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

**MATTHEW-057**. **CHRIST'S ENCOURAGEMENTS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Son*, *be of good cheer."*

*Matthew 9:2*

This word of encouragement, which exhorts to both cheerfulness and courage, is often upon Christ's lips. It is only once employed in the Gospels by any other than He. If we throw together the various instances in which He thus speaks, we may get a somewhat striking view of the hindrances to such a temper of bold, buoyant cheerfulness which the world presents, and of the means for securing it which Christ provides.

But before I consider these individually, let me point you to this thought, that such a disposition, facing the inevitable sorrows, evils, and toilsome tasks of life with glad and courageous buoyancy, is a Christian duty, and is a temper not merely to be longed for, but consciously and definitely to be striven after.

We have a great deal more in our power, in the regulation of moods and tempers and dispositions, than we often are willing to acknowledge to ourselves. Our lowtimes--when we fret and are dull, and all things seem wrapped in gloom, and we are ready to sit down and bewail ourselves, like Job on his dunghill--are often quite as much the results of our own imperfect Christianity as the response of our feelings to external circumstances. It is by no means an unnecessary reminder for us, who have heavy tasks set us, which often seem too heavy, and are surrounded, as we all are, with crowding temptations to be bitter and melancholy and sad, that Christ commands us to be, and therefore we ought to be, of good cheer.

Another observation may be made as preliminary, and that is that Jesus Christ never tells people to cheer up without giving them reason to do so. We shall see presently that in all cases where the words occur they are immediately followed by words or deeds of His which hold forth something on which, if the hearer's faith lay hold, darkness and gloom will fly like morning mists before the rising sun. The world comes to us and says, in the midst of our sorrows and our difficulties, Be of good cheer, and says it in vain, and generally only rubs salt into the sore by saying it. Jesus Christ never thus vainly preaches the duty of encouraging ourselves without giving us ample reasons for the cheerfulness which He enjoins.

With these two remarks to begin with--that we ought to make it a part of our Christian discipline of ourselves to seek to cultivate a continuous and equable temperament of calm, courageous good cheer; and that Jesus Christ never commands such a temper without showing cause for our obedience--let us turn for a few moments to the various instances in which this expression falls from His lips.

**I**. **Now the first of them is this of my text**, **and from it we learn this truth**, **that Christ's first contribution to our temper of equable**, **courageous cheerfulness is the assurance that all our sins are forgiven.**

Son, be of good cheer, said He to that poor palsied sufferer lying there upon the little light bed in front of Him. He had been brought to Christ to be cured of his palsy. Our Lord seems to offer him a very irrelevant blessing when, instead of the healing of his limbs, He offers him the forgiveness of his sins. That was possibly not what he wanted most, certainly it was not what the friends who had brought him wanted for him, but Jesus knew better than they what the man suffered most from and most needed to have cured. They would have said Palsy. He said, Yes! but palsy that comes from sin. For, no doubt, the sick man's disease was a sin of flesh avenged in kind, and so Christ went to the fountain-head when He said, Thy sins be forgiven thee. He therein implied, not only that the man was longing for something more than his four kindly but ignorant bearers there knew, but also that the root of his disease was extirpated when his sins were forgiven.

And so, in like manner, thus conscience doth make cowards of us all. There is nothing that so drapes a soul with darkness as either the consciousness of unforgiven sin or the want of consciousness of forgiven sin. There may be plenty of superficial cheerfulness. I know that; and I know what the bitter wise man called it, the crackling of thorns under the pot, which, the more they crackle, the faster they turn into powdery ash and lose all their warmth. For stable, deep, lifelong, reliable courage and cheerfulness, there must be thorough work made with the black spot in the heart, and the black lines in the history. And unless our comforters can come to us and say, Thy sins be forgiven thee, they are only chattering nonsense, and singing songs to a heavy heart which will make an effervescence like vinegar on nitre, when they say to us, Be of good cheer. How can I be glad if there lie coiled in my heart that consciousness of alienation and disorder in my relations to God, which all men carry with them, though they overlay it and try to forget it? There is no basis for a peaceful gladness worthy of a man except that which digs deep down into the very secrets of the heart, and lays the first course of the building in the consciousness of pardoned sin. Son, be of good cheer!Lift up thy head. Face smaller evils without discomposure, and with quietly throbbing pulses, for the fountain of possible terrors and calamities is stanched and stayed with, Thy sins are forgiven thee.

Side by side with this first instance, illustrating the same general thought, though from a somewhat different point of view, I may put another of the instances in which the same phrase was soothingly on our Lord's lips. Daughter, said He to the poor woman with the issue of blood, be of good cheer. Thy faith hath saved thee. The consciousness of a living union with God through Christ by faith, which results in the present possession of a real, though it may be a partial, salvation, is indispensable to the temper of equable cheerfulness of which I have been speaking. Apart from that consciousness, you may have plenty of excitement, but no lasting calm. The contrast between the drugged and effervescent potion which the world gives as a cup of gladness, and the pure tonic which Jesus Christ administers for the same purpose, is infinite. He says to us, I forgive thy sins; by thy faith I save thee; go in peace. Then the burdened heart is freed from its oppression, and the downcast face is lifted up, and all things around change, as when the sunshine comes out on the wintry landscape, and the very snow sparkles into diamonds. So much, then, for the first of the instances of the use of this phrase.

**II**. **We now take a second**. **Jesus Christ ministers to us cheerful courage because He manifests Himself to us as a Companion in the storm (Matt**. **14:27).**

The narrative is very familiar to us, so that I need not enlarge upon it. You remember the scene--our Lord alone on the mountain in prayer, the darkness coming down upon the little boat, the storm rising as the darkness fell, the wind howling down the gorges of the mountains round the landlocked lake, the crew toiling in rowing, for the wind was contrary. And then, all at once, out of the mysterious obscurity beneath the shadow of the hills, Something is seen moving, and it comes nearer; and the waves become solid beneath that light and noiseless foot, as steadily nearer He comes. Jesus Christ uses the billows as the pavement over which He approaches His servants, and the storms which beat on us are His occasion for drawing very near. Then they think Him a spirit, and cry out with voices that were heard amidst the howling of the tempest, and struck upon the ear of whomsoever told the Evangelist the story. They cry out with a shriek of terror--because Jesus Christ is coming to them in so strange a fashion! Have we never shrieked and groaned, and passionately wept aloud for the same reason; and mistaken the Lord of love and consolation for some grisly spectre? When He comes it is with the old word on His lips, Be of good cheer.

Tell us not to be frightened when we see something stalking across the waves in the darkness!It is I; surely that is enough. The Companion in the storm is the Calmer of the terror. He who recognises Jesus Christ as drawing near to his heart over wild billows may well be of good cheer, since the storm but brings his truest treasure to him.

Well roars the storm to those who hear

A deeper Voice across the storm.

And He who, with unwetted foot, can tread on the wave, and with quiet voice heard above the shriek of the blast can say, It is I, has the right to say, Be of good cheer, and never says it in vain to such as take Him into their lives however tempest-tossed, and into their hearts however tremulous.

**III**. **A third instance of the occurrence of this word of cheer presents Jesus as ministering cheerful courage to us by reason of His being victor in the strife with the world (John xvi**. **33).**

In the world ye shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world.

Of course the worldwhich He overcame is the whole aggregate of things and persons considered as separated from God, and as being the great Antagonist and counter power to a holy life of obedience and filial devotion. At that last moment when, according to all outward seeming and the estimate of things which sense would make, He was utterly and hopelessly and all but ignominiously beaten, He says, I have overcome the world. What! Thou! within four-and-twenty hours of Thy Cross? Is that victory? Yes! For he conquers the world who uses all its opposition as well as its real good to help him, absolutely and utterly, to do the will of God. And he is conquered by the world who lets it, by its glozing sweetnesses and flatteries, or by its knitted brows and frowning eyes and threatening hand, hinder him from the path of perfect consecration and entire conformity to the Father's will.

Christ has conquered. What does that matter to us? Why, it matters this, that we may have the Spirit of Jesus Christ in our hearts to make us also victorious in the same fight. And whosoever will lay his weakness on that strong arm, and open his emptiness to receive the fulness of that victorious Spirit for the very spirit of his life, will be more than conqueror through Him that loved us, and can front all the evils, dangers, threatenings, temptations of the world, its heaped sweets and its frowning antagonisms, with the calm confidence that none of them are able to daunt him; and that the Victor Lord will cover his head in the day of battle and deliver him from every evil work. Be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world, and play your parts like men in the good fight of faith; for I am at your back, and will help you with Mine own strength.

**IV**. **The last instance that I point to of the use of this phrase is one in which it was spoken by Christ's voice from heaven (Acts 23:11)**.

It was the voice which was heard by the Apostle Paul after he had been almost torn in pieces by the crowd in the Temple, and had been bestowed for security, by the half-contemptuous protection of the Roman governor, in the castle, and was looking onward into a very doubtful future, not knowing how many hourspurchase his life might be worth. That same night the Lord appeared to him and said, Be of good cheer, Paul, for as thou hast testified of Me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome. That is to say, No man can touch you until I let him, and nobody shall touch you until you have done your work and spoken out your testimony. Jerusalem is a little sphere; Rome is a great one. The tools to the hand that can use them. The reward for work is more work, and work in a larger sphere. So cheer up! for I have much for you to do yet.

And the spirit of that encouragement may go with us all, breeding in us the quiet confidence that no matter who may thwart or hinder, no matter what dangers or evils may seem to ring us round, the Master who bids us Be of good cheerwill give us a charmed life, and nothing shall by any means hurt us until He says to us, Be of good courage; for you have done your work; and now come and rest. Wait on the Lord. Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen thine heart; wait, I say, on the Lord.