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

**LUKE-094**. **DETAINING CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"28. And they drew nigh unto the village, whither they went: and He made as though He would have gone further. 29. But they constrained Him, saying, Abide with us: for it is toward evening, and the day is far spent. And He went in to tarry with them."*

*Luke 24:28-29*

Of course, a chance companion, picked up on the road, is dropped when the journey's end is reached. When these two disciples had come to Emmaus, perhaps arriving at some humble inn or caravanserai, or perhaps at the home of one of them, it would have been an unmannerly intrusion for the Stranger who had met them on the road, and could accompany them there without rudely forcing Himself on them, to have inflicted His company further on them unless they had wished it. And so He made as though He would have gone further, not pretending what He did not mean, but doing what was but natural and proper in the circumstances. But Jesus had a further motive for showing His intention of parting company at the door of t he house in Emmaus. He desired to evoke the expression of the desire of His two fellow-walkers that He should tarry with them. Having evoked it, then with infinite willingness omnipotence lets itself be controlled by feebleness, and Jesus suffers Himself to be constrained by those whom, unknown to themselves, He was gently and mightily constraining. He made as though, unfortunately suggests to an English reader the idea of acting a part, and of seeming to intend what was not really intended. But there is no such thought in Luke's mind.

The first suggestion that strikes one from this incident is just this: Jesus Christ will certainly leave us if we do not detain Him.

It is no more certain that that walk to Emmaus had its end, and that that first day of the week, day of Resurrection though it was, was destined to close in sunset and evening darkness, than that all seasons of quickened intercourse with Jesus Christ, all times when duty and grace and privilege seem to be very great and real, all times when we awake more than ordinarily to the recognition of the Presence of the Lord with us and of the glories that lie beyond, tend to end and to leave us bare and deprived of the vision, unless there be on our parts a distinct and resolute effort to make perpetual that which in its nature is transient and comes to a close, unless we avert its cessation. All motion tends to rest, and Christian feeling falls under the same law. Nay, the more thrilling the moment's experience the more exhausting is it, and the more certain to be followed by depression and collapse. Action and reaction are equal and contrary. The height of the wave determines the depth of the trough. Therefore Christian people have to be specially careful towards the end of a time of special vitality and earnestness; because, unless they by desire and by discipline of their minds interpose, the natural result will be deadness in proportion to the previous excitement. He made as though He would have gone further, and He certainly will unless His retreating skirts be grasped at by the outstretched hands of faith and desire, and the prayer go after Him, Abide with us for it is toward evening.

That is quite true, too, in another application of the incident. Convictions, spiritual experiences of a rudimentary sort, certainly die away and leave people harder and worse than they were before, unless they be fostered and cherished and brought to maturity and invested with permanence by the honest efforts of the subjects of the same. The grace of God, in the preaching of His Gospel, is like a flying summer shower. It falls upon one land and then passes on with its treasures and pours them out somewhere else. The religious history of many countries and of long centuries is a commentary written out in great and tragic characters on the profound truth that lies in the simple incident of my text. Look at Palestine, look at Asia Minor, at the places where the Gospel first won its triumphs; look at Eastern Europe. What is the present condition of these once fair lands but an illustration of this principle, that Christ who comes to men in His grace is kept only by the earnestness and faithfulness and desire of the men to whom He comes?

And you and I, dear brethren, both as members of a Christian community and in our individual capacity, have our religious blessings on the same conditions as Ephesus and Constantinople had theirs, and may fling them away by the same negligence as has ruined large tracts of the world through long ages of time. Christ will certainly go unless you keep Him.

Then further, notice from my text this other thought, that Christ seeks by His action to stimulate our desires for Him.

He made as though He would have gone further. But while His feet were directed to the road His heart remained with His two fellow-travellers whom He was apparently leaving, and His wish was that the sight of His retiring figure might kindle in their hearts great outgoings of desire to which He would so gladly yield. It is the same action on His part, only under a slightly different form, but actuated by the same motive and the same in substance, as we find over and over again in the gospels. You remember the instances. I need only refer to them in a word.

Here is one: the dark lake, the rising moon behind the Eastern hills, a figure coming out of the gloom across the stormy sea, and when He reached the tossing fishing cobble it seemed as if He would have passed by; and He would, but that the cry flung out over the dark water stopped Him.

Here are two blind men sitting by the roadside crying Thou Son of David, have mercy upon us. Not a word, not even a glance over His shoulder, no stopping of His resolved stride; onwards towards Jerusalem, Pilate, and Calvary. Because He did not heed their cry? Because He did not infinitely long to help them? No. The purpose of His apparent indifference was attained when they cried the more earnestly, Thou Son of David, have mercy upon us.

Here is another. A woman half mad with anguish for her demon-ridden daughter, calling after Him with the shrill shriek of Eastern sorrow and disturbing the fine nerves of the disciples, but causing no movements nor any sign that He even heard, or if He heard, heeded, the ear-piercing and heart-moving cries. Why was that ear which was always open to the call of misery closed now? Because He wished to bring her to such an agony of desire as might open her heart very wide for an amplitude of blessing; and so He let her cry, knowing that the longer she called the more she would wish, and that the more she wished the more He would bestow.

And that is what He does with us all sometimes: seeming to leave our wishes and our yearnings all unnoticed. Then the devil says to us, What's the use of crying to Him? He does not hear you. But faith hears the promise: Open thy mouth wide and I will fill it, though to sense there seems to be no voice nor any that answered.

Christ has no other reason in any of the delays and trying prolongations of His answers than to make us capable of larger blessing, because delay deepens our longing. He is infinitely wishful to-day, as He was on that Resurrection evening, to draw near to every heart and pour upon it the whole sunlit cataract of the mighty fact that He lives to bless. But He cannot come to us unless we desire Him, and He cannot give to us more of Himself than we wish; and therefore He is obliged, as the first thing, to make our desires larger and fuller, and then He will answer them. He could there do no mighty works because of their unbelief.

Our faithlessness limits His power; our faith is the measure of our capacity.

Lastly, the text reminds us that Jesus Christ is glad to be forced.

They constrained: a very strong word, kindred to the other one which our Lord Himself employs when He speaks about the kingdom of heaven suffering violence, and the violent taking it by force. That bold expression gives emphatic utterance to the truth that there is a real power lodged in the desires of humble hearts that desire Him, so as that they can prescribe to Him what He shall do for them and how much of Himself He shall give them. Our feebleness can in a measure set in motion and regulate the energy of Omnipotence. They constrained Him.

Do you remember who it was that was called a prince with Godand how he won the title and was able to prevail? We, too, have the charter given to us that we can--I speak it reverently--guide God's hand and compel Omnipotence to bless us. We master Nature by yielding to it and utilising its energies. We have power with God by yielding to Him and conforming our desires to the longings of His heart and asking the things that are according to His will. Concerning the work of My hands command ye Me. And what we, leaning on His promise and in unison with His mighty purpose of love, desire, that will as certainly come down to us as every stream must pour into the lowest levels and fill the depressions in its course.

You can make sure of Christ if two things are yours. He will always remain with us if, on the one hand, we wish for Him honestly and really to be with us all the day long, which would be extremely inconvenient for some of us; and if, on the other hand, we take care not to do the acts nor cultivate the tempers which drive Him away. For How can two walk together except they be agreed?And how can we ask Him to come in and sit down in a house which is all full of filth and worldliness? Turn the demons out and open the door, and anything is more likely than that the door will stand gaping and the doorway be unfilled by the meek presence of the Christ that enters in.

The old prayer is susceptible of application to our community and to our individual hearts. When Israel prayed, Arise, O Lord, into Thy rest; Thou and the Ark of Thy strength, the answer was prompt and certain. This is My rest for ever; here will I dwell, for I have desired it. But the divine desire was not accomplished till the human desire opened the Temple gates for the entrance of the Ark.

He made as though He would have gone further; but they constrained Him, and then He entered in.