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

**MATTHEW-125**. **THIS CUP by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"27.* *And Jesus took the cup, and grave 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."*

*Matthew 26:27-28*

The comparative silence of our Lord as to the sacrificial character of His death has very often been urged as a reason for doubting that doctrine, and for regarding it as no part of the original Christian teaching. That silence may be accounted for by sufficient reasons. It has been very much exaggerated, and those who argue from it against the doctrine of the Atonement have forgotten that Jesus Christ founded the Lord's Supper.

That rite shows us what He thought, and what He would have us think, of His death; and in the presence of its testimony it seems to me impossible to deny that His conception of it was distinctly sacrificial. By it He points out the moment of His whole career which He desires that men should remember. Not His words of tenderness and wisdom; not His miracles, amazing and gracious as these were; not the flawless beauty of His character, though it touches all hearts and wins the most rugged to love, and the most degraded to hope; but the moment in which He gave His life is what He would imprint for ever on the memory of the world.

And not only so, but in the rite he distinctly tells us in what aspect He would have that death remembered. Not as the tragic end of a noble career which might be hallowed by tears such as are shed over a martyr's ashes; not as the crowning proof of love; not as the supreme act of patient forgiveness; but as a death for us, in which, as by the blood of the sacrifice, is secured the remission of sins.

And not only so, but the double symbol in the Lord's Supper--whilst in some respects the bread and wine speak the same truths, and certainly point to the same Cross--has in each of its parts special lessons intrusted to it, and special truths to proclaim. The bread and the wine both say:--Remember Me and My death. Taken in conjunction they point to that death as violent; taken separately they each suggest various aspects of it, and of the blessings that will flow to us therefrom. And it is my present purpose to bring out, as briefly and as clearly as I can, the special lessons which our Lord would have us draw from that cup which is the emblem of His shed blood.

**I. First, then, observe that it speaks to us of a divine treaty or covenant.**

Ancient Israel had lived for nearly 2000 years under the charter of their national existence which, as we read in the Old Testament, was given on Sinai amidst thunderings and lightnings--Now, therefore, if ye will obey My voice indeed, and keep My covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto Me above all people; for all the earth is Mine, and ye shall be unto Me a kingdom of priests and an holy nation.

And that covenant, or agreement, or treaty, on the part of God, was ratified by a solemn act, in which the blood of the sacrifice, divided into two portions, was sprinkled, one half upon the altar, and the other half, after their acceptance of the conditions and obligations of the covenant, on the people, who had pledged themselves to obedience.

And now, here is a Galilean peasant, in a borrowed upper room, within four-and-twenty hours of His ignominious death which might seem to blast all His work, who steps forward and says, I put away that ancient covenant which knits this nation to God. It is antiquated. I am the true offering and sacrifice, by the blood of which, sprinkled on altar and on people, a new covenant, built upon better promises, shall henceforth be.

What a tremendous piece of audacity, except on the one hypothesis that He that spake was indeed the Word of God; and that He was making that which Himself had established of old, to give way to that which He establishes now! The new covenant which Christ seals in His blood, is the charter, the better charter, under the conditions of which, not a nation but the world may find an external salvation which dwarfs all the deliverances of the past. That idea of a covenant confirmed by Christ's blood may sound to many hearers dry and hard. But if you will try to think what great truths are wrapped up in the theological phraseology, you will find them very real and very strong. Is it not a grand thought that between us and the infinite divine Nature there is established a firm and unmovable agreement? Then He has revealed His purposes; we are not left to grope in darkness, at the mercy of peradventuresand probablies; nor reduced to consult the ambiguous oracles of nature or of Providence, or the varying voices of our own hearts, or painfully and dubiously to construct more or less strong bases for confidence in a loving God out of such hints and fragments of revelation as these supply. He has come out of His darkness, and spoken articulate words, plain words, faithful words, which bind Him to a distinctly defined course of action. Across the great ocean of possible modes of action for a divine nature He has, if I may so say, buoyed out for Himself a channel, so as that we know His path, which is in the deep waters. He has limited Himself by the utterance of a faithful word, and we can now come to Him with His own promise, and cast it down before Him, and say: Thou hast spoken, and Thou art bound to fulfil it. We have a covenant wherein God has shown us His hand, has told us what He is going to do and has thereby pledged Himself to its performance.

And, still further, in order to get the full sweetness of this thought, to break the husk and reach to the kernel, you must remember what, according to the New Testament, are the conditions of this covenant. The old agreement was, If ye will obey My voice and do My commandments, then,--so and so will happen. The old condition was, Do and live; be righteous and blessed!The new condition is: Take and have; believe and live!The one was law, the other is gift; the one was retribution, the other is forgiveness. One was outward, hard, rigid law, fitly graven with a pen of iron on the rocks for ever; the other is impulse, love, a power bestowed that will make us obedient; and the sole condition that we have to render is the condition of humble and believing acceptance of the divine gift. The new covenant, in the exuberant fulness of its mercy, and in the tenderness of its gracious purposes, is at once the completion and the antithesis of the ancient covenant with its precepts and its retribution.

And, still further, this new covenant, of which the essence is God's bestowment of Himself on every heart that wills to possess Him; this new covenant, according to the teaching of these words of my text and of the symbol to which they refer, is ratified and sealed by that great sacrifice. The blood was sprinkled on the altar; the blood was sprinkled on the people, which being translated into plain, unmetaphorical language is simply this, that Christ's death remains for ever present to the divine mind as the great reason and motive which modifies His government, and which ensures that His love shall ever find its way to every seeking soul. His death is the token; His death is the reason; His death is the pledge of the unending and the inexhaustible mercy of God bestowed upon each of us. He that spared not His own Son, shall He not with Him also freely give us all things?The outward rite with its symbol is the exhibition in visible form of that truth, that the blood of Jesus Christ seals to the world the infinite mercy of God.

And, on the other hand, that same blood of the covenant, sprinkled upon the other parties to the treaty, even our poor sinful hearts, binds them to the fulfilment of the condition which belongs to them. That is to say, by the power of that sacrifice there are evoked in our poor souls, faith, love, surrender. It, and it alone, knits us to God; it, and it alone, binds us to the fulfilment of the covenant. My brother, have you entered into that sweet, solemn, sacred alliance and union with God? Have you accepted and fulfilled the conditions? Is your heart 'sprinkled with the blood so freely shed for you; and have you thereby been brought into living alliance with the God who has pledged His being and His name to be the all-sufficient God to you?

**II. Still further, this cup speaks to us of the forgiveness of sins.**

One theory, and one theory only, as it seems to me, of the meaning of Christ's death, is possible if these words of my text ever dropped from Christ's lips, or if He ever instituted the rite to which they refer; He must have believed that His death was a sacrifice, without which the sins of the world were not forgiven; and by which forgiveness came to us all.

And I do not think that we rightly conceive the relation between the sacrifices of barbarous heathen tribes, or the sacrifices appointed in Israel, and the great sacrifice on the Cross, if we say that our Lord's death is only figuratively accommodated to these in order to meet lower or grosser conceptions, but rather, I take it, that the accommodation is the other way. In all nations beyond the limits of Israel the sacrifices of living victims spoke not only of surrender and dependence, but likewise of the consciousness of demerit and evil on the part of the offerers, and were at once a confession of sin, a prayer for pardon, and a propitiation of an offended God. And I believe that the sacrifices in Israel were intended and adapted not only to meet the deep-felt want of human nature, common to them as to all other tribes, but also were intended and adapted to point onwards to Him in whose death a real want of mankind was met, in whose death a real sacrifice was offered, in whose death an angry God was not indeed propitiated, but in whose death the loving Father of our souls Himself provided the Lamb for the offering, without which, for reasons deeper than we can wholly fathom, it was impossible that sin should be remitted.

I insist upon no theory of an Atonement. I believe there is no Gospel, worth calling so, worth the preaching, worth your believing, or that will ever move the world or purify society, except the Gospel which begins with the fact of an Atonement, and points to the Cross as the altar on which the Sacrifice for the sins of the world, without whose death pardon is impossible, has died for us all.

Oh! dear friends, do not let yourselves be confused by the difficulties that beset all human and incomplete statements of the philosophy of the death of Christ; but getting away from these, cleave you to the fact that your sins were laid upon Christ, and that He has died for us all; that His death is a sacrifice; His body broken for us; and for the remission of our sins, His blood freely shed. Thus, and only thus, will you come to the understanding either of the sweetness of His love or of the power of His example; then, and only then, shall we know why it was that He elected to be remembered, out of all the moments of His life, by that one when He hung in weakness upon the Cross, and out of the darkness came the cry, My God, My God, why hast Thou forsaken Me?

**III. And now, again, let me remind you that this cup speaks likewise of a life infused.**

The blood is the life, says the physiology of the Hebrews. The blood is the life, and when men drink of that cup they symbolise the fact that Christ's own life and spirit are imparted to them that love Him. Except ye eat the flesh, and drink the blood of the Son of Man, ye have no life in you. The very heart of Christ's gift to us is the gift of His own very life to be the life of our lives. In deep, mystical reality He Himself passes into our being, and the law of the spirit of life makes us free from the law of sin and death, so that we may say: He that is joined to the Lord is one spirit, and the humble believing soul may rejoice in this: I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in Me. This is, in one aspect, the very deepest meaning of this Communion rite. As physicians sometimes tried to restore life to an almost dead man by the transfusion into his shrunken veins of the fresh warm blood from a young and healthy subject, so into our fevered life, into our corrupted blood, there is poured the full tide of the pure and perfect life of Jesus Christ Himself, and we live, not by our own power, nor for our own will, nor in obedience to our own caprices, but by Him and in Him, and with Him and for Him. This is the heart of Christianity, the possession within us of the life, the immortal life of Him that died for us.

My brother have you that great gift in your heart? Be sure of this, that unless the life of Christ is in you by faith, ye are dead, dead in trespasses and in sins; dead, and sure to rot away and disintegrate into corruption. The cup of blessing which we drink speaks to us of the transfusion into our spirits of the Spirit of Jesus Christ.

**IV. And lastly, it speaks of a festal gladness.**

The bread says nothing to us of the remission of sins. The broken bread proclaims, indeed, our nourishment from Jesus, but falls short of the deep and solemn truth that it is the very life-blood of Christ Himself which nourishes us and vitalises us. And the bread, in like manner, proclaims indeed the fact that we are fed on Him, but says nothing of the joy of that feeding. The wine is the symbol of that, and it proclaims to us that the Christian life here on earth, just because it is the feeding on and the drinking in of Jesus Christ, ought ever to be a life of blessedness, of abounding joy, by whatsoever darkness, burdens, cares, toils, sorrows, and solitude it may be shaded and saddened. They who live on Christ, they who drink in of His spirit, they should be glad in all circumstances, they, and they alone. We sit at a table, though it be in the wilderness, though it be in the presence of our enemies, where there ought to be joy and the voice of rejoicing.

But beyond that, as our Master Himself taught these apostles in that upper room, this cup points onwards to a future feast. At that solemn hour Jesus stayed His own heart with the vision of the perfected kingdom and the glad festival then. So this Communion has a prophetic element in it, and links on with predictions and parables which speak of the marriage supperof the great King, and of the time when we shall sit at His table in His kingdom.

For the past the Lord's Supper speaks of the one sufficient oblation and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. For the present it speaks of life produced and sustained by communion with Jesus Christ. And for the future it speaks of the unending, joyful satisfaction of all desires in the upper roomof the heavens.

How unlike, and yet how like to that scene in the upper room at Jerusalem! From it the sad disciples went out, some of them to deny their Master; all of them to struggle, to sin, to lose Him from their sight, to toil, to sorrow, and at last to die. From that other table we shall go no more out, but sit there with Him in full fruition of unfailing blessedness and participation of His immortal life for evermore.

Dear brethren, these are the lessons, these the hopes, which this blood of the new covenantteaches and inspires. Have you entered into that covenant with God? Have you made sure work of the forgiveness of your sins through His blood? Have you received into your spirits His immortal life? Then you may humbly be confident that, after life's weariness and lonesomeness are past, you will be welcomed to the banqueting hall by the Lord of the feast, and sit with Him and His servants who loved Him at that table and be glad.