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

**MATTHEW-106**. **THE COMING OF THE KING TO HIS PALACE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"1.* *And when they drew nigh unto Jerusalem, and were come to Bethphage, unto the mount of Olives, then sent Jesus two disciples, 2. Saying unto them, Go into the village over against you, and straightway ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her: loose them, and bring them unto Me. 3. And if any man say ought unto you, ye shall say, The Lord hath need of them; and straightway he will send them. 4. All this was done, that it might he fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, 5. Tell ye the daughter of Sion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass, and a colt the foal of an ass. 6. And the disciples went, and did as Jesus commanded them, 7. And brought the ass, and the colt, and put on them their clothes, and they set Him thereon. 8. And a very great multitude spread their garments in the way; others cut down branches from the trees, and strawed them in the way. 9. And the multitudes that went before, and that followed, cried, saying, Hosanna to the Son of David: Blessed is He that cometh in the name of the Lord; Hosanna in the highest. 10. And when He was come into Jerusalem, all the city was moved, saying, Who is this? 11. And the multitude said, This is Jesus the prophet of Nazareth of Galilee. 12. And Jesus went into the temple of God, and cast out all them that sold and bought in the temple, and overthrew the tables of the moneychangers, and the seats of them that sold doves, 13. And said unto them, It is written, My house shall be called the house of prayer; but ye have made it a den of thieves. 14. And the blind and the lame came to Him in the temple; and He healed them. 15. And when the chief priests and scribes saw the wonderful things that He did, and the children crying in the temple, and saying, Hosanna to the Son of David, they were sore displeased, 16. And said unto Him, Hearest Thou what these say? And Jesus saith unto them, Yea; have ye never read, Out of the mouth of babes and sucklings Thou hast perfected praise?."*

*Matthew 21:1-16*

Jesus spent His last Sabbath in the quiet home at Bethany with Lazarus and his sisters. Some sense of His approaching death tinged the modest festivities of that evening with sadness, and spoke in Mary's anointing of His body for the burying. The pause was brief, and, with the dawn of Sunday, He set Himself again to tread the road to the cross. Who can doubt that He felt the relief of that momentary relaxation of the strain on His spirit, and the corresponding pressure of its renewed tightening? This passage shows Him putting out from the quiet haven and facing the storm again. It is in two main sections, dealing respectively with the royal procession, and the acts of the King in the temple.

**I. The procession of the King.**

The first noteworthy point is that our Lord initiates the whole incident, and deliberately sets Himself to evoke the popular enthusiasm, by a distinct voluntary fulfilment of a Messianic prophecy. The allusion to the prophecy, in His sending for the colt and mounting it, may have escaped the disciples and the crowds of pilgrims; but they rightly caught His intention to make a solemn triumphal entry into the city, and responded with a burst of enthusiasm, which He expected and wished. The poor garments flung hastily on the animals, the travel-stained cloaks cast on the rocky path, the branches of olive and palm waved in the hands, and the tumult of acclaim, which shrilly echoed the words of the psalm, and proclaimed Him to be the Son of David, are all tokens that the crowds hailed Him as their King, and were all permitted and welcomed by Him. All this is in absolute opposition to His usual action, which had been one long effort to damp down inflammable and unspiritual Messianic hopes, and to avoid the very enthusiasm which now surges round Him unchecked. Certainly that calm figure, sitting on the slow-pacing ass, with the noisy multitude pressing round Him, is strangely unlike Him, who hid Himself among the hills when they sought to make Him a King. His action is the more remarkable, if it be remembered that the roads were alive with pilgrims, most of whom passing through Bethany would be Galileans; that they had seen Lazarus walking about the village, and knew who had raised him; that the Passover festival was the time in all the year when popular tumults were to be expected; and that the crowds going to Jerusalem were met by a crowd coming from it, bent on seeing the doer and the subject of the great miracle. Into this heap of combustibles our Lord puts a light. He must have meant that it should blaze as it did.

What is the reason for this contrast? The need for the former reticence no longer existed. There was no fear now of His teaching and ministry being interrupted by popular outburst. He knew that it was finished, and that His hour had come. Therefore, the same motive of filial obedience which had led Him to avoid what would prevent His discharging His Father's commission, now impelled Him to draw the attention of the nation and its rulers to the full extent of His claims, and to put the plain issue of their acceptance or rejection in the most unmistakable manner. A certain divine decorum, if we may so call it, required that once He should enter the city as its King. Some among the shouting crowds might have their enthusiasm purified and spiritualised, if once it were directed to Him. It was for us, no less than for them, that this one interruption of His ordinary method was adopted by Him, that we too might ponder the fact that He laid His hand on that magnificent prophecy, and said, It is mine. I am the King.

The royal procession is also a revelation of the character of the King and the nature of His kingdom. A strange King this, indeed, who has not even an ass of His own, and for followers, peasants with palm branches instead of swords! What would a Roman soldier or one of Herod's men have thought of that rustic procession of a pauper prince on an ass, and a hundred or two of weaponless, penniless men? Christ's one moment of royal pomp is as eloquent of His humiliation as the long stretch of His lowly life is. And yet, as is always the case, side by side with the lowliness there gleams the veiled splendour. He had to borrow the colt, and the message in which He asks for it is a strange paradox. The Lord hath need of him--so great was the poverty of so great a King. But it spoke, too, of a more than human knowledge, and of an authority which had only to require in order to receive. Some farming villager, no doubt, who was a disciple but secretly, gladly yielded his beasts. The prophecy which Matthew quotes, with the omission of some words, from Zechariah, and the addition of the first clause from Isaiah, is symbolic, and would have been amply fulfilled in the mission and character of Christ, though this event had never taken place. But just as it is symbolic, so this external fulfilment, which is intended to point to the real fulfilment, is also symbolic. The chariot and the horse are the emblems of conquerors. It is fitting that the Prince of Peace should make His state entry on a colt, unridden before, and saddled only with a garment. Zechariah meant that Zion's King should not reign by the right of the strongest, and that all His triumphs should be won by lowly meekness. Christ meant the same by His remarkable act. And has not the picture of Him, throned thus, stamped for ever on the imagination of the world a profounder sense of the inmost nature of His kingdom than many words would have done? Have we learned the lesson of the gentleness which belongs to His kingdom, and of the unchristian character of war and violence? Do we understand what the Psalmist meant when he sang, In thy majesty ride on prosperously, because of ... meekness? Let us not forget the other picture, Behold, a white horse, and He that sat thereon, called Faithful and True; and in righteousness He doth judge and make war.

The entry may remind us also of the worthlessness of mere enthusiastic feeling in reference to Jesus Christ. The day was the Sunday. How many of that crowd were shouting as loudly, Crucify Him!and Not this man, but Barabbas!on the Friday? The palm-branches had not faded, where they had been tossed, before the fickle crowd had swung round to the opposite mood. Perhaps the very exuberance of feeling at the beginning, had something to do with the bitterness of the execrations at the end, of the week. He had not answered their expectations, but, instead of heading a revolt, had simply taught in the temple, and meekly let Himself be laid hold of. Nothing succeeds like success, and no idol is so quickly forsaken as the idol of a popular rising. All were eager to disclaim connection with Him, and to efface the remembrance of their Sunday's hosannas by their groans round His gibbet. But there is a wider lesson here. No enthusiasm can be too intense which is based upon a true sense of our need of Christ, and of His work for us; but it is easy to excite apparently religious emotion by partial presentations of Him, and such excitement foams itself away by its very violence, like some Eastern river that in winter time dashes down the wady with irresistible force, and in summer is bone dry. Unless we know Christ to be the Saviour of our souls and the Lamb of God, we shall soon tire of singing hosannas in His train, and want a king with more pretensions; but if we have learned who and what He is to us, then let us open our mouths wide, and not be afraid of letting the world hear our shout of praise.

**II. The coming of the King in the temple.**

The discussion of the accuracy of Matthew's arrangement of events here is unnecessary. He has evidently grouped, as usual, incidents which have a common bearing, and wishes to put these three, of the cleansing, the healing, and the pleasure in the children's praise, as the characteristic acts of the King in the temple. We can scarcely avoid seeing in the first of the three a reference to Malachi's prophecy, The Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come to His temple ... And He shall purify the sons of Levi. His first act, when in manhood He visited the temple, had been to cleanse. His first act when He enters it as its Lord is the same. The abuse had grown again apace. Much could be said in its vindication, as convenient and harmless, and it was too profitable to be lightly abandoned. But the altar of Mammon so near the altar of God was sacrilege in His eyes, and though He had passed the traders unmolested many times since that first driving out, now that He solemnly comes to claim His rights, He cannot but repeat it. It is perhaps significant that His words now have both a more sovereign and a more severe tone than before. Then He had spoken of My Father's house, now it is My house, which are a part of His quotation indeed, but not therefore necessarily void of reference to Himself. He is exercising the authority of a son over His own house, and bears Himself as Lord of the temple. Before, He charged them with making it a house of merchandise; now, with turning it into a robber's cave. Evil rebuked and done again is worse than before. Trafficking in things pertaining to the altar is even more likely than other trading to cross the not always very well defined line which separates trade from trickery and commerce from theft. That lesson needs to be laid to heart in many quarters now. There is always a fringe of moneyed interests round Christ's Church, seeking gain out of religious institutions; and their stands have a wonderful tendency to creep inwards from the court of the Gentiles to holier places. The parasite grows very quickly, and Christ had to deal with it more than once to keep down its growth. The sellers of doves and changers of money into the sacred shekel were venial offenders compared with many in the Church, and the race is not extinct. If Christ were to come to His house to-day, in bodily form, who doubts that He would begin, as He did before, by driving the traders out of His temple? How many most respectableusages and people would have to go, if He did!

The second characteristic, or we might say symbolical, act is the healing of the blind and lame. Royal state and cleansing severity are wonderfully blended with tender pity and the gentle hand of sovereign virtue to heal. The very manifestation of the former drew the needy to Him; and the blind, though they could not see, and the lame, though they could not walk, managed to grope and hobble their way to Him, not afraid of His severity, nor daunted by His royalty. No doubt they haunted the temple precincts as beggars, with perhaps as little sense of its sacredness as the money-changers; but their misery kindled a flicker of confidence and desire, to which He who tends the dimmest wick till it breaks into clear flame could not but respond. Though in His house He casts out the traders, He will heal the cripples and the blind, who know their need, and faintly trust His heart and power. Such a trait could not be wanting in this typical representation of the acts of the King.

Finally, He encourages and casts the shield of His approval round the children's praises. How natural it is that the children, pleased with the stir and not yet drilled into conventionalism, should have kept up their glad shouts, even inside the temple enclosure! How their fresh treble voices ring yet through all these centuries! The priests had, no doubt, been nursing their wrath at all that had been going on, but they had not dared to interfere with the cleansing, nor, for very shame, with the healings; but now they see their opportunity. This is a clear breach of all propriety, and that is the crime of crimes in the eyes of such people. They had kept quite cool and serenely contemptuous, amid the stir of the glad procession, and they did not much care though He healed some beggars; but to have this unseemly noise, though it was praise, was more than they could stand. Ecclesiastical martinets, and men whose religion is mostly ceremony, are, of course, more moved with indignationat any breach of ceremonial regulations than at holes made in graver laws. Nothing makes men more insensitive to the ring of real worship than being accustomed to the dull decorum of formal worship. Christ answers their hearest thou?with a did ye never read?and shuts their mouths with words so apposite in their plainest meaning that even they are silenced. To Him these young ringing hosannas are perfect praise, and worth any quantity of rabbispreachments. In their deeper sense, His words declare that the ears of God and of His Son, the Lord of the temple, are more gladly filled with the praises of the little ones, who know their weakness, and hymn His goodness with simple tongue, than with heartless eloquence of words or pomp of worship. The psalm from which the words are taken declares man's superiority over the highest works of God's hands, and the perfecting of the divine praise from his lips. We are but as the little children of creation, but because we know sin and redemption, we lead the chorus of heaven. As St. Bernard says, Something is wanting to the praise of heaven, if those be wanting who can say, "We went through fire and through water; and Thou broughtest us out into a wealthy place."In like manner, those praise Him most acceptably among men who know their feebleness, and with stammering lips humbly try to breathe their love, their need, and their trust.