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

**MATTHEW-060**. **THE TOUCH OF FAITH AND THE TOUCH OF CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"18.* *While He spake these things unto them, behold, there came a certain ruler, and worshipped Him, saying, My daughter is even now dead: but come and lay Thy hand upon her, and she shall live. 19. And Jesus arose, and followed him, and so did His disciples. 20. And, behold, a woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood twelve years, came behind Him, and touched the hem of His garment: 21. For she said within herself, If I may but touch His garment, I shall be whole. 22. But Jesus turned Him about, and when He saw her, He said, Daughter, be of good comfort; thy faith hath made thee whole. And the woman was made whole from that hour. 23. And when Jesus came into the ruler's house, and saw the minstrels and the people making a noise. 24. He said unto them, Give place: for the maid is not dead, but sleepeth. And they laughed Him to scorn. 25. But when the people were put forth, He went in, and took her by the hand, and the maid arose. 26. And the fame hereof went abroad into all that land. 27. And when Jesus departed thence, two blind men followed Him, crying, and saying, Thou Son of David, have mercy on us. 28. And when He was come into the house, the blind men came to Him: and Jesus saith unto them, Believe ye that I am able to do this? They said unto Him, Yea, Lord. 29. Then touched He their eyes, saying, According to your faith be it unto you. 30. And their eyes were opened; and Jesus straitly charged them, saying, See that no man know it. 31. But they, when they were departed, spread abroad His fame in all that country."*

*Matthew 9:18-31*

The three miracles included in the present section belong to the last group of this series. Those of the second group were all effected by Christ's word. Those now to be considered are all effected by touch. The first two are intertwined. The narrative of the healing of the woman is embedded in the account of the raising of Jairus's daughter.

Mark the impression of calm consciousness of power and leisurely dignity produced by Christ's having time to pause, even on such an errand, in order to heal, by the way, the other sufferer. The father and the disciples would wonder at Him as He stayed His steps, and be apt to feel that priceless moments were being lost; but He knows His own resources, and can afford to let the child die while He heals the woman. The one shall receive no harm by the delay, and the other will be blessed. Our Lord is sitting at the feast which Matthew gave on the occasion of his call, engaged in vindicating His sharing in innocent festivity against the cavils of the Pharisees, when the summons to the death-bed comes to Him from the lips of the father, who breaks in on the banquet with his imploring cry. Matthew gives the story much more summarily than the other evangelists, and does not distinguish, as they do, between Jairus's first words, at the point of death, and the message of her actual decease, which met them on the way. The call of sorrow always reaches Christ's ear, and the cry for help is never deemed by Him an interruption. So this man, gluttonous and a wine-bibber, as these Pharisees thought Him, willingly and at once leaves the house of feasting for that of mourning. How near together, in this awful life of ours, the two lie, and how thin the partition walls! Well for those whose feasts do not bar them out from hearing the weeping next door.

As the crowd accompanies Jesus, His hasting love is, for a moment, diverted by another sufferer. We never go on an errand of mercy but we pass a hundred other sorrowing hearts, so close packed lie the griefs of men. This woman is a poor shrinking creature, broken down by long illness (which had lasted for the same length of time as the joyous life of Jairus's child), made more timid by disappointed hopes of cure, and depressed by poverty to which her many doctors had brought her. She does not venture to stop this new Rabbi-physician, as He goes with the church dignitary of the town to heal his daughter, but lets Him pass before she can make up her mind to go near Him; and then she comes creeping up behind the crowd, puts out her wasted, trembling hand to the hem of His garment,--and she is whole.

The other evangelists give us a more extended account, but Matthew throws into prominence, in his condensed narrative, the essential points.

Notice her real but imperfect faith. There was unquestionable confidence in Christ's power, and very genuine desire for healing. But it was a very ignorant faith. She believes that her touch of the garment will heal without Christ's will or knowledge, much more His pitying love, having any part in it. She thinks that she may win her desire furtively, and may carry it away, and He be none the wiser nor the poorer for the stolen blessing. What utter, blank ignorance of His character and way of working! What gross superstition! Yes, and withal what a hunger of desire, what absolute assurance of confidence that one finger-tip on His robe was enough! Therefore she had her desire, and her Healer recognised her faith as true, though blended with much ignorance of Him. Her error was very like that which many Christians entertain with less excuse. To attach importance to external means of grace, rites, ordinances, sacraments, outward connection with Christian organisations, is the very same misconception in a slightly different form. Such error is always near us; it is especially rife in countries where there has long been a visible Church. It has received strange new vigour to-day, partly by reaction from extreme rationalism, partly by the growing cultivation of the aesthetic faculties. It is threatening to corrupt the simplicity and spirituality of Christian worship, and needs to be strenuously resisted. But the more we have to fight against it, the more do we need to remember that, along with this clinging to the hem of the garment instead of to the heart of its Wearer, there may be a very real trust, which might shame some of those who profess to hold a less sensuous form of faith. Many a poor soul clasping a crucifix clings to the Cross. Many a devout heart kneeling at mass sees through the incense-smoke the face of Christ.

This woman's faith was selfish. She wanted health; she did not care much about the Healer. She would have been quite contented to have had no more to do with Him, if she could only have stolen out of the crowd cured. She would have had little gratitude to the unconscious Giver of a stolen good. So, many a Christian life in its earlier stages is more absorbed with its own deep misery and its desire for deliverance, than with Him. Love comes after, born of the experience of His love. But faith precedes love, and the predominant motive impelling to faith at first is distinctly self-regard. That is all as it should be. The most purely self-absorbed wish to escape from the most rudely pictured hell is often the beginning of a true trust in Christ, which, in due time, will be elevated into perfect consecration. Some of our modern teachers, who are shocked at Christianity because it lays the foundation of the most self-denying morality in such selfishness, would be none the worse for going to school to this story, and learning from it how a desire for nothing more than to get rid of a painful disease, started a process which turned a life into a peaceful, thankful surrender of the cured self to the love and service of the mighty Healer.

Observe, next, how Christ answers the imperfect faith, and, by answering, corrects and confirms it. Matthew omits Christ's question as to who touched Him, the disciplesreply, and His renewed asseveration that He was conscious of power having gone forth from Him. All these belong to the loving method by which our Lord sought to draw forth an open acknowledgment. Womanly diffidence, enfeebled health, her special disease, all made the woman wish to hide herself. She wanted to steal away unnoticed, as she hoped that she had come. But Christ forces her to stand out before all the crowd, and there, with all eyes upon her,--cold, cruel eyes, some of them--to conquer her shame, and tell all the truth. Strange kindness that; strangely contrasted with His ordinary desire to avoid notoriety, and with His ordinary tender consideration for shrinking weakness! He did it for her sake, not for His own. She is changed from timidity to courage. At one moment she stretches out her wasted finger, a tremulous invalid; at the next, she flings herself at His feet, a confessor. He would have us testify for Him, because faith unavowed, like a plant in the dark, is apt to become pale and sickly; but ere He bids us own His name, He pours into our hearts, in answer to our secret appeal, the health of His own life, and the blissful consciousness of that great gift which makes the tongue of the dumb sing.

His words to her are full of tenderness. She receives the name of daughter. Gently He encourages her timidity by that Be of good cheer, and then He sets right her error: Thy faith--not thy finger--hath made thee whole. There was no real connection between the touch of the robe and healing; but the woman thought that there was, and so Christ stooped to her childish thought, and allowed her to prescribe the road which His mercy should take. But He would not leave her with her error. The true means of contact between us and Him is not our outward contact with external means of grace, but the touch of our spirits by faith. Faith is nothing in itself, and heals only because it brings us into union with His power, which is the sole cause of our healing. Faith is the hand which receives the blessing. It may be a wasted and tremulous hand, like that which this woman laid lightly on His robe. But He feels its touch, though a universe presses on Him, and He answers. Not the garment's hem, but Christ's love, is the cause of our salvation. Not an outward contact with it or with Him, but faith, is the condition on which His life, which knows no disease, pours into our souls. The hand of my faith lifted to Him will receive into its empty palm and clasping fingers the special blessing for my special wants.

The other evangelists tell us that, at the moment of His words to the woman, the messengers came bearing tidings of the child's death. How Jairus must have grudged the pause! A word from Christ, like the pressure of His hand, heartened him. Like a river turned from its course for a space, to fill some empty reservoir, His love comes back to its original direction. How abundant the power and mercy, to which such a work as that just done was but a parenthesis! The doleful music and the shrill shrieks of Eastern mourning, which met them as they entered Jairus's house, disturbed the sanctity of the hour, and were in strong contrast with the majestic calmness of Jesus. Not amid venal lamentations and excited cries will He do His work. He bids the noisy crowd forth with curt, almost stern, command, and therein rebukes all such hollow and tumultuous scenes, in the presence of the stillness of death, still more where faith in Him has robbed it of its terror, in robbing it of its perpetuity. It is strange that believing readers should have thought that our Lord meant to say that the little girl was not really dead, but only in a swoon. The scornful laughter of the flute-players and hired mourners understood Him better. They knew that it was real death, as men count death, and, as has often been the case, the laughter of His foes has served to establish the truth. That was not worthy to be called death from which the child was so soon and easily to be awaked. But, besides this special application to the case in hand, that great saying of our Lord's carries the blessed truth that, since He has come, death is softened into sleep for all who love Him. The euphemism is not peculiar to Christianity, but has a deeper meaning on Christian lips than when Greeks or Romans spoke of the eternal sleep. Others speak of death by any name rather than its own, because they fear it so much. The Christian does so, because he fears it so little,--and, as a matter of fact, the use of the word death as meaning merely the separation of soul and body by the physical act is exceptional in the New Testament. This name of sleep, sanctioned thus by Christ, is the sweetest of all. It speaks of the cessation of connection with the world of sense, and long disquiet merged in rest. It does not imply unconsciousness, for we are not unconscious when we sleep, but only unaware of externals. It holds the promise of waking when the sun comes. So it has driven out the ugly old name. Our tears flow less bitterly when we think of our dear ones as sleeping in Jesus. Their bodies, like this little child's, are dead, but they are not. They rest, conscious of their own blessedness and of Him in whom they live, and have their being, whether they moveor no.

Then comes the great deed. The crowd is shut out. For such a work silence is befitting. The father and mother, with His foremost three disciples, go with Him into the chamber. There is no effort, repeated and gradually successful, as when Elisha raised the dead boy; no praying, as when Peter raised Dorcas; only the touch of the hand in which life throbbed in fulness, and, as the other narratives record, two words, spoken strangely to, and yet more strangely heard by, the dull, cold ear of death. Their echo lingered long with Peter, and Mark gives us them in the original Aramaic. But Matthew passes them by, as he seems here to have desired to emphasise the power of Christ's touch. But touch or word, the real cause of the miracle was simply His will; and whether He used media to help men's faith, or said only I will, mattered little. He varied His methods as the circumstances of the recipients required, and in order that they and we might learn that He was tied to none. These miracles of raising the dead are three in number. Jairus's daughter is raised from her bed, just having passed away; the widow's son at Nain from his bier, having been for a little longer separated from his body; Lazarus from the grave, having been dead four days. A few minutes, or days, or four thousand years, are one to His power. These three are in some sense the first-fruits of the great harvest; the stars that shone out singly before all the heaven is in a blaze. For, though they died again, and so left to Him the precedence in resurrection, as in all besides, they are still prophetic of His power in the hour when they that sleep in the dustshall awake at His voice. Blessed they who, like this little maiden, are awakened, not only by His voice, but by His touch, and to find, as she did, their hand in His!

The third of these miracles, which Matthew seems to reckon as the second in the group, because he treats the two former as so closely connected as to be but one in numeration, need not detain us long. It is found only in this Gospel. The first point to be observed in it is the cry of these two blind men. There is something pathetic and exquisitely natural in the two being together, as is also the case in the similar miracle, at a later period, on the outskirts of Jericho. Equal sorrows drive men together for such poor help and solace as they can give each other. They have common experiences which isolate them from others, and they creep close for warmth and companionship. All the blind men in the Gospels have certain resemblances. One is that they are all sturdily persevering, as perhaps was easier for them because they could not see the impatience of the listeners, and possibly because, in most cases, persistent begging was their trade, and they were used to refusals. But a more important trait is their recognition of Jesus as Son of David. Blind as they are, they see more than do the seeing. Thrown in upon themselves, they may have been led to ponder the old words, and by their affliction been made more ready to welcome One who, if He were Messiah, was coming with a special blessing for them--to open the blind eyes. Men who deeply desire a good are quick to listen to the promise of its accomplishment. So these two followed Him along the road, loudly and perseveringly calling out their profession of faith, and their entreaty for sight.

The next point is our Lord's treatment. He let them cry on, apparently unheeding. Had, then, the two miracles just done exhausted His stock of power or of pity? Certainly His reason was, as it always was, their good. We do not know why it was better for them to have to wait, and continue their entreaty; but we may be quite sure that the reason for all His delays is the same,--the larger blessing which comes with the answer when it comes, and the large blessings which may be gathered while we wait its coming. Christ's question to them, when at last they have found their way even indoors, holds out more hope than they had yet received. By it, Christ established a close relation with them, and implied to them that He was willing to answer their cry. One can fancy how the poor blind faces would light up with a flush of eager expectation, and how swift would be the answer. The question is not cold or inquisitorial. It is more than half a promise, and a powerful aid to the faith which it requires.

There is something very beautiful and pathetic in the simple brevity of the unhesitating answer, Yea, Lord. Sincerity needs few words. Faith can put an infinite deal of meaning into a monosyllable. Their eagerness to reach the goal made their answer brief. But it was enough. Again the hand which had clasped the maiden's palm is put out and laid gently on the useless eyes, and the great word spoken, According to your faith be it unto you. Their blindness made the touch peculiarly fitting in their case, as bringing evidence of sense to those who could not see the gracious pity of His looks. The word spoken was, like that to the centurion, a declaration of the power of faith, which determines the measure, and often the manner, of His gifts to us. The containing vessel not only settles the quantity of, but the shape assumed by, the water which is taken up in it from the sea. Faith, which keeps inside of Christ's promises (and what goes outside of them is not faith), decides how much of Christ we shall have for our very own. He condescends to run the molten gold of His mercies into the moulds which our faith prepares.

These two men, who had used their tongues so well in their persistent cry for healing, went away to make a worse use of them in telling everywhere of their cure. Jesus desired silence. Possibly He did not wish His reputation as a mere worker of miracles to be spread abroad. In all His earlier ministry He avoided publicity, singularly contrasting therein with the evident desire to make Himself the centre of observation which marks its close. He dreaded the smoky flame of popular excitement. His message was to individuals, not to crowds. It was a natural impulse to tell the benefits these two had received; but truer gratitude and deeper faith would have made them obey His lightest word, and have shut their mouths. We honour Christ most, not by taking our way of honouring Him, but by absolute obedience.

The final miracle of the nine (or ten) marshalled in long procession in chapters viii. and ix. is told with singular brevity. There is nothing individual in our Lord's treatment of the sufferer, as there was in the previous healing of the two blind men, and no details are given of either the appeal to His pity or the method of His cure. The dumb demoniac could lift no cry, nor exercise any faith, and all the petitions and hopes of his bearers were expressed in the act of bringing the sufferer thither, and silently setting him there before these eyes of universal pity. It was enough. With Jesus, to see was to compassionate, and to compassionate was to help. In the other instances of casting out demons, the method is an authoritative command, addressed not to the possessed, but to the alien personality that has seized on him, and we conclude that such was the method here. Jesus undoubtedly believed in demoniacal possession, if we can at all rely on the Gospel narratives; and it may be humbly suggested that there are dark depths in humanity, which had need to be fathomed more completely, before any one is warranted in dogmatically pronouncing that He was wrong in His diagnosis. There are ugly facts which should give pause to those who are inclined to say--There are no demons, and if there were, they could not dominate a human consciousness.

But the effects of the miracle are emphasised more than itself. They are two, neither of them what might or should have been. The dumb man is not said to have used his recovered speech to thank his deliverer, nor is there any sign that he clung to Him, either for fear of being captured again or in passionate gratitude. It looks as if he selfishly bore away his blessing and cared nothing for its giver. That is very human, and we all are too often guilty of the same sin. Nor was the effect on the multitudes much better, for they were only struck with vulgar wonder, which had no moral quality in it and led to nothing. They saw the miracle, that is, the wonderfulness of the act made some dint even on their minds, but these were either too fluid to retain the impression, or too hard to let it be deep, and so it soon filled up again. We have to think of Christ's deeds as signs, not only as wonders, or they will do little to draw us to Him. Wonder is a necessarily evanescent emotion, which may indeed set something better stirring in us, but is quite as likely to die barren.

The Pharisees did not wonder, and did look into the phenomenon with sharp eyes; and in so far, they were in advance of the gaping multitudes. They were much too superior persons to be astonished at anything, and they had already settled on a formula which was delightfully easy of application, and had the further advantage of turning the miracles into evidences that the doer of them was a child of the Devil. It appears to have been a well-worked formula too, for it is found again in chap. xii. 24, and in Luke xi. 15, in the account of another cure of a dumb demoniac. It is possible that the incident now before us may be the same as this, but there is nothing improbable in the occurrence of such a case twice, nor in the repetition of what had become the commonplace of the Pharisaic polemic. But what a piercing example that explanation is of the blinding power of prejudice, determined to hold on to a foregone conclusion, and not to see the sun at noon! Jesus in league with the prince of the devils! And that was gravely said by religious authorities! They saw the loveliness of His perfect life, His gentle goodness, His self-forgetting love, His swift-springing pity, and they set it all down to His commerce with the Evil One. He was so good that He must be more than humanly bad.