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

**MATTHEW-123**. **THE NEW PASSOVER by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"17.* *Now the first day of the feast of unleavened bread the disciples came to Jesus, saying unto Him, Where wilt Thou that we prepare for Thee to eat the passover? 18. And He said, Go into the city to such a man, and say unto him, The Master saith, My time is at hand; I will keep the passover at thy house with My disciples. 19. And the disciples did as Jesus had appointed them; and they made ready the passover. 20. Now when the even was come, He sat down with the twelve. 21. And as they did eat, He said, Verily I say unto you, That one of you shall betray Me. 22. And they were exceeding sorrowful, and began every one of them to say unto Him, Lord, is it I? 23. And He answered and said, He that dippeth his hand with Me in the dish, the same shall betray Me. 21. The Son of Man goeth as it is written of Him; but woe unto that man by whom the Son of Man is betrayed! it had been good for that man if he had not been born. 25. Then Judas, which betrayed Him, answered and said, Master, is it I? He said unto him, Thou hast said 26. And as they were eating, Jesus took bread, and blessed it, and brake it, and gave it to the disciples, and said, Take, eat; this is My body. 27. And He took the cup, and gave thanks, and gave it to them, saying, Drink ye all of it; 28. For this is My blood of the new testament, which is shed for many for the remission of sins. 29. But I say unto you, I will not drink henceforth of this fruit of the vine, until that day when I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom. 30. And when they had sung an hymn, they went out into the Mount of Olives."*

*Matthew 26:17-30*

The Tuesday of Passion Week was occupied by the wonderful discourses which have furnished so many of our meditations. At its close Jesus sought retirement in Bethany, not only to soothe and prepare His spirit but to hide Himselffrom the Sanhedrin. There He spent the Wednesday. Who can imagine His thoughts? While He was calmly reposing in Mary's quiet home, the rulers determined on His arrest, but were at a loss how to effect it without a riot. Judas comes to them opportunely, and they leave it to him to give the signal. Possibly we may account for the peculiar secrecy observed as to the place for the last supper, by our Lord's knowledge that His steps were watched, and by His earnest wish to eat the Passover with the disciples before He suffered. The change between the courting of publicity and almost inviting of arrest at the beginning of the week, and the evident desire to postpone the crisis till the fitting moment which marks the close of it, is remarkable, and most naturally explained by the supposition that He wished the time of His death to be that very hour when, according to law, the paschal lamb was slain. On the Thursday, then, he sent Peter and John into the city to prepare the Passover; the others being in ignorance of the place till they were there, and Judas being thus prevented from carrying out his purpose till after the celebration.

The precautions taken to ensure this have left their mark on Matthew's narrative, in the peculiar designation of the host,--'Such a man!It is a kind of echo of the mystery which he so well remembered as round the errand of the two. He does not seem to have heard of the token by which they knew the house, viz., the man with the pitcher whom they were to meet. But he does know that Peter and John got secret instructions, and that he and the others wondered where they were to go. Had there been a previous arrangement with this unnamed such an one, or were the token and the message alike instances of Christ's supernatural knowledge and authority? It is difficult to say. I incline to the former supposition, which would be in accordance with the distinct effort after secrecy which marks these days; but the narratives do not decide the question. At all events, the host was a disciple, as appears from the authoritative the Master saith; and, whether he had known beforehand that this dayincarnate salvation would come to his houseor no, he eagerly accepts the peril and the honour. His message is royal in its tone. The Lord does not ask permission, but issues His commands. But He is a pauper King, not having where to lay His head, and needing another man's house in which to gather His own household together for the family feast of the Passover. What profound truths are wrapped up in that My time is come! It speaks of the voluntariness of His surrender, the consciousness that His Cross was the centre point of His work, His superiority to all external influences as determining the hour of His death, and His submission to the supreme appointment of the Father. Obedience and freedom, choice and necessity, are wonderfully blended in it.

So, late on that Thursday evening, the little band left Bethany for the last time, in a fashion very unlike the joyous stir of the triumphal entry. As the evening is falling, they thread their way through the noisy streets, all astir with the festal crowds, and reach the upper room, Judas vainly watching for an opportunity to slip away on his black errand. The chamber, prepared by unknown hands, has vanished, and the hands are dust; but both are immortal. How many of the living acts of His servants in like manner seem to perish, and the doers of them to be forgotten or unknown! But He knows the name of such an one, and does not forget that he opened his door for Him to enter in and sup.

The fact that Jesus put aside the Passover and founded the Lord's Supper in its place, tells much both about His authority and its meaning. What must He have conceived of Himself, who bade Jew and Gentile turn away from that God-appointed festival, and think not of Moses, but of Him? What did He mean by setting the Lord's Supper in the place of the Passover, if He did not mean that He was the true Paschal Lamb, that His death was a true sacrifice, that in His sprinkled blood was safety, that His death inaugurated the better deliverance of the true Israel from a darker prison-house and a sorer bondage, that His followers were a family, and that the children's breadwas the sacrifice which He had made? There are many reasons for the doubling of the commemorative emblem, but this is obviously one of the chief--that, by the separation of the two in the rite, we are carried back to the separation in fact; that is to say, to the violent death of Christ. Not His flesh alone, in the sense of Incarnation, but His body broken and His blood shed, are what He wills should be for ever remembered. His own estimate of the centre point of His work is unmistakably pronounced in His institution of this rite.

But we may consider the force of each emblem separately. In many important points they mean the same things, but they have each their own significance as well. Matthew's condensed version of the words of institution omits all reference to the breaking of the body and to the memorial character of the observance, but both are implied. He emphasises the reception, the participation, and the significance of the bread. As to the latter, This is My bodyis to be understood in the same way as the field is the world, and many other sayings. To speak in the language of grammarians, the copula is that of symbolic relationship, not that of existence; or, to speak in the language of the street, ishere means, as it often does, represents. How could it mean anything else, when Christ sat there in His body, and His blood was in His veins? What, then, is the teaching of this symbol? It is not merely that He in His humanity is the bread of life, but that He in His death is the nourishment of our true life. In that great discourse in John's Gospel, which embodies in words the lessons which the Lord's Supper teaches by symbols, He advances from the general statement, I am the Bread of Life, to the yet more mysterious and profound teaching that His flesh, which at some then future point He will give for the life of the world, is the bread; thus distinctly foreshadowing His death, and asserting that by that death we live, and by partaking of it are nourished. The participation in the benefits of Christ's death, which is symbolised by Take, eat, is effected by living faith. We feed on Christ when our minds are occupied with His truth, and our hearts nourished by His love, when it is the meatof our wills to do His will, and when our whole inward man fastens on Him as its true object, and draws from Him its best being. But the act of reception teaches the great lesson that Christ must be in us, if He is to do us any good. He is not for usin any real sense, unless He be in us. The word rendered in John's Gospel eatethis that used for the ruminating of cattle, and wonderfully indicates the calm, continual, patient meditation by which alone we can receive Christ into our hearts, and nourish our lives on Him. Bread eaten is assimilated to the body, but this bread eaten assimilates the eater to itself, and he who feeds on Christ becomes Christ-like, as the silk-worm takes the hue of the leaves on which it browses. Bread eaten to-day will not nourish us to-morrow, neither will past experiences of Christ's sweetness sustain the soul. He must be our daily breadif we are not to pine with hunger.

The wine carries its own special teaching, which clearly appears in Matthew's version of the words of institution. It is My blood, and by its being presented in a form separate from the bread which is His body suggests a violent death. It is covenant blood, the seal of that better covenantthan the old, which God makes now with all mankind, wherein are given renewed hearts which carry the divine law within themselves; the reciprocal and mutually blessed possession of God by men and of men by God, the universally diffused knowledge of God, which is more than head knowledge, being the consciousness of possessing Him; and, finally, the oblivion of all sins. These promises are fulfilled, and the covenant made sure, by the shed blood of Christ. So, finally, it is shed for many, for the remission of sins. The end of Christ's death is pardon which can only be extended on the ground of His death. We are told that Christ did not teach the doctrine of atonement. Did He establish the Lord's Supper? If He did (and nobody denies that), what did He mean by it, if He did not mean the setting forth by symbol of the very same truth which, stated in words, is the doctrine of His atoning death? This rite does not, indeed, explain the rationale of the doctrine; but it is a piece of unmeaning mummery, unless it preaches plainly the fact that Christ's death is the ground of our forgiveness.

Bread is the staff of life, but blood is the life. So this cupteaches that the lifeof Jesus Christ must pass into His people's veins, and that the secret of the Christian life is I live; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. Wine is joy, and the Christian life is not only to be a feeding of the soul on Christ as its nourishment, but a glad partaking, as at a feast, of His life and therein of His joy. Gladness of heart is a Christian duty, the joy of the Lord is your strengthand should be our joy; and though here we eat with loins girt, and go out, some of us to deny, some of us to flee, all of us to toil and suffer, yet we may have His joy fulfilled in ourselves, even whilst we sorrow.

The Lord's Supper is predominantly a memorial, but it is also a prophecy, and is marked as such by the mysterious last words of Jesus, about drinking the new wine in the Father's kingdom. They point the thoughts of the saddened eleven, on whom the dark shadow of parting lay heavily, to an eternal reunion, in a land where all things are become new, and where the festal cup shall be filled with a draught that has power to gladden and to inspire beyond any experience here. The joys of heaven will be so far analogous to the Christian joys of earth that the same name may be applied to both; but they will be so unlike that the old name will need a new meaning, and communion with Christ at His table in His kingdom, and our exuberance of joy in the full drinking in of His immortal life, will transcend the selectest hours of communion here. Compared with that fulness of joy they will be as water unto wine,--the new wine of the kingdom.