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

**MATTHEW-092**. **THE DIVINE CHRIST CONFESSED, THE SUFFERING CHRIST DENIED by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"13.* *When Jesus came into the coasts of Caesarea Phllippi, He asked His disciples, saying, Whom do men say that I the Son of Man am? 14. And they said, Some say that thou art John the Baptist; some, Elias; and others, Jeremias, or one of the prophets. 15. He saith unto them, But whom say ye that I am? 16. And Simon Peter answered and said, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. 17. And Jesus answered and said unto him, Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-jona: for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but My Father which is in heaven. 18. And I say also unto thee, That thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build My church; and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. 19. And I will give unto thee the keys of the kingdom of heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt bind on earth shall be hound in heaven: and whatsoever thou shalt loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven. 20. Then charged He His disciples that they should tell no man that He was Jesus the Christ. 21. From that time forth began Jesus to shew unto His disciples, how that He must go unto Jerusalem, and suffer many things of the elders and chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and be raised again the third day. 22. Then Peter took Him, and began to rebuke Him, saying, Be it far from Thee, Lord: this shall not be unto Thee. 23. But He turned, and said unto Peter, Get thee behind Me, Satan: thou art an offence unto Me: for thou savourest not the things that be of God, but those that be of men. 24. Then said Jesus unto His disciples, If any man will come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25. For whosoever will save his life shall lose it: and whosoever will lose his life for My sake shall find it. 26. For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul? 27. For the Son of Man shall come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and then He shall reward every man according to his works. 28. Verily I say unto you, There be some standing here, which shall not taste of death, till they see the Son of Man coming in His kingdom."*

*Matthew 16:13-28*

This section is embarrassing from its fulness of material. We can but lightly touch points on which volumes might be, and indeed have been, written.

**I. The first section (vs. 13-20) gives us Peter's great confession in the name of the disciples, and Christ's answer to it.**

The centre of this section is the eager avowal of the impetuous apostle, always foremost for good or evil. We note the preparation for it, its contents, and its results. As to the preparation,--our Lord is entering on a new era in His work, and desires to bring clearly into His followersconsciousness the sum of His past self-revelation. The excitement, which He had checked after the first miraculous feeding, had died down. The fickle crowd had gone away from Him, and the shadows of the cross were darkening. Amid the seclusion of the woods, fountains, and rocks of Caesarea, far away from distracting influences, He puts these two momentous questions. Following the Revised Version reading, we have a double contrast between the first and second. Menanswers to ye, and the Son of Manto I. The first question is as to the partial and conflicting opinions among the multitudes who had heard His name for Himself from His own lips; the second, in its use of the I, hints at the fuller unveiling of the depths of His gracious personality, which the disciples had experienced, and implies, Surely you, who have been beside Me, and known Me so closely, have reached a deeper understanding. It has a tone of the same wistfulness and wonder as that other question of His, Have I been so long time with you, and yet hast thou not known Me?For their sakes, He seeks to draw out their partly unconscious faith, that had been smouldering, fed by their daily experience of His beauty and tenderness. Half-recognised convictions float in many a heart, which need but a pointed question to crystallise into master-truths, to which, henceforward, the whole being is subject. Great are the dangers of articulate creeds; but great is the power of putting our shadowy beliefs into plain words. With the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Why should this great question have been preceded by the other? Probably to make the disciples feel more distinctly the chaotic contradictions of the popular judgment, and their own isolation by their possession of the clearer light. He wishes them to see the gulf opening between them and their fellows, and so to bind them more closely to Himself. This is the question the answer to which settles everything for a man. It has an intensely sharp point. We cannot take refuge from it in the general opinion. Nor does any other man's judgment about Him matter one whit to us. This Christ has a strange power, after nineteen hundred years, of coming to each of us, with the same persistent interrogation on His lips. And to-day, as then, all depends on the answer which we give. Many answer by exalted estimates of Him, like these varying replies which ascribed to Him prophetic authority, but they have not understood His own name for Himself, nor drunk in the meaning of His self-revelation, unless they can reply with the full-toned confession of the apostle, which sets Him far above and apart from the highest and holiest.

As to the contents of the confession, it includes both the human and the divine sides of Christ's nature. He is the Messiah, but He is more than what a Jew meant by that name; He is the Son of the living God, by which we cannot indeed suppose that Peter meant all that he afterwards learned it contained, or all that the Church has now been taught of its meaning, but which, nevertheless, is not to be watered down as if it did not declare His unique filial relation to the Father, and so His divine nature. Nathanael had burst into rapturous adoration of Jesus as the Son of Godat the very beginning; and the disciplesglad confidence, which cast out the fear of the dim form striding across the sea, had echoed the confession; all had heard His words, No man knoweth the Father but the Son. So we need not hesitate to interpret this confession as in essence and germ containing the whole future doctrine of our Lord's divinity. True, the speaker did not know all which lay in His words. Do we? Do we not see here an illustration of the method of Christian progress in doctrine, which consists not in the winning of new truths, but in the penetrating further into the meaning of old and initial truths? The conviction which made and makes a Christian, is this of Peter's; and Christian growth is into, not away from, it.

As to the results, they are set forth in our Lord's answer, which breathes of delight, and we may almost say gratitude. His manhood knew the thrill of satisfaction at having some hearts which understood though partially, and loved even better than they knew. The solemn address to the apostle by his ancestral name, gives emphasis to the contrast between his natural weakness and his divine illumination and consequent privilege. The name of Peter is not here bestowed, but interpreted. Christ does not say Thou shalt be, but Thou art, and so presupposes the former conferring of the name. Unquestionably, the apostle is the rock on which the Church is built. The efforts to avoid that conclusion would never have been heard of, but for the Roman Catholic controversy; but they are as unnecessary as unsuccessful. Is it credible that in the course of an address which is wholly occupied with conferring prerogatives on the apostle, a clause should come in, which is concerned about an altogether different subject from the thouof the preceding and the theeof the following clauses, and which yet should take the very name of the apostle, slightly modified, for that other subject? We do not interpret other books in that fashion. But it was not the flesh and bloodPeter, but Peter as the recipient and faithful utterer of the divine inspiration in his confession, who received these privileges. Therefore they are not his exclusive property, but belong to his faith, which grasped and confessed the divine-human Lord; and wherever that faith is, there are these gifts, which are its results. They are the naturalconsequences of the true faith in Christ, in that higher region where the supernatural is the natural. Peter's grasp of Christ's nature wrought upon his character, as pressure does upon sand, and solidified his shifting impetuosity into rock-like firmness. So the same faith will tend to do in any man. It made him the chief instrument in the establishment of the early Church. On souls steadied and made solid by like faith, and only on such, can Christ build His Church. Of course, the metaphor here regards Jesus, not as the foundation, as the Scripture generally does, but as the founder. The names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb are on the foundations of the heavenly city; and, in historical fact, the name of this apostle is graven on the deepest and first laid. In like subordinate sense, all who share that heroic faith and proclaim it are used by the Master-builder in the foundations of His Church; and Peter himself is eager to share his name among his brethren, when he says Ye also, as living stones.

Built on men who hold by that confession, the Church is immortal; and the armies who pour out of the gates of the pale kingdoms of the unseen world shall not be able to destroy it. Peter, as confessor of his Lord's human-divine nature, wields the keys of the kingdom of heaven, like a steward of a great house; and that too was fulfilled in his apostolic activity in his admitting Jews at Pentecost, and Gentiles in the house of Cornelius. But the same power attends all who share his faith and avowal, for the preaching of that faith is the opening of heaven's door to men. He receives the power of binding and loosing, by which is not meant that of forgiving or retaining sins, but that of prohibiting or allowing actions, or, in other words, of laying down the law of Christian conduct. This meaning of the metaphors is made certain by the common Jewish use of them. Despotic legislative power is not here committed to the apostle, but the great principle is taught that the morality of Christianity flows directly from its theology, and that whosoever, like Peter, grasps firmly the cardinal truth of Christ's nature, and all which flows therefrom, will have his insight so cleared that his judgments on what is permitted or forbidden to a Christian man will correspond with the decisions of heaven, in the measure of his hold upon the truth which underlies all religion and all morality, namely, Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God. These are gifts to Peter indeed, but only as possessor of that faith, and are much more truly understood as belonging to all who possess like precious faith(as Peter says), than as the prerogative of any individual or class.

**II. The second section (vs. 21-23) contains the startling new revelation of the suffering Messiah, and the disciples repugnance to it.**

The Gospel has two parts: Jesus is the Christ, and the Christ must suffer and enter into His glory. Our Lord has made sure that the disciples have learned the first before He leads to the second. The very conviction of His dignity and divine nature made that second truth the more bewildering, but still the only road to it was through the first. Verse 21 covers an indefinite time, during which Jesus gradually taught His sufferings. Ordinarily we exaggerate the suddenness, and therefore the depth, of Peter's fall, by supposing that it took place immediately after his confession; but the narrative discountenances the idea, and merely says that Jesus then beganHis new teaching. There had been veiled hints of it (such as John ii. 19, and Matt. ix. 15, xii. 40), but henceforward it assumed prominence, and was taught without veil. It was no new thought to Himself, forced on Him by the growing enmity of the nation. The cross always cast its shadow on His path. He was no enthusiast, beginning with the dream of winning a world to His side, and slowly and heroically making up His mind to die a martyr, but His purpose in being born was to minister and to die, a ransom for the many. We have not here to do with a growing consciousness, but simply with an increasing clearness of utterance. Note the detailed accuracy of His prevision, which points to Jerusalem as the scene, and to the rulers of the nation as the instruments, and to death as the climax, and to resurrection as the issue, of His sufferings; the clear setting forth of the divine necessity which, as it ruled all His life, ruled here also, and is expressed in that solemn must; and the perfectly willing acceptance by Him of that necessity, implied in that go, and certified by many another word of His. The necessity was no external compulsion, driving Him to an unwelcome sacrifice, but one imposed alike by filial obedience and by brotherly love. He must die because He would save.

How vividly the scene of Peter's rash rejection of the teaching is described! The apostle, full of eager love, still, as of old, swift to speak, and driven by unexamined impulse, lays his hand on Christ, and draws Him a little apart, while he beginsto pour out words which show that he has forgotten his confession. Rebukemust not be softened down into anything less vehement or more respectful. He knows better than Jesus what will happen. Perhaps his assurance that this shall never bemeans We will fight first. But he is not allowed to finish what he began; for the Master, whom he loved unwisely but well, turns His back on him, as in horror, and shows by the terrible severity of His rebuke how deeply moved He is. He repels the hint in almost the same words as He had used to the tempter in the wilderness, of whom that Peter, who had so lately been the recipient and proclaimer of a divine illumination, has become the mouthpiece. So possible is it to fall from sunny heights to doleful depths! So little can any divine inspiration be permanent, if the man turn away from it to think man's thoughts, and set his affections on the things which men desire! So certainly does minding these degrade to becoming an organ of Satan! The words are full of restrained emotion, which reveal how real a temptation Peter had flung in Christ's path. The rock has become a stone of stumbling; the man Jesus shrank from the cross with a natural and innocent shrinking, which never made His will tremulous, but was none the less real; and such words from loving lips did affect him. Let us note, on the whole, that the complete truth about Jesus Christ must include these two parts,--His divine nature and Messiahship, and His death on the cross; and that neither alone is the gospel, nor is he a disciple, such as Christ desires, who does not cleave to both with mind and heart.

**III. In verses 24-28, the law, which ruled the Master's life, is extended to the servants.**

They recoiled from the thought of His having to suffer. They had to learn that they must suffer too if they would be His. First, the condition of discipleship is set before them as being the fellowship of His suffering. If any man willgives them the option of withdrawal. A new epoch is beginning, and they will have to enlist again, and to do so with open eyes. He will have no unwilling soldiers, nor any who have been beguiled into the ranks. No doubt, some went away, and walked no more with Him. The terms of service are clear. Discipleship means imitation, and imitation means self-crucifixion. At that time they would only partially understand what taking up their cross was, but they would apprehend that a martyred master must needs have for followers men ready to be martyrs too. But the requirement goes much deeper than this. There is no discipleship without self-denial, both in the easier form of starving passions and desires, and in the harder of yielding up the will, and letting His will supplant ours. Only so can we ever come after Him, and of such sacrifice of self the cross is the eminent example. We cannot think too much of it as the instrument of our reconciliation and forgiveness, but we may, and too often do, think too little of it as the pattern of our lives. When Jesus began to teach His death, He immediately presented it as His servantsexample. Let us not forget that fact.

The ground of the law is next stated in verse 25. The desire to save life is the loss of life in the highest sense. If that desire guide us, then farewell to enthusiasm, courage, the martyr spirit, and all which makes man's life nobler than a beast's. He who is ruled mainly by the wish to keep a whole skin, loses the best part of what he is so anxious to keep. In a wider application, regard for self as a ruling motive is destruction, and selfishness is suicide. On the other hand, lives hazarded for Christ are therein truly saved, and if they be not only hazarded, but actually lost, such loss is gain; and the same law, by which the Master mustdie and rise again, will work in the servant. Verse 26 urges the wisdom of such apparent folly, and enforces the requirement by the plain consideration that lifeis worth more than anything beside, and that on the two grounds, that the world itself would be of no use to a dead man, and that, once lost, lifecannot be bought back. Therefore the dictate of the wisest prudence is that seemingly prodigal flinging away of the lower lifewhich puts us in possession of the higher. Note that the appeal is here made to a reasonable regard to personal advantage, and that in the very act of urging to crucify self. So little did Christ think, as some people do, that the desire to save one's soul is selfishness.

Verse 27 confirms all the preceding by the solemn announcement of the coming of the Son of Man as Judge. Mark the dignity of the words. He is to come in the glory of the Father. That ineffable and inaccessible light which rays forth from the Father enwraps the Son. Their glory is one. The waiting angels are His. He renders to every man according to his doing (his actions considered as one whole). Thus He claims for Himself universal sway, and the power of accurately determining the whole moral character of every life, as well as that of awarding precisely graduated retribution. They surely shall then find their lives who have followed Him here.

Verse 28 adds, with His solemn verily, a confirmation of this announcement of His coming to judge. The question of what event is referred to may best be answered by noting that it must be one sufficiently far off from the moment of speaking to allow of the death of the greater number of His hearers, and sufficiently near to allow of the survival of some; that it must also be an event, after which these survivors would go the common road into the grave; that it is apparently distinguished from His coming in the glory of the Father, and yet is of such a nature as to afford convincing proof of the establishment of His kingdom on earth, and to be, in some sort, a sign of that final act of judgment. All these requirements (and they are all the fair inferences from the words) meet only in the destruction of Jerusalem, and of the national life of the chosen people. That was a crash of which we faintly realise the tremendous significance. It swept away the last remnant of the hope that Israel was to be the kingdom of the Messiah; and from out of the dust and chaos of that fall the Christian Church emerged, manifestly destined for world-wide extension. It was a great and terrible day of the Lord, and, as such, was a precursor and a prophecy of the day of the Lord, when He shall come in the glory of the Father, and render unto every man according to his deeds.