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

**MARK-037**. **CHRIST'S CROSS, AND OURS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"27.* *And Jesus went out, and His disciples, into the towns of Caesarea Philippi: and by the way He asked His disciples, saying unto them, Whom do men say that I am? 28. And they answered, John the Baptist: but some say, Elias; and others, One of the prophets. 29. And He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? And Peter answereth and saith unto Him, Thou art the Christ. 30. And He charged them that they should tell no man of Him. 31. And He began to teach them, that the Son of Man must suffer many things, and be rejected of the elders, and of the chief priests, and scribes, and be killed, and after three days rise again. 32. And He spake that saying openly. And Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him. 33. But when He had turned about and looked on His disciples, He rebuked Peter, saying, Get thee behind me, Satan: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but the things that be of men. 34. And when He had called the people unto Him with His disciples also, He said unto them, Whosoever will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 35. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for My sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it. 36 For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? 37. Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 38. Whosoever therefore shall be ashamed of Me and of My words in this adulterous and sinful generation; of him also shall the Son of Man be ashamed, when He cometh in the glory of His Father with the holy angels. IX. 1. And He said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That there be some of them that stand here, which shall not taste of death, till they have seen the kingdom of God come with power."*

*Mark 8:27 - 9:1*

Our Lord led His disciples away from familiar ground into the comparative seclusion of the country round Caesarea Philippi, in order to tell them plainly of His death. He knew how terrible the announcement would be, and He desired to make it in some quiet spot, where there would be collectedness and leisure to let it sink into their minds. His consummate wisdom and perfect tenderness are equally and beautifully shown in His manner of disclosing the truth which would try their faithfulness and fortitude. From the beginning He had given hints, gradually increasing in clearness; and now the time had come for full disclosure. What a journey that was! He, with the heavy secret filling His thoughts; they, dimly aware of something absorbing Him, in which they had no part. And at last, in the way, as if moved by some sudden impulse--like that which we all know, leading us to speak out abruptly what we have long waited to say--He gives them a share in the burden of His thought. But, even then, note how He leads up to it by degrees. This passage has the announcement of the Cross as its centre, prepared for, on the one hand, by a question, and followed, on the other, by a warning that His followers must travel the same road.

**I. Note the preparation for the announcement of the Cross (verses 27-30).**

Why did Christ begin by asking about the popular judgment of His personality? Apparently in order to bring clearly home to the disciples that, as far as the masses were concerned, His work and theirs had failed, and had, for net result, total misconception. Who that had the faintest glimmer of what He was could suppose that the stern, fiery spirits of Elijah or John had come to life again in Him? The second question, But whom say ye that I am?with its sharp transition, is meant to force home the conviction of the gulf between His disciples and the whole nation. He would have them feel their isolation, and face the fact that they stood alone in their faith; and He would test them whether, knowing that they did stand alone, they had courage and tenacity to re-assert it. The unpopularity of a belief drives away cowards, and draws the brave and true. If none else believed in Him, that was an additional reason for loving hearts to cleave to Him; and those only truly know and love Him who are ready to stand by Him, if they stand alone-- Athanasius contra mundum. Mark, too, that this is the all-important question for every man. Our own individual thoughtof Him determines our whole worth and fate.

Mark gives Peter's confession in a lower key, as it were, than Matthew does, omitting the full-toned clause, The Son of the living God. This is not because Mark has a lower conception than his brother Evangelist, for the first words of this Gospel announce that it is the Gospel of Jesus, the Messiah, the Son of God. And, as he has identified the two conceptions at the outset, he must, in all fairness, be supposed to consider that the one implies the other, and to include both here. But possibly there is truth in the observation that the omission is one of a number of instances in which this Gospel passes lightly over the exalted side of Christ's nature, in accordance with its purpose of setting Him forth rather as the Servant than as the Lord. It is not meant that that exalted side was absent from Mark's thoughts, but that his design led him rather to emphasise the other. Matthew's is the Gospel of the King; Mark's, of the Worker.

The omission of Christ's eulogium on Peter has often been pointed out as an interesting corroboration of the tradition that he was Mark's source; and perhaps the failure to record the praise, and the carefulness to tell the subsequent rebuke, reveal the humble-hearted elderinto whom the self-confident young Apostle had grown. Flesh delights to recall praise; faith and self-knowledge find more profit in remembering errors forgiven and rebukes deserved, and in their severity, most loving. How did these questions and their answers serve as introduction to the announcement of the Cross? In several ways. They brought clearly before the disciples the hard fact of Christ's rejection by the popular voice, and defined their own position as sharply antagonistic. If His claims were thus unanimously tossed aside, a collision must come. A rejected Messiah could not fail to be, sooner or later, a slain Messiah. Then clear, firm faith in His Messiahship was needed to enable them to stand the ordeal to which the announcement, and, still more, its fulfilment, would subject them. A suffering Messiah might be a rude shock to all their dreams; but a suffering Jesus, who was not Messiah, would have been the end of their discipleship. Again, the significance and worth of the Cross could only be understood when seen in the light of that great confession. Even as now, we must believe that He who died was the Son of the living God before we can see what that Death was and did. An imperfect conception of who Jesus is takes the meaning and the power out of all His life, but, most of all, impoverishes the infinite preciousness of His Death.

The charge of silence contrasts singularly with the former employment of the Apostles as heralds of Jesus. The silence was partly punitive and partly prudential. It was punitive, inasmuch as the people had already had abundantly the proclamation of His gospel, and had cast it away. It was in accordance with the solemn law of God's retributive justice that offers rejected should be withdrawn; and from them that had not, even that which they had should be taken away. Christ never bids His servants be silent until men have refused to hear their speech. The silence enjoined was also prudential, in order to avoid hastening on the inevitable collision; not because Christ desired escape, but because He would first fulfil His day.

**II. We have here the announcement of the Cross (verses 31-33).**

There had been many hints before this; for Christ saw the end from the beginning, however far back in the depths of time or eternity we place that beginning. We do not sufficiently realise that His Death was before Him, all through His days, as the great purpose for which He had come. If the anticipation of sorrow is the multiplication of sorrow, even when there is hope of escaping it, how much must His have been multiplied, and bitterness been diffused through all His life, by that foresight, so clear and constant, of the certain end! How much more gracious and wonderful His quick sympathy, His patient self forgetfulness, His unwearied toil, show against that dark background! Mark here the solemn necessity. Why mustHe suffer? Not because of the enmity of the three sets of rejecters. He recognises no necessity which is imposed by hostile human power. The cords which bind this sacrifice to the horns of the altar were not spun by men's hands. The great mustwhich ruled His life was a cable of two strands-- obedience to the Father, and love to men. These haled Him to the Cross, and fastened Him there. He would save; therefore He mustdie. The same muststretches beyond death. Resurrection is a part of His whole work; and, without it, His Death has no power, but falls into the undistinguished mass of human mortality. Bewildered as the disciples were, that assurance of resurrection had little present force, but even then would faintly hint at some comfort and blessed mystery. What was to them a nebulous hope is to us a sun of certitude and cheer, Christ that diedis no gospel until you go on to say, Yea, rather, that is risen again.

Peter's rash rebuke, like most of his appearances in the Gospel, is strangely compounded of warm-hearted, impulsive love and presumptuous self-confidence. No doubt, the praise which he had just received had turned his head, not very steady in these early days at its best, and the dignity which had been promised him would seem to him to be sadly overclouded by the prospect opened in Christ's forecast. But he was not thinking of himself; and when he said, This shall not be unto Thee, probably he meant to suggest that they would all draw the sword to defend their Master. Mark's use of the word rebuke, which is also Matthew's, seems to imply that he found fault with Christ. For what? Probably for not trusting to His followersarms, or for letting Himself become a victim to the must, which Peter thought of as depending only on the power of the ecclesiastics in Jerusalem. He blames Christ for not hoisting the flag of a revolt.

This blind love was the nearest approach to sympathy which Christ received; and it was repugnant to Him, so as to draw the sharpest words from Him that He ever spoke to a loving heart. In his eagerness, Peter had taken Jesus on one side to whisper his suggestion; but Christ will have all hear His rejection of the counsel. Therefore He turned about, facing the rest of the group, and by the act putting Peter behind Him, and spoke aloud the stern words. Not thus was He wont to repel ignorant love, nor to tell out faults in public; but the act witnessed to the recoil of His fixed spirit from the temptation which addressed His natural human shrinking from death, as well as to His desire that once for all, every dream of resistance by force should be shattered. He hears in Peter's voice the tone of that other voice, which, in the wilderness, had suggested the same temptation to escape the Cross and win the crown by worshipping the Devil; and he puts the meaning of His instinctive gesture into the same words in which he had rejected that earlier seducing suggestion. Jesus was a man, and the things that be of menfound a response in His sinless nature. It shrank from pain and the Cross with innocent and inevitable shrinking. Does not the very severity of the rebuke testify to its having set some chords vibrating in His soul? Note that it may be the work of Satanto appeal to the things that be of men, however innocent, if by so doing obedience to God's will is hindered. Note, too, that a Simon may be Peterat one moment, and Satanat the next.

**III. We have here the announcement of the Cross as the law for the disciples too (verses 34-38).**

Christ's followers must follow, but men can choose whether they will be His followers or not. So the mustis changed into let him, and the if any man willis put in the forefront. The conditions are fixed, but the choice as to accepting the position is free. A wider circle hears the terms of discipleship than heard the announcement of Christ's own sufferings. The terms are for all and for us. The law is stated in verse 34, and then a series of reasons for it, and motives for accepting it, follow.

The law for every disciple is self-denial and taking up his cross. How present His own Cross must have been to Christ's vision, since the thought is introduced here, though He had not spoken of it, in foretelling His own death! It is not Christ's Cross that we have to take up. His sufferings stand alone, incapable of repetition and needing none; but each follower has his own. To slay the life of self is always pain, and there is no discipleship without crucifying the old man. Taking up my cross does not merely mean meekly accepting God-sent or men-inflicted sorrows, but persistently carrying on the special form of self-denial which my special type of character requires. It will include these other meanings, but it goes deeper than they. Such self-immolation is the same thing as following Christ; for, with all the infinite difference between His Cross and ours, they are both crosses, and on the one hand there is no real discipleship without self-denial, and on the other there is no full self-denial without discipleship.

The first of the reasons for the law, in verse 35, is a paradox, and a truth with two sides. To wish to save life is to lose it; to lose it for Christ's sake is to save it. Both are true, even without taking the future into account. The life of self is death; the death of the lower self is the life of the true self. The man who lives absorbed in the miserable care for his own well-being is dead to all which makes life noble, sweet, and real. Flagrant vice is not needed to kill the real life. Clean, respectable selfishness does the work effectually. The deadly gas is invisible, and has no smell. But while all selfishness is fatal, it is self-surrender and sacrifice, for My sake and the gospel's, which is life-giving. Heroism, generous self-devotion without love to Christ, is noble, but falls short of discipleship, and may even aggravate the sin of the man who exhibits it, because it shows what treasures he could lay at Christ's feet, if he would. It is only self-denial made sweet by reference to Him that leads to life. Who is this who thus demands that He should be the motive for which men shall hatetheir own lives, and calmly assumes power to reward such sacrifice with a better life? The paradox is true, if we include a reference to the future, which is usually taken to be its only meaning; but on that familiar thought we need not enlarge.

The forof verse 36 seems to refer back to the law in verse 34, and the verse enforces the command by an appeal to self-interest, which, in the highest sense of the word, dictates self-sacrifice. The men who live for self are dead, as Christ has been saying. Suppose their self-living had been successfulto the highest point, what would be the good of all the world to a dead man? Shrouds have no pockets. He makes a poor bargain who sells his soul for the world. A man gets rich, and in the process drops generous impulses, affections, interest in noble things, perhaps principle and religion. He has shrivelled and hardened into a mere fragment of himself; and so, when success comes, he cannot much enjoy it, and was happier, poor and sympathetic and enthusiastic and generous, than he is now, rich and dwindled. He who loses himself in gaining the world does not win it, but is mastered by it. This motive, too, like the preceding, has a double application--to the facts of life here, when they are seen in their deepest reality, and to the solemn future.

To that future our Lord passes, as His last reason for the command and motive for obeying it, in verse 38. One great hindrance to out-and-out discipleship is fear of what the world will say. Hence come compromises and weak compliance on the part of disciples too timid to stand alone, or too sensitive to face a sarcasm and a smile. A wholesome contempt for the world's cackle is needed for following Christ. The geese on the common hiss at the passer-by who goes steadily through the flock. How grave and awful is that irony, if we may call it so, which casts the retribution in the mould of the sin! The judge shall be ashamedof such unworthy disciples--shall blush to own such as His. May we venture to put stress on the fact that He does not say that He will reject them? They who were ashamed of Him were secret and imperfect disciples. Perhaps, though He be ashamed of them, though they have brought Him no credit, He will not wholly turn from them.

How marvellous the transition from the prediction of the Cross to this of the Throne! The Son of Man must suffer many things, and the same Son of Man shall come, attended by hosts of spirits who own Him for their King, and surrounded by the uncreated blaze of the glory of God in which He sits throned as His native abode. We do not know Jesus unless we know Him as the crucified Sacrifice for the world's sins, and as the exalted Judge of the world's deeds.

He adds a weighty word of enigmatical meaning, lest any should think that He was speaking only of some far-off judgment. The destruction of Jerusalem seems to be the event intended, which was, in fact, the beginning of retribution for Israel, and the starting-point of a more conspicuous manifestation of the kingdom of God. It was, therefore, a kind of rehearsal, or picture in little, of that coming and ultimate great day of the Lord, and was meant to be a signthat it should surely come.