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

**MATTHEW-003. THE NAME ABOVE EVERY NAME by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... Thou shalt call His name JESUS: for He shall save His people from their sins."*

*Matthew 1:21*

**I. The historical associations of the name.**

It was a very common Jewish name, and of course was given in memory of the great leader who brought the hosts of Israel to rest in the promised land.

There is no sharper contrast conceivable than between Joshua and Jesus. The contrast and the parallel are both most significant.

**(a)** The contrast.

Joshua is perhaps one of the least interesting of the Old Testament men; a mere soldier, fit for the fierce work which he had to do, rough and hard, ready and prompt, of an iron will and a brave heart. The one exhortation given him when he comes to the leadership is be strong and of a good courage, and that seems to have been the main virtue of his character. The task he had to do was a bloody one, and thoroughly he did it. The difficulties that have been found in the extermination of the Canaanites may be met by considerations of the changed atmosphere between then and now, and of their moral putrescence. But no explanation can make the deed other than terrible, or the man that did it other than fierce and stern. No traits of chivalrous generosity are told of him, nothing that softens the dreadfulness of war. He showed no touch of pity or compunction, no lofty, statesmanlike qualities, nothing constructive; he was simply a rough soldier, with an iron hand and an iron heel, who burned and slew and settled down his men in the land they had devastated.

The very sharpness of the contrast in character is intended to be felt by us. Put by the side of this man the image of Jesus Christ, in all His meekness and gentleness.

Does not this speak to us of the profound change which He comes to establish among men?

* The highest ideal of character is no longer the rough soldier, the strong man, but the man of meekness, and gentleness, and patience.
* How far the world yet is from understanding all that is meant in the contrast between the first and the second bearers of the name!
* We have done with force, and are come into the region of love. There is no place in Christ's kingdom for arms and vulgar warfare.
* The strongest thing is love, armed with celestial armour. Truth and meekness and righteousness are our keenest-edged weapons--this is true for Christian morals; and for politics in a measure which the world has not yet learned.
* Put up thy sword into its sheath,'

**(b)** The parallel.

It is not to be forgotten that the work which the soldier did in type is the work which Christ does. He is the true Moses who leads us through the wilderness. But also He is the Captain who will bring us into the mountain of His inheritance.

But besides this, we too often forget the soldier-like virtues in the character of Christ.

We have lost sight of these very much, but certainly they are present and most conspicuous. If only we will look at our Lord's life as a real human one, and apply the same tests and terms to it which we do to others, we shall see these characteristics plainly enough.

What do we call persistence which, in spite of all opposition, goes right on to the end, and is true to conscience and duty, even to death? What do we call the calmness which forgets self even in the agonies of pain on the cross? What do we call the virtue which rebukes evil in high places and never blanches nor falters in the utterance of unwelcome truths?

* Daring courage.
* Promptness of action.
* All conspicuous in Jesus.
* Iron will.

It has become a commonplace thing now to say that the bravery which dares to do right in the face of all opposition is higher than that of the soldier who flings away his life on the battlefield. The soldiers of peace are known now to deserve the laurel no less than the heroes of war.

But who can tell how much of the modern world's estimate of the superiority of moral courage to mere brute force is owing to the history of the life of Christ?

We find a further parallel in the warfare through which He conquers for us the land.

His own struggle (I have overcome), and the lesson that we too must fight, and that all our religious life is to be a conflict. It is easy to run off into mere rhetorical metaphor, but it is a very solemn and a very practical truth which is taught us, if we ponder that name of the warrior Leader borne by our Master as explained to us by Himself in His words, In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.

Ps. 110. Thy people shall be willing in the day of thy power, in the beauties of holiness from the womb of the morning: thou hast the dew of thy youth.

**II. The significance of the name.**

Joshua means God is Saviour. As borne by the Israelitish leader, it pointed both him and the people away from him to the unseen and omnipotent source of their victory, and was in one word an explanation of their whole history, with all its miracles of deliverance and preservation of that handful of people against the powerful nations around. It taught the leader that he was only the lieutenant of an unseen Captain. It taught the soldiers that they got not the land in possession by their own arms, but because He had a favour unto them.

**(a)** God as Saviour appears in highest manifestation in Jesus.

I do not now mean in regard to the nature of the salvation, but in regard to the relation between the human and the divine. Joshua was the human agent through which the divine will effected deliverance, but, as in all helpers and teachers, he was but the instrument. He could not have said, I lead you, I give you victory. His name taught him that he was not to come in his own name. But he shall save--not merely God shall save through him. And his people--not the people of God'

All this but points to the broad distinction between Christ and all others, in that God, the Saviour, is manifest in Him as in none other.

We are not detracting from the glory of God when we say that Christ saves us.

Christ's consciousness of being Himself Salvation is expressed in many of His words. He makes claims and puts forward His own personality in a fashion that would be blasphemy in any other man, and yet all the while is true to His name, God is the Saviour.

The paradox which lies in these earliest words, the great gulf between the name and the interpretation on the angel's lips, is only solved when we accept the teaching which tells us that in that Word made flesh and dwelling among us, we behold God manifest in the flesh, and in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself.

The name guards us, too, from that very common error of thinking of Christ as if He were more our Saviour than God is. We are not without need of this warning. Christ does not bend the divine will to love, is not more tender than our Father God.

**(b)** The Salvation brought by Jesus is in its nature the loftiest.

It is with strong emphasis that the angel defines the sphere of salvation as being their sins. The Messianic expectation had been degraded as it flowed through the generations, as some pure stream loses its early sparkle, and gathers scum on its surface from filth flung into it by men. Mere deliverance from the Roman yoke was all the salvation that the mass wanted or expected, and the tragedy of the Cross was foreshadowed in this prophecy which declares an inward emancipation from sin as the true work of Mary's unborn Son.

We can discern the Jewish error in externalising and materialising the conception of salvation, but many of us repeat it in essence. What is the difference between the Jew who thought that salvation was deliverance from Rome, and the Christian who thinks that it is deliverance not from sin but from its punishment?

We have to think of a liberation from sin itself, not merely from its penalties. This thought has been often obscured by preachers, and often neglected by Christians, in whom selfishness and an imperfect understanding of the gospel have too often made salvation appear as merely a means of escape from impending suffering. All deep knowledge of what Sin is teaches us that it is its own punishment, and that the hell of hell is to be under the dominion of evil.

**(c)** God's people are His people.

Israel was God's portion--and Joshua was but their leader for a time. But the people of God are the people of Christ.

The way by which we become the people of Jesus is simply by faith in Him.

**III. The usage of the name.**

It was a common Jewish name, but seems to have been almost abandoned since then by Jews from abhorrence, by Christians from reverence.

The Jewish fanatic who during the siege stalked through Jerusalem shrieking, Woe to the city, and, as he fell mortally wounded, added, and to myself also, was a Jesus. There is a Jesus in Colossians.

We find it as the usual appellation in the Gospels, as is natural. But in the Epistles it is comparatively rare alone.

The reason, of course, is that it brings mainly before us the human personality of Jesus. So when used alone in later books it emphasises this: This same Jesus shall so come. We see Jesus, made a little, etc.

Found in frequent use by two classes of religionists-- Unitarian and Sentimental.

We should seek to get all the blessing out of it, and to dwell, taught by it, on the thoughts of His true manhood, tempted, our brother, bone of our bone.

We should beware of confining our thoughts to what is taught us by that name. Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God. Even with thoughts of His lovely human character let us blend thoughts of His Messianic office and of His divine nature. We shall not see all the beauty of Jesus unless we know Him as the Christ, the Son of the Highest.

And besides the name written on His vesture and his thigh, He bears a name which no man knoweth but Himself. Beyond our grasp is His uncommunicable name, His deep character, but near to us for our love and for our faith is all we need to know. That name which He bore in His humiliation He bears still in His glory, and the name which is above every name, and at which every knee shall bow, is the name by which Jewish mothers called their children, and through eternity we shall call His name Jesus because He hath finally and fully saved us from our sins.