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

**MATTHEW-063**. **CHRIST'S CHARGE TO HIS HERALDS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"5.* *These twelve Jesus sent forth, and commanded them, saying, do not into the way of the Gentiles, and into any city of the Samaritans enter ye not: 6. But go rather to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. 7. And as ye go, preach, saying, The kingdom of heaven is at hand. 8. Heal the sick, cleanse the lepers, raise the dead, cast out devils: freely ye have received, freely give. 9. Provide neither gold, nor silver, nor brass in your purses, 10. Nor scrip for your journey, neither two coats, neither shoes, nor yet staves: for the workman is worthy of his meat. 11. And into whatsoever city or town ye shall enter, enquire who in it is worthy: and there abide till ye go thence. 12. And when ye come into an house, salute it. 13. And if the house be worthy, let your peace come upon it: but if it be not worthy, let your peace return to you. 14. And whosoever shall not receive you, nor hear your words, when ye depart out of that house or city, shake off the dust of your feet. 15. Verily I say unto you, It shall be more tolerable for the land of Sodom and Gomorrha in the day of judgment, than for that city. 16. Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves.."*

*Matthew 10:5-16*

The letter of these instructions to the apostles has been abrogated by Christ, both in reference to the scope of, and the equipment for, their mission (Matt. xxviii. 19; Luke xxii. 36). The spirit of them remains as the perpetual obligation of all Christian workers, and every Christian should belong to that class. Some direct evangelistic work ought to be done by every believer, and in doing it he will find no better directory than this charge to the apostles.

**I. We have, first, the apostles mission in its sphere and manner (vs. 5-8).**

They are told where to go and what to do there. Mark that the negative prohibition precedes the positive injunction, as if the apostles were already so imbued with the spirit of universalism that they would probably have overpassed the bounds which for the present were needful. The restriction was transient. It continued in the line of divine limitation of the sphere of Revelation which confined itself to the Jew, in order that through him it might reach the world. That method could not be abandoned till the Jew himself had destroyed it by rejecting Christ. Jesus still clung to it. Even when the commission was widened to all the world, Paul went to the Jew first, till he too was taught by uniform failure that Israel was fixed in unbelief.

How tenderly our Lord designates the nation as the lost sheep of the house of Israel! He is still influenced by that compassion which the sight of the multitudes had moved in Him (chap. ix. 36). Lost indeed, wandering with torn fleece, and lying panting, in ignorance of their pasture and their Shepherd, they are yet sheep, and they belong to that chosen seed, sprung from so venerable ancestors, and heirs of so glorious promises. Clear sight of, and infinite pity for, men's miseries, must underlie all apostolic effort.

The work to be done is twofold--a glad truth is to be proclaimed, gracious deeds of power are to be done. How blessed must be the kingdom, the forerunners of which are miracles of healing and life-giving! If the heralds can do these, what will not the King be able to do? If such hues attend the dawn, how radiant will be the noontide! Note as ye go, indicating that they were travelling evangelists, and were to speak as they went, and go when they had spoken. The road was to be their pulpit, and each man they met their audience. What a different world it would be if Christians carried their message with them so!

Freely ye have received; namely, in the first application of the words, the message of the coming kingdom and the power to work miracles. But the force of the injunction, as applied to us, is even more soul-subduing, as our gift is greater, and the freedom of its bestowal should evoke deeper gratitude. The deepest springs of the heart's love are set flowing by the undeserved, unpurchased gift of God, which contains in itself both the most tender and mighty motive for self-forgetting labour, and the pattern for Christian service. How can one who has received that gift keep it to himself? How can he sell what he got for nothing? Freely give--the precept forbids the seeking of personal profit or advantage from preaching the gospel, and so makes a sharp test of our motives; and it also forbids clogging the gift with non-essential conditions, and so makes a sharp test of our methods.

**II. The prohibition to make gain out of the message, serves as a transition to the directions as to equipment.**

The apostles were to go as they stood; for the command is, Get you no gold, etc. It has been already noted that these prohibitions were abrogated by Jesus in view of His departure, and the world-wide mission of the Church. But the spirit of them is not abrogated. Note that the descending value of the metals named makes an ascending stringency in the prohibition. Not even copper money is to be taken. The walletwas a leather satchel or bag, used by shepherds and others to carry a little food; sustenance, then, was also to be left uncared for. Dress, too, was to be limited to that in wear; no change of inner robe nor a spare pair of shoes was to encumber them, nor even a spare staff. If any of them had one in his hand, he was to take it (Mark vi. 8). The command was meant to lift the apostles above suspicion, to make them manifestly disinterested, to free them from anxiety about earthly things, that their message might absorb their thoughts and efforts, and to give room for the display of Christ's power to provide. It had a promise wrapped in it. He who forbade them to provide for themselves thereby pledged Himself to take care of them. The labourer is worthy of his food. They may be sure of subsistence, and are not to wish for more.

All this has a distinct bearing on modern church arrangements. On the one hand, it vindicates the right of those who preach the gospel to live of the gospel, and sets any payments to them on the right footing, as not being charity or generosity, but the discharge of a debt. On the other hand, it enjoins on preachers and others who are paid for service not to serve for pay, not to be covetous of large remuneration, and to take care that no taint of greed for money shall mar their work, but that their conduct may confirm their words when they say with Paul, We seek not yours, but you.

**III. The conduct required from, and the reception met with by, the messengers come next.**

Christ first enjoins discretion and discrimination of character, so far as possible. The messenger of the kingdom is not to be mixed up with disreputable people, lest the message should suffer. The principle of his choice of a home is to be, not position, comfort, or the like, but worthiness; that is, predisposition to receive the message. However poor the chamber in the house of such, there is the apostle to settle himself. If ye have judged me to be faithful, come into my house, said Lydia. The less Christ's messengers are at home with Christ's neglecters, the calmer their own hearts, and the more potent their message. They give the lie to it, if they voluntarily choose as their associates those to whom their dearest convictions are idle. Christian charity does not blind to distinctions of character. A little common sense in reading these will save many a scandal, and much weakening of influence.

Christian earnestness does not abolish courtesy. The message is not to be blurted out in defiance of even conventional forms. Zeal for the Lord is no excuse for rude abruptness. But the salutation of the true apostle will deepen the meaning of such forms, and make the conventional the real expression of real goodwill. No man should say Peace be unto youso heartily as Christ's servant. The servant's benediction will bring the Master's ratification; for Jesus says, Let your peace come upon it, as if commanding the good which we can only wish. That will be so, if the requisite condition is fulfilled. There must be soil for the seed to root in.

But no true wish for othersgood--still more, no effort for it--is ever void of blessed issue. If the peace does not rest on a house into which jarring and sin forbid its entrance, it will not be homeless, but come back, like the dove to the ark, and fold its wings in the heart of the sender. The reflex influence of Christian effort is precious, whatever its direct results are. How the Church has been benefited by its missionary enterprises!

Jesus encouraged no illusions in His servants as to their success. From the beginning they were led to expect that some would receive and some would reject their words. In this rapid preparatory mission, there was no time for long delay anywhere; but for us, it is not wise to conclude that patient effort will fail because first appeals have not succeeded. Much close communion with Jesus, not a little self-suppression, and abundant practical wisdom, are needed to determine the point at which further efforts are vain. No doubt, there is often great waste of strength in trying to impress unimpressible people, or to revive some moribund enterprise; but it is a pardonable weakness to be reluctant to abandon a field. Still it is a weakness, and there come times when the only right thing to do is to shake off the dustof the messenger's feet in token that all connection is ended, and that he is clear from the blood of the rejecters. The awful doom of such is solemnly introduced by Verily, I say unto you. It rests on the plain principle that the measure of light is the measure of criminality, and hence the measure of punishment. The rejecters of Christ among us are as much more guilty than that cityas its inhabitants were than the men of Sodom.

The first section of this charge properly ends with verse 15, the following verse being a transition to the second part. The Greek puts strong emphasis on I. It is He who sends among wolves, therefore He will protect. A strange thing for a shepherd to do! A strange encouragement for the apostles on the threshold of their work! But the words would often come back to them when beset by the pack with their white teeth gleaming, and their howls filling the night. They are not promised that they will not be torn, but they are assured that, even if they are, the Shepherd wills it, and will not lose one of His flock.

What is the Christian defence? Prudence like the serpent's, but not the serpent's craft or malice; harmlessness like the dove's, but not without the other safeguard of wisdom. The combination is a rare one, and the surest way to possess it is to live so close to Jesus that we shall be progressively changed into His likeness. Then our prudence will never degenerate into cunning, nor our simplicity become blindness to dangers. The Christian armour and arms are meek, unconquerable patience, and Christ-likeness, To resist is to be beaten; to endure unretaliating is to be victorious. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.