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

**LUKE-097**. **THE TRUIMPHANT END by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"36. And as they thus spake, Jesus Himself stood in the midst of them, and saith unto them, Peace be unto you. 37. But they were terrified and affrighted, and supposed that they had seen a spirit. 38. And He said unto them, Why are ye troubled? and why do thoughts arise in your hearts? 39. Behold My hands and My feet, that it is I Myself: handle Me, and see; for a spirit hath not flesh and bones, as ye see Me have. 40. And when He had thus spoken, He shewed them His hands and His feet. 41. And while they yet believed not for joy, and wondered, He said unto them, Have ye here any meat? 42. And they gave Him a piece of a broiled fish, and of an honeycomb. 43. And He took it, and did eat before them. 44. And He said unto them, These are the words which I spake unto you, while I was yet with you, that all things must be fulfilled, which were written in the law of Moses, and in the prophets, and in the psalms, concerning Me. 45. Then opened He their understanding, that they might understand the scriptures, 46. And said unto them, Thus it is written, and thus it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day: 47. And that repentance and remission of sins should be preached in His name among all nations, beginning at Jerusalem. 48. And ye are witnesses of these things. 49. And, behold, I send the promise of My Father upon you: but tarry ye in the city of Jerusalem, until ye be endued with power from on high. 50. And He led them out as far as to Bethany; and He lifted up His hands, and blessed them. 51. And it came to pass, while He blessed them, He was parted from them, and carried up into heaven. 52. And they worshipped Him, and returned to Jerusalem with great joy: 53. And were continually in the temple, praising and blessing God."*

*Luke 24:36-53*

There are no marks of time in this passage, and, for anything that appears, the narrative is continuous, and the Ascension might have occurred on the evening of the Resurrection. But neither is there anything to forbid interpreting this close of Luke's Gospel by the fuller details contained in the beginning of his other treatise, the Acts, where the space of forty days interposes between the Resurrection and the Ascension. It is but reasonable to suppose that an author's two books agree, when he gives no hint of change of opinion, and it is reasonable to regard the narrative in this passage as a summary of the whole period of forty days. If so, it contains three things,--the first appearance of the risen Lord to the assembled disciples (vs. 36-43), a condensed summary of the teachings of the risen Lord (vs. 44-49), and an equally compressed record of the Ascension (vs. 50-53).

**I. The proofs of the Resurrection graciously granted to incredulous love (vs. 36-43).**

The disciples were probably assembled in the upper room, where the Lord's Supper had been instituted, and which became their ordinary meeting-place (Acts i.) up till Pentecost. What sights that room saw! There, when night had come, they were discussing the strange reports of the Resurrection, when, all suddenly, they saw Jesus, not coming or moving, but standing in the midst. Had He come in unnoticed by them in their eager talk? The doors were shut. How had this calm Presence become visible all at once?

So little were they the enthusiastic, credulous people whom modern theories which explain away the Resurrection assume them to have been, that even His familiar voice in His familiar salutation, tenfold more significant now than ever before, did not wake belief that it was verily He. They fled to the ready refuge of supposing that they saw a spirit. Our Lord has no rebukes for their incredulity, but patiently resumes His old task of instruction, and condescends to let them have the evidence of two senses, not shrinking from their investigating touch. When even these proofs were seen by Him to be insufficient, He added the yet more cogent one of eating before them. Then they were convinced.

Now their incredulity is important, and the acknowledgment shows the simple historical good faith of the narrator. A witness who at first disbelieved is all the more trustworthy. These hopeless mourners who had forgotten all Christ's prophecies of His Resurrection, and were so fixed in their despair that the two from Emmaus could not so far kindle a gleam of hope as to make them believe that their Lord stood before them, were not the kind of people in whom hallucination would operate, as modern deniers of the Resurrection make them out to have been. What changed their mood? A fancy? Surely nothing less than a solid fact. Hallucination may lay hold on a solitary, morbid mind, but it does not attack a company, and it scarcely reaches to fancying touch and the sight of eating.

Note Luke's explanation of the persistent incredulity, as being for joy. It is like his notice that the three in Gethsemane slept for sorrow. Great emotion sometimes produces effects opposite to what might have been expected. Who can wonder that the mighty fact which turned the black smoke of despair into bright flame should have seemed too good to be true? The little notice brings the disciples near to our experience and sympathy. Christ's loving forbearance and condescending affording of more than sufficient evidence show how little changed He was by Death and Resurrection. He is as little changed by sitting at the right hand of God. Still He is patient with our slow hearts. Still He meets our hesitating faith with lavish assurances. Still He lets us touch Him, if not with the hand of sense, with the truer contact of spirit, and we may have as firm personal experience of the reality of His life and Presence as had that wondering company in the upper room.

**II. Verses 44-49 are best taken as a summary of the forty days teaching.**

They fall into stages which are distinctly separated. First we have (ver. 44) the reiteration of Christ's earlier teaching, which had been dark when delivered, and now flashed up into light when explained by the event. These are my words which I spake, and which you did not understand or note. Jesus asserts that He is the theme of all the ancient revelation. If we suppose that the present arrangement of the Old Testament existed then, its present three divisions are named; namely, Law, Prophets, and Hagiographa, as represented by its chief member. But, in any case, He lays His hand on the whole book, and declares that He, and His Death as sacrifice, are inwrought into its substance. The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy. Whatever views we hold as to the date and manner of origin of the Old Testament books, we miss the most pregnant fact about them if we fail to recognise that they all point onwards to Him.

Another stage is marked by that remarkable expression, He opened their mind. His teaching was not, like ours, from without only. He gave not merely instruction, but inspiration. It was not enough to spread truth before the disciples. He did more; He made them able to receive it. He gives no lesser gifts from the throne than He gave in the upper room, and we may receive, if our minds are kept expectant and in touch with Him, the same inward eye to see wondrous things out of the Word.

Verse 46, by its repetition of and He said, seems to point to another stage, in which the teaching as to the meaning of the Old Testament passes into instructions for the future. Already Jesus had hinted at the cessation of the old close intercourse in that pathetic while I was yet with you, and now He goes on to outline the functions and equipment of the disciples in the future period of His absence. As to the past sufferings, He indicates a double necessity for them,--one based on their having been predicted; another, deeper, based on the fitness of things. These sufferings made the preaching of repentance and forgiveness possible, and imposed on His followers the obligation of preaching His name to all the world. Without the Cross His servants would have no gospel. Having the Cross, His servants are bound to publish it everywhere.

The universal reach of His atonement is implied in the commission. The sacrifice for the world's sin is the sole ground of remission of sin, and is to be proclaimed to every creature. Mark that here the same word is employed in connection with proclaiming Christ's Death as in John's version of this saying (John 20:23), which is misused as a fortress of the priestly power of absolution. The plain inference is that the servant's power of remission is exercised by preaching the Master's death of expiation.

The ultimate reach of the message is to be to all nations; the beginning of the universal gospel is to be at Jerusalem. The whole history of the world and the Church lies between these two. By that command to begin at Jerusalem, the connection of the Old with the New is preserved, the Jewish prerogative honoured, the path made easier for the disciples, the development of the Church brought into unison with their natural sentiments and capacities.

The spirit of the commandment remains still imperative. The eyes of a fool are in the ends of the earth. A wise and Christlike beneficence will not gaze far afield, and neglect things close at our doors. The scoff at the supporters of foreign missions, as if they quixotically went abroad when they should work at home, has no point even as regards Christian practice, for it is the people who work for the distant heathen who also toil for home ones; but it has still less ground in regard to Christian conceptions of duty, for the Lord of the harvest has bidden the reapers begin with the fields nearest them.

The equipment for work is investiture with divine power. A partial bestowment of the Spirit, which is the Father's promise, took place while Jesus spoke. I sendrefers to something done at the moment; but the fuller clothing with that garment of power was to be waited for in expectancy and desire. No man can do the Christian work of witnessing for and of Christ without that clothing with power. It was granted as an abiding gift on Pentecost. It needs perpetual renewal. We may all have it. Without it, eloquence, learning, and all else, are but as sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal.

**III. Verses 50-53 give us the transcendent miracle which closes the earthly life of Jesus.**

We cannot here enter on the large questions which it raises, but must content ourselves with simply pointing to the salient features of Luke's condensed account. The mention of the place as over against Bethanyrecalls the many memories of that village where Jesus had found His nearest approach to a home, where He had exercised His stupendous life-giving power, whence He had set out to the upper room and the near Cross. His last act was to bless His followers. He is the High-priest for ever, and these uplifted hands meant a sacreder thing than the affectionate good wishes of a departing friend. He gives the blessings which He invokes. His wish is a conveyance of good.

The hands remained in the attitude of benediction while He ascended, and the last sight of Him, as the cloud wrapped Him round, showed Him shedding blessing from them. He continues that attitude and act till He comes again. Two separate motions are described in verse 51. He was parted from them,--that is, withdrew some little distance on the mountain, that all might see, and none might hinder, His departure; and was carried up into heavenby a slow upward movement, as the word implies. Contrast this with Elijah's rapture. There was no need of fiery chariot or whirlwind to lift Jesus to the heavens. He went up where He was before, returning to the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. The end matches the beginning. The supernatural birth corresponds with the supernatural departure.

We have to think of that Ascension as the entrance of corporeal humanity into the divine glory, as the beginning of His heavenly activity for the world, as the token of His work being triumphantly completed, as the prophecy and pledge of immortal life like His own for all who love Him. Therefore we may share the joy which flooded the lately sorrowful discipleshearts, and, like them, should make all life sacred, and be continually in the Temple, blessing God, and have the deep roots of our lives hid with Christ in the glory.