thou shalt be Cephas. It is entirely on the same line as the words with which He greeted another of this little group, When thou wast under the fig-tree I saw thee. It is on the same line as the words with which He penetrated to the unspoken thoughts of His churlish entertainer when He said, Simon! I have somewhat to say unto thee. It is on the lines on which we have to think of that Lord now as knowing us all. He looks still from the judgment-seat, where He does not stand as a criminal, but sits as the supreme and omniscient Arbiter of our fates, and Judge of our actions. And He beholds us, each of us, moment by moment, as we go about our work, and often, by our cowardice, by our faithlessness, by our inconsistencies, deny the Lord that boughtus. It is an awful thought, and therefore do men put it away from them: Thou God seest me. But it is stripped of all its awfulness, while it retains all its purifying and quickening power, when we think, as our old hymn has it:

Though now ascended up on high,

He bends on earth a Brother's eye.

And we have not only to feel that the eye that looks upon us is cognisant of our denials, but that it is an eye that pities our infirmities, and knowing us altogether, loves us better than we know. Oh! if we believed in Christ's look, and that it was the look of infinite love, life would be less solitary, less sad, and we should feel that wherever His glance fell there His help was sure, and there were illumination and blessedness. The look spoke of Christ's knowledge.

Again, it spoke of Christ's pain. Peter had not thought that he was hurting his Master by his denials; he only thought of saving himself. And, perhaps, if it had come into his loving and impulsive nature, which yielded to the temptation the more readily because of the same impulsiveness which also led it to yield swiftly to good influences, if he had thought that he was adding another pang to the pains of his Lord whom he had loved through all his denial, even his cowardice would have plucked up courage to confess, and deny not but confess, that he belonged to the Christ. But he did not remember all that. And now there came into his mind--from that look, the bitter thought, I have wrung His heart with yet another pang, and at this supreme moment, when there is so much to rack and pain; I have joined the tormentors.

And so, do we not pain Jesus Christ? Mysterious as it is, yet it seems as if, since it is true that we please Him when we are obeying Him, it must be somehow true that we pain Him when we deny Him, and some kind of shadow of grief may pass even over that glorified nature when we sin against Him, and forget Him, and repay His love with indifference, and reject His counsel. We know that in His earthly life there was no bitterer pang inflicted upon Him than the one which the Psalmist prophesied, He that ate bread with Me hath lifted up his heel against Me. And we know that in the measure in which human nature is purified and perfected, in that measure does it become more susceptible and sensitive to the pain of faithless friends. Chilled love, rejected endeavours to help--which are, perhaps, the deepest and the most spiritual of sorrows which men can inflict upon one another, Jesus Christ experienced in full measure, heaped up and running over. And we, even we today, may be grieving the Holy Spirit of God, whereby we are sealed unto the day of redemption. Christ's knowledge of the Apostle's denials brought pain to His heart.

Again, the look spoke of Christ's love. There was in it saddened disapprobation, but there was not in it any spark of anger; nor what, perhaps, would be worse, any ice of withdrawal or indifference. But there even at that supreme moment, lied against by false witnesses, insulted and spit upon by rude soldiers, rejected by the priests as an impostor and a blasphemer, and on His road to the Cross, when, if ever, He might have been absorbed in Himself, was His heart at leisure from itself, and in divine and calm self-oblivion could think of helping the poor denier that stood trembling there beneath His glance. That is of a piece with the majestic, yet not repelling calm, which marks the Lord in all His life, and which reaches its very climax in the Passion and on the Cross. Just as, whilst nailed there, He had leisure to think of the penitent thief, and of the weeping mother, and of the disciple whose loss of his Lord would be compensated by the gaining of her to take care of, so as He was being borne to Pilate's judgment, He turned with a love that forgot itself, and poured itself into the denier's heart. Is not that a divine and eternal revelation for us? We speak of the love of a brother who, sinned against seventy times seven, yet forgives. We bow in reverence before the love of a mother who cannot forget, but must have compassion on the son of her womb. We wonder at the love of a father who goes out to seek the prodigal. But all these are less than that love which beamed lambent from the eye of Christ, as it fell on the denier, and which therein, in that one transitory glance, revealed for the faith and thankfulness of all ages an eternal fact. That love is steadfast as the heavens, firm as the foundations of the earth. Yea! the mountains may depart and the hills be removed, but My loving kindness shall not depart, neither shall the covenant of My peace be removed. It cannot be frozen, into indifference. It cannot be stirred into heat of anger. It cannot be provoked to withdrawal. Repelled, it returns; sinned against, it forgives; denied, it meekly beams on in self-revelation; it hopeth all things, it beareth all things. And He who, as He passed out to Pilate's bar, cast His look of love on the denier, is looking upon each of us, if we would believe it, with the same look, pitiful and patient, reproachful, and yet forgiving, which unveils all His love, and would fain draw us in answering love, to cast ourselves at His feet, and tell Him all our sin.

And now, let us turn to the second point that I suggested.

**II. What the look did.**

First, it tore away the veil that hid Peter's sin from himself. He had not thought that he was doing anything wrong when he denied. He had not thought about anything but saving his own skin. If he had reflected for a moment no doubt he would have found excuses, as we all can do. But when Christ stood there, what had become of the excuses? As by a flash he saw the ugliness of the deed that he himself had done. And there came, no doubt, into his mind in aggravation of the denial, all that had passed from that very first day when he had come to Christ's presence, all the confidences that had been given to him, how his wife's mother had been healed, how he himself had been cared for and educated, how he had been honoured and distinguished, how he had boasted and vowed and hectored the day before. And so he went out and wept bitterly.

Now our sin captures us by lying to us, by blinding our consciences. You cannot hear the shouts of the men on the bank warning you of your danger when you are in the midst of the rapids, and so our sin deafens us to the still small voice of conscience. But nothing so surely reveals to us the true moral character of any of our actions, be they right or wrong, as bringing them under Christ's eye, and thinking to ourselves. Durst I do that if He stood there beside me and saw it?Peter could deny Him when He was at the far end of the hall. He could not have denied Him if he had had Him by his side. And if we will take our actions, especially any of them about which we are in doubt, into His presence, then it will be wonderful how conscience will be enlightened and quickened, how the fiend will start up in his own shape, and how poor and small the motives which tempted so strongly to do wrong will come to look, when we think of adducing them to Jesus. What did a maid-servant's flippant tongue matter to Peter then? And how wretchedly inadequate the reason for his denial looked when Christ's eye fell upon him. The most recent surgical method of treating skin diseases is to bring an electric light, ten times as strong as the brightest street lights, to bear upon the diseased patch, and fifty minutes of that search-light clears away the disease. Bring the beam from Christ's eye to bear on your lives, and you will see a great deal of leprosy, and scurf, and lupus, and all that you see will be cleared away. The look tore down the veil.

What more did it do? It melted the denier's heart into sorrow. I can quite understand a conscience being so enlightened as to be convinced of the evil of a certain course, and yet there being none of that melting into sorrow, which, as I believe, is absolutely necessary for any permanent victory over sins. No man will ever conquer his evil as long as he only shudderingly recoils from it. He has to be broken down into the penitential mood before he will secure the victory over his sin. You remember the profound words in our Lord's pregnant parable of the seeds, how one class which transitorily was Christian, had for its characteristic that immediately with joy they received the word. Yes; a Christianity that puts repentance into a parenthesis, and talks about faith only, will never underlie a permanent and thorough moral reformation. There is nothing that brings godly sorrow, so surely as a glimpse of Christ's love; and nothing that reveals the love so certainly as the look. You may hammer at a man's heart with law, principle, and moral duty, and all the rest of it, and you may get him to feel that he is a very poor creature, but unless the sunshine of Christ's love shines down upon him, there will be no melting, and if there is no melting there will be no permanent bettering.

And there was another thing that the look did. It tore away the veil from the sin; it made rivers of water flow from the melted heart in sorrow of true repentance; and it kept the sorrow from turning into despair. Judas went out and hanged himself. Peter went out and wept bitterly. What made the one the victim of remorse, and the other the glad child of repentance? How was it that the one was stiffened into despair that had no tears, and the other was saved because he could weep? Because the one saw his sin in the lurid light of an awakened conscience, and the other saw his sin in the loving look of a pardoning Lord. And that is how you and I ought to see our sins. Be sure, dear friend, that the same long-suffering, patient love is looking down upon each of us, and that if we will, like Peter, let the look melt us into penitent self-distrust and heart-sorrow for our clinging sins, then Jesus will do for us, as He did for that penitent denier on the Resurrection morning. He will take us apart by ourselves and speak healing words of forgiveness and reconciliation, so that we, like him, will dare in spite of our faithlessness, to fall at His feet and say, Lord, Thou knowest all things; Thou knowest that I, erst faithless and treacherous, love Thee; and all the more because Thou hast forgiven the denial and restored the denier.