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

**MATTHEW-052. THE HEALING CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses."*

*Matthew 8:17*

You will remember, probably, that in our Old Testament translation of these words they are made to refer to man's mental and spiritual evils: He bare our griefs and carried our sorrows. Our evangelist takes them to refer, certainly not exclusively, but in part, to men's corporeal evils--our infirmities (bodily weaknesses, that is) and our sicknesses. He was distinctly justified in so doing, both by the meaning of the original words, which are perfectly general and capable of either application, and by the true and deep view of the comprehensiveness of our Lord's mission and purpose. Christ is the antagonist of all the evils that affect man's life, whether his corporeal or his spiritual; and no less true is it that, in His deep sympathy, He bare our sicknesses than that, in the mystery of His atoning death, He was wounded for our transgressions.

It is, therefore, this point of view of Christ, as the Healer, which I desire to bring before you now.

**I. First, I ask you to look at the plain facts as to our Lord's ministry which are contained in these words:--Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses.**

Now, there are two points that I desire to emphasise very briefly. One is the prominence in Christ's life which is given to His healing energy. We are accustomed to think of His cures as miracles. We are accustomed to think of them in that aspect as evidences of His mission, or as difficulties and stumbling-blocks, as the case may be. But I ask you to put away all such thoughts for a minute, and think about the miracles simply as being cures. Remember how enormous a proportion of our Lord's time and pains and sympathy and thoughts was directed to that one purpose of healing people of their bodily infirmities. We may almost say that to an outsider He would look a great deal liker a man who, as the Apostle Peter painted Him in one of his earliest addresses, went about doing good and healing, than as a teacher of divine wisdom, to say nothing of an incarnation of the divine nature. His miracles of healing were certainly the most conspicuous part of His life's work.

And then, remember, that whilst the great proportion of our Lord's miracles are miracles of healing, we are sure that the whole of the recorded miraculous works of our Lord are the smallest fraction of what He really did. You remember how there crop up, here and there, in the Gospels, general résumé of our Lord's work, of such a kind as this:--And Jesus went about all Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, and preaching the Gospel of the Kingdom, and healing all manner of sickness and all manner of disease among the people. And they brought unto Him all sick people that were taken with divers diseases and torments, and those which were possessed with devils, and those which were lunatic, and those that had the palsy and He healed them. Or, again:--And Jesus departed from thence, and came nigh unto the sea of Galilee, and went up into a mountain, and sat down there. And great multitudes came unto Him, having those that were lame, blind, dumb, maimed, and many others, and cast them down at Jesus feet, and He healed them. Now these are but specimens of the occasional generalisations which we find in the Gospels, which warrant us in saying that, according to the New Testament record, Christ's works of healing were to be numbered, not by tens, but by hundreds, and perhaps by thousands.

That is the first fact calling for notice. The words of our text suggest a second thought as to the cost at which these cures were wrought. Himself took and bare does not mean only took away. It includes that, as a consequence, but it points to something before the removal of the sicknesses. It points to the fact that Christ in some real sense endured the loads which He removed. Of course, His cross is the highest exemplification of the great law which runs through His whole life, that He identifies Himself with all the evil which He takes away, and is able to take it away only because He identifies Himself with it. But whilst the cross is the highest exemplification of this, every miracle of mercy which He wrought is an illustration of the same principle in its appropriate fashion, and upon a lower level. And although we cannot say that the physical sufferings which He alleviated were physically laid upon Him, yet we can say that He so identified Himself with all sufferers by His swift sympathy as that He bore, and therefore bore away, the diseases as well as the sins of the men for whose healing He lived, and for whose redemption He died.

The proof of this crops up now and then. What did it mean that, when He stood beside one poor sufferer, before He could utter from His authoritative lips the divine word of power, Ephphatha, be opened, the same lips had to shape themselves for the utterance of an altogether human and brotherly sigh? Did it not mean that the condition of His healing power was sympathy, that He must bring Himself to feel the burden that He will roll away? That sigh proves that His cures were the works, not without cost to the doer, of a sympathising heart, and not the mere passionless acts of a miracle-monger.

In like manner, what meant that strange tempest of agitation that swept across the pacific ocean of His nature ere He stood by the grave of Lazarus? Why that being troubled in Himself before He raised him? Wherefore the tears that heralded the restoration of the man to life? They could not be shed for the loss that was so soon to be repaired. They can only have been the emotion and tears of One who saw, as massed in one black whole, the entire sorrows that affected physical humanity, and rose in a holy passion of indignation and of sorrow at the sight of that enemy, Death, with whose beginnings He had wrestled in many a miracle of restoration, and whose sceptre He was now about to pluck from his bony clutch. Therefore I say that Christ the healer bore, and thereby bore away, the sicknesses and the infirmities of men.

Amidst mountains of rubbish and chaff, the Rabbis have a grain of wheat in their legend which tells us that Messias is to come as a leper, and to be found sitting amongst the lepers at the city's gate; which is a picturesque and symbolical way of declaring the same truth that I am now insisting upon, the participation by the Redeemer in all burdens and sorrows of body and of spirit which He takes away.

**II. And now with these facts--for I take them to be such--for the basis of our thoughts, let me ask you to turn, in the second place, to some plain practical conclusions that come from them.**

The first of these that I would suggest is the lesson as to the proper sweep and sphere of Christian beneficence. As I said in my introductory remarks, we do not rightly measure the whole circumference of Christ's work unless we regard it as covering and including all forms of human evil. He is the antagonist of everything that is antagonistic to man--pain, misery, sickness, death itself. All these are excrescences on the divine design, transient accompaniments of disordered relations between God and man. And this great physician of souls fights the disease and does not neglect the symptoms; deals with the central evil and is not so absorbed with that as to omit from His view or His treatment the merely superficial manifestations of it.

So that if Christian people, individually and as Churches, are justly exposed, in any measure, to the sarcasm which is freely cast upon them, that they neglect the temporal well-being of men in order to attend exclusively to their spiritual wants, they have not learned the example of such partial treatment from their Master; nor have they taken in the significance and the power of His life in its relation to human sorrow. All that makes the heart bleed Christ comes to take away. All the ills that flesh is heir to, as well as those which each spirit, by rebellion, brings upon itself--are the foes with whom Christ has left His Church in the world in order to wage incessant warfare. If we Christians, oppressed with the sense of the depth and central nature of the evil of man's sin, have so devoted ourselves to preaching and evangelising, that we are, in any measure, rightly chargeable with neglecting hospitals and infirmaries and other forms of relief for temporal necessities, just in that proportion have we departed from our Master's spirit. But I do not, for my part, much believe, either in the good faith of the accusers or in the applicability of the charge which men, who never do anything for the religious improvement of their fellows, are apt to bring against us. My little experience, I think, teaches me that the folk who say to us Do not waste your money on Bibles and missionaries, give it to hospitals and schools, are not usually the people that waste their money on either; and that the largest portion of all the work that is done in England to-day, for the temporal well-being of men, comes from the Christians who also do work for their spiritual well-being.

But let us learn the lesson, if we need it, from our enemies and our critics; and see to it that the more we feel the lofty and transcendent importance of carrying Christ's salvation to men's souls, the more we endeavour, likewise, to live amongst them as He did, the embodiment of pity, wide-eyed and comprehensive, for every evil that racks their hearts and every pain that tortures their nerves. As a fact, hospitals are found within the limits of Christianity, and not outside it; and so far, Christendom, though it is largely professing Christendom only, has learned that it follows a Christ who is the Saviour of the body and the Physician of the soul.

In the next place, another practical lesson which I would draw from this is, as to the sole conditions upon which any form of Christian help can be rendered. The condition for the elevation of men is that the lever which lifts them must have its point below them. That is to say, you have to go down if you would heave up. You have to go amongst if you would deliver; you have to make your own, by a sympathy which you have learned of your Master, the sorrows and the sins of humanity, if you would effectually remedy them. A guinea to an hospital is not your contribution to the Christ-like relief of human suffering. It wants, and He wants, your heart, your sympathy. Think for a moment of the universe of anguish that may lie within the narrow limits of one human body--that awful mystery of pain which holds in its red-hot pincers hundreds and thousands of men and women in this city at this moment. Try to imagine the mass of bodily agony, an enormous percentage of which is utterly innocent, and a still larger percentage of it perfectly remediable, which at this hour, whilst we sit here, is torturing mankind. And oh! brethren, do not let any thought of the transcendent importance of Christ's gospel, and what it does to men's hearts, make us careless about these real, though lesser, evils which lie beside us, and which we can remedy and help.

Only, remember the condition of help for them all. The newspapers went into raptures some years since, and wisely, over a Roman Catholic priest who shut himself up in a little island with a colony of lepers. Some Protestant martyrs have done the same before him, without any chorus of newspaper praise. Whoever did it had penetrated to the secret of Christian help--identification with the evil. If we would take away any misery or sin, we must act like that doctor who shut himself up in the wards of an hospital, and kept a diary of the symptoms of his disease, till the pen dropped from his fingers and the film came over his eyes. Are we ready to do anything like that for our brethren? Until we are, we have yet to learn and to practise the pattern which He has set, Who, though He was rich, for our sins became poor': and who, forasmuch as the children were partakers of flesh and blood, Himself likewise--in their own fashion of weakness, and weariness, and sorrow, and pain, and ultimately death--took part of the same. He bore our sicknesses, therefore He bore them away, and, in so doing, taught us the law of Christian help.

And lastly, let me not pass from this subject without leaving on your hearts, dear friends, the other thought, of the connection and the relative importance of these two hemispheres of Christ's work. The sicknesses are symbols of the sins; the removal of the bodily pain and disease is a prophecy and a visible parable proclaiming the removal of all the harassment and abnormal action that afflict intellect, will, or spirit. Christ Himself has taught us to regard His miracles of healing as the making visible, in the outward sphere, of the analogous miracles of healing in the spiritual realm. And although I have been saying a great deal about the preciousness and the sacredness of the curative influences which flow from Christ, and deal with outward diseases and evils, let us not forget that a sound body is of small worth as compared with a sound mind; that the body is the servant of the spirit, meant mainly to do its behests, bring it knowledge, and express its will; and that high above, and pointed to by, the lower, though precious work of healing men's sicknesses, towers that work which we all of us need, and the robustest of us, perhaps, need most, the healing of our sick souls and their deliverance from death.

Every one of these manifold miracles which the Saviour wrought may be taken as parabolical. You and I grope in darkness as the blind. You and I have ears deaf to hear, and lips dumb to speak, the praises and the love and the word of God. We are lame in the powers of mind and spirit to run in the way of His commandments, and to walk unfainting in the paths of duty. The fever of hot, passionate, foolish desires burns in the veins of us all with its poison. The paralysis of a will that is slothful to good infests and hinders us all. But there comes to us that great hope and promise that Christ has the Spirit of the Lord upon Him to bring liberty to the captive, sight to the blind, hearing to the deaf, healing to the fevered, vigour to the palsied, activity to the lame. Only let us set our trust in Him, carry our weaknesses to Him, acknowledge our sins to Him, seek the touch of His healing and quickening hand, and the miracle shall be wrought.

The old-fashioned surgery used to believe in the transfusion of blood from a sound to a diseased person, and the consequent expulsion of disease. That is the fact about our relation to Christ. Put your arm side by side with His by simple faith in Him. Come into contact with Him, and the blood of Jesus Christ, the law of the spirit of life that was in Him, will pass into the veins of your spirits, and make you whole of whatsoever disease you have. Then shall the eyes of the blind be opened, and the ears of the deaf shall be unstopped; then shall the lame man leap as a hart, and the tongue of the dumb shall sing. And so shall you begin that course of healing and purifying, which will know no pause nor natural termination until, redeemed in body, soul, and spirit, you reach the land where the inhabitant thereof shall no more say, I am sick,--and there shall be no more death, neither shall there be any more pain.