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

**MARK-034**. **THE PATIENT TEACHER, AND THE SLOW SCHOLARS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"And when Jesus knew It, He saith unto them, Why reason ye, because ye have no bread? perceive ye not yet, neither understand? have ye your heart yet hardened? 18. Having eyes, see ye not? having ears, hear ye not? and do ye not remember?"*

*Mark 8:17, 18*

How different were the thoughts of Christ and of His disciples, as they sat together in the boat, making their way across the lake! He was pursuing a train of sad reflections which, the moment before their embarkation, had caused Him to sigh deeply in His spirit and say, Why doth this generation seek after a sign?Absorbed in thought, He spoke, Beware of the leaven of the Pharisees, who had been asking that question.

So meditated and spoke Jesus in the stern, and amidships the disciplesthoughts were only concerned about the negligent omission, very excusable in the hurry of embarkation, by which they had forgotten to lay in a fresh supply of provisions, and had set sail with but one loaf left in the boat. So taken up were they with this petty trouble that they twisted the Master's words as they fell from His lips, and thought that He was rebuking them for what they were rebuking themselves for. So apt are we to interpret otherssayings by the thoughts uppermost in our own minds.

And then our Lord poured out this altogether unusual--perhaps I may say unique--hail of questions which indicate how deeply moved from His ordinary calm He was by this strange slowness of apprehension on the part of His disciples. There is no other instance that I can recall in the whole Gospels, with the exception of Gethsemane, where our Lord's words seem to indicate such agitation of the windless sea of His spirit as this rapid succession of rebuking interrogations. They give a glimpse into the depths of His mind, showing us what He generally kept sacredly shut up, and let us see how deeply He was touched and pained by the slowness of apprehension of His servants.

Let us look at these questions as suggesting to us two things--the grieved Teacher and the slow scholars.

**I. The grieved Teacher.**

I have said that the revelation of the depths of our Lord's experience here is unexampled. We can understand the mood of which it is the utterance; the feeling of despair that sometimes comes over the most patient instructor when he finds that all his efforts to hammer some truth into, or to print some impression on, the brain or heart of man or boy, have been foiled, and that years, it may be, of patient work have scarcely left more traces on unretentive minds than remain on the ocean of the passage through it of a keel.

Christ felt that; and I do not think we half enough realise how large an element in the sorrows of the Man of Sorrows, and of the grief with which He was acquainted, was His necessary association with people who, He felt, did not in the least degree understand Him, however truly, blindly, and almost animally, they might love Him. It was His disciplesmisconception that stung him most. If I might so say, He calculated upon being misunderstood by Pharisees and outsiders, but that these followers who had been gathered round about Him all these months, and had been the subjects of His sedulous toil, should blurt out such words as these which precede the question of my text, cut deep into that loving heart. It was not only the pain of being misunderstood, but also the pain of feeling that the people who cared most for Him did not understand Him, and were so hard to drag up to the level where they could even catch a glimpse of His meaning, that struck His heart with almost a kind of despair; and, as I said, made Him pour out this rain of questions.

And what do the questions suggest? Not only emotion very unusual in Him, yet truly human, and showing Him to be our Brother; but they suggest three distinct types of emotion, all of them dashed with pain.

Why reason ye? Having eyes, see ye not? Do ye not remember?That speaks of His astonishment. Do not start at the word, or suppose that it in any degree contradicts the lofty beliefs that I suppose most of us have with regard to the Deity of our Lord and Saviour. We find in another place in the Gospels, not by inference as here, but in plain words, the ascription to Him of wonder; He marvelled at their unbelief. And we read of a more blessed kind of surprise as having once been His, when He wondered at the faith of the heathen centurion. But here His astonishment is that after all these years of toil, and of sympathy, and of discipleship, and of listening and trying to get hold of His meaning, His disciples were so far away from any understanding of what He was driving at. He had to learn by experience the depths of men's stupidity and ignorance. And although He was the Word of God made flesh, we recognise here the token of a true brother in that He was capable not only of the physical feelings of weariness, and hunger, and thirst, and pain, but that He, too, had that emotion which only a limited understanding can have--the emotion of wonder. And it was drawn out by His disciplesdenseness and inertness.

Ah! dear friends, does He not wonder at us? One of the prophets says, Be astonished, O heavens!And be sure of this, that the manhood of Jesus Christ is not now so lifted up above what it was upon earth as that that same sensation--twin-sister to yours and mine--of surprise, does not sometimes visit Him when He looks down upon us; and has to say to us--as, alas! He has to say--what He once said to one of the Twelve, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known me, Philip?Is not the same question coming to us? Why is it that we do not understand? Wonder, then, is the first emotion that is expressed in this question. There is another one: Pain. And there again I fall back not upon inference, but upon plain words of another part of the Gospels. He looked round upon them with anger, being grieved at the hardness of their hearts. It seems daring to venture to say that the exalted and glorified humanity of Jesus Christ to-day is, in any measure, capable of feeling analogous to that; but it will not seem so daring if you remember the solemn charge of one of the Apostles, Grieve not the Holy Spirit of God. It is Christ's disciples that pain Him most. They vexed His Holy Spirit, therefore He fought against them. Brethren, let us look into our own hearts and our own lives, and ask ourselves if there is not something there that gives a pang even to the heart of the glorified Master, and makes Him sigh deeply within Himself? May I add one more emotion which seems to me to be unmistakably expressed by this rapid fusilade of questions? That is indignation. Again I fall back upon plain words: He looked round about upon them with anger, being grieved. The two things were braided together in His heart, and did not conflict with each other There were infinite sorrow, infinite pity, and real displeasure. You must take all notions of passion and of malignity, and of desire to do harm to the subject, out of the conception of anger as applied to God or to Christ who is the revelation of God. But it seems to me that it is a maimed Christ that we put before the world unless we say that in the Love there lie the possibilities of Wrath. Behold the Lion of the tribe of Judah, and I beheld, and lo! a Lamb!Wrath and gentleness are in Him inseparably united, neither of them limiting nor making impossible the other.

So here we have a self-revelation, as by one glimpse into a great chamber, of the deep heart of Christ, the great Teacher, moved to astonishment, grief, and indignation.

**II. Now let me say a word about the slow scholars.**

I have spoken of these questions as being rapid and repeated, and as a rain of what we may almost call fiery interrogation. But they are by no means tautology or useless and aimless repetition. If we look at them closely, I think we shall see that they open out to us several different sides and phases of the fault in His disciples that moves these emotions.

There is, first, His scholarsstolid insensibility, which moves Him to anger, to astonishment, and to grief. Are your hearts yet hardened?by which is meant, not hardened in the sense of being suddenly and stiffly set in antagonism to Him, but simply in the sense of being--may I use the word?--so pachydermatous, so thick-skinned, that nothing can go through them. They showed it is a dull, stolid insensibility, and it marks some of us professing Christians, on whom promises and invitations and revelations of truth all fall with equal ineffectiveness, and from whom they glide off with equal rapidity. You may rain upon a black basalt rock to all eternity, and nothing will grow upon it. All the drops will run down the polished sides, and a quarter of an inch below the surface it will be as dry as it was before the first drop fell. And here are we Christian ministers, talk--talk--talking, week in and week out; and here is Christ, by His providences and by His word, speaking far more loudly than any of us; and it all falls with absolute impotence on hosts of people that call themselves Christians. Ah! brethren, it is not only unbelievers who have their hearts hardened. Orthodox professors are often guilty of the same. If I might alter the metaphor, many of us have waterproofed our minds, and the ingredients of the mixture by which we have waterproofed them are our knowledge of the plan of salvation, our connection with a Christian community, our membership in a church, our obedience to the formalisms of the devout life. All these have only made a non-transmitting medium interposed between ourselves and the concentrated electric energy that ever flashes from Jesus Christ. Our hardened hearts, with their stolid insensibility, amaze our Master, and no wonder that they do.

But that is not all. There is not only what I have ventured to call stolid insensibility, but, as a result of it, there is the not using the capacities that we have. Having eyes, see ye not? Having ears, hear ye not?We are not like children that cannot, but like careless, untrained schoolboys that will not, learn. We have the capacity, and it is our own fault that we are dunces in the school, and at the bottom of the class. Use the power that you have, and unto him that hath shall be given, and he shall have in abundance. There are fishes in the caverns of North America that have lived so long in the dark, underground channels, that the present generation of them has no eyes. We are doing our best to deprive ourselves of our capacities of beholding by refusing to use them. Having eyes, see ye not?Our non-use of the powers we have amazes and grieves our Master.

Further, the reason why there are this stolid insensibility and this non-use of capacity lies here: Ye reason about the bread. The absorption of our minds and efforts and time with material things, that perish with the using, come in between us and our apprehension of Christ's teaching. Ah! brethren, it is not only the rich man that is swallowed up with the present world; the poor man may be so as really. All of us, by reason of the absolute necessities of our lives, are in danger of getting our hearts so filled and crowded with the things that are seen and temporalthat we have no time, nor room, for the things that are unseen and eternal. I do not need to elaborate that point. We all know that it is there that our danger, in various forms, lies. If you in the bows of the ship are reasoning about bread, you will misunderstand Christ in the stern warning against the leaven of the Pharisees.

The last suggestion from these questions is that the cure for all that stolid insensibility, and its resulting misuse of capacity, and the absorption in daily visible things, is remembrance of His and our past--Do ye not remember?It was only that same morning, or the day before at the furthest, that one of the miracles of feeding the thousands had been performed. Christ wonders, as well He might, at the short memories of the disciples who, with the baskets-full of fragments scarcely eaten yet, could worry themselves because there was only one loaf in the locker. Do ye not remember, when I broke the loaves among the thousands, how many baskets took ye up? And they said, seven. And He said, How is it that ye do not understand?Yes, Memory is the one wing and Hope the other, that lift our heaviness from earth towards heaven. And any man who will bethink himself of what Jesus Christ has been for him, did for him on earth, and has done for him during his life, will not be so absorbed in worldly cares as that he will have no eyes to see the things unseen and eternal; and the hard, dead insensibility of his heart will melt into thankful consecration, and so he will rise nearer and nearer to intelligent apprehension of the lofty and deep things that the Incarnate Word says to him. We are here in Christ's school, and it depends upon the place in the class that we take here where we shall be put at what schoolboys call the next remove. If here we have indeed learned of Him the truth as it is in Jesus, we shall be put up into the top classes yonder, and get larger and more blessed lessons in the Father's house above.