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

**MARK-038**. **THE TRANSFIGURATION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"2.* *And after six days Jesus taketh with Him Peter, and James, and John, and leadeth them up into an high mountain apart by themselves: and He was transfigured before them. 3. And His raimemt became shining, exceeding white as snow; so as no fuller on earth can white them. 4. And there appeared unto them Elias with Moses: and they were talking with Jesus. 5. And Peter answered and said to Jesus, Master, it is good for us to be here: and let us make three tabernacles; one for Thee, and one for Moses, and one for Elias. 6. For he wist not what to say; for they were sore afraid. 7. And there was a cloud that overshadowed them: and a voice came out of the cloud, saying, This is My beloved Son: hear Him. 8. And suddenly, when they had looked round about, they saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. 9. And as they came down from the mountain, He charged them that they should tell no man what things they had seen, till the Son of Man were risen from the dead. 10. And they kept that saying with themselves, questioning one with another what the rising from the dead should mean. 11. And they asked Him, saying, Why say the scribes that Elias must first come? 12. And He answered and told them, Elias verily cometh first, and restoreth all things; and how it is written of the Son of Man, that He must suffer many things, and be set at nought. 13. But I say unto you, That Elias is indeed come, and they have done unto him whatsoever they listed, as it is written of him."*

*Mark 9:2-13*

All three Evangelists are careful to date the Transfiguration by a reference to the solemn new teaching at Caesarea, and Mark's six daysplainly cover the same time as Luke's eight--the former reckoning excluding in the count, and the latter including, the days on which the two incidents occurred. If we would understand the Transfiguration, then, we must look at it as the sequel to Jesusopen announcement of His death. His seeking the seclusion of the hills, attended only by the innermost group of the faithful three, is a touching token of the strain to which that week had subjected Him. How Peter's heart must have filled with thankfulness that, notwithstanding the stern rebuke, he was taken with the other two! There were three stages in the complex incident which we call the Transfiguration--the change in Jesusappearance, the colloquy with Moses and Elijah, and the voice from the cloud.

Luke, who has frequent references to Jesusprayers, tells us that the change in our Lord's countenance and raiment took place as He prayed; and probably we are reverently following his lead if we think of Jesusprayer as, in some sense, the occasion of the glorious change. So far as we know, this was the only time when mortal eyes saw Him absorbed in communion with the Father. It was only when He ceased prayingin a certain place that they came to Himasking to be taught to pray (Luke xi. 1); and in Gethsemane the disciples slept while He prayed beneath the olives quivering in the moonlight. It may be that what the three then saw did not occur then only. In such an hour of high communion withHis Father the elevated spirit may have more than ordinarily illuminated the pure body, and the pure body may have been more than ordinarily transparent. The brighter the light, fed by fragrant oil within an alabaster lamp, the more the alabaster will glow. Faint foreshadowings of the spirit's power to light up the face with unearthly beauty of holiness are not unknown among us. It may be that the glory which always shone in the depths of His perfectly holy manhood rose, as it were, to the surface for that one time, a witness of what He really was, a prophecy of what humanity may become.

Did Jesus will His transfiguration, or did it come about without His volition, or perhaps even without His consciousness? Did it continue during all the time on the mountain, or did it pass when the second stage of the incident began? We cannot tell. Matthew and Mark both say that Jesus was transfigured beforethe three, as if the making visible of the glory had special regard to them. It may be that Jesus, like Moses, knew not that the skin of His face shone; at all events, it was the second stage of the incident, the conversation with Elijah and Moses, that had a special message of strength for Him. The first and third stages were, apparently, intended for the three and for us all; and the first is a revelation, not only of the veiled glory that dwelt in Jesus, but of the beauty that may pass into a holy face, and of the possibilities of a bodily frame becoming a spiritual body, the adequate organ and manifestation of a perfect spirit. Paul teaches the prophetic aspect of the Transfiguration when he says that Jesus shall change the body of our humiliation that it may be fashioned like unto the body of His glory.

Luke adds two very significant points to the accounts by Matthew and Mark--namely, the disciplessleep, and the subject on which Moses and Elijah talked with Jesus. Mark lays the main stress on the fact that the two great persons of the old economy, its founder and its restorer, the legislator and the chief of the prophets, came from the dim region to which one of them had passed in a chariot of fire, and stood by the transfigured Christ, as if witnessing to Him as the greater, to whom their ministries were subordinate, and in whom their teachings centred. Jesus is the goal of all previous revelation, mightier than the mightiest who are honoured by being His attendants. He is the Lord both of the dead and of the living, and the spirits of just men made perfectbow before Him, and reverently watch His work on earth.

So much did that appearance proclaim to the mortal three, but their slumber showed that they were not principally concerned, and that the other three had things to speak which they were not fit to hear. The theme was the same which had been, a week before, spoken to them, and had doubtless been the subject of all Jesusteachings for these six days. No doubt, their horror at the thought, and His necessary insistence on it, had brought Him to need strengthening. And these two came, as did the angel in Gethsemane, and, like him, in answer to Christ's prayer, to bring the sought-for strength. How different it would be to speak to them of the decease which He should accomplish at Jerusalem, from speaking to the reluctant, protesting Twelve! And how different to listen to them speaking of that miracle of divine love expressed in human death from the point of view of the principalities and powers in heavenly places, as over against the remonstrances and misunderstandings with which He had been struggling for a whole week! The appearance of Moses and Elijah teaches us the relation of Jesus to all former revelation, the interest of the dwellers in heavenly light in the Cross, and the need which Jesus felt for strengthening to endure it.

Peter's foolish words, half excused by his being scarcely awake, may be passed by with the one remark that it was like him to say something, though he did not know what to say, and that it would therefore have been wise to say nothing.

The third part of this incident, the appearance of the cloud and the voice from it, was for the disciples. Luke tells us that it was a brightcloud, and yet it overshadowed them. That sets us on the right track and indicates that we are to think of the cloud of glory, which was the visible token of the divine presence, the cloud which shone lambent between the cherubim, the cloud which at last received Him out of their sight. Luke tells, too, that they entered into it. Who entered? Moses and Elijah had previously departed from Him. Jesus and the disciples remained, and we cannot suppose that the three could have passed into that solemn glory, if He had not led them in. In that sacred moment He was the way, and keeping close to Him, mortal feet could pass into the glory which even a Moses had not been fit to behold. The spiritual significance of the incident seems to require the supposition that, led by Jesus, they entered the cloud. They were men, therefore they were afraid; Jesus was with them, therefore they stood within the circle of that light and lived.

The voice repeated the attestation of Jesus as the beloved Sonof the Father, which had been given at the baptism, but with the addition, Hear Him, which shows that it was now meant for the disciples, not, as at the baptism, for Jesus Himself. While the command to listen to His voice as to the voice from the cloud is perfectly general, and lays all His words on us as all God's words, it had special reference to the disciples, and that in regard to the new teaching which had so disturbed them--the teaching of the necessity for His death. The offence of the Crossbegan with the first clear statement of it, and in the hearts that loved Him best and came most near to understanding Him. To fail in accepting His teaching that it behoved the Son of Man to suffer, is to fail in accepting it in the most important matter. There are sounds in nature too low-pitched to be audible to untrained ears, and the message of the Cross is unheard unless the ears of the deaf are unstopped. If we do not hear Jesus when He speaks of His passion, we may almost as well not hear Him at all.

Moses and Elijah had vanished, having borne their last testimony to Jesus. Peter had wished to keep them beside Jesus, but that could not be. Their highest glory was to fade in His light. They came, they disappeared; He remained--and remains. They saw no man any more, save Jesus only with themselves. So should it be for us in life. So may it be with us in death! Hear Him, for all other voices are but for a time, and die into silence, but Jesus speaks for eternity, and His words shall not pass away. When time is ended, and the world's history is all gathered up into its final issue, His name shall stand out alone as Author and End of all.