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

**MARK-051**. **GIGNITY AND SERVICE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"35.* *And James and John, the sons of Zebedee, come unto Him, saying, Master, we would that Thou shouldest do for us whatsoever we shall desire. 36. And He said unto them, What would ye that I should do for you? 37. They said unto Him, Grant unto us that we may sit, one on Thy right hand, and the other on Thy left hand, in Thy glory. 38. But Jesus said unto them, Ye know not what ye ask: can ye drink of the cup that I drink of! and he baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with! 39. And they said unto Him, We can. And Jesus said unto them, Ye shall indeed drink of the cup that I drink of; and with the baptism that I am baptized withal shall ye be baptized: 40. But to sit on My right hand and on My left hand is not Mine to give; but it shall be given to them for whom it its prepared. 41. And when the Ten heard it, they began to be much displeased with James and John. 42. But Jesus called them to Him, and saith unto them, Ye know that they which are accounted to rule over the Gentiles exercise lordship over them; and their great ones exercise authority upon them. 43. But so shall it not be among you: but whosoever will be great among you, shall be your minister: 44. And whosoever of you will be the chiefest, shall be servant of all. 45. For even the Son of Man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give His life a ransom for many."*

*Mark 10:35-45*

How lonely Jesus was! While He strode before the Twelve, absorbed in thoughts of the Cross to which He was pressing, they, as they followed, amazedand afraid, were thinking not of what He would suffer, but of what they might gain. He saw the Cross. They understood little of it, but supposed that somehow it would bring in the kingdom, and they dimly saw thrones for themselves. Hence James and John try to secure the foremost places, and hence the othersanger at what they thought an unfair attempt to push in front of them. What a contrast between Jesus, striding on ahead with setface, and the Twelve unsympathetic and self-seeking, lagging behind to squabble about pre-eminence! We have in this incident two parts: the request and its answer, the indignation of the Ten and its rebuke. The one sets forth the qualifications for the highest place in the kingdom; the other, the paradox that pre-eminence there is service.

James and John were members of the group of original disciples who stood nearest to Jesus, and of the group of three whom He kept specially at His side. Their present place might well lead them to expect pre-eminence in the kingdom, but their trick was mean, as being an underhand attempt to forestall Peter, the remaining one of the three, as putting forward their mother as spokeswoman, and as endeavouring to entrap Jesus into promising before the disclosure of what was desired. Matthew tells that the mother was brought in order to make the request, and that Jesus brushed her aside by directing His answer to her sons (Ye know not what ye ask). The attempt to get Jesuspromise without telling what was desired betrayed the consciousness that the wish was wrong. His guarded counter-question would chill them and make their disclosure somewhat hesitating.

Note the strangely blended good and evil of the request. The gold was mingled with clay; selfishness and love delighting in being near Him had both place in it. We may well recognise our own likenesses in these two with their love spotted with self-regard, and be grateful for the gentle answer which did not blame the desire for pre-eminence, but sought to test the love. It was not only to teach them, that He brought them back to think of the Cross which must precede the glory, but because His own mind was so filled with it that He saw that glory only as through the darkness which had to be traversed to reach it. But for us all the question is solemn and heart-searching.

Was not the answer, We are able, too bold? They knew neither what they asked nor what they promised; but just as their ignorant question was partly redeemed by its love, their ignorant vow was ennobled by its very rashness, as well as by the unfaltering love in it. They did not know what they were promising, but they knew that they loved Him so well that to share anything with Him would be blessed. So it was not in their own strength that the swift answer rushed to their lips, but in the strength of a love that makes heroes out of cowards. And they nobly redeemed their pledge. We, too, if we are Christ's, have the same question put to us, and, weak and timid as we are, may venture to give the same answer, trusting to His strength.

The full declaration of what had been only implied in the previous question follows. Jesus tells the two, and us all, that there are degrees in nearness to Him and in dignity in that future, but that the highest places are not given by favouritism, but attained by fitness. He does not deny that He gives, but only that He gives without regard to qualification. Paul expected the crown from the righteous Judge, and one of these two brethren was chosen to record His promise of giving a seat on His throne to all that overcome. Those for whom it is preparedare those who are prepared for it, and the preparation lies in being made conformable to His death, and being so joined to Him that in spirit and mind we are partakers of His sufferings, whether we are called to partake of them in outward form or not.

The two had had their lesson, and next the Ten were to have theirs. The conversation with the former had been private, for it was hearing of it that made the others so angry. We can imagine the hot words among them as they marched behind Jesus, and how they felt ashamed already when He called them. What they were to be now taught was not so much the qualifications for pre-eminence in the kingdom, whether here or hereafter, as the meaning of pre-eminence and the service to which it binds. In the world, the higher men are, the more they are served; in Christ's kingdom, both in its imperfect earthly and in its perfect heavenly form, the higher men are, the more they serve. So-called Christiannations are organised on the former un-Christian basis still. But wherever pre-eminence is not used for the general good, there authority rests on slippery foundations, and there will never be social wellbeing or national tranquillity until Christ's law of dignity for service and dignity by service shapes and sweetens society. But it is not so among youlaid down the constitution for earth, and not only for some remote heaven; and every infraction of it, sooner or later, brings a Nemesis.

The highest is to be the lowest; for He who is higher than the highesthas shown that such is the law which He obeys. The point in the heaven that is highest above our heads is in twelve hours deepest beneath our feet. Fellowship in Christ's sufferings was declared to be the qualification for our sharing in His dignity. His lowly service and sacrificial death are now declared to be the pattern for our use of dignity. Still the thought of the Cross looms large before Jesus, and He is not content with presenting Himself as the pattern of service only, but calls on His disciples to take Him as the pattern of utter self-surrender also. We cannot enter on the great teaching of these words, but can only beseech all who hear them to note how Jesus sets forth His death as the climax of His work, without which even that life of ministering were incomplete; how He ascribes to it the power of ransoming men from bondage and buying them back to God; and of how He presents even these unparalleled sufferings, which bear or need no repetition as long as the world lasts, as yet being the example to which our lives must be conformed. So His lesson to the angry Ten merges into that to the self-seeking two, and declares to each of us that, if we are ever to win a place at His right hand in His glory, we must here take a place with Him in imitating His life of service and His death of self-surrender for men's good. If we endure, we shall also reign with Him.