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

**MATTHEW-078**. **A GREATER THAN SOLOMON by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"A greater than Solomon is here."*

*Matthew 12:42*

It is condescension in Him to compare Himself with any; yet if any might have been selected, it is that great name. To the Jews Solomon is an ideal figure, who appealed so strongly to popular imagination as to become the centre of endless legends; whose dominion was the very apex of national glory, in recounting whose splendours the historical books seem to be scarce able to restrain their triumph and pride.

**I. The Man.**

The story gives us a richly endowed and many-sided character. It begins with lovely, youthful enthusiasm, with a profound sense of his own weakness, with earnest longings after wisdom and guidance. He lived a pure and beautiful youth, and all his earlier and middle life was adorned with various graces. There is a certain splendid largeness about the character. He had a rich variety of gifts: he was statesman, merchant, sage, physicist, builder, one of the many-sided men whom the old world produced. And on this we may build a comparison and contrast.

The completeness of Christ's Humanity transcends all other men, even the most various, and transcends all gathered together. Every type of excellence is in Him. We cannot say that His character is any one thing in special, it falls under no classification. It is a pure white light in which all rays are blended. This all-comprehensiveness and symmetry of character are remarkably shown in four brief records.

But we have to take into account the dark shadows that fell on Solomon's later years. He clearly fell away from his early consecration and noble ideals, and let his sensuous appetites gain power. He countenanced, if he did not himself practise, idolatry. As a king he became an arbitrary tyrant, and his love of building led him to oppress his subjects, and so laid the foundation for the revolt under Jeroboam which rent the kingdom. So his history is another illustration of the possible shipwreck of a great character. It is one more instance of the fall of a son of the morning. We need not elaborate the contrast with Christ's character. In Him is no falling from a high ideal, no fading of morning glory into a cloudy noon or a lurid evening. There is no black streak in that flawless white marble. Jesus draws the perfect circle, like Giotto's O, while all other lives show some faltering of hand, and consequent irregularity of outline. Greater than Solomon, with his over-clouded glories and his character worsened by self-indulgence, is Jesus, the Sun of righteousness, the perfect round of whose lustrous light is broken by no spots on the surface, no indentations in the circumference, nor obscured by any clouds over its face.

**II. The Teacher.**

Solomon was traditionally regarded as the author of much of the Book of Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes was written as by him. Possibly the attribution to him of some share in the former book may be correct, but at any rate, his wisdom was said to have drawn the Queen of Sheba to hear him, and that is the point of the comparison of our text.

If we take these two books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes into account, as popularly attributed to him, they suggest points of comparison and contrast with Jesus as a teacher, which we may briefly point out. Now, Proverbs falls into two very distinct portions, the former part being a connected fatherly admonition to the pursuit of wisdom, and the latter a collection of prudential maxims, in which it is rare for any two contiguous verses to have anything to do with each other. In the former part Wisdom is set forth as man's chief good, and the Wisdom which is so set forth is mainly moral wisdom, the right disposition of will and heart, and almost identical with what the Old Testament elsewhere calls righteousness. But it is invested, as the writer proceeds, with more and more august and queenly attributes, and at last stands forth as being, if not a divine person, at least a personification of a divine attribute.

Bring that ancient teaching and set it side by side with Jesus, and what can we say but that He is what the old writer, be he Solomon or another, dimly saw? He is the wisdomwhich was traditionally called the wisdom of Solomon, and which the Queen came from far to hear. Jesus is greater, as the light is more than the eye, or as the theme is more than the speaker. The power of God and the wisdom of Godis greater than the sage or seer who celebrates it. What is true of Solomon or whoever wrote that praise of Wisdom, is true of all teachers and wise men, they are not that light, they are sent to bear witness of that light. Jesus is Wisdom, other men are wise. Jesus is the greatest teacher, for He teaches us Himself. He is lesson as well as teacher. Unless He was a great deal more than Teacher, He could not be the perfect Teacher for whom the world groans.

The second half of Proverbs is, as I have said, mostly a collection of prudential and moral maxims, with very little reference to God or high ideals of duty in them. They may represent to us the impotence of wise saws to get themselves practised. A guide-post is not a guide. It stretches out its gaunt wooden arms towards the city, but it cannot bend them to help a lame man lying at its foot. Men do not go wrong for lack of knowing the road, nearly so often as for lack of inclination to walk in it. We have abundant voices to tell us what we ought to do. But what we want is the swaying of inclination to do it, and the gift of power to do it. And it is precisely because Jesus gives us both these that He is what no collection of the wisest sayings can ever be, the efficient teacher of all righteousness, and of the true wisdom which is the principal thing.

As for Ecclesiastes, though not his, it represents not untruly the tone which we may suppose to have characterised his later days in its dwelling on the vanity of life. The sadness of it may be contrasted with the light thrown by the Gospel on the darkest problems. Solomon cries, All is vanity--Jesus teaches His scholars to sing, All things work together for good.

**III. The Temple builder.**

In this respect a greater than Solomon is here, inasmuch as Jesus is Himself the true Temple, being for all men, which Solomon's structure only shadowed, the meeting-place of God and man, in whom God dwells and through whom we can draw near to Him, the place where the true Sacrifice is once for all offered, by which Sacrifice sin is truly put away. And, further, Jesus is greater than Solomon in that He is, through the ages, building up the great Temple of His Church of redeemed men, the eternal temple of which not one stone shall ever be taken down.

**IV. The peaceful King.**

There were no wars in Solomon's reign. But a dark shadow brooded over it in its later years, which were darkened by oppression, luxury, and incipient revolt.

Contrast with that merely external and sadly imperfect peacefulness, the deep, inward peace of spirit which Jesus breathes into every man who trusts and obeys Him, and with the peace among men which the acceptance of His rule brings, and will one day bring perfectly, to a regenerated humanity dwelling on a renewed earth. He is King of righteousness, and after that also King of peace.

Surely from all these contrasts it is plain that a greater than Solomon is here.