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

**MATTHEW-067**. **A LIFE LOST AND FOUND by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it."*

*Matthew 10:39*

My heart impels me to break this morning my usual rule of avoiding personal references in the pulpit. Death has been busy in our own congregation this last week, and yesterday we laid in the grave all that was mortal of a man to whom Manchester owes more than it knows. Mr. Crossley has been for thirty years my close and dear friend. He was long a member of this church and congregation. I need not speak of his utter unselfishness, of his lifelong consecration, of his lavish generosity, of his unstinted work for God and man; but thinking of him and of it, I have felt as if the words of my text were the secret of his life, and as if he now understood the fulness of the promise they contain: He that loseth his life for My sake shall find it. Now, looking at these words in the light of the example so tenderly beloved by some of us, so sharply criticised by many, but now so fully recognised as saintly by all, I ask you to consider--

**I. The stringent requirement for the Christian life that is here made.**

Now we shall very much impoverish the meaning and narrow the sweep of these great and penetrating words, if we understand by losing one's lifeonly the actual surrender of physical existence. It is not only the martyr on whose bleeding brows the crown of life is gently placed; it is not only the temples that have been torn by the crown of thorns, that are soothed by that unfading wreath; but there is a daily dying, which is continually required from all Christian people, and is, perhaps, as hard as, or harder than, the brief and bloody passage of martyrdom by which some enter into rest. For the true losing of life is the slaying of self, and that has to be done day by day, and not once for all, in some supreme act of surrender at the end, or in some initial act of submission and yielding at the beginning, of the Christian life. We ourselves have to take the knife into our own hands and strike, and that not once, but ever, right on through our whole career. For, by natural disposition, we are all inclined to make our own selves to be our own centres, our own aims, the objects of our trust, our own law; and if we do so, we are dead whilst we live, and the death that brings life is when, day by day, we crucify the old man with his affections and lusts. Crucifixion was no sudden death; it was an exquisitely painful one, which made every nerve quiver and the whole frame thrill with anguish; and that slow agony, in all its terribleness and protractedness, is the image that is set before us as the true ideal of every life that would not be a living death. The world is to be crucified to me, and I to the world.

We have our centre in ourselves, and we need the centre to be shifted, or we live in sin. If I might venture upon so violent an image, the comets that career about the heavens need to be caught and tamed, and bound to peaceful revolution round some central sun, or else they are wandering stars to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever. So, brethren, the slaying of self by a painful, protracted process, is the requirement of Christ.

But do not let us confine ourselves to generalities. What is meant? This is meant--the absolute submission of the will to commandments and providences, the making of that obstinate part of our nature meek and obedient and plastic as the clay in the potter's hands. The tanner takes a stiff hide, and soaks it in bitter waters, and dresses it with sharp tools, and lubricates it with unguents, and his work is not done till all the stiffness is out of it and it is flexible. And we do not lose our lives in the lofty, noble sense, until we can say--and verify the speech by our actions--Not my will but Thine be done. They who thus submit, they who thus welcome into their hearts, and enthrone upon the sovereign seat in their wills, Christ and His will--these are they who have lost their lives. When we can say, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, then, and only then, have we in the deepest sense of the words lost our lives.

The phrase means the suppression, and sometimes the excision, of appetites, passions, desires, inclinations. It means the hallowing of all aims; it means the devotion and the consecration of all activities. It means the surrender and the stewardship of all possessions. And only then, when we have done these things, shall we have come to practical obedience to the initial requirement that Christ makes from us all--to lose our lives for His sake.

I need not diverge here to point to that life from which my thoughts have taken their start in this sermon. Surely if there was any one characteristic in it more distinct and lovely than another, it was that self was dead and that Christ lived. There may be sometimes a call for the actual--which is the lesser--surrender of the bodily life, in obedience to the call of duty. There have been Christian men who have wrought themselves to death in the Master's service. Perhaps he of whom I have been speaking was one of these. It may be that, if he had done like so many of our wealthy men--had flung himself into business and then collapsed into repose--he would have been here to-day. Perhaps it would have been better if there had been a less entire throwing of himself into arduous and clamant duties. I am not going to enter on the ethics of that question. I do not think there are many of this generation of Christians who are likely to work themselves to death in Christ's cause; and perhaps, after all, the old saying is a true one, Better to wear out than to rust out. But only this I will say: we honour the martyrs of Science, of Commerce, of Empire, why should not we honour the martyrs of Faith? And why should they be branded as imprudent enthusiasts, if they make the same sacrifice which, when an explorer or a soldier makes, his memory is honoured as heroic, and his cold brows are crowned with laurels? Surely it is as wise to die for Christ as for England. But be that as it may; the requirement, the stringent requirement, of my text is not addressed to any spiritual aristocracy, but is laid upon the consciences of all professing Christians.

**II. Observe the grounds of this requirement.**

Did you ever think--or has the fact become so familiar to you that it ceases to attract notice?--did you ever think what an extraordinary position it is for the son of a carpenter in Nazareth to plant Himself before the human race and say, You will be wise if you die for My sake, and you will be doing nothing more than your plain duty? What business has He to assume such a position as that? What warrants that autocratic and all-demanding tone from His lips? Who art Thou--we may fancy people saying--that Thou shouldst put out a masterful hand and claim to take as Thine the life of my heart?Ah! brethren, there is but one answer: Who loved me, and gave Himself for me. The foolish, loving, impulsive apostle that blurted out, before his time had come, I will lay down my life for Thy sake, was only premature; he was not mistaken. There needed that His Lord should lay down His life for Peter's sake; and then He had a right to turn to the apostle and say, Thou shalt follow Me afterwards, and lay down thy life for My sake. The ground of Christ's unique claim is Christ's solitary sacrifice. He who has died for men, and He only, has the right to require the unconditional, the absolute surrender of themselves, not only in the sacrifice of a life that is submitted, but, if circumstances demand, in the sacrifice of a death. The ground of the requirement is laid, first in the fact of our Lord's divine nature, and second, in the fact that He who asks my life has first of all given His.

But that same phrase, for My sake, suggests--

**III. The all-sufficient motive which makes such a loss of life possible.**

I suppose that there is nothing else that will wholly dethrone self but the enthroning of Jesus Christ. That dominion is too deeply rooted to be abolished by any enthusiasms, however noble they may be, except the one that kindles its undying torch at the flame of Christ's own love. God forbid that I should deny that wonderful and lovely instances of self-oblivion may be found in hearts untouched by the supreme love of Christ! But whilst I recognise all the beauty of such, I, for my part, humbly venture to believe and assert that, for the entire deliverance of a man from self-regard, the one sufficient motive power is the reception into his opening heart of the love of Jesus Christ.

Ah! brethren, you and I know how hard it is to escape from the tyrannous dominion of self, and how the evil spirits that have taken possession of us mock at all lesser charms than the name which devils fear and fly; the Name that is above every name. We have tried other motives. We have sought to reprove our selfishness by other considerations. Human love--which itself is sometimes only the love of self, seeking satisfaction from another--human love does conquer it, but yet conquers it partially. The demons turn round upon all other would-be exorcists, and say, Jesus we know ... but who are ye?It is only when the Ark is carried into the Temple that Dagon falls prone before it. If you would drive self out of your hearts--and if you do not it will slay you--if you would drive self out, let Christ's love and sacrifice come in. And then, what no brooms and brushes, no spades nor wheelbarrows, will ever do--namely, cleanse out the filth that lodges there--the turning of the river in will do, and float it all away. The one possibility for complete, conclusive deliverance from the dominion and tyranny of Self is to be found in the words For My sake. Ah! brethren, I suppose there are none of us so poor in earthly love, possessed or remembered, but that we know the omnipotence of these words when whispered by beloved lips, For My sake; and Jesus Christ is saying them to us all.

**IV. Lastly, notice the recompense of the stringent requirement.**

Shall find it, and that finding, like the losing, has a twofold reference and accomplishment: here and now, yonder and then.

Here and now, no man possesses himself till he has given himself to Jesus Christ. Only then, when we put the reins into His hands, can we coerce and guide the fiery steeds of passion and of impulse, And so Scripture, in more than one place, uses a remarkable expression, when it speaks of those that believe to the acquiring of their souls. You are not your own masters until you are Christ's servants; and when you fancy yourselves to be most entirely your own masters, you have promised yourselves liberty and have become the slave of corruption. So if you would own yourselves, give yourselves away. And such an one shall findhis life, here and now, in that all earthly things will be sweeter and better. The altar sanctifies the gift. When some pebble is plunged into a sunlit stream, the water brings out the veined colourings of the stone that looked all dull and dim when it was lying upon the bank. Fling your whole being, your wealth, your activities, and everything, into that stream, and they will flash in splendour else unknown. Did not my friend, of whom I have been speaking, enjoy his wealth far more, when he poured it out like water upon good causes, than if he had spent it in luxury and self-indulgence? And shall we not find that everything is sweeter, nobler, better, fuller of capacity to delight, if we give it all to our Master? The stringent requirement of Christ is the perfection of prudence. Who pleasure follows pleasure slays, and who slays pleasure finds a deeper and a holier delight. The keenest epicureanism could devise no better means for sucking the last drop of sweetness out of the clustering grapes of the gladnesses of earth than to obey this stringent requirement, and so realise the blessed promise, Whoso loseth his life for My sake shall find it. The selfish man is a roundabout fool. The self-devoted man, the Christ-enthroning man, is the wise man.

And there will be the further finding hereafter, about which we cannot speak. Only remember, how in a passage parallel with this of my text, spoken when almost within sight of Calvary, our Lord laid down not only the principle of His own life but the principle for all His servants, when He said, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit. The solitary grain dropped into the furrow brings forth a waving harvest. We may not, we need not, particularise, but the life that is found at last is as the fruit an hundredfold of the life that men called lostand God called 'sown.

Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord; they rest from their labours, and their works do follow them.

[A Sermon preached after the funeral of Mr. F. W. Crossley.]