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

**MATTHEW-061**. **A CHRISTLIKE JUDGMENT OF MEN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"But when He saw the multitudes, He was moved with compassion on them, because they fainted, and were scattered abroad, as sheep having no shepherd."*

*Matthew 9:36*

In the course of our Lord's wandering life of teaching and healing, there had naturally gathered around Him a large number of persons who followed Him from place to place, and we have here cast into a symbol the impression produced upon Him by their outward condition. That is to say, He sees them lying there weary, and footsore, and travel-stained. They have flung themselves down by the wayside. There is no leader or guide, no Joshua or director to order their march; they are a worn-out, tired, unregulated mob, and the sight smites upon His eye, and it smites upon His heart. He says to Himself, if I may venture to put words into His lips, There are a worse weariness, and a worse wandering, and a worse anarchy, and a worse disorder afflicting men than that poor mob of tired pedestrians shows. Matthew, who was always fond of showing the links and connections between the Old Testament and the New, casts our Lord's impression of what He then saw into language borrowed from the prophecy of Ezekiel (ch. 34.), which tells of a flock that is scattered in a dark and cloudy day, that is broken, and torn, and driven away. I venture to see in the text three points: (i) Christ teaching us how to look at men; (ii) Christ teaching us how to feel at such a sight; and (iii) Christ teaching us what to do with the feeling. When He saw the multitude, He was moved with compassion, because they fainted and were scattered abroad. Then He said unto His disciples, the harvest is plenteous, the labourers are few, pray ye the Lord of the harvest to send forth labourers unto the harvest. And then there follows, And when He had called unto Him His twelve disciples, He gave them power against unclean spirits to cast them out. There are, then, these three points;--just a word or two about each of them.

**I. Here we have our Lord teaching us how to look at men.**

The picture of my text is, of course, in its broad outlines, very clear and intelligible, but there may be a little difficulty as to the precise force of the language. The obscurity of it is in some degree reflected in the margin of our Bibles; so, perhaps, you will permit one word of an expository nature. The description of the flock, Because they fainted and were scattered abroad, is couched in the original in a couple of words, one of which means properly tornor fainting, according as one or other of two readings of the text is adopted, and the other means lying down. Now, the former of these gives a very pathetic picture if we apply it to the individuals that made up the flock. We have then the image of the poor sheep that has lost its way, struggling through briars and thorns, getting out of them with its fleece all torn and hanging in strips dangling at its heels, or of it as lacerated by the beasts of the field to whom it is a prey. If we take the metaphor, as seems more probably to be intended, as applying not so much to the individuals as to the flock, then it comes to mean torn asunder, thrown apart, and gives us the notion of anarchic confusion into which the flock comes if there be no shepherd to lead it. Then the other word, which our Bible translates were scattered abroad, seems to mean more properly lying down, and it gives the idea of the poor, wearied creature, after all its struggles and wanderings, utterly beaten and dejected, having lost its way, at its witsend and resourceless, flinging itself down there in despair, and panting its timid life out anywhere where it finds itself. So it comes to be a picture of the utter weariness and hopelessness of all men's efforts apart from that Guide and Shepherd, who alone can lead them in the way. And then both of these miserable states, the laceration if you take the one explanation, the disintegration and casting apart if you take the other, the weariness and exhaustion, are traced to their source, they are as sheep having no shepherd. He has gone, and so all this comes. With this explanation we may take the points of view that are thus suggested simply as they lie before us.

First of all, notice how here, as always to Jesus Christ, the outward was nothing, except as a symbol and manifestation of the inward; how the thing that He saw in a man was not the external accidents of circumstance or position, for His true, clear gaze and His loving, wise heart went straight to the essence of the matter, and dealt with the man not according to what he might happen to be in the categories of earth, but to what he was in the categories of heaven. All the same to Him whether it was some poor harlot, or a rabbi; all the same to Him whether it was Pilate on the judgment-seat, or the penitent thief hanging at His side. These gauds and shows were nothing; sheer away He cut them all, and went down to the hidden heart of the man, and He allocated and ranged them according to that. Christian men and women, do you try to do the same thing, and to get rid of all these superficial veils and curtains with which we drape ourselves and attitudinise in the world, and to see men as Christ saw them, both in regard to your judgment of them, and in regard to your judgment of yourselves? I am a scholar and a wise man; a great thinker; a rich merchant; a man of rising importance and influence. Very well; what does that matter? I am ignorant or a pauper; be it so. Let us get below all that. The one question worth asking and worth answering is, How am I affected towards Him?There are many temporary and local principles of arrangement and order among men; but they will all vanish some day, and there will be one regulating and arranging principle, and it is this: Do I love God in Jesus Christ, or do I not?Oh! for myself, for yourself, and for all our outlook towards others, let us not forget that the inmost, deepest, hidden man of the heart is the man, and that all else is naught, and that its whole character is absolutely determined by its relation to Jesus Christ.

But this is somewhat aside from my main purpose, which is rather briefly to expand the various phases which, as I have already suggested, are included in such an emblem. The first of them is this: Try to think for yourselves of the condition of humanity as apart from Christ--shepherdless. That old metaphor of a shepherd which comes out of the Old Testament is there sometimes used to indicate a prophet, and sometimes to indicate a king. I suppose we may put both of these uses together, as far as our present purposes are concerned; and this is what I want to insist upon. I dare say some people here will think it is very old-fashioned, very narrow in these broad and liberal days; but what I would say is this, that unless Jesus Christ is both Guide and Teacher, we have neither guide nor teacher but are shepherdless without Him. There are plenty of rulers. There was no lack of other authority in the days of His flesh. There were crowds of rabbis, guides, and directors. The life of the nation was throttled by the authorities that had planted themselves upon its back, and yet Christ saw that there were none of those who were fit for the work, or afforded the adequate guidance. And so it is, now and always. There have been hosts of men who have sought to impose their authority upon an era. Where is there one that has swayed passion, that has ruled hearts, that has impressed his own image on the will, that has made obedience an honour, and absolute, abject devotion to his command a very patent of nobility? Here, and nowhere beside. Besides that Christ there is no ruler amongst men who can come to them and say to his servant, Go, and he goeth, and to this man, Do this, and he doeth it. Obedience to any besides is treason against the dignity of our own nature; disobedience to Him is both treason against our nature and blasphemy against God. Thou art the King of Glory, O Christ, Thou art the everlasting Son of the Father. There is the deepest reason for His rule.

And as for teacher, whom are we to put up beside Him? Is it to be these dim figures of religious reformers that are gliding, ghostlike, to their doom, being wrapped round and round about by ever thicker and thicker folds of the inevitable oblivion that swallows all that is human? Brethren, by common consent it is Christ or nobody. Aaron dies upon Hor; Moses dies upon Pisgah; the teachers, the leaders, the guides, the under-shepherds, pass away one by one; and if this Christ be but a Man and a Teacher, He too will pass away. Shall I be thought very blind to the signs of the times if I say that I see no sign of His dominion being exhausted, of His influence being diminished, of His guidance being capable of being dispensed with? You may say, Oh, we do not want any teacher or guide; we do not want a shepherd. I am not going to enter upon that question now at all, except just to say this, that the instincts of humanity rise up in contradiction, as it seems to me, of that cold and cheerless creed, and that we have this fact staring us in the face, that men are made capable of a devotion and submission the most passionate, the most absolute, the most mighty force in their lives, to human guides and ensamples, and that it is all wasted unless there be somewhere a Man, our Brother, who shall come to us and say, All that ever went before Me are thieves and robbers; I am the Good Shepherd; follow Me, and ye shall not walk in darkness, He saw the multitudes as sheep having no shepherd.

Still further, take that other phase of the metaphor which, as I suggested, the text includes, namely, the idea of disintegration, the rending apart of social ties and union, unless there be the centre of unity in the shepherd of the flock. I will smite the shepherd, and the sheep shall be scattered, says the old prophecy. Of course, for what is there to hold them together unless it be their guide and their director? So we are brought face to face with this plain prosaic rendering of the metaphor--that but for the centre of unity provided for mankind in the person and work of Jesus Christ, there is no satisfaction of the deep hunger for unity and society with which in that case God would have cursed mankind. For whilst there are many other bonds most true, most blessed, God-given, and mighty, such as that of the sacred unity of the family, and that of the nation and many others of which we need not speak, yet all these are constantly being disintegrated by the unresting waves of that gnawing sea of selfishness, if I may so say, which, like the waters upon our eastern coasts, eats and eats for ever at the base of the cliffs, so that society in all its forms, whether it be built upon identity of opinion, which is perhaps the shabbiest bond of all, or whether it be built upon purposes of mutual action, which is a great deal better, or whether it be built upon hatred of other people, which is the modern form of patriotism, or whether it be built upon the domestic affections, which are the purest and highest of all--all the other bonds of society, such as creeds, schools, nations, associations, leagues, families, denominations, all go sooner or later. The base is eaten out of them, because every man that belongs to them has in him that tyrannous, dominant self, which is ever seeking to assert its own supremacy. Here is Babel, with its half-finished tower, built on slime; and there is Pentecost, with its great Spirit; here is the confusion, there is the unifying; here the disintegration, there the power that draws them all together. They were scattered abroad as sheep having no shepherd, and one looks out over the world and sees great tracts of country and long dismal generations of time, in which the very thought of unity and charity and human bonds knitting men together has faded from the consciousness of the race, and then one turns to blessed, sweet, simple words that say, there shall be one flock and one shepherd, and I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto Me. Drawing thus, He will draw them into the eternal, mighty bond of union that shall never be broken, and is all the more precious and all the more true because it is not a unity like the vulgar unities that express themselves in external associations. You know, of course or if you do not know it will be a good thing that you should know, that that verse in John's Gospel which I have quoted has been terribly mangled by a little slip of our translators. Christ said, Other sheep I must bring which are not of this fold, the fold being the external unity of the Jewish church--an enclosure made of hurdles that you can stick in the ground. I shall bring them, says He, and there shall be one--(not, as our Bible says, fold,--but something far better)--there shall be one flock; which becomes a unity not by wattling round about it on the outside, but by a shepherd standing in the middle. There shall be one flock and one shepherd--a unity which is neither the destruction of the variety of the churches, nor the crushing of men, nationalities, and types of character all down into one dead level beneath the heel of a conqueror, but the unity which subsists in the many operations of the one Spirit, and is expressed by all the forms of the one inspired grace.

Then passing by altogether the other idea which I said was only doubtfully suggested by the words--namely, that of laceration and wounding--let me say a word about the last of the aspects of humanity when Christless, which is set forth in this text, and that is, the dejected weariness arising from the fruitless wanderings wherewith men are cursed. As a verse in the Book of Proverbs puts it, The labour of the foolish wearieth every one of them, because they know not how to go to the city. Putting aside the metaphor, the plain truth which it embodies is just this, that there is in all men's souls a deep longing after peace and rest, after goodness and beauty and truth, and that all the strenuous efforts to satisfy these longings, either by social reforms or by individual culture and discipline, are pathetically vain and profitless, because there is none to guide them. The sheep go wandering in any direction, and with no goal; and wherever one has jumped, a dozen others will go after him, and so they are wearied out long before the day's journey is ended, and they never reach the goal. Put that into less vivid, and, therefore, as people generally suppose, more accurate, language, and it is a statement of the universal law of human history that, after any epoch of great aspirations and strong excitement of the noblest parts of human nature, there has always come a reaction of corruption and a collapse from weariness. What did Liberty, Equality, Fraternityend in? A guillotine. What do all similar epochs end in, when they do not take the Christ to march ahead of them? An utter disgust and disillusion, and a despair of all progress. That is why wild revolutionists in their youth are always obstinate Conservatives in their old age. The wandering sheep are footsore, and they fling themselves down by the wayside. That is why heathenism presents to us the aspect that it does. There is nothing about it that seems to me more tragical than the weary languor that besets it. Do you ever think of the depth of pathetic, tragic meaning that there is in that verse in one of the Psalms, Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death? There they sit, because there is no hope in rising and moving. They would have to grope if they arose, and so with folded hands they sit like the Buddha, which one great section of heathenism has taken as being the true emblem and ideal of the noblest life. Absolute passivity lays hold upon them all--torpor, stagnation, no dream of advance or progress. The sheep are dejected, despairing, anarchic, disintegrated, lacerated, guideless, and shepherdless--away from Christ. So He thought them. God give you and me grace, dear brethren, to see, as Christ saw, the condition of humanity and our own apart from Him.

**II. And now let me say a word in the next place as to the second movement of His mind and heart here. He teaches us not only how to think of men, but how that sight should touch us.**

He was moved with compassion on them when He saw the multitude--with the eye of a god, I was going to say, and the heart of a man. Pity belongs to the idea of divinity; compassion belongs to the idea of divinity incarnate; and the motion that passed across His heart is the motion that I would seek may pass, with its sweet and healing breath, across yours and mine. The right emotion for a Christian looking on the Christless crowds is pity, not aversion; pity, not anger; pity, not curiosity; pity, not indifference. How many of us walk the streets of the towns in which our lot is cast, and never know one touch of that emotion, when we look at these people here in England torn, and anarchic, and wearied, and shepherdless, within sound of our psalm-singing in our chapels? Why, on any Sunday there are thousands of men and women standing about the streets who, we may be sure, have not seen the inside of a church or a chapel since they were married, and that not one in five hundred of all the good people that are going with their prayer-books and hymn-books to church and chapel ever think anything about them as they pass them by; and some of them, perhaps, if they come to any especially disreputable one, will gather up their skirts and keep on the safe side of the pavement, and there an end of it. But Jesus Christ had no aversions. His white purity was a great deal nearer to the blackness of the woman that was a sinner, than was the leprous whiteness of the whited sepulchre of the self-righteous Pharisee. He had neither aversion, nor anger, nor indifference.

And, if I might venture to touch upon another matter, compassion and not curiosity is an especial lesson for the day to the more thoughtful and cultivated amongst our congregations. I have just said that the appropriate Christian feeling in contemplating the state of the sheep without the Shepherd is compassion, not curiosity. That reminder is particularly needful in view of the prominence to-day of investigations into the new science of Comparative Religion. I speak with most unfeigned respect of it and of its teachers, and gratefully hail the wonderful light that it is casting upon ideas underlying the strange and often savage and obscene rites of heathenism; but it has a side of danger in it against which I would warn you all, especially young, reading men and women. The time has not yet come when we can afford to let such investigations be our principal occupation in the face of heathenism. If idolatry was dead we could afford to do that, but it is alive--the more's the pity; and it is not only a curious instance of the workings of man's intelligence, and a great apocalypse of earlier stages of society, but, besides that, it is a lie that is deceiving and damning our brethren, and we have got to kill it first and dissect it afterwards. So I say, do not only think of heathenism in its various forms as a subject for speculation and analysis; as much as you like of that, only do not let it drive out the other thing, and after you have tried to understand it, then come back to my text, He was moved with compassion. And so pity, and neither anger, nor aversion, nor curiosity, nor indifference is what I urge as the Christian emotion.

**III. Let us take this text as teaching us how Christ would have us act, after such emotion built and based upon such a look.**

It is perfectly legitimate, although it is by no means the highest motive, to appeal to feeling as a stimulus to action. We have a right to base our urging of Christian men and women to missionary work either at home or abroad, upon the ground of the condition of the men to whom the Gospel has to be carried. I know that if taken alone it is a very inadequate motive. I believe that any failure that may be manifest in the interest of Christian people in missionary work is largely traceable to the blunder we have made in dwelling on superficial motives more than we ought to have done, in proportion to the degree in which we have dwelt on the deepest. We have been gathering the surface-water instead of going right down to the green sand, to which the artesian well must be sunk if the stream is to come up without pumping or wasting. So I say that a deeper reason than the sorrow and darkness of the heathen is--the love of Christ constraineth me; but yet the first is a legitimate one. Only remember this, that Bishop Butler taught us long ago, that if you excite emotions which are intended to lead to action, and the action does not follow, the excitation of the emotion without its appropriate action makes the heart a great deal harder than it was before. That is why it is playing with edged tools to speak so much to our Christian audiences, as we sometimes hear done, about the condition of the heathen as a stimulus to missionary work. If a man does not respond and do something, some crust of callousness and coldness comes over his own heart. You cannot indulge in the luxury of emotion which you do not use to drive your spindles, without doing yourselves harm. It is never intended to be blown off as waste steam and allowed to vanish into the air. It is meant to be conserved and guided, and to have something done with it. Therefore beware of sentimental contemplation of the sad condition of the shepherdless sheep which does not move you to do anything to help them.

One word more. Take my text as a guide to the form of action into which we are to cast the emotions that should spring from this gaze upon the world. I will only name three points. Christ opened His mouth and spake to them, and taught them many things; Christ said to His disciples, Pray ye the Lord of the harvest; and Christ sent out His apostles to preach the Kingdom. These three things in their bearing upon us are--personal work, prayer, help to send forth Christ's messengers. There is nothing like personal work for making a man understand and feel the miseries of his fellows. Christian men and women, it is your first business everywhere to proclaim the name of Jesus Christ, and no prayers and no subscriptions absolve you from that. In this army a man cannot buy himself off and send in a substitute at the cost of an annual guinea. If Christ sent the apostles, do you hold up the hands of the apostlessuccessors, and so by God's grace you and I may help on the coming of that blessed day when there shall be one flock and one Shepherd, and when the Lamb that is in the midst of the throne--for the Shepherd is Himself a lamb--'shall feed them and lead them, and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.