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

**MATTHEW-082**. **SEEING AND BLIND by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"They seeing, see not."*

*Matthew 13:13*

This is true about all the senses of the word seeing; there is not one man in ten thousand who sees the things before his eyes. Is not this the distinction, for instance, of the poet or painter, and man of science--just that they do see? How true is this about the eye of the mind, what a small number really understand what they know! But these illustrations are of less moment than the saddest example--religious indifference. I wish to speak about this now, and to ask you to consider—(i) The extent to which it prevails. (ii) The causes from which it springs. (iii) The fearful contrasts it suggests. (iv) The end to which it conducts.

**I. The extent to which it prevails.**

I have no hesitation in saying that it is the condition of by far the largest proportion of our nation. It is the true enemy of souls. I do not believe that any large proportion of Englishmen are actual disbelievers, who reject Christianity as unworthy of credence, or attach themselves to any of the innumerable varieties of deistical and pantheistical schools. I am not saying at present whether it would be a more or less hopeful state if it were so, but only that it is not so, and that a complacent taking for granted of religious truth, a torpor of soul, an entire carelessness about God and Christ, and the whole mighty scheme of the Gospel, is the characteristic of many in all classes of English society. We have it here in our churches and chapels as the first foe we have to fight with. Disbelief slays its thousands, and dissipation its tens of thousands, but this sleek, well-to-do carelessness, its millions. As some one says, it is as if an opium sky had rained down soporifics.

**II. The causes from which it springs.**

Of course, the great cause of this condition is man's evil heart of alienation, the spirit of slumber--but we may find proximate and special causes.

There is the indifference springing from the absorbing interests of the present. A man has only a certain quantity of interest to put forth. If he expends it all on small things, he has none for great. This overmastering, overshadowing present draws us all to itself, and we have no power of attention or interest to spare for anything else, or for reflection upon Christian truth in connection with our own conduct.

Then there is the indifference caused by fear of what the results of attention might be. It is sometimes broken in upon, and men are in danger of having their eyes opened, then with an effort they fling themselves into some distraction, and sleep again. As the text says, Their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes.

Then there is the indifference fed by an indolent acquiescence in the truth. That is a favourite way of breaking the force of all unwelcome moral truth, and especially of the Gospel. A man says, Oh yes, it is true, and because it is, therefore he thinks he has done enough when he has acknowledged it. Many do not seem to dream that the Word has any personal application to them at all.

Then there is the indifference which comes from long familiarity with the truth. It is this which haunts our congregations and makes it so impossible to get at many who know all our message already. You can tell them nothing they do not know. As with men who live by a forge, the sound of the blow of the hammer only lulls them to sleep. The Gospel is so familiar to them that there is no longer any power about it. The vulgar emotion of wonder is not excited, and the other of love and admiration has not taken its place.

Men who live in mountain scenery do not know its beauties, and as with all other operations of the listless eye so with this, the old is deemed to be uninteresting, and the common is the commonplace. As even in the piece of earth that you have trodden on longest, you would find marvels that you do not dream of if you would look, so here. You have heard too much and reflected too little. Oh, brethren, it oppresses a man who has to speak to you when he reflects how often you have heard it all, how the flow of the river only seems to have worn your souls smooth enough to let it glide past without one stoppage.

**III. The contrasts it suggests.**

Contrast the indolence here with the earnestness in life. The same men who sit with faces stolid and expressionless over a sermon--meet them on Monday morning! They go to sleep at prayer or over a Bible, but see them in a bargain or over a ledger. Think of what powers of intense love, yea, of almost fearful devotion and energy, lie in us, ay and come out of us, and then think how poor, how cold we are here, and we may well be ashamed. It is as if a burning mountain with its cataract of fire were suddenly quenched and locked in everlasting frost, and all the flaming glory running down its heaving sides turned into a slow glacier. There comes ice instead of fire, frost instead of flame, snow instead of sparks. It is as if some magician waved a wand and stiffened men into a paralysis. Religion seems to numb men instead of inspiring them. It is an awful thought of how they serve themselves and the world, how they can love one another, how they can be stirred to noble enthusiasm, and how little of all this ever comes to God.

Contrast the indifference of the men and the awfulness of the things they are indifferent about. God--Christ--their souls--heaven--hell. The grandest things men can think about, the mightiest realities in the universe, the eternal, the most powerful, these it is which some of you, seeing, see not.

Contrast men's indifference and the earnestness of the rest of the creation. God rose early and sent His prophets. He so loved the world that He gave His Son. Christ died, lives, works, rules, expects, beseeches. Angels desire to look into the wonders that you seeing, see not'. What makes heaven fill with rapture, and flash through all her golden glories with light, what makes hell look on with the lurid scowl of baffled malignity, that is what you are careless about. My friend, you and other men like you are the only beings in the universe careless about the salvation of your souls.

**IV. The end to which it conducts.**

That end is certain ruin. Ah, dear friends, you do not need to do much to ruin your own souls. You have only to continue indifferent and you will do it effectually. Negligence is quite enough. Ruin is what it will certainly end in.

And remember that when the possibility of salvation ends, your indifference will end too. The poor toad that is fascinated by the serpent, and drops powerless into the cruel jaws, wakes from the stupor when it feels the pang. And the lifelong torpor will be dissolved for you when you pass into another world. What an awful awaking that will be when men look back and see by the light of eternity what they were doing here! Oh! friends, would to God that any poor word of mine could rouse you from this drugged and opiate sleep! Believe me, it is merciful violence which would rouse you. Anything rather than that the poison should work on till the heavy slumber darkens into death. Let me implore you, as you value your own souls, as you would not fling away your most precious jewel to awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light. Beware of the treacherous indifference which creeps on, till, like men in the Arctic regions, the sleepers die.