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

**MARK-065**. **THE NEW PASSOVER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"12.* *And the first day of unleavened bread, when they killed the Passover, the disciples said unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we go and prepare that Thou mayest eat the Passover? 13. And He sendeth forth two of His disciples, and saith unto them, Go ye into the city, and there shall meet you a man bearing a pitcher of water: follow him. 14. And wheresoever he shall go in, say ye to the goodman of the house, The Master saith, Where is the guestchamber, where I shall eat the Passover with My disciples? 15. And he will shew you a large upper room furnished and prepared: there make ready for us. 16. And His disciples went forth, and came into the city, and found as He had said unto them: and they made ready the Passover. 17. And in the evening He cometh with the twelve. 18. And as they sat and did eat, Jesus said, Verily I say unto you, One of you which eateth with Me shall betray Me. 19. And they began to be sorrowful, and to say unto Him one by one, Is it I? and another said, Is it I? 20. And He answered and said unto them, It is one of the twelve, that dippeth with Me in the dish. 21. The Son of Man indeed goeth, as it is written of Him: but woe to that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! good were it for that man if he had never been born. 22. And as they did eat, Jesus took bread, and blessed, and brake it, and gave to them, and said, Take, eat: this is My body. 23. And He took the cup, and when He had given thanks, He gave it to them: and they all drank of it. 24. And He said unto them, This is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many. 25. Verily I say unto you, I will drink no more of the fruit of the vine, until that day that I drink it new in the kingdom of God. 26. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the mount of Olives."*

*Mark 14:12-26*

This passage falls into three sections--the secret preparation for the Passover (verses 12-17), the sad announcement of the betrayer (verses 18-21), and the institution of the Lord's Supper (verses 22-26). It may be interesting to notice that in the two former of these Mark's account approximates to Luke's, while in the third he is nearer Matthew's. A comparison of the three accounts, noting the slight, but often significant, variations, should be made. Nothing in the Gospels is trivial. The dust of that land is gold.

**I. The secret preparation for the Passover.**

The three Evangelists all give the disciplesquestion, but only Luke tells us that it was in answer to our Lord's command to Peter and John to go and prepare the Passover. They very naturally said Where?as they were all strangers in Jerusalem. Matthew may not have known of our Lord's initiative; but if Mark were, as he is, with apparent correctness, said to have been, Peter's mouthpiece in his Gospel, the reticence as to the prominence of that Apostle is natural, and explains the omission of all but the bare fact of the despatch of the two. The curiously roundabout way in which they are directed to the upper roomis only explicable on the supposition that it was intended to keep them in the dark till the last moment, so that no hint might leak from them to Judas. Whether the token of the man with the waterpot was a preconcerted signal or an instance of our Lord's supernatural knowledge and sovereign sway, his employment as a silent and probably unconscious guide testifies to Christ's wish for that last hour to be undisturbed. A man carrying a water-pot, which was woman's special task, would be a conspicuous figure even in the festival crowds. The message to the householder implies that he recognised the Masteras his Master, and was ready to give up at His requisition even the chamber which he had prepared for his own family celebration of the feast.

Thus instructed, the two trusted Apostles left Bethany, early in the day, without a clue of their destination reaching Judas's hungry watchfulness. Evidently they did not return, and in the evening Jesus led the others straight to the place. Mark says that He came with the twelve; but he does not mean thereby to specify the number, but to define the class, of His attendants.

Each figure in this preparatory scene yields important lessons. Our Lord's earnest desire to secure that still hour before pushing out into the storm speaks pathetically of His felt need of companionship and strengthening, as well as of His self-forgetting purpose to help His handful of bewildered followers and His human longing to live in faithful memories. His careful arrangements bring vividly into sight the limitations of His manhood, in that He, by whom all things consist, had to contrive and plan in order to baffle for a moment His pursuers. And, side by side with the lowliness, as ever, is the majesty; for while He stoops to arrange, He sees with superhuman certitude what will happen, moves unconscious feet with secret and sovereign sway, and in royal tones claims possession of His servant's possessions.

The two messengers, sent out with instructions which would only guide them half-way to their destination, and obliged, if they were to move at all, to trust absolutely to His knowledge, present specimens of the obedience still required. He sends us out still on a road full of sharp turnings round which we cannot see. We get light enough for the first stage; and when it is traversed, the second will be plainer.

The man with the water-pot reminds us how little we may be aware of the Hand which guides us, or of our uses in His plans. I girded thee, though thou hast not known Me,--how little the poor water-bearer knew who were following, or dreamed that he and his load would be remembered for ever! The householder responded at once, and gladly, to the authoritative message, which does not ask a favour, but demands a right. Probably he had intended to celebrate the Passover with his own family, in the large chamber on the roof, with the cool evening air about it, and the moonlight sleeping around. But he gladly gives it up. Are we as ready to surrender our cherished possessions for His use?

**II. The sad announcement of the traitor (verses 18-21).**

As the Revised Version indicates more clearly than the Authorised, the purport of the announcement was not merely that the betrayer was an Apostle, but that he was to be known by his dipping his hand into the common dish at the same moment as our Lord. The prophetic psalm would have been abundantly fulfilled though Judas's fingers had never touched Christ's; but the minute accomplishment should teach us that Jewish prophecy was the voice of divine foreknowledge, and embraced small details as well as large tendencies. Many hands dipped with Christ's, and so the sign was not unmistakably indicative, and hence was privately supplemented, as John tells us, by the giving of the sop. The uncertainty as to the indication given by the token is reflected by the reiterated questions of the Apostles, which, in the Greek, are cast in a form that anticipates a negative answer: Surely not I?Mark omits the audacious hypocrisy of Judas's question in the same form, and Christ's curt, sad answer which Matthew gives. His brief and vivid sketch is meant to fix attention on the unanimous shuddering horror of these faithful hearts at the thought that they could be thus guilty--a horror which was not the child of presumptuous self-confidence, but of hearty, honest love. They thought it impossible, as they felt the throbbing of their own hearts--and yet--and yet--might it not be? As they probed their hearts deeper, they became dimly aware of dark gulfs of possible unfaithfulness half visible there, and so betook themselves to their Master, and strengthened their loyalty by the question, which breathed at once detestation of the treason and humble distrust of themselves. It is well to feel and speak the strong recoil from sin of a heart loyal to Jesus. It is better to recognise the sleeping snakes, the possibilities of evil in ourselves, and to take to Christ our ignorance and self-distrust. It is wiser to cry Is it I?than to boast, Although all shall be offended, yet will not I. Hold Thou me up, and I shall be safe.

Our Lord answers the questions by a still more emphatic repetition of the distinctive mark, and then, in verse 21, speaks deep words of mingled pathos, dignity, and submission. The voluntariness of His death, and its uniqueness as His own act of return to His eternal home, are contained in that majestic goeth, which asserts the impotence of the betrayer and his employers, without the Lord's own consent. On the other hand, the necessity to which He willingly bowed is set forth in that as it is written of Him. And what sadness and lofty consciousness of His own sacred personality and judicial authority are blended in the awful sentence on the traitor! What was He that treachery to Him should be a crime so transcendent? What right had He thus calmly to pronounce condemnation? Did He see into the future? Is it the voice of a Divine Judge, or of a man judging in his own cause, which speaks this passionless sentence? Surely none of His sayings are more fully charged with His claims to pre-existence, divinity, and judicial authority, than this which He spoke at the very moment when the traitor's plot was on the verge of success.

**III. The institution of the Lord's Supper (verses 22-26).**

Mark's account is the briefest of the three, and his version of Christ's words the most compressed. It omits the affecting Do this for remembering Me, which is pre-supposed by the very act of instituting the ordinance, since it is nothing if not memorial; and it makes prominent two things--the significance of the elements, and the command to partake of them. To these must be added Christ's attitude in blessingthe bread and cup, and His distribution of them among the disciples. The Passover was to Israel the commemoration of their redemption from captivity and their birth as a nation. Jesus puts aside this divinely appointed and venerable festival to set in its stead the remembrance of Himself. That night, to be much remembered of the children of Israel, is to be forgotten, and come no more into the number of the months; and its empty place is to be filled by the memory of the hours then passing. Surely His act was either arrogance or the calm consciousness of the unique significance and power of His death. Think of any mere teacher or prophet doing the like! The world would meet the preposterous claim implied with deserved and inextinguishable laughter. Why does it not do so with Christ's act? Christ's view of His death is written unmistakably on the Lord's Supper. It is not merely that He wishes it rather than His life, His miracles, or words, to be kept in thankful remembrance, but that He desires one aspect of it to be held high and clear above all others. He is the true Passover Lamb, whose shed and sprinkled blood establishes new bonds of amity and new relations, with tender and wonderful reciprocal obligations, between God and the manywho truly partake of that sacrifice. The key-words of Judaism--'sacrifice, covenant, sprinkling with blood--are taken over into Christianity, and the ideas they represent are set in its centre, to be cherished as its life. The Lord's Supper is the conclusive answer to the allegation that Christ did not teach the sacrificial character and atoning power of His death. What, then, did He teach when He said, This is My blood of the covenant, which is shed for many? The Passover was a family festival, and that characteristic passes over to the Lord's Supper. Christ is not only the food on which we feed, but the Head of the family and distributor of the banquet. He is the feast and the Governor of the feast, and all who sit at that table are brethren. One life is in them all, and they are one as partakers of One.

The Lord's Supper is a visible symbol of the Christian life, which should not only be all lived in remembrance of Him, but consists in partaking by faith of His life, and incorporating it in ours, until we come to the measure of perfect men, which, in one aspect, we reach when we can say, I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me.

There is a prophetic element, as well as a commemorative and symbolic, in the Lord's Supper, which is prominent in Christ's closing words. He does not partake of the symbols which He gives; but there comes a time, in that perfected form of the kingdom, when perfect love shall make all the citizens perfectly conformed to the perfect will of God. Then, whatsoever associations of joy, of invigoration, of festal fellowship, clustered round the wine-cup here, shall be heightened, purified, and perpetuated in the calm raptures of the heavenly feast, in which He will be Partaker, as well as Giver and Food. Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. The King's lips will touch the golden cup filled with un-foaming wine, ere He commends it to His guests. And from that feast they will go no more out, neither shall the triumphant music of its great hymnbe followed by any Olivet or Gethsemane, or any denial, or any Calvary; but there shall be no more sorrow, nor sin, nor death; for the former things are passed away, and He has made all things new.