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

**MATTHEW-107**. **A NEW KIND OF KING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"All this was done, that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by the prophet, saying, Tell ye the daughter of Zion, Behold, thy King cometh unto thee, meek, and sitting upon an ass."*

*Matthew 21:4-5*

Our Lord's entrance into Jerusalem is one of the comparatively few events which are recorded in all the four Gospels. Its singular unlikeness to the rest of His life, and its powerful influence in bringing about the Crucifixion, may account for its prominence in the narratives. It took place probably on the Sunday of Passion Week. Before the palm branches were withered the enthusiasm had died away, and the shouting crowd had found out that this was not the sort of king that they wanted. They might have found that out, even by the very circumstances of the entrance, for they were profoundly significant; though their meaning, like so much of the rest of Christ's life, was less clear to the partakers and spectators than it is to us. These things understood not the disciples at the first, says John in closing his narrative of the entrance, but when Jesus was glorified, then they remembered that they had done these things unto Him.

My object in this sermon is not at all to attempt a pictorial treatment of this narrative, for these Gospels tell it us a great deal better than any of us can tell it after them; but to seek to bring out, if it may be, two or three aspects of its significance.

**I. First, then, I ask you to consider its significance as an altogether exceptional fact in Christ's life.**

Throughout the whole of the preceding period, He had had two aims distinctly in view. One was to shun publicity; and the other was to damp down the heated, vulgar anticipations of the multitude, who expected a temporal king. And now here He deliberately, and of set purpose, takes a step which is like flinging a spark into a powder barrel. The nation was assembled in crowds, full of the unwholesome excitement which attended their meeting for the annual feast. All were in a quiver of expectation; and knowing that, Jesus Christ originates this scene by His act of sending the two disciples into the village over against them, to bring the ass, and the colt the foal of an ass. The reasons for a course so entirely opposed to all the preceding must have been strong. Let us try to see what they were.

First, He did it in order to precipitate the conflict which was to end in His death. Now, had He any right to do that? Knowing as He did the ferment of expectation into which He was thrusting this new element of disturbance, and foreseeing, as He must have done, that it would sharpen the hostility of the rulers of the people to a murderous degree, how can He be acquitted of one of two things--either singular shortsightedness or rash foolhardiness in taking such a step? Was He justified, or was He not?

If we are to look at His conduct from ordinary points of view, the answer must certainly be that He was not. And we can only understand this, and all the rest of His actions during the fateful three or four days that followed it, if we recognise in them the fixed resolve of One who knew that His mission was not only to live and to teach by word and life, but to die, and by death to deliver the world. I take it that it is very hard to save the character of Jesus Christ for our reverence if we refuse to regard His death as for our redemption. But if He came, and knew that He came, not only to ministerbut to give His life a ransom for many, then we can understand how He hastened to the Cross, and deliberately set a light to the train which was to end in that great explosion. On any other hypothesis it seems to me immensely hard to account for His act here.

Then, still further, looking at this distinctly exceptional fact in our Lord's life, we see in it a very emphatic claim to very singular prerogative and position. He not only thereby presented Himself before the nation in their collective capacity as being the King of Israel, but He also did a very strange thing. He dressed Himself, so to speak, in order to fulfil a prophecy. He posed before the world as being the Person who was meant by sacred old words. And His Entrance upon the slow-pacing colt was His voluntary and solemn assertion that He was the Person of whom the whole stream and current of divinely sent premonitions and forecasts had been witnessing from the beginning. He claimed thereby to be the King of Israel and the Fulfiller of the divine promises that were of old.

Now again, I have to ask the question, Was He right, or was He wrong? If He was right, then He is a great deal more than a wise Teacher, and a perfect Example of excellence. If He was wrong, He is a great deal less. There is no escape from that alternative, as it seems to me, but by the desperate expedient of denying that He ever did this thing which this narrative tells us that He did. At all events I beseech you all, dear friends, to take fairly into your account of the character of Jesus Christ, this fact, that He, the meek, the gentle, said that He was meek, and everybody has believed Him; and that once, in the very crisis of His life, and in circumstances which make the act most conspicuous, He who always shunned publicity, nor caused His voice to be heard in the streets, and steadfastly put away from Himself the vulgar homage that would have degraded Him into a mere temporal monarch, did assert that He was the King of Israel and the Fulfiller of prophecy. Ask yourselves, What does that fact mean?

And then, still further, looking at the act as exceptional in our Lord's life, note that it was done in order to make one final, solemn appeal and offer to the men who beheld Him. It was the last bolt in His quiver. All else had failed, perhaps this might succeed. We know not the depths of the mysteries of that divine foreknowledge which, even though it foresees failure, ceases not to plead and to woo obstinate hearts. But this we may thankfully learn, that, just as with despairing hope, but with unremitting energy, Jesus Christ, often rejected, offered Himself once more if perchance He might win men to repentance, so the loving patience and long-suffering of our God cease not to plead ever with us. Last of all He sent unto them His Son, saying, They will reverence My Son when they see Him; and yet the expectation was disappointed, and the Son was slain. We touch deep mysteries, but the persistence of the pleading and rejected love and pity of our God shine through this strange fact.

**II. And now, secondly, let me ask you to note its significance as a symbol.**

The prophecy which two out of the four evangelists--viz., Matthew and John--regard as having been, in some sense, fulfilled by the Entrance into Jerusalem, would have been fulfilled quite as truly if there had been no Entrance. For the mere detail of the prophecy is but a picturesque way of setting forth its central and essential point--viz., the meekness of the King. So our Lord's fulfilment is only an external, altogether subsidiary, accomplishment of the prophecy; and in fact, like some other of the external correspondences between His life and the outward details of Old Testament prophecy, is intended for little more than a picture or a signpost which may direct our thoughts to the inward correspondence, which is the true fulfilment.

So then, the deed, like the prophecy after which it is moulded, is wholly and entirely of importance in its symbolical aspect.

The symbolism is clear enough. This is a new kind of King. He comes, not mounted on a warhorse, or thundering across the battlefield in a scythe-armed chariot, like the Pharaohs and the Assyrian monarchs, who have left us their vainglorious monuments, but mounted on the emblem of meekness, patience, gentleness, and peace. And He is a pauper King, for He has to borrow the beast on which He rides, and His throne is draped with the poor, perhaps ragged, robes of a handful of fishermen. And His attendants are not warriors bearing spears, but peasants with palm branches. And the salutation of His royalty is not the blare of trumpets, but the Hosanna!from a thousand throats. That is not the sort of King that the world calls a King. The Roman soldiers might well have thought they were perpetrating an exquisite jest when they thrust the reed into His unresisting hand, and crushed down the crown of thorns on His bleeding brows.

But the symbol discloses the very secret of His Kingdom, the innermost mysteries of His own character and of the forces to which He intrusts the further progress of His word. Gentleness is royal and omnipotent; force and violence are feeble. The Lord is in the still, small voice, not in the earthquake, nor the fire, nor the mighty wind. The dove's light pinion will fly further than the wings of Rome's eagles, with their strong talons and blood-dyed beaks. And the kingdom that is established in meekness, and rules by gentleness and for gentleness, and has for its only weapons the power of love and the omnipotence of patience, that is the kingdom which shall be eternal and universal.

Now all that is a great deal more than pretty sentiment; it has the closest practical bearing upon our lives. How slow God's Church has been to believe that the strength of Christ's kingdom is meekness! Professing Christian men have sought to win the world to their side, and by wealth or force or persecution, or this, that, or the other of the weapons out of the world's armoury, to promote the kingdom of Christ. But it has all been in vain. There is only one power that conquers hate, and that is meek love. There is only one way by which Christ's kingdom can stand firm, and that is its unworldly contrast to all the manner of human dominion. Wheresoever God's Church has allied itself with secular sovereignties, and trusted in the arm of flesh, there has the fine gold become dimmed. Endurance wears out persecution, patient submission paralyses hostile violence, for you cannot keep on striking down unresisting crowds with the sword. The Church of Christ is an anvil that has been beaten upon by many hammers, and it has worn them all out. Meekness is victorious, and the kingdom of Christ can only be advanced by the faithful proclamation of His gentle love, from lips that are moved by hearts which themselves are conformed to His patient image.

Then, still further, let me remind you that this symbol carries in it, as it seems to me, the lesson of the radical incompatibility of war with Christ's kingdom and dominion. It has taken the world all these centuries to begin to learn that lesson. But slowly men are coming to it, and the day will dawn when all the pomp of warfare, and the hell of evil passions from which it comes, and which it stimulates, will be felt to be as utterly incompatible with the spirit of Christianity as slavery is felt to-day. The prophecy which underlies our symbol is very significant in this respect. Immediately upon that vision of the meek King throned on the colt the foal of an ass, follows this: And I will cut off the chariot from Ephraim, and the horses from Jerusalem; and the battle bow shall be cut off, and He shall speak peace unto the heathen.

Let me beseech you, Christian men and women, to lay to heart the duty of Christ's followers in reference to the influence and leavening of public opinion upon this matter, and to see to it that, in so far as we can help, we set ourselves steadfastly against that devilish spirit which still oppresses with an incubus almost intolerable, the nations of so-called Christendom. Lift up your voices be not afraid, but cry, We are the followers of the Prince of Peace, and we war against the war that is blasphemy against His dominion.

And so, still further, note the practical force of this symbol as influencing our own conduct. We are the followers of the meek Christ. It becomes us to walk in all meekness and gentleness. Spirited conductis the world's euphemism for unchristian conduct, in ninety-nine cases out of the hundred. The perspective of virtue has altered since Jesus Christ taught us how to love. The old heathen virtues of magnanimity, fortitude, and the like have with shame to take a lower room. There is something better than these. The saint has all the virtues of the old heathen hero, and some more besides, which are higher than these, and those which he has in common, he has in different proportion. The flaunting tulips and peonies of the garden of the world seem to outshine the white snowdrops and the glowing, modest little violets below their leaves, but the former are vulgar, and they drop very soon, and the latter, if paler and more delicate, are refined in their celestial beauty. The slow-pacing steed on which Jesus Christ rides will out-travel the fiery warhorse, and will pursue its patient, steadfast path till He bring forth righteousness unto judgment, and all the upright in heart shall follow Him.

**III. Lastly, notice the significance of this fact as a prophecy.**

It was, as I have pointed out, the last solemn appeal to the nation, and in a very real sense it was Christ's coming to judgment. It is impossible to look at it without seeing, besides all its other meanings, gleaming dimly through it, the anticipations of that other coming, when the Lord Himself shall descend with a shout, with the voice of the Archangel, and the trump of God.

Let me bring into connection with the scene of my text three others, gathered from various parts of Scripture. In the forty-fifth Psalm we find, side by side with the great words, Ride on prosperously because of truth and meekness and righteousness, the others, Thine arrows are sharp in the hearts of the king's enemies; the people shall fall under Thee. Now, though it is possible that that later warlike figure may be merely the carrying out of the thought which is more gently put before us in the former words, still it looks as if there were two sides to the conquering manifestation of the king--one being in meekness and truth and righteousness, and the other in some sense destructive and punitive.

But, however that may be, my second scene is drawn from the last book of Scripture, where we read that, when the first seal was opened, there rode forth a Figure, crowned, mounted upon a white steed, bearing bow and arrow, conquering and to conquer. And, though that again may be but an image of the victorious progress of the gentle Gospel of Jesus Christ throughout the whole earth, still it comes as one in a series of judgments, and may rather be taken to express the punitive effects which follow its proclamation even here and now.

But there can be no doubt with regard to the third of the scenes which I connect with the incident of which we are discoursing: And I saw heaven opened, and beheld a white horse; and He that sat upon Him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness doth He judge and make war.... And out of His mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it He should smite the nations; and He shall rule them with a rod of iron; and He treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God. That is the Christ who came into Jerusalem on the colt the foal of an ass. That is the Christ who is meek and long-suffering. There is a reserve of punitive and destructive power in the meek King. And oh I what can be so terrible as the anger of meekness, the wrath of infinite gentleness? In the triumphal entry, we find that, when the procession turned the rocky shoulder of Olivet, and the long line of the white city walls, with the gilding of the Temple glittering in the sunshine, burst upon their view, the multitude lifted up their voices in gladness. But Christ sat there, and as He looked across the valley, and beheld, with His divine prescience, the city, now so joyous and full of stir, sitting solitary and desolate, He lifted up His voice in loud wailing. The Christ wept because He must punish, but He punished though He wept.

Our Judge is the gentle Jesus, therefore we can hope. The gentle Jesus is our Judge, therefore let us not presume. I beseech you, brethren, lay, as these poor people did their garments, your lusts and proud wills in His way, and join the welcoming shout that hails the King, meek and having salvation. And then, when He comes forth to judge and to destroy, you will not be amongst the ranks of the enemies, whom He will ride down and scatter, but amongst the armies that follow Him, ... clothed in fine linen, clean and pure.

Kiss the Son lest He be angry, and ye perish from the way when His wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in Him.