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

**MATTHEW-073**. **THE REST GIVER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"28.* *Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. 29. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls."*

*Matthew 11:28-29*

One does not know whether tenderness or majesty is predominant in these wonderful words. A divine penetration into man's true condition, and a divine pity, are expressed in them. Jesus looks with clearsighted compassion into the inmost history of all hearts, and sees the toil and the sorrow which weigh on every soul. And no less remarkable is the divine consciousness of power, to succour and to help, which speaks in them. Think of a Jewish peasant of thirty years old, opening his arms to embrace the world, and saying to all men, Come and rest on My breast. Think of a man supposing himself to be possessed of a charm which could soothe all sorrow and lift the weight from every heart.

A great sculptor has composed a group where there diverge from the central figure on either side, in two long lines, types of all the cruel varieties of human pains and pangs; and in the midst stands, calm, pure, with the consciousness of power and love in His looks, and with outstretched hands, as if beckoning invitation and dropping benediction, Christ the Consoler. The artist has but embodied the claim which the Master makes for Himself here. No less remarkable is His own picture of Himself, as meek and lowly in heart. Did ever anybody before say, I am humble, without provoking the comment, He that says he is humble proves that he is not? But Jesus Christ said it, and the world has allowed the claim; and has answered, Though Thou bearest record of Thyself, Thy record is true.

But my object now is not so much to deal with the revelation of our Lord contained in these marvellous words, as to try, as well as I can, to re-echo, however faintly, the invitation that sounds in them. There is a very striking reduplication running through them which is often passed unnoticed. I shall shape my remarks so as to bring out that feature of the text, asking you to look first with me at the twofold designation of the persons addressed; next at the twofold invitation; and last at the twofold promise of rest.

**I. Consider then the twofold designation here of the persons addressed, Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden.**

The one word expresses effort and toil, the other a burden and endurance. The one speaks of the active, the other of the passive, side of human misery and evil. Toil is work which is distasteful in itself, or which is beyond our faculties. Such toil, sometime or other, more or less, sooner or later, is the lot of every man. All work becomes labour, and all labour, sometime or other, becomes toil. The text is, first of all, and in its most simple and surface meaning, an invitation to all the men who know how ceaseless, how wearying, how empty the effort and energy of life is, to come to this Master and rest.

You remember those bitter words of the Book of Ecclesiastes, where the preacher sets forth a circle of labour that only comes back to the point where it began, as being the law for nature and the law for man. And truly much of our work seems to be no better than that. We are like squirrels in a cage, putting forth immense muscular effort, and nothing to show for it after all. All is vanity, and striving after wind.

Toil is a curse; work is a blessing. But all our work darkens into toil; and the invitation, Come unto Me, all ye that labour, reaches to the very utmost verge of the world and includes every soul.

And then, in like manner, the other side of human experience is set forth in that other word. For most men have not only to work, but to bear; not only to toil, but to sorrow. There are efforts that need to be put forth, which task all our energy, and leave the muscles flaccid and feeble. And many of us have, at one and the same moment, to work and to weep, to toil whilst our hearts are beating like a forge-hammer; to labour whilst memories and thoughts that might enfeeble any worker, are busy with us. A burden of sorrow, as well as effort and toil, is, sooner or later, the lot of all men.

But that is only surface. The twofold designation here before us goes a great deal deeper than that. It points to two relationships to God and to God's law of righteousness. Men labour with vague and yet with noble effort, sometimes, to do the thing that is right, and after all efforts there is left a burden of conscious defect. In the purest and the highest lives there come both of these things. And Jesus Christ, in this merciful invitation of His, speaks to all the men that have tried, and tried in vain, to satisfy their consciences and to obey the law of God, and says to them, Cease your efforts, and no longer carry that burden of failure and of sin upon your shoulders. Come unto Me, and I will give you rest.

I should be sorry to think that I was speaking to any man or woman who had not, more or less, tried to do what is right. You have laboured at that effort with more or less of consistency, with more or less of earnestness. Have you not found that you could not achieve it?

I am sure that I am speaking to no man or woman who has not upon his or her conscience a great weight of neglected duties, of actual transgressions, of mean thoughts, of foul words and passions, of deeds that they would be ashamed that any should see; ashamed that their dearest should catch a glimpse of. My friend, universal sinfulness is no mere black dogma of a narrow Calvinism; it is no uncharitable indictment against the race; it is simply putting into definite words the consciousness that is in every one of your hearts. You know that, whether you like to think about it or not, you have broken God's law, and are a sinful man. You carry a burden on your back whether you realise the fact or no, a burden that clogs all your efforts, and that will sink you deeper into the darkness and the mire. Come unto Me, all ye that labour, and with noble, but, at bottom, vain, efforts have striven after right and truth. Come unto Me all ye that are burdened, and bear, sometimes forgetting it, but often reminded of its pressure by galled shoulders and wearied limbs, the burden of sin on your bent backs.

This invitation includes the whole race. In it, as in a blank form, you may each insert your name. Jesus Christ speaks to thee, John, Thomas, Mary, Peter, whatever thy name may be, as distinctly as if you saw your name written on the pages of your New Testament, when He says to you, Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden. For the allis but the sum of the units; and I, and thou, and thou, have our place within the word.

**II. Now, secondly, look at the twofold invitation that is here.**

Come unto Me ... Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me. These two things are not the same. Coming unto Me, as is quite plain to the most superficial observation, is the first step in the approach to a companionship, which companionship is afterwards perfected and kept up by obedience and imitation. The comingis an initial act which makes a man Christ's companion. And the Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me, is the continuous act by which that companionship is manifested and preserved. So that in these words, which come so familiarly to most of our memories that they have almost ceased to present a sharp meaning, there is not only a merciful summons to the initial act, but a description of the continual life of which that act is the introduction.

And now, to put that into simpler words, when Jesus Christ says Come unto Me, He Himself has taught us what is His inmost meaning in that invitation, by another word of His: He that cometh unto Me shall never hunger, and he that believeth on Me shall never thirst; where the parallelism of the clauses teaches us that to come to Christ is simply to put our trust in Him. There is in faith a true movement of the whole soul towards the Master. I think that this metaphor teaches us a great deal more about that faith that we are always talking about in the pulpit, and which, I am afraid, many of our congregations do not very distinctly understand, than many a book of theology does. To come to Himimplies, distinctly, that He, and no mere theological dogma, however precious and clear, is the Object on which faith rests.

And, therefore, if Christ, and not merely a doctrinal truth about Christ, be the Object of our faith, then it is very clear that faith, which grasps a Person, must be something more than the mere act of the understanding which assents to a truth. And what more is it? How is it possible for one person to lay hold of and to come to another? By trust and love, and by these alone. These be the bonds that bind men together. Mere intellectual consent may be sufficient to fasten a man to a dogma, but there must be will and heart at work to bind a man to a person; and if it be Christ and not a theology, to which we come by our faith, then it must be with something more than our brains that we grasp Him and draw near to Him. That is to say, your will is engaged in your confidence. Trust Him as you trust one another, only with the difference befitting a trust directed to an absolute and perfect object of trust, and not to a poor, variable human heart. Trust Him as you trust one another. Then, just as husband and wife, parent and child, friend and friend, pass through all intervening hindrances and come together when they trust and love, so you come closer to Christ as the very soul of your soul by an inward real union, than you do even to your dear ones, if you grapple Him to your heart with the hoops of steel, which, by simple trust in Him, the Divine Redeemer forges for us. Come unto Me, being translated out of metaphor into fact, is simply Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and thou shalt be saved.

And still further, we have here, not only the initial act by which companionship and union with Jesus Christ is brought about, but the continual course by which it is kept up, and by which it is manifested. The faith which saves a man's soul is not all which is required for a Christian life. Take My yoke upon you, and learn of Me. The yoke is that which, laid on the broad forehead or the thick neck of the ox, has attached to it the cords which are bound to the burden that the animal draws. The burden, then, which Christ gives to His servants to pull, is a metaphor for the specific duties which He enjoins upon them to perform; and the yoke by which they are fastened to their burdens, obligedto their duties, is His authority, So to take His yokeupon us is to submit our wills to His authority. Therefore this further call is addressed to all those who have come to Him, feeling their weakness and their need and their sinfulness, and have found in Him a Saviour who has made them restful and glad; and it bids them live in the deepest submission of will to Him, in joyful obedience, in constant service; and, above all, in the daily imitation of the Master.

You must put both these commandments together before you get Christ's will for His children completely expressed. There are some of you who think that Christianity is only a means by which you may escape the penalty of your sins; and you are ready enough, or fancy yourselves so, to listen when He says, Come to Me that you may be pardoned, but you are not so ready to listen to what He says afterwards, when He calls upon you to take His yoke upon you, to obey Him, to serve Him, and above all to copy Him. And I beseech you to remember that if you go and part these two halves from one another, as many people do, some of them bearing away the one half and some the other, you have got a maimed Gospel; in the one case a foundation without a building, and in the other case a building without a foundation. The people who say that Christ's call to the world is Come unto Me, and whose Christianity and whose Gospel is only a proclamation of indulgence and pardon for past sin, have laid hold of half of the truth. The people who say that Christ's call is Take My yoke upon you and learn of Me, and that Christianity is a proclamation of the duty of pure living after the pattern of Jesus Christ our great Example, have laid hold of the other half of the truth. And both halves bleed themselves away and die, being torn asunder; put them together, and each has power.

That separation is one reason why so many Christian men and women are such poor Christians as they are--having so little real religion, and consequently so little real joy. I could lay my fingers upon many men, professing Christians--I do not say whether in this church or in other churches--whose whole life shows that they do not understand that Jesus Christ has a twofold summons to His servants; and that it is of no avail once, long ago, to have come, or to think that you have come, to Him to get pardon, unless day by day you are keeping beside Him, doing His commandments, and copying His sweet and blessed example.

**III. And now, lastly, look at the twofold promise which is here.**

I do not know if there is any importance to be attached to the slight diversity of language in the two verses, so as that in the one case the promise runs, I will give you rest, and in the other, Ye shall find rest. That sounds as if the rest that was contingent upon the first of the invitations was in a certain and more direct and exclusive fashion Christ's gift than the rest which was contingent upon the second. It may be so, but I attach no importance to that criticism; only I would have you observe that our Lord distinctly separates here between the rest of coming, and the rest of wearing His yoke. These two, howsoever they may be like each other, are still not the same. The one is the perfecting and the prolongation, no doubt, of the other, but has likewise in it some other, I say not more blessed, elements. Dear brethren, here are two precious things held out and offered to us all. There is rest in coming to Christ; the rest of a quiet conscience which gnaws no more; the rest of a conscious friendship and union with God, in whom alone are our soul's home, harbour, and repose; the rest of fears dispelled; the rest of forgiveness received into the heart. Do you want that? Go to Christ, and as soon as you go to Him you will get that rest.

There is rest in faith. The very act of confidence is repose. Look how that little child goes to sleep in its mother's lap, secure from harm because it trusts. And, oh! if there steal over our hearts such a sweet relaxation of the tension of anxiety when there is some dear one on whom we can cast all responsibility, how much more may we be delivered from all disquieting fears by the exercise of quiet confidence in the infinite love and power of our Brother Redeemer, Christ! He will be a covert from the storm, and a refuge from the tempest; as rivers of water in a dry place, and the shadow of a great rock in a weary land. If we come to Him, the very act of coming brings repose.

But, brethren, that is not enough, and, blessed be God! that is not all. There is a further, deeper rest in obedience, and emphatically and most blessedly there is a rest in Christ-likeness. Take My yoke upon you. There is repose in saying Thou art my Master, and to Thee I bow. You are delivered from the unrest of self-will, from the unrest of contending desires, you get rid of the weight of too much liberty. There is peace in submission; peace in abdicating the control of my own being; peace in saying, Take Thou the reins, and do Thou rule and guide me. There is peace in surrender and in taking His yoke upon us.

And most especially the path of rest for men is in treading in Christ's footsteps. Learn of Me, it is the secret of tranquillity. We have done with passionate hot desires,--and it is these that breed all the disquiet in our lives--when we take the meekness and the lowliness of the Master for our pattern. The river will no longer roll, broken by many a boulder, and chafed into foam over many a fall, but will flow with even foot, and broad, smooth bosom, to the parent sea.

There is quietness in self-sacrifice, there is tranquillity in ceasing from mine own works and growing like the Master.

The Cross is strength; the solemn Cross is gain.

The Cross is Jesusbreast,

Here giveth He the rest,

That to His best beloved doth still remain.

Take up thy cross daily, and thou enterest into His rest.

My brother, the wicked is like the troubled sea that cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. But you, if you come to Christ, and if you cleave to Christ, may be like that sea of glass, mingled with fire, that lies pure, transparent, waveless before the Throne of God, over which no tempests rave, and which, in its deepest depths, mirrors the majesty of Him that sitteth upon the Throne, and of the Lamb.