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

**MARK-015**. **CHRIST'S KINDRED by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"31.* *There came then His brethren and His mother, and, standing without, sent unto Him, calling Him. 32. And the multitude sat about Him; and they said unto Him, Behold, Thy mother and Thy brethren without seek for Thee. 33. And He answered them, saying, Who is My mother, or My brethren? 34. And He looked round about on them which sat about Him, and said, Behold My mother and My brethren! 35. For whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and mother."*

*Mark 3:31-35*

We learn from an earlier part of this chapter, and from it only, the significance of this visit of Christ's brethren and mother. It was prompted by the belief that He was beside Himself, and they meant to lay hands on Him, possibly with a kindly wish to save Him from a worse fate, but certainly to stop His activity. We do not know whether Mary consented, in her mistaken maternal affection, to the scheme, or whether she was brought unwillingly to give a colour to it, and influence our Lord. The sinister purpose of the visit betrays itself in the fact that the brethren did not present themselves before Christ, but sent a messenger; although they could as easily have had access to His presence as their messenger could. Apparently they wished to get Him by Himself, so as to avoid the necessity of using force against the force that His disciples would be likely to put forth. Jesus knew their purpose, though they thought it was hidden deep in the recesses of their breasts. And that falls in with a great many other incidents which indicate His superhuman knowledge of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

But, however that may be, our Lord here, with a singular mixture of dignity, tenderness, and decisiveness, puts aside the insidious snare without shaming its contrivers, and turns from the kinsmen, with whom He had no real bond, to draw closer to Himself, and pour out His love over, those who do the will of His Father in heaven. His words go very deep; let us try to gather some, at any rate, of the surface lessons which they suggest.

**I. First, then, the true token of blood relationship to Jesus Christ is obedience to God.**

Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and My sister, and mother. Now I must not be betrayed into a digression from my main purpose by dwelling upon what yet is worthy of notice--viz., the consciousness, on the part of Jesus Christ, which here is evidently implied, that the doing of the will of God was the very inmost secret of His own being. He was conscious, only and always, of delighting to do the will of God. When, therefore, He found that delight in others, there He recognised a bond of union between Him and them.

We must carefully observe that these great words of our Lord are not intended to describe the means by which men become His kinsfolk, but the tokens that they are such. He is not saying--as superficial readers sometimes run away with the notion that He is saying--If a man will, apart from Me, do the will of God, then he will become My true kinsman, but He is saying, If you are My kinsman, you will do the will of God, and if you do it, you will show that you are related to Myself. In other words, He is not speaking about the means of originating this relationship, but about the signs of its reality. And, therefore, the words of my text need, for their full understanding, and for placing them in due relation to all the rest of Christ's teaching, to be laid side by side with other words of His, such as these:--Apart from Me ye can do nothing. For the deepest truth in regard to relationship to Jesus Christ and obedience is this, that the way by which men are made able to do the will of God is by receiving into themselves the very life-blood of Jesus Christ. The relationship must precede the obedience, and the obedience is the sign, because it is the sequel, of the relationship.

But far deeper down than mere affinity lies the true bond between us and Christ, and the true means of performing the commandments of God. There must be a passing over into us of His own life-spirit. By His inhabiting our hearts, and moulding our wills, and being the life of our lives and the soul of our souls, are we made able to do the commandments of the Lord. And so, seeing that actual union with Jesus Christ, and the reception into ourselves of His life, is the precedent condition of all true obedience, then the more familiar form of presenting the bond between Him and us, which runs through the New Testament, falls into its proper place, and the faith, which is the condition of receiving the life of Christ into our hearts, is at once the affinity which makes us His kindred, and the means by which we appropriate to ourselves the power of obedient submission and conformity to the will of God. This is the work of God, that ye believe on Him whom He hath sent.

So, then, my text does not in the slightest degree contradict or interfere with the great teaching that the one way by which we become Christ's brethren is by trusting in Him. For the text and the doctrine that faith unites us to Him take up the process at different stages: the one pointing to the means of origination, the other to the tokens of reality. Faith is the root, obedience is the flower and the fruit. He that doeth the will of God, does it, not in order that he may become, but because he already is, possessor of a blood-relationship to Jesus Christ.

Then, notice, again, with what emphatic decisiveness our Lord here takes simple, practical obedience in daily life, in little and in great things, as the manifestation of being akin to Himself. Orthodoxy is all very well; religious experiences, inward emotions, sweet, precious, secret feelings and sentiments cannot be over-estimated. External forms, whether of the more simple or of the more ornate and sensuous kind, may be helps for the religious life; and are so in view of the weaknesses that are always associated with it. But all these, a true creed, a belief in the creed, the joyous and deep and secret emotions that follow thereupon, and the participation in outward services which may help to these, all these are but scaffolding: the building is character and conduct conformed to the will of God.

Evangelical preachers, and those who in the main hold that faith, are often charged with putting too little stress on practical homely righteousness. I would that the charge had less substance in it. But let me lay it upon your consciences, dear brethren, now, that no amount of right credence, no amount of trust, nor of love and hope and joy will avail to witness kindred to Christ. It must be the daily life, in its efforts after conformity to the known will of God, in great things and in small things, that attests the family resemblance. If Christ's blood be in our veins, if the law of the spirit of lifein Him is the law of the spirit of our lives, then these lives will run parallel with His, in some visible measure, and we, too, shall be able to say, Lo! I come. I delight to do Thy will; and Thy law is within my heart. Obedience is the test of relationship to Jesus.

Then, still further, note how, though we must emphatically dismiss the mistake that we make our selves Christ's brethren and friends by independent efforts after keeping the commandments, it is true that, in the measure in which we do thus bend our wills to God's will, whether in the way of action or of endurance, we realise more blessedly and strongly the tie that binds us to the Lord, and as a matter of fact do receive, in the measure of our obedience, sweet tokens of union with Him, and of love in His heart to us. No man will fully feel living contact with Jesus Christ if between Christ and him there is a film of conscious and voluntary disobedience to the will of God. The smallest crumb that can come in between two polished plates will prevent their adherence. A trivial sin will slip your hand out of Christ's hand; and though His love will still come and linger about you, until the sin is put out it cannot enter in.

It can but listen at the gate,

And hear the household jar within.

He that doeth the will of God, the same is--and feels himself to be--My brother, and sister, and mother.

**II. This relationship includes all others.**

That is a very singular form of expression which our Lord employs. Whosoever shall do the will of God, the same is My brother, and sister, and mother. We should have expected, seeing that He was speaking about three different relationships, that He would have used the plural verb, and said, The same are My brother, and sister, and mother. And I do not think that it is pedantic grammatical accuracy to point out this remarkable form of speech, and even to venture to draw a conclusion from it--viz., that what our Lord meant was, not that if there were three people, of different sexes, and of different ages, all doing the will of God, one of these sweet names of relationship would apply to A, another to B, and the other to C; but that to each who does the will of God, all the sweetnesses that are hived in all the names, and in any other analogous ones that can be uttered, belong. Of course the selection here of relationships specified has reference to the composition of that group outside the circle. But there is a great deal more than that in it. Whether you accept the grammatical remark that I have made or no, we shall, at least, I suppose, all agree in this, that, in fact, the bond of kindred that unites a trusting obedient soul with Jesus Christ does in itself include whatsoever of sweetness, of power, of protection, of clinging trust, and of any other blessed emotion that makes a shadow of Eden still upon earth, has ever been attached to human bonds.

Remember how many of these, Christ, and His servants for Him, have laid their hands upon, and claimed to be His. Thy Maker is thy husband; He that hath the Bride is the bridegroom; Go tell My brethren; I have not called you servants, but friends. And if there be any other sweet names, they belong to Him, and in His one pure, all-sufficient love they are all enclosed. Fragmentary preciousnesses are strewed about us. There is one pearl of great price. Many fragrances come from the flowers that grow on the dunghill of the world, but they are all gathered in Him whose name is as ointment poured forth, filling the house with its fragrance.

For Christ is to us all that all separated lovers and friends can be. And whatsoever our poor hearts may need most, of human affection and sympathy, and may see least possibility of finding now, among the incompletenesses and limitations of earth, that Jesus Christ is waiting to be. All solitary souls and mourning hearts may turn themselves to, and rest themselves on, these great words. And as they look at the empty places in their circle, in their homes, and feel the ache of the empty places in their hearts, they may hear His voice saying, Behold My mother and My brethren. He comes to us all in the character that we need most. Just as the great ocean, when it flows in amongst the land, takes the shape imposed upon it by the containing banks of the loch, so Christ pours Himself into our hearts, and there assumes the form that the outline of their emptiness tells we need most. To many, in all generations, who have been weeping over departed joys, He says again, though with a different application, turning not away from but to Himself mourning eyes and hearts, Woman, behold thy Son--not on the cross nor in the grave, but on the throne--Son, behold Thy mother.

**III. Lastly, this relationship requires always the subordination, and sometimes the sacrifice, of the lower ones.**

We have to think of Christ here as Himself putting away the lower claims, in order more fully to yield Himself to the higher. It was because it would have been impossible for Him to do the will of His Father if He had yielded to the purposes of His brethren and His mother, that He steeled His heart and made solemn His tone in refusing to go with them.

That group that had come for Him suggests to us the ways in which earthly ties may limit heavenly obedience. In regard to them the situation was complicated, because Jesus Christ was their kinsman according to the flesh, and their Messiah, according to the spirit. But in them their earthly love, and familiarity with Him, hid from them His higher glory; and in them He found impediments to His true consecration, and would-be thwarters of His highest work. And, in like manner, all our earthly relationships may become means of obscuring to us the transcendent brightness and greatness of Jesus Christ as our Saviour And, in like manner as to Him these, His brethren, became stumbling blocksthat He had decisively to put behind Him, so in regard to us a man's foes may be those of his own household; and not least his foes when they are most his idols, his comforts, and his sweetnesses. If our earthly loves and relationships obscure to us the face of Christ; if we find enough in them for our hearts, and go not beyond them for our true love; if they make us negligent of duty; if they bind us to the present; if they make us careless of that loftier affection which alone can satisfy us; if they clog our steps in the divine life, then they are our foes. They need to be always subordinated, and, so subordinated, they are more precious than when they are placed mistakenly foremost. They are better second than first. They are full of sweetness when our hearts know a sweetness surpassing theirs; they are robbed of their possible power to harm when they are rigidly held in inferiority to the one absolute and supreme love. There need be no collision--there will be no collision--if the second is second and the first is first. But sometimes beggars get upon horseback, and the crew mutinies and would displace the commander, and then there is nothing for it but sacrifice. If thy hand offend thee, cut it off and cast it from thee. I communed not with flesh and blood, and we must not, if ever they conflict with our supreme devotion to Jesus Christ.

These other things and relationships are precious to us, but He is priceless. They are shadows, but He is the substance. They are brooks by the way; He is the boundless, bottomless ocean of delights and loves. Shall we not always subordinate--and sometimes, if needful, sacrifice--the less to the greater? If we do, we shall get the less back, greatened by its surrender. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Mecommands the sacrifice. There is no man that hath left brethren or sisters, or father or mother, or wife or children, for My sake and the Gospel's, but he shall receive a hundredfold now, in this timepromises the reward.