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

**MATTHEW-055. THE PEACE BRINGER IN THE NATURAL WORLD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"23.* *And when He was entered into a ship, His disciples followed Him. 24. And, behold, there arose a great tempest in the sea, insomuch that the ship was covered with the waves; but He was asleep. 25. And His disciples came to Him, and awoke Him, saying, Lord, save us: we perish. 26. And He saith unto them, Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith? Then he arose, and rebuked the winds and the sea, and there was a great calm. 27. But the men marvelled, saying, What manner of man la this, that even the winds and the sea obey him!--."*

*Matthew 8:23-27*

The second group of miracles in these chapters shows us Christ as the Prince of Peace, and that in three regions--the material, the superhuman, and the moral. He stills the tempest, casts out demons, and forgives sins, thus quieting nature, spirit, and conscience.

Mountain-girdled lakes are exposed to sudden storms from the wind sweeping down the glens. Such a one comes roaring down as the little boat, probably belonging to James and John, is labouring across the six or seven miles to the eastern side. Matthew describes the boat as it would appear from shore, as being covered and lost to sight by the breaking waves. Mark, who is Peter's mouthpiece, describes the desperate plight as one on board knew it, and says the boat was filling. It must have been a serious gale which frightened a crew who had spent all their lives on the lake.

Note Christ's sleep in the storm. His calm slumber is contrasted with the hurly-burly of the tempest and the alarm of the crew. It was the sleep of physical exhaustion after a hard day's work. He was too tired to keep awake, or to be disturbed by the tumult. His fatigue is a sign of His true manhood, of His toil up to the very edge of His strength; a characteristic of His life of service, which we do not make as prominent in our thoughts as we should. It is also a sign of His calm conscience and pure heart. Jonah slept through the storm because his conscience was stupefied; but Christ, as a tired child laying its head on its mother's lap.

That sleep may have a symbolical meaning for us. Though Christ is present, the storm comes, and He sleeps through it. Lazarus dies, and He makes no sign of sympathy. Peter lies in prison, and not till the hammers of the carpenters putting up the gibbet for to-morrow are heard, does deliverance come. He delays His help, that He may try our faith and quicken our prayers. The boat may be covered with the waves, and He sleeps on, but He will wake before it sinks. He sleeps, but He never over-sleeps, and there are no too-lates with Him.

Note next the awaking cry of fear. The broken abruptness of their appeal reveals the urgency of the case in the experienced eyes of these fishermen. Their summons is a curious mixture of fear and faith. Save us is the language of faith; we perish is that of fear. That strange blending of opposites is often repeated by us. The office of faith is to suppress fear. But the origin of faith is often in fear, and we are driven to trust just because we are so much afraid. A faith which does not wholly suppress fear may still be most real; and the highest faith has ever the consciousness that unless Christ help, and that speedily, we perish.

So note next the gentle remonstrance. There is something very majestic in the tranquillity of our Lord's awaking, and, if we follow Matthew's order, in His addressing Himself first to the disciples weakness, and letting the storm rage on. It can do no harm, and for the present may blow as it listeth, while He gives the trembling disciples a lesson. Observe how lovingly our Lord meets an imperfect faith. He has no rebuke for their rude awaking of Him. He does not find fault with them for being fearful, but for being so fearful as to let fear cover faith, just as the waves were doing the boat. He pityingly recognises the struggle in their souls, and their possession of some spark of faith which He would fain blow into a flame. He shows them and us the reason for overwhelming fear as being a deficiency in faith. And He casts all into the form of a question, thus softening rebuke, and calming their terrors by the appeal to their common sense. Fear is irrational if we can exercise faith. It is mere bravado to say I will not be afraid, for this awful universe is full of occasions for just terror; but it is the voice of sober reason which says I will trust, and not be afraid. Christ answers His own question in the act of putting it,--ye are of little faith, that is why ye are so fearful.

Note, next, the word that calms the storm. Christ yields to the cry of an imperfect faith, and so strengthens it. If He did not, what would become of any of us? He does not quench the dimly burning wick, but tends it and feeds it with oil--by His inward gifts and by His answers to prayer--till it burns up clear and smokeless, a faith without fear. Even smoke needs but a higher temperature to flame; and fear which is mingled with faith needs but a little more heat to be converted into radiance of trust. That is precisely what Christ does by this miracle. His royal word is all-powerful. We see Him rising in the stern of the fishing-boat, and sending His voice into the howling darkness, and wind and waves cower at His feet like dogs that know their master. As in the healing of the centurion's servant, we have the token of divinity in that His bare word is able to produce effects in the natural realm. As He lay asleep He showed the weakness of manhood; but He woke to manifest the power of indwelling divinity. So it is always in His life, where, side by side with the signs of humiliation and participation in man's weakness, we ever have tokens of His divinity breaking through the veil. All this power is put forth at the cry of timid men. The storm was meant to move to terror; terror was meant to evoke the miracle--the result was complete and immediate. No after-swell disturbed the placid waters when the wind dropped. There had been a great tempest, and now there was a great calm, as the fishermen floated peacefully to their landing-place beneath the shadow of the hills. The wilder the tempest, the profounder the subsequent repose.

All this is a true symbol of our individual lives, as well as of the history of the Church. Storms will come, and He may seem to be heedless. He is ever awakened by our cry, which needs not to be pure faith in order to bring the answer, but may be strangely intertwined of faith and fear. The Lord will help ... and that right early, and the peace that He brings is peace indeed. So it may be with us amid the struggles of life. So may it be with us when the voyage on this storm-tossed sea of time is done! They cry unto the Lord in their trouble. He maketh the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad because they be quiet; so He bringeth them unto their desired haven.