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

**MATTHEW-065**. **LIKE TEACHER, LIKE SCHOLAR by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"25. The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. 26. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord."*

*Matthew 10:25-26*

These words were often on Christ's lips. Like other teachers, He too had His favourite sayings, the light of which He was wont to flash into many dark places. Such a saying, for instance, was, To him that hath shall be given. Such a saying is this of my text; and probably several other of our Lord's utterances, which are repeated more than once in different Gospels, and have too hastily been sometimes assumed to have been introduced erroneously by the evangelists, in varying connections.

This half-proverb occurs four times in the Gospels, and in three very different connections, pointing to three different subjects. Here, and once in John's Gospel, in the fifteenth chapter, it is employed to enforce the lesson of the oneness of Christ and His disciples in their relation to the world; and that His servants cannot expect to be better off than the Master was. If they have called Me Beelzebub they will not call you anything else.

Then in Luke's Gospel (6:40) it is employed to illustrate the principle that the scholar cannot expect to be wiser than his master; that a blind teacher will have blind pupils, and that they will both fall into the ditch. Of course, the scholar may get beyond his master, but then he will get up and go away from the school, and will not be his scholar any longer. As long as he is a scholar, the best that can happen to him, and that will not often happen, is to be on the level of his teacher.

Then in another place in John's Gospel (13:16) the saying is employed in reference to a different subject, viz. to teach the meaning of the pathetic, symbolical foot-washing, and to enforce the exhortation to imitate Jesus Christ, as generally in conduct, so specially in His wondrous humility. The servant is not greater than his lord. I have left you an example that ye should do as I have done to you.

So if we put these three instances together we get a threefold illustration of the relation between the disciple and the teacher, in respect to wisdom, conduct, and reception by the world. And these three, with their bearing on the relation between Christians and Jesus Christ, open out large fields of duty and of privilege. The very centre of Christianity is discipleship, and the very highest hope, as well as the most imperative command which the Gospel brings to men is, Be like Him whom you profess to have taken as your Master. Be like Him here, and you shall be like Him hereafter.

**I. Likeness to the teacher in wisdom is the disciple's perfection.**

If the blind lead the blind both shall fall into the ditch. The disciple is not greater than his master. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master. If that be a true principle, that the best that can happen to the scholar is to tread in his teacher's footsteps, to see with his eyes, to absorb his wisdom, to learn his truth, we may apply it in two opposite directions. First, it teaches us the limitations, and the misery, and the folly of taking men for our masters; and then, on the other hand, it teaches us the large hope, the blessing, freedom, and joy of having Christ for our Master.

Now, first, look at the principle as bearing upon the relation of disciple and human teacher. All such teachers have their limitations. Each man has his little circle of favourite ideas that he is perpetually reiterating. In fact, it seems as if one truth was about as much as one teacher could manage, and as if, whensoever God had any great truth to give to the world, He had to take one man and make him its sole apostle. So that teachers become mere fragments, and to listen to them is to dwarf and narrow oneself.

The chances are that no scholar shall be on his master's level. The eyes that see truth directly and for themselves in this world are very few. Most men have to take truth at second-hand, and few indeed are they who, like a perfect medium, receive even the fragmentary truth that human lips can impart to them, and transmit it as pure as they receive it. Disciples present exaggerations, caricatures, misconceptions, the limitations of the master becoming even more rigid in the pupil. Schools spring up which push the founder's teaching to extremes, and draw conclusions from it which he never dreamed of. Instead of a fresh voice, we have echoes, which, like all echoes, give only a syllable or two out of a sentence. Teachers can tell what they see, but they cannot give their followers eyes, and so the followers can do little more than repeat what their leader said he saw. They are like the little suckers that spring up from the stoolof a cut-down tree, or like the kinglets among whose feebler hands the great empire of an Alexander was divided at his death.

It is a dwarfing thing to call any man master upon earth. And yet men will give to a man the credence which they refuse to Christ. The followers of some of the fashionable teachers of to-day--Comte, Spencer, or others--protest, in the name of mental independence, against accepting Christ as the absolute teacher of morals and religion, and then go away and put a man in the very place which they have denied to Him, and swallow down his dicta whole.

Such facts show how heart and mind crave a teacher; how discipleship is ingrained in our nature; how we all long for some one who shall come to us authoritatively and say, Here is truth--believe it and live on it. And yet it is fatal to pin one's faith on any, and it is miserable to have to change guides perpetually and to feel that we have outgrown those whom we reverence, and that we can look down on the height which once seemed to touch the stars--and, if we cut ourselves loose from all men's teaching, the isolation is dreary, and few of us are strong enough of arm, or clear enough of eye, to force or find the path through the tangled jungles of error.

So take this thought, that the highest hope of a disciple is to be like the master in wisdom, in its bearing on the relation between us and Christ, and look how it then flashes up into blessedness and beauty.

Such a teacher as we have in Him has no limitations, and it is safe to follow Him absolutely and Him alone. All others have plainly borne the impress of their age, or their nation, or their idiosyncrasy, in some way or another; Christ Jesus is the only teacher that the world has ever heard of, in whose teaching there is no mark of the age or generation or set of circumstances in which it originated. This water does not taste of any soil through which it has passed, it has come straight down from Heaven, and is pure and uncontaminated as the Heaven from which it has come. This teacher is safe to listen to absolutely: there are no limitations there; you never hear Him arguing; there is no sign about His words as if He had ever dug out for Himself the wisdom that He is proclaiming, or had ever seen it less distinctly than He sees it at the moment. The great peculiarity of His teaching is that He does not reason, but declares that His Verily! Verily!is the confirmation of all His message. His teaching is Himself; other men bring lessons about truth; He says, I am the Truth. Other teachers keep their personality in the background; He clashes His down in the foreground. Other men say, Listen to what I tell you, never mind about me. He says, This is life eternal, that ye should believe on Me. This Teacher has His message level to all minds, high and low, wise and foolish, cultivated and rude. This Teacher does not only impart wisdom by words as from without, though He does that too, but He comes into men's spirits, and communicates Himself, and so makes them wise. Other teachers fumble at the outside, but in the hidden parts He makes me to know wisdom. So it is safe to take this Teacher absolutely, and to say, Thou art my Master, Thy word is truth, and the opening of Thy lips to me is wisdom.

In following Christ as our absolute Teacher, there is no sacrifice of independence or freedom of mind, but listening to Him is the way to secure these in their highest degree. We are set free from men, we are growingly delivered from errors and misconceptions, in the measure in which we keep close to Christ as our Master. The Lord is that Teacher, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there, and there only, is liberty; freedom from self, from the dominion of popular opinion, from the coterie-speech of schools, from the imposing authority of individuals, and from all that makes cowardly men say as other people say, and fall in with the majority; and freedom from our own prejudices and our own errors, which are cleared away when we take Christ for our Master and cleave to Him.

His teaching can never cease until it has accomplished its purpose, and not until we have gathered into our consciousness all the truth that He has to give, and have received all the wisdom that He can impart unto us as to God and Himself, does His teaching cease. Here we may grow indefinitely in the knowledge of Christ, and in the future we shall know even as we are known. His merciful teaching will not come to a close till we have drunk in all His wisdom, and till He has declared to us all which He has heard of the Father. He will pass us from one form to another of His school, but in Heaven we shall still be His scholars; Every one shall sit at Thy feet, every one shall receive of Thy words.

So, then, let us turn away from men, from rabbis and Sanhedrins, from authorities and schools, from doctors and churches. Why resort to cisterns when we may draw from the spring? Why listen to men when we may hear Christ? He is, as Dante called the great Greek thinker, the Master of those who know. Why should we look to the planets when we can see the sun? Call no man master upon earth, for One is your Master, and all ye are brethren. And His merciful teaching will never cease until everyone that is perfected shall be as his Master.

**II. Now, turn to the second application of this principle. Likeness to the Master in life is the law of a disciple's conduct.**

That pathetic and wonderful story about the foot-washing in John's Gospel is meant for a symbol. It is the presenting, in a picturesque form, of the very heart and essence of Christ's Incarnation in its motive and purpose. The solemn prelude with which the evangelist introduces it lays bare our Lord's heart and His reason for His action. Having loved His own, which were in the world, He loved them to the end. His motive, then, was love. Again, the exalted consciousness which accompanied His self-abasement is made prominent in the words, Knowing that the Father had given all things into His hand, and that He was come from God and went to God. And the majestic deliberation and patient continuance in resolved humility with which He goes down the successive steps of the descent, are wonderfully given in the evangelist's record of how He riseth from supper, and laid aside His garments and girded Himself, and poured water into the basin. It is a parable. Thus, in the consciousness of His divine authority and dignity, and moved by His love to the whole world, He laid aside the garments of His glory, and vested Himself with the towel of His humanity, the servant's garb, and took the water of His cleansing power, and came to wash the feet of all who will let Him cleanse them from their soil. And then, having reassumed His garments, He speaks from His throne to those who have been cleansed by His humiliation and His sacrifice, Know ye what I have done to you? The servant is not greater than his lord.

That is to say, dear brethren, in this one incident, which is the condensation, so to speak, of the whole spirit of His life, is the law for our lives as well. We, too, are bound to that same love as the main motive of all our actions; we, too, are bound to that same stripping off of dignity and lowly equalising of ourselves with those below us whom we would help, and we, too, are bound to make it our main object, in our intercourse with men, not merely that we should please nor enlighten them, nor succour their lower temporal needs, but that we should cleanse them and make them pure with the purity that Christ gives.

A Christian life all moved and animated by self-denuding love, and which came amongst men to make them better and purer, and all the influence of which tended in the direction of helping poor foul hearts to get rid of their filth, how different it would be from our lives! What a grim contrast much of our lives is to the Master's example and command! Did you ever strip yourself of anything, my brother, in order to make some poor, wretched creature a little purer and liker the Saviour? Did you ever drop your dignity and go down to the low levels in order to lift up the people that were there? Do men see anything of that example, as reproduced in your lives, of the Master that lays aside the garments of Heaven for the vesture of earth, and dies upon the Cross in order that He might make our poor hearts purer and liker His own?

But, hard as such imitation is, it is only one case of a general principle. Discipleship is likeness to Jesus Christ in conduct. There is no discipleship worth naming which does not, at least, attempt that likeness. What is the use of a man saying that he is the disciple of Incarnate Love if his whole life is incarnate selfishness? What is the use of your calling yourselves Christians, and saying that you are followers of Jesus Christ, when He came to do God's will and delighted in it, and you come to do your own, and never do God's will at all, or scarcely at all, and then reluctantly and with many a murmur? What kind of a disciple is he, the habitual tenor of whose life contradicts the life of his Master and disobeys His commandments? And I am bound to say that that is the life of an enormously large proportion of the professing disciples in this age of conventional Christianity.

The disciple shall be as his master. Do you make it your effort to be like Him? If so, then the saying is not only a law, but a promise, for it assures us that our effort shall not fail but progressively succeed, and lead on at last to our becoming what we behold, and being conformed to Him whom we love, and like the Master to whose wisdom we profess to listen. They whose earthly life is a following of Christ, with faltering steps and afar off, shall have for their heavenly blessedness, that they shall follow the Lamb whithersoever He goeth.

**III. And now, lastly, likeness to the Master in relation to the world is the fate that the disciple must put up with.**

If they have called the master of the house Beelzebub, how much more shall they call them of his household?The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. Our Lord reiterated the statement in another place in John's Gospel, reminding them that He had said it before.

If we are like Jesus Christ in conduct, and if we have received His Word as the truth upon which we repose, depend upon it, in our measure and in varying fashions, we shall have to bear the same kind of treatment that He received from the world. The days of so-called persecution are over in so-called Christian countries, but if you are a disciple in the sense of believing all that Jesus Christ says, and taking Him for your Teacher, the public opinion of this day will have a great many things to say about you that will not be very pleasant. You will be considered to be old-fashioned, narrow, behind the times, etc. etc. etc. Look at the bitter spirit of antagonism to an earnest and simple Christianity and adoption of Christ as our authoritative Teacher which goes through much of our high-class literature to-day. It is a very small matter as measured with what Christian men used to have to bear; but it indicates the set of things. We may make up our minds that if we are not contented with the pared-down Christianity which the world allows to pass at present, but insist upon coming to the New Testament for our beliefs and practices, and avow--I believe all that Jesus Christ says, and I believe it because He says it, and I take Him as my model; we shall find out that the disciple has to be as his Master, and that the Pharisees and the Scribes of to-day stand in the same relation to the followers as their predecessors did to the Leader. If you are like your Master in conduct, you will be no more popular with the world than He was. As long as Christianity will be quiet, and let the world go its own gait, the world is very well contented to let it alone, or even to say polite things to it. Why should the world take the trouble of persecuting the kind of Christianity that so many of us display? What is the difference between our Christianity and their worldliness? The world is quite willing to come to church on Sundays, and to call itself a Christian world, if only it may live as it likes. And many professing Christians have precisely the same idea. They attend to the externals of Christianity, and call themselves Christians, but they bargain for its having very little power over their lives. Why, then, should two sets of people who have the same ideas and practices dislike each other? No reason at all! But let Christian men live up to their profession, and above all let them become aggressive, and try to attack the world's evil, as they are bound to do; let them fight drunkenness, let them go against the lust of great cities, let them preach peace in the face of a nation howling for war, let them apply the golden rules of Christianity to commerce and social relationships and the like, and you will very soon hear a pretty shout that will tell you that the disciple who is a disciple has to share the fate of the Master, notwithstanding nineteen centuries of Christian teaching.

If you do not know what it is to find yourselves out of harmony with the world, I am afraid it is because you have less of the Master's spirit than you have of the world's. The world loves its own. If you are not of the world, the world will hate you. If it does not, it must be because, in spite of your name, you belong to it.

But if we are like Him in our relation to the world, because we are like Him in character, our very share in His reproach, and our sense of being alienshere, bear the promise that we shall be like Him in all worlds. His fortune is ours. The disciple shall be as his master. If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him. No cross, no crown;--if cross, then crown! The end of discipleship is not reached until the Master's image and the Master's lot are repeated in the scholar.

Take Christ for your sacrifice, trust to His blood, listen to His teaching, walk in His footsteps, and you shall share His sovereignty and sit on His throne. It is enough,--ay! more than enough, and nothing less than that is enough,--for the disciple that he be as--and with--his master. I shall be satisfied when I awake in Thy likeness.