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

**MARK-062**. **AUTHORITY AND WORK by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"For the Son of Man is as a man taking a far journey, who left his house, and gave authority to his servants, and to every man his work, and commanded the porter to watch."*

*Mark 13:34*

Church order is not directly touched on in the Gospels, but the principles which underlie all Church order are distinctly laid down. The whole community of Christian people is a family or household, being brethren because possessors of a new life through Christ. In that household there is one Master, and all its members are servants. That name suggests the purpose for which they exist; the meaning of all their offices, dignities, etc.

**I. The authority with which the servants are invested.**

We hear a great deal about the authority of the Church in these days, as a determiner of truth and as a prescriber of Christian action. It means generally official authority, the power of guidance and definition of the Church's action, etc., which some people think is lodged in the hands of preachers, pastors, priests, either individually or collectively. There is nothing of that sort meant here. Whatever this authority is, it belongs to the whole body of the servants, not to individuals among them. It is the prerogative of the whole ecclesia, not of some handful of them. This honour, whatever it be, have all the saints.

Explain by reference to the kings of the earth exercise lordship over them; the greatest shall be your servant. It is then but another name for capacity for service, power to bless, etc.

And this idea is still further borne out if we go back to the parable of our text. A man leaves his house in charge of his servants. To them is committed the responsibility for his goods. His honour and interests are in their hands. They have control over his possessions. This is the analogy which our Lord suggests as presenting a vivid likeness to our position in the world.

Christ has committed the care of His kingdom, the glory of His name, the growth of His cause in the world to His Church, and has endowed it with all talents, i.e. gifts needful for that work. Or, to put it in other words, they are His representatives in the world. They have to defend His honour. His name is scandalised or glorified by their actions. They have to see to His interests. They are charged with the carrying out of His mind and purposes.

The foundation of all is laid. Henceforth building on it is all, and that is to be done by men. Human lips and Christian effort--not without the divine Spirit in the word--are to be the means.

It is as when some commander plans his battle, and from an eminence overlooks the current of the fight, and marks the plunging legions as they struggle through the smoke. He holds all the tremendous machinery in his hands. The plan and the glory are his, but the execution of the plan lies with the troops.

In a still more true sense all the glory of the Christian conquest of the world is His, but still the instruments are ourselves. The whole counsel of God is on our side. We go not a warfare at our own charges. Note the perfect consistency of this with all that we hold of the necessity of divine influence, etc.

His servants are intrusted with all His goods. They have authority over the gifts which He has given them, i.e. Christian men are stewards of Christ's riches for others.

They have access to the free use of them all for themselves.

Thus the authorityis all derived. It is all given for the sake of others. It is all capacity for service. Hence,

**II. The authority with which the servants are invested binds every one of them to hard work for Christ.**

To every man his work.

**(a)** Gifts involve duties. That is the first great thought. To have received binds us to impart. Freely ye have received, freely give.

All selfish possession of the gifts which Christ bestows is grave sin.

The price at which they were procured, that miracle and mystery of self-sacrifice, is the great pattern as well as the great motive for our service.

The purpose for which we have received them is plainly set forth: in the existence of the solidarity in which we are all bound; in the definite utterances of Scripture.

The need for their exercise is only too palpable in the condition of things around us.

**(b)** In this multitude of servants every one has his own task.

The universality of the great gift leads to a corresponding universality of obligation. All Christians have their gifts. Each of us has his special work marked out for him by character, relationships, circumstances, natural tastes, etc.

How solemn a divine call there is in these individual peculiarities which we so often think of as unimportant accidents, or regard mainly in their bearing on our own ease and comfort! How reverently we should regard the diversities which are thus revelations of God's will concerning our tasks! How earnestly we should seek to know what it is that we are fitted for! The importance of all protests against priestly assumption lies here, that they strengthen the force with which we proclaim that every man has his work.

Ponder the variety of characters and gifts which Christ gives and desires His servants to use, and the indispensable need for them all. The ideal Church is the bodyof Christ, in which each member has its place and function.

Our fault in this matter.

**(c)** The duties are to be done in the spirit of hard toil.

The servant has his workallotted him, and the word implies that the work calls for effort. The race is not to be run without dust and sweat. Our Christian service is not to be regarded as a bye-productor parergon. It is, so to speak, a vocation, not an avocation. It deserves and demands all the energy that we can put forth, continuity and constancy, plan and system. Nothing is to be done for God, any more than for ourselves, without toil. In the sweat of thy brow shalt thou eat bread and give it to others.

**III. To do this work, watchfulness is needed.**

The division of tasks between servantand porteris only part of the drapery of the parable. To show that watchfulness belongs to all, see the two following verses.

What is this watchfulness? Not constant fidgety curiosity about the coming of the Lord; not hunting after apocalyptic dates. The modern impression seems to be that such study is watchfulness. Christ says that the time of His coming is hidden (see previous verses). Ignorance of that is the very reason why we are to watch. Watchfulness, then, is just a profound and constant feeling of the transiency of this present. The mind is to be kept detached from it; the eye and heart are to be going out to things unseen and eternal; we are to be familiarising ourselves with the thought that the world is passing away.

This watchfulness is an indispensable part of our work. The true Christian thought of the transiency of the world sets us to work the more vigorously in it, and increases, not diminishes, our sense of the importance of time and of earthly things, and braces us to our tasks by the thought of the brevity of opportunity, as well as by guarding us against tastes and habits which eat all earnestness out of the soul.

Thus working and watching, happy will be the servant whom his Lord will find so doing, i.e. at work, not idly looking for Him. Our common duties are the best preparation for our Lord's coming.