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

**MARK-060**. **NOT FAR AND NOT IN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Thou art not far from the kingdom of God."*

*Mark 12:34*

A bruised reed He will not break, and the smoking flax He will not quench.

Here is Christ's recognition of the low beginnings of goodness and faith.

This is a special case of a man who appears to have fully discerned the spirituality and inwardness of law, and to have felt that the one bond between God and man was love. He needed only to have followed out the former thought to have been smitten by the conviction of his own sinfulness, and to have reflected on the latter to have discovered that he needed some one who could certify and commend God's love to him, and thereby to kindle his to God. Christ recognises such beginnings and encourages him to persevere: but warns him against the danger of supposing himself in the kingdom, and against the prolongation of what is only good as a transition state.

This Scribe is an interesting study as being one who recognised the Law in its spiritual meaning, in opposition to forms and ceremonies. His intellectual convictions needed to be led on from recognition of the spirituality of the Law to recognition of his own failures. By law is the knowledge of sin. His intellectual convictions needed to pass over into and influence his heart and life. He recognised true piety, and was earnestly striving after it, but entrance into the kingdom is by faith in the Saviour, who is the Way. So Jesuspraise of him is but measured. For in him there was separation between knowing and doing.

**I. Who are near? Christ's kingdom is near us all, whether we are heathen, infidel, profligate or not.**

Here is a distinct recognition of two things--(i) Degrees of approximation; (ii) decisive separation between those who are, and those who are not, within the kingdom.

This Scribe was near, and yet not in, the kingdom, because, like so many in all ages, he had an intellectual hold of principles which he had never followed out to their intellectual issues, nor ever enthroned as, in their practical issues, the guides of his life. How constantly we find characters of similar incompleteness among ourselves! How many of us have true thoughts concerning God's law and what it requires, which ought, in all reason, to have brought us to the consciousness of our own sin, and are yet untouched by one pang of penitence! How many of us have lying in our heads, like disused furniture in a lumber-room, what we suppose to be beliefs of ours, which only need to be followed out to their necessary results to refurnish with a new equipment the whole of our religious thinking! How few of us do really take pains to bring our beliefs into clear sunlight, and to follow them wherever they lead us! There is no commoner fault, and no greater foe, than the hazy, lazy half-belief, of which its owner neither knows the grounds nor perceives the intellectual or the practical issues.

There are multitudes who have, or have had, convictions of which the only rational outcome is practical surrender to Jesus Christ by faith and love. Such persons abound in Christian congregations and in Christian homes. They are on the verge of the great surrender, but they do not go beyond the verge, and so they perpetrate the great refusal. And to all such the word of our text should sound as a warning note, which has also hope in its bone. Not far fromis still outside.

**II. Why they are only near.**

The reason is not because of anything apart from themselves. The Christian gospel offers immediate entrance into the Kingdom, and all the gifts which its King can bestow, to all and every one who will. So that the sole cause of any man's non-entrance lies with himself.

We have spoken of failure to follow out truths partially grasped, and that constitutes a reason which affects the intellect mainly, and plays its part in keeping men out of the Kingdom.

But there are other, perhaps more common, reasons, which intervene to prevent convictions being followed out into their properly consequent acts.

The two most familiar and fatal of these are:--

* Procrastination.
* Lingering love of the world.

**III. Such men cannot continue near.**

The state is necessarily transitional. It must pass over into--(i) Either going on and into the Kingdom, or (ii) going further away from it.

Christ warns here, and would stimulate to action, for--(i) Convictions not acted on die; (ii) truths not followed out fade; (iii) impressions resisted are harder to be made again; (iv) obstacles increase with time; (v) the habit of lingering becomes strengthened.

**IV. Unless you are in, you are finally shut out.**

City of refuge. It was of no avail to have been near. Strive to enter in.

Appeal to all such as are in this transition stage.