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

**MATTHEW-066**. **THE KING'S CHARGE TO HIS AMBASSADORS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"32.* *Whosoever therefore shall confess Me before men, him will I confess also before My Father which is in heaven. 33. But whosoever shall deny Me before men, him will I also deny before My Father which is in heaven. 34. Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword. 35. For I am come to set a man at variance against his father, and the daughter against her mother, and the daughter in law against her mother in law. 36. And man's foes shall be they of his own household. 37. He that loveth father or mother more than Me is not worthy of Me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than Me is not worthy of Me. 38. And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after Me, is not worthy of Me. 39. He that findeth his life shall lose it: and he that loseth his life for My sake shall find it 40. He that receiveth you receiveth Me, and he that receiveth Me receiveth Him that sent Me. 41. He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward; and he that receiveth a righteous man in the name of a righteous man shall receive a righteous man's reward. 42. And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only in the name of a disciple, verily I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."*

*Matthew 10:32-42*

The first mission of the apostles, important as it was, was but a short flight to try the young birdswings. The larger portion of this charge to them passes far beyond the immediate occasion, and deals with the permanent relations of Christ's servants to the world in which they live, for the purpose of bringing it into subjection to its true King. These solemn closing words, which make our present subject, contain the duty and blessedness of confessing Him, the vision of the antagonisms which He excites, His demand for all-surrendering following, and the rewards of those who receive Christ's messengers, and therein receive Himself and His Father.

**I. The duty and blessedness of confessing Him (vs. 32, 33).**

The thereforeis significant. It attaches the promise which follows to the immediately preceding thoughts of a watchful, fatherly care, extending like a great invisible hand over the true disciple. Because each is thus guarded, each shall be preserved to receive the honour of being confessed by Christ. No matter what may befall His witnesses, the extremest disaster shall not rob them of their reward. They may be flung down from the house-tops where they lift up their bold voices, but He who does not let a sparrow fall to the ground uncared for, will give His angels charge concerning them who are so much more precious, and they shall be borne up on outstretched wings, lest they be dashed on the pavement below. Thus preserved, they shall all attain at last to their guerdon. Nothing can come between Christ's servant and his crown. The tender providence of the Father, whose mercy is over all His works, makes sure of that. The river of the confessor's life may plunge underground, and be lost amid persecutions, but it will emerge again into the brighter sunshine on the other side of the mountains.

The confession which is to be thus rewarded, like the denial opposed to it, is, of course, not merely a single utterance of the lip. So far Judas Iscariot confessed Christ, and Peter denied Him. But it is the habitual acknowledgment by lip and life, unwithdrawn to the end. The context implies that the confession is maintained in the face of opposition, and that the denial is a cowardly attempt to save one's skin at the cost of treason to Jesus. The temptation does not come in that sharpest form to us. Perhaps some cowards would be made brave if it did. It is perhaps easier to face the gibbet and the fire, and screw oneself up for once to a brief endurance, than to resist the more specious blandishments of the world, especially when it has been christened, and calls itself religious. The light laugh of scorn, the silent pressure of the low average of Christian character, the close associations in trade, literature, public and domestic life which Christians have with non-Christians, make many a man's tongue lie silent, to the sore detriment of his own religious life. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, and find it hard to fulfil the easier conflict to which you are called. The sun has more power than the tempest to make the pilgrim drop his garment. But the duty remains the same for all ages. Every man is bound to make the deepest springs of his life visible, and to stand to his convictions, whatever they be. If he do not, his convictions will disappear like a piece of ice hid in a hot hand, which will melt and trickle away. This obligation lies with infinitely increased weight on Christ's servants; and the consequences of failing to discharge it are more tragic in their cases, in the exact proportion of the greater preciousness of their faith. Corn hoarded is sure to be spoiled by weevils and rust. The bread of life hidden in our sacks will certainly go mouldy.

The reward and punishment of confession and denial come to them not as separate acts, but as each being the revelation of the spiritual condition of the doers. Christ implies that a true disciple cannot but be a confessor, and that therefore the denier must certainly be one whom He has never known. Because, therefore, each act is symptomatic of the doer, each receives the congruous and correspondent reward. The confessor is confessed; the denier is denied. What calm and assured consciousness of His place as Judge underlies these words! His recognition is God's acceptance; His denial is darkness and misery. The correspondence between the work and the reward is beautifully brought out by the use of the same word to express each. And yet what a difference between our confession of Him and His of us! And what a hope is here for all who have tremblingly, and in the consciousness of much unworthiness, ventured to say that they were Christ's subjects, and He their King, brother, and all! Their poor, feeble confession will be endorsed by His. He will say, Yes, this man is mine, and I am his. That will be glory, honour, blessedness, life, heaven.

**II. The vision of the discord which follows the coming of the King of peace.**

It is not enough to interpret these words as meaning that our Lord's purpose indeed was to bring peace, but that the result of His coming was strife. The ultimate purpose is peace; but an immediate purpose is conflict, as the only road to the peace. He is first King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace. But, if His kingdom be righteousness, purity, love, then unrighteousness, filthiness, and selfishness will fight against it for their lives. The ultimate purpose of Christ's coming is to transform the world into the likeness of heaven; and all in the world which hates such likeness is embattled against Him. He saw realities, and knew men's hearts, and was under no illusion, such as many an ardent reformer has cherished, that the fair form of truth need only be shown to men, and they will take her to their hearts. Incessant struggle is the law for the individual and for society till Christ's purpose for both is realised.

That conflict ranges the dearest in opposite ranks. The gospel is the great solvent. As when a substance is brought into contact with some chemical compound, which has greater affinity for one of its elements than the other element has, the old combination is dissolved, and a new and more stable one is formed, so Christianity analyses and destroys in order to synthesis and construction. In verse 21 our Lord had foretold that brother should deliver up brother to death. Here the severance is considered from the opposite side. The persons who are set at variancewith their kindred are here Christians. Perhaps it is fanciful to observe that they are all junior members of families, as if the young would be more likely to flock to the new light. But however that may be, the separation is mutual, but the hate is all on one side. The man's foesare of his own household; but he is not their foe, though he be parted from them.

**III. Earthly love may be a worse foe to a true Christian than even the enmity of the dearest; and that enmity may often be excited by the Christian subordination of earthly to heavenly love.**

So our Lord passes from the warnings of discord and hate to the danger of the opposite--undue love.

He claims absolute supremacy in our hearts. He goes still farther, and claims the surrender, not only of affections, but of self and life to Him. What a strange claim this is! A Jewish peasant, dead nineteen hundred years since, fronts the whole race of man, and asserts His right to their love, which is strange, and to their supreme love, which is stranger still. Why should we love Him at all, if He were only a man, however pure and benevolent? We may admire, as we do many another fair nature in the past; but is there any possibility of evoking anything as warm as love to an unseen person, who can have had no knowledge of or love to us? And why should we love Him more than our dearest, from whom we have drawn, or to whom we have given, life? What explanation or justification does He give of this unexampled demand? Absolutely none. He seems to think that its reasonableness needs no elucidation. Surely never did teacher professing wisdom, modesty, and, still more, religion, put forward such a claim of right; and surely never besides did any succeed in persuading generations unborn to yield His demand, when they heard it. The strangest thing in the world's history is that to-day there are millions who do love Jesus Christ more than all besides, and whose chief self-accusation is that they do not love Him more. The strange, audacious claim is most reasonable, if we believe that Jesus is the Son of God, who died for each of us, and that each man and woman to the last of the generations had a separate place in His divine human love when He died. It is meet to love Him, if that be true; it is not, unless it be. The requirement is as stringent as strange. If the two ever seem to conflict, the earthly must give way. If the earthly be withdrawn, there must be found sufficiency for comfort and peace in the heavenly. The lower must not be permitted to hinder the flight of the heavenly to its home. More than Meis a rebuke to most of us. What a contrast between the warmth of our earthly and the tepidity or coldness of our heavenly love! How spontaneously our thoughts, when left free, turn to the one; how hard we find it to keep them fixed on the other! How sweet service is to the dear ones here; how reluctantly it is given to Christ! How we long, when parted, to rejoin them; how little we are drawn to the place where He is! We have all to confess that we are not worthy ofHim; that we requite His love with inadequate returns, and live lives which tax His love for its highest exercise, the free forgiveness of sins against itself. Compliance with that stringent law, and subordinating all earthly love to His, is the true elevating and ennobling of the earthly. It is promoted, not degraded, when it is made second, and is infinitely sweeter and deeper then than when it was set in the place of supremacy, where it had no right to be.

But Christ's demand is not only for the surrender of the heart, but for the giving up of self, and, in a very profound sense, for the surrender of life. How enigmatical that saying about taking up the cross must have sounded to the disciples! They knew little about the cross, as a punishment; they had not yet associated it in any way with their Lord. This seems to have been the first occasion of His mentioning it, and the allusion is so veiled as to be but partially intelligible. But what was intelligible was bewildering. A strange royal procession that, of the King with a cross on His shoulder, and all His subjects behind Him with similar burdens! Through the ages that procession has marched, and it marches still. Self-denial for Christ's sake is the badge of all our tribe. Observe that word take. The cross must be willingly and by ourselves assumed. No other can lay it on our shoulders. Observe that other word his. Each man has his own special form in which self-denial is needful for him. We require pure eyes, and hearts kept in very close communion with Jesus, to ascertain what our particular cross is. He has them of many patterns, shapes, sizes, and materials. We can always make sure of strength to carry the one which He means us to carry, but not of strength to bear what is not ours.

**IV. We have the rewards of those who receive Christ's messengers, and therein receive Him and His Father.**

Our Lord first identifies these twelve with Himself in a manner which must have sounded strange to them then, but have heartened them for their work by the consciousness of His mysterious oneness with them. The whole doctrine of Christ's unity with His people lay in germ in these words, though much more was needed, both of teaching and of experience, before their depth of blessing and strengthening could be apprehended. We know that He dwells in His true subjects by His Spirit, and that a most real union subsists between the head and the members, of which the closest unions of earth are but faint shadows, so as that not only those who receive His followers receive Him, but, more wonderful still, His followers are received at the last by God Himself as joined to Him, and portions of His very self, and therefore accepted in the Beloved. Our Lord adds to these words the thought that, in like manner, to receive Him is to receive the Father, and so implies that our relation to Him is in certain real respects parallel with His relation to the Father. We too are sent. He who sends abides with us, as the Son ever abode in God, and God in Him. We are sent to be the brightness of Christ's glory, and to manifest Him to men, as He was sent to reveal the Father.