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

**MARK-004**. **HEALING AND SERVICE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"30.* *Simon's wife's mother lay sick of a fever; and straightway they tell Him of her: 31. And He came and took her by the hand, and raised her up; and the fever left her, and she ministered unto them."*

*Mark 1:30-31 (R.V.)*

This miracle is told us by three of the four Evangelists, and the comparison of their brief narratives is very interesting and instructive. We all know, I suppose, that the common tradition is that Mark was, in some sense, Peter's mouthpiece in this Gospel. The truthfulness of that ancient statement is borne out by little morsels of evidence that crop up here and there throughout the Gospel. There is one of them in this context. The other two Evangelists tell us that our Lord, with His four attendant disciples, entered into the house of Simon; Mark knows that Simon's brother Andrew shared the house with him. Who was likely to have told him such an insignificant thing as that? We seem to hear the Apostle himself recounting the whole story to his amanuensis.

Then, further, Mark's narrative is distinguished from that of the other two Evangelists in very minute and yet interesting points, which will come out as we go along. So I think we may fairly say that we have here Peter himself telling us the story of his mother-in-law's cure. Now, one thing that strikes one is that this is a very small miracle. It is by no means--if we can apply the words greatand smallto these miraculous events--one of the more striking and significant. Another point to note is that it was done evidently without the slightest intention of vindicating Christ's mission, or of preaching any truth whatever, and so it starts up into a new beauty as being simply and solely a manifestation of His love. I think, when some people are so busy in denying, and others in proving, the miraculous element in Scripture, and others in drawing doctrinal or symbolical lessons out of it, that there is great need to emphasise this, that the first thing about all Christ's miracles, and most conspicuously about this one, is that they were the welling out of His loving heart which responded to the sight of human sorrow--I was going to say instinctively; but I will find a better word, and say divinely. The deed that had no purpose whatsoever except to lighten the burden upon a disciple's heart, and to heal the passing physical trouble of one poor old woman, is great, just because it is small; and full of teaching because, to the superficial eye, it teaches nothing.

The first thing in the story is, as it seems to me--

**I. The disciple's intercession.**

I wonder if Peter knew that his wife's mother was ill, when he said to Jesus Christ, after that exciting morning in the synagogue, Come home, and rest in our house? Probably not. One can scarcely imagine hospitality proffered under such circumstances, or with a knowledge of them. And if we look a little more closely into the preceding narrative we shall see that it is at least possible that Peter and his brother had been away from home for some time; so that the old woman might easily have fallen ill during their temporary absence. But be that as it may, they expect to find rest and food, and they find a sick woman.

There must have been at least two rooms in the humble house, because they come to Jesus Christ and tell Him of her. Now if we turn to the other Evangelists, we shall find that Matthew says nothing about any message being communicated to Jesus, but brings Him at once, as It were, to the side of the sick-bed. That is evidently an incomplete account. And then we find in Luke's Gospel that, instead of the simple tell Him of herof Mark, he intensifies the telling into they besought Him for her. Now, I think that Mark's is plainly the more precise story, because he lets us see that Jesus Christ did not commit such a breach of courtesy, due to the humblest home, as to go to the woman's bedside without being summoned, and he also lets us see that the beseechingwas a simple intimation to Him. They did not ask; they tell Him; being, perhaps, restrained from definite petitioning partly by reverence, and partly, no doubt, by hesitation in these early days of their discipleship--for this incident occurred at the very beginning, when all the subsequent manifestations of His character were yet waiting to be flashed upon them--as to whether it might be in accordance with their new Teacher's very little known disposition and mind to help. They knew that He could, because He had just healed a demoniac in the synagogue, but one can understand how, at the beginning of their discipleship, there was a little faltering of confidence as to whether they should go so far as to ask Him to do such a thing. So they tell Him of her, and do you not think that the tone of petition vibrated in the intimation, and that there looked out of the eyes of the impulsive, warm-hearted Peter, an unspoken prayer? So Luke was perfectly right in his interpretation of the incident, though not precise in his statement of the external fact, when, instead of saying they tell Him of her, he translated that telling into what it meant, and put it, they besought Him for her.

Ah! dear brethren, there are a great many things in our lives which, though we ought to know Jesus Christ better than the first disciples at first did, scarcely seem to us fit to be turned into subjects of petition, partly because we have wrong notions as to the sphere and limits of prayer, and partly because they seem to be such transitory things that it is a shame to trouble Him about such insignificant matters. Well, go and tell Him, at any rate. I do not think that Christians ought to have anything in their heads or hearts that they do not take to Jesus Christ, and it is an uncommonly good test--and one very easily applied--of our hopes, fears, purposes, thoughts, deeds, and desires--Should I like to go and make a clean breast of it to the Master?

They tell Him of her, and that meant petition, and Jesus Christ can interpret an unspoken petition, and an unexpressed desire appeals to His sympathetic heart. Although the words be but O Lord! I am troubled, perplexed; and I do not know what to do, He translates them into Calm Thou me; enlighten Thou me; guide Thou me; and be sure of this, that as in the story before us, so in our lives, He will answer the unspoken petition in so far as may be best for us.

The next thing to note in this incident is--

**II. The Healers method.**

There, again, the three stories diverge, and yet are all one. Matthew says, He touched her; Luke says, He stood-or rather, as the Greek means, He bent over her--and rebuked the fever. Perhaps Peter was close to the pallet, and saw and remembered that there were not a standing over and rebuking the fever only, but that there was the going out of His tender sympathy to the sufferer, and that if there were stern words as of indignation and authority addressed to the disease as if to an unlawful intruder, there were also compassion and tenderness for the victim. For Mark tells that it was not a touch only, but that He took her by the hand and lifted her up, and the grasp banished sickness and brought strength.

Now the most precious of the lessons that we can gather from the variety of Christ's methods of healing is this: that all methods which He used were in themselves equally powerless, and that the curative virtue was in neither the word nor the touch, nor the spittle, nor the clay, nor the bathing in the pool of Siloam, but was purely and simply in the outgoing of His will. The reasons for the wonderful variety of ways in which He communicated His healing power are to be sought partly in the respective moral, and spiritual, and intellectual condition of the people to be healed, and partly in wider reasons and considerations. Why did He stoop and touch the woman, and take her by the hand and gently lift her up? Because His heart went out to her, because He felt the emotion and sympathy which makes the whole world kin, and because His heart was a heart of love, and bade Him come into close contact with the poor fever-ridden woman. Unless we regard that hand-clasp as being such an instinctive attitude and action of Christ's sympathetic love, we lose the deepest significance of it. And then, when we have given full weight to that, the simplest and yet the most blessed of all the thoughts that cluster round the deed, we can venture further to say that in that small matter we see mirrored, as a wide sweep of country in a tiny mirror, or the sun in a bowl of water, the great truth: He took not hold of angels, but He took hold of the seed of Abraham, wherefore it behoved Him to be made in all things like unto His brethren. The touch upon the fevered hand of that old woman in Capernaum was as a condensation into one act of the very principle of the Incarnation and of the whole power which Christ exercises upon a fevered and sick world. For it is by His touch, by His lifting hand, by His sympathetic grasp, and by our real contact with Him, that all our sicknesses are banished, and health and strength come to our souls.

So let us learn a lesson for our own guidance. We can do no man any real good unless we make ourselves one with him, and benefits that we bestow will hurt rather than help, if they are flung down upon men as from a height, or as people cast a bone to a dog. The heart must go with them; and identification with the sufferer is a condition of succour. If we would take lepers and blind beggars and poor old women by the hand--I mean, of course, by giving them our sympathy along with our help--we should see larger results from, and be more Christ-like in, our deeds of beneficence.

The last point is--

**III. The healed sufferer's service.**

She arose--yes, of course she did, when Christ grasped her. How could she help it? And she ministered to them,--how could she help that either, if she had any thankfulness in her heart? What a lovely, glad, awe-stricken meal that would be, to which they all sat down in Simon's house, on that Sabbath night, as the sun was setting! It was a humble household. There were no servants in it. The convalescent old woman had to do all the ministering herself, and that she was able to do it was, of course, as everybody remarks on reading the narrative, the sign of the completeness of the cure. But it was a great deal more than that. How could she sit still and not minister to Him who had done so much for her? And if you and I, dear friends, have any living apprehension of Christ's healing power, and understand and respond at all to that for which we have been laid hold ofby Him, our thankfulness will take the same shape, and we, too, shall become His servants. Up yonder, amidst the blaze of the glory, He is still capable of being ministered to by us. The woman who did so on earth had no monopoly of this sacred office, but it continues still. And every housewife, as she goes about her duties, and every domestic servant, as she moves round her mistress's dinner-table, and all of us, in our secular avocations, as people call them, may indeed serve Christ, if only we have regard to Him in the doing of them. There is also a yet higher sense in which that ministration, incumbent upon all the healed, and spontaneous on their part if they have truly been recipients of the healing grace, is still possible for us. When saw we Thee... in need... and served Thee?Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these My brethren, ye did it unto Me.