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

**MATTHEW-064**. **THE WIDENED MISSION, ITS PERILS AND DEFENCES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"16.* *Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves; be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves. 17. But beware of men: for they will deliver you up to the councils, and they will scourge you in their synagogues; 18. And ye shall be brought before governors and kings for My sake, for a testimony against them and the Gentiles. 19. But when they deliver you up, take no thought how or what ye shall speak: for it shall be given you in that same hour what ye shall speak. 20. For it is not ye that speak, but the Spirit of your Father which speaketh in you. 21. And the brother shall deliver up the brother to death, and the father the child: and the children shall rise up against their parents, and cause them to be put to death. 22. And ye shall be hated of all men for My name's sake: but he that endureth to the end shall be saved. 23. But when they persecute you in this city, flee ye into another: for verily I say unto you, Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel, till the Son of Man be come. 24. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. 25. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord. If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household? 26. Fear them not therefore: for there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known. 27. What I tell you in darkness, that speak ye in light: and what ye hear in the ear, that preach ye upon the housetops. 28. And fear not them which kill the body, but are not able to kill the soul: but rather fear Him which is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. 29. Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? and one of them shall not fall on the ground without your Father. 30. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. 31. Fear ye not therefore, ye are of more value than many sparrows."*

*Matthew 10:16-31*

We have already had two instances of Matthew's way of bringing together sayings and incidents of a like kind without regard to their original connection. The Sermon on the Mount and the series of miracles in chapters viii. and ix. are groups, the elements of which are for the most part found disconnected in Mark and Luke. This charge to the twelve in chapter x. seems to present a third instance, and to pass over in verse 16 to a wider mission than that of the twelve during our Lord's lifetime, for it forebodes persecution, whereas the preceding verses opened no darker prospect than that of indifference or non-reception. The citywhich, in that stage of the gospel message, simply would not receive you nor hear your words, in this stage has worsened into one where they persecute you, and the persecutors are now kingsand Gentiles, as well as Jewish councils and synagogue-frequenters. The period covered in these verses, too, reaches to the end, the final revelation of all hidden things.

Obviously, then, our Lord is looking down a far future, and giving a charge to the dim crowd of His later disciples, whom His prescient eye saw pressing behind the twelve in days to come. He had no dreams of swift success, but realised the long, hard fight to which He was summoning His disciples. And His frankness in telling them the worst that they had to expect was as suggestive as was His freedom from the rosy, groundless visions of at once capturing a world which enthusiasts are apt to cherish, till hard experience shatters the illusions. He knew the future in store for Himself, for His Gospel, for His disciples. And He knew that dangers and death itself will not appal a soul that is touched into heroic self-forgetfulness by His love. Set down my name, says the man in Pilgrim's Progress, though he knew--may we not say, because he knew?--that the enemies were outside waiting to fall on him.

A further difference between this and the preceding section is, that there the stress was laid on the contents of the disciplesmessage, but that here it is laid on their sufferings. Not so much by what they say, as by how they endure, are they to testify. The noble army of martyrs praise Thee, and the primitive Church preached Jesus most effectually by dying for Him.

The keynote is struck in verse 16, in which are to be noted the Behold, which introduces something important and strange, and calls for close attention; the majestic I send you, which moves to obedience whatever the issues, and pledges Him to defend the poor men who are going on His errands and the pathetic picture of the little flock huddled together, while the gleaming teeth of the wolves gnash all round them. A strange theme to drape in a metaphor! but does not the very metaphor help to lighten the darkness of the picture, as well as speak of His calmness, while He contemplates it? If the Shepherd sends His sheep into the midst of wolves, surely He will come to their help, and surely any peril is more courageously faced when they can say to themselves, He put us here. The sheep has no claws to wound with nor teeth to tear with, but the defenceless Christian has a defence, and in his very weaponlessness wields the sharpest two-edged sword. Force from force must ever flow. Resistance is a mistake. The victorious antagonist of savage enmity is patient meekness. Sufferance is the badge of alltrue servants of Jesus. Wherever they have been misguided enough to depart from Christ's law of endurance and to give blow for blow, they have lost their cause in the long run, and have hurt their own Christian life more than their enemiesbodies. Guilelessness and harmlessness are their weapons. But be ye wise as serpentsis equally imperative with guileless as doves. Mark the fine sanity of that injunction, which not only permits but enjoins prudent self-preservation, so long as it does not stoop to crooked policy, and is saved from that by dove-like guilelessness. A difficult combination, but a possible one, and when realised, a beautiful one!

The following verses (17-22) expand the preceding, and mingle in a very remarkable way plain predictions of persecution to the death and encouragements to front the worst. Jewish councils and synagogues, Gentile governors and kings, will unite for once in common hatred, than which there is no stronger bond. That is a grim prospect to set before a handful of Galilean peasants, but two little words turn its terror into joy; it is for My sake, and that is enough. Jesus trusted His humble friends, as He trusts all such always, and believed that for My sakewas a talisman which would sweeten the bitterest cup and would make cowards into heroes, and send men and women to their deaths triumphant. And history has proved that He did not trust them too much. For His sake--is that a charm for us, which makes the crooked straight and the rough places plain, which nerves for suffering and impels to noble acts, which moulds life and takes the sting and the terror out of death? Nor is that the only encouragement given to the twelve, who might well be appalled at the prospect of standing before Gentile kings. Jesus seems to discern how they shrank as they listened, at the thought of having to bear testimonybefore exalted personages, and, with beautiful adaptation to their weakness, He interjects a great promise, which, for the first time, presents the divine Spirit as dwelling in the disciplesspirits. The occasion of the dawning of that great Christian thought is very noteworthy, and not less so is the designation of the Spirit as of your Father, with all the implications of paternal care and love which that name carries. Special crises bring special helps, and the martyrologies of all ages and lands, from Stephen outside the city wall to the last Chinese woman, have attested the faithfulness of the Promiser. How often have some calm, simple words from some slave girl in Roman cities, or some ignorant confessor before Inquisitors, been manifestly touched with heavenly light and power, and silenced sophistries and threats!

The solemn foretelling of persecution, broken for a moment, goes on and becomes even more foreboding, for it speaks of dearest ones turned to foes, and the sweet sanctities of family ties dissolved by the solvent of the new Faith. There is no enemy like a brother estranged, and it is tragically significant that it is in connection with the rupture of family bonds that death is first mentioned as the price that Christ's messengers would have to pay for faithfulness to their message. But the prediction springs at a bound, as it were, from the narrow circle of home to the widest range, and does not fear to spread before the eyes of the twelve that they will become the objects of hatred to the whole human race if they are true to Christ's charge. The picture is dark enough, and it has turned out to be a true forecast of facts. It suggests two questions. What right had Jesus to send men out on such an errand, and to bid them gladly die for Him? And what made these men gladly take up the burden which He laid on them? He has the right to dispose of us, because He is the Son of God who has died for us. Otherwise He is not entitled to say to us, Do my bidding, even if it leads you to death. His servants find their inspiration to absolute, unconditional self-surrender in the Love that has died for them. That which gives Him His right to dispose of us in life and death gives us the disposition to yield ourselves wholly to Him, to be His apostles according to our opportunities, and to say, Whether I live or die, I am the Lord's.

That thought of world-wide hatred is soothed by the recurrence of the talisman, For My name's sake, and by a moment's showing of a fair prospect behind the gloom streaked with lightning in the foreground. He that endureth to the end shall be saved. The same saying occurs in chapter 24:13, in connection with the prediction of the fall of Jerusalem, and in the same connection in Mark 13:13, in both of which places several other sayings which appear in this charge to the apostles are found. It is impossible to settle which is the original place for these, or whether they were twice spoken. The latter supposition is very unfashionable at present, but has perhaps more to say for itself than modern critics are willing to allow. But Luke (21:19) has a remarkable variation of the saying, for his version of it is, In your patience, ye shall win your souls. His word patienceis a noun cognate with the verb rendered in Matthew and Mark endureth, and to win one's soulis obviously synonymous with being saved. The saying cannot be limited, in any of its forms, to a mere securing of earthly life, for in this context it plainly includes those who have been delivered to death by parents and brethren, but who by death have won their lives, and have been, as Paul expected to be, thereby 'saved into His heavenly kingdom. To the Christian, death is the usher who introduces him into the presence-chamber of the King, and he that loseth his life for My name's sake, finds it glorified in, and into, life eternal.

But willingness to endure the utmost is to be accompanied with willingness to take all worthy means to escape it. There has been a certain unwholesome craving for martyrdom generated in times of persecution, which may appear noble but is very wasteful. The worst use that you can put a man to is to burn him, and a living witness may do more for Christ than a dead martyr. Christian heroism may be shown in not being afraid to flee quite as much as in courting, or passively awaiting, danger. And Christ's Name will be spread when His lovers are hounded from one city to another, just as it was when they that were scattered abroad, went everywhere, preaching the word. When the brands are kicked apart by the heel of violence, they kindle flames where they fall.

But the reason for this command to flee is perplexing. Ye shall not have gone over the cities of Israel till the Son of Man be come. Is Jesus here reverting to the narrower immediate mission of the apostles? What comingis referred to? We have seen that the first mission of the twelve was the theme of verses 5-15, and was there pursued to its ultimate consequences of final judgment on rejecters, whilst the wider horizon of a future mission opens out from verse 16 onwards. A renewed contraction of the horizon is extremely unlikely. It would be as if a flower should shut and be a bud again. The recurrence in verse 23 of Verily I say unto you, which has already occurred in verse 15, closing the first section of the charge, makes it probable that here too a section is completed, and that probability is strengthened if it is observed that the same phrase occurs, for a third time, in the last verse of the chapter, where again the discourse soars to the height of contemplating the final reward. The fact that the apostles met with no persecution on their first mission, puts out of court the explanation of the words that refers them to that mission, and takes the comingto be Jesusown appearances in the places they had preceded Him as His heralds. The difficult question as to what is the terminus ad quem pointed to here seems best solved by taking the coming of the Son of Manto be His judicial manifestation in the destruction of Jerusalem and the consequent desolation of many of the cities of Israel, whilst at the same time, the nearer and smaller catastrophe is a prophecy and symbol of the remoter and greater day of the Son of Manat the end of the days. The recognition of that aspect of the fall of Jerusalem is forced on us by the eschatological parts of the Gospels, which are a bewildering whirl without it. Here, however, it is the crash of the fall itself which is in view, and the thought conveyed is that there would be cities enough to serve for refuges, and scope enough for evangelistic work, till the end of the Jewish possession of the land.

In verses 26-31, fear notis thrice spoken, and at each occurrence is enforced by a reason. The first of these encouragements is the assurance of the certain ultimate world-wide manifestation of hidden things. That same dictum occurs in other connections, and with other applications, but in the present context can only be taken as an assurance that the Gospel message, little known as it thus far was, was destined to fill all ears. Therefore the disciples were to be fearless in doing their part in making it known, and so working in alliance with the divine purpose. It is the same thing that is meant by the coveredthat shall be revealed, the hiddenthat shall be known, that which is spoken in darkness, and that which is whispered in the ear; and all four designations refer to the word which every Christian has it in charge to sound out. We note that Jesus foresees a far wider range of publicity for His servantsministry than for His own, just as He afterwards declared that they would do greater worksthan His. He spoke to a handful of men in an obscure corner of the world. His teaching was necessarily largely confidential communication to the fit few. But the spark is going to be a blaze, and the whisper to become a shout that fills the world. Surely, then, we who are working in the line of direction of God's working should let no fear make us dumb, but should ever hear and obey the command: Lift up thy voice with strength, lift it up, be not afraid.

A second reason for fearlessness is the limitation of the enemy's power to hurt, reinforced by the thought that, while the penalties that man can inflict for faithfulness are only corporeal, transitory, and incapable of harming the true self, the consequences of unfaithfulness fling the whole man, body and soul, down to utter ruin. There is a fear that makes cowards and apostates; there is a fear which makes heroes and apostles. He who fears God, with the awe that has no torment and is own sister to love, is afraid of nothing and of no man. That holy and blessed fear drives out all other, as fire draws the heat out of a burn. He that serves Christ is lord of the world; he that fears God fronts the world, and is not afraid.

The last reason for fearlessness touches a tender chord, and discloses a gracious thought of God as Father, which softens the tremendous preceding word: Who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell. Take both designations together, and let them work together in producing the awe which makes us brave, and the filial trust which makes us braver. A bird does not fall to the groundunless wounded, and if it falls it dies. Jesus had looked pityingly on the great mystery, the woes of the creatures, and had stayed Himself on the thought of the all-embracing working of God. The very dying sparrow, with broken wing, had its place in that universal care. God is immanentin nature. The antithesis often drawn between His universal care and His special providenceis misleading. Providence is special because it is universal. That which embraces everything must embrace each thing. But the immanent God is your Father, and because of that sonship, ye are of more value than many sparrows. There is an ascending order, and an increasing closeness and tenderness of relation. A man is better than a sheep, and Christians, being God's children, may count on getting closer into the Father's heart than the poor crippled bird can, or than the godless man can. Your Father, on the one hand, can destroy soul and body, therefore fear Him; but, on the other, He determines whether you shall fall to the groundor soar above dangers, therefore fear none but Him.