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

**MATTHEW-126**. **UNTIL THAT DAY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"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."*

*Matthew 26:29*

This remarkable saying of our Lord's is recorded in all of the accounts of the institution of the Lord's Supper. The thought embodied in it ought to be present in the minds of all who partake of that rite. It converts what is primarily a memorial into a prophecy. It bids us hope as well as, and because we, remember. The light behind us is cast forward on to the dimness before. So the Apostle Paul, in his solitary reference to the Communion--which, indeed, is an entirely incidental one, and evoked simply by the corruptions in the Corinthian Church, emphasises this prophetic and onward-looking aspect of the backward-looking rite when he says, Ye do show the Lord's death till He come.

Now, it seems to me that those of us who so strongly hold that the Communion is primarily a simple memorial service, with no mysterious or magical efficacy of any sort about it, do rather ignore in our ordinary thoughts the other aspect which is brought out in my text; and that comparative ignoring seems to me to be but a part of a very lamentable and general tendency of this day, whereby the prospect of a future life has become somewhat dimmed and does not fill the place either in ordinary Christian thinking, or as a motive for Christian service which the proportion of faith, and the relative importance of the present and the future suggest that it ought to fill. The Christianity of this day has so much to do with the present life, and the thought of the Gospel as a power in the present has been so emphasised, in legitimate reaction from the opposite exaggeration, that there is great need, as I believe, to preach to Christian people the wisdom of making more prominent in their faith their immortal hope. I wish, then, to turn now to this aspect of the rite which we regard as a memorial, and try to emphasise its forward-looking attitude, and the large blessed truths that emerge if we consider that.

**I. First, let me say just a word about the twin aspect of the Communion as a memorial prophecy, or prophetic remembrance.**

Now, I need not remind you, I suppose, that according to the view which, as I believe, the New Testament takes, and which certainly we Nonconformists take, of all the rites of external worship, every one of them is a prophecy, because every act in which our sense is brought in to reinforce the spirit--and by outward forms, be they vocal, or be they manual, or be they of any other sort, we try to express and to quicken spiritual emotions and intellectual convictions--declares its own imperfection, digs its own grave, and prophecies its own resurrection in a nobler and better fashion. Just because these outward symbols of bread and wine do, through the senses, quicken the faith and the love of the spirit, they declare themselves to be transitory, and they point onwards to the time when that which is perfect shall absorb, and so destroy, that which is in part, and when sense shall be no longer necessary as the ally and humble servant of spirit. I saw no temple therein. Temples, and rites, and services, and holy days, and all the external apparatus of worship, are but scaffolding, and just as the scaffolding round a building is a prophecy of its own being pulled down when the building is reared and completed, so we cannot partake of these external symbols rightly, unless we recognise their transiency, and feel that they say to us, A mightier than I cometh after me, the latchet of whose shoe I am not worthy to unloose. The light that shines in the dark heralds the day and its own extinction.

So, looking back we must look forward, and partaking of the symbol, we must reach out to the time when the symbol shall be antiquated, the reality having come. The Passover of Israel did not more truly point onwards to the true Lamb of Sacrifice, and to the true Passover that was slain for us, and to its own elevation into the Lord's Supper of the Christian Church, than the Lord's Supper of the Christian Church points onwards to the marriage supper of the Lamb, and its own cessation.

But then, again, let me remind you that this prophetic aspect is inherent in the memorial aspect of the Communion, because what we remember necessarily demands the coming of what we hope. That is to say, if Jesus Christ be what the Lord's Supper says that He is, and if He has done what that broken bread and poured out wine proclaim, according to His own utterance, that He has done, then clearly that death which was for the life of the world, that death which was the seal of a covenant, that body broken for the remission of sins, that wine partaken of as a reception into ourselves of the very life-blood of Jesus Christ, do all demand something far nobler and more perfect than the broken, incomplete obedience and loyalties and communions which Christian men here exercise and possess.

If He died, as the rite says that He did, and if dying He left such a commentary upon His act as that ordinance affords, then He cannot have done with the world; then the powers that were set in motion by His death cannot pause nor cease their action until they have reached their appropriate culmination in effecting all that it was in them to effect. If, leaving His people, He said to them, Never forget My death for you, My broken body, and My shed blood, He therein said that the time will come, must come, when all the powers of the Cross shall be incorporated in humanity, and when the parted shall be reunited. The Communion would stand as the expression of Christ's mistaken estimate of His own importance, if there were not beyond the grave the perfecting of it, and the full appropriation and joyful possession of all which the death that it signifies brought to mankind.

Therefore, dear brethren, it seems to me that the best way by which Christians can deepen their confidence and brighten their hope in the perfect reunion and blessedness of the heavens, is to increase the firmness of their faith in, and the depth of their apprehension of, the sacrifice of the Cross. If the Cross demands the Crown, then our surest way to realise as certain our own possession of that Crown is to cling very close to that Cross. The more we look backwards to it the more will it fling its light into all the dark places that are in front of us, and flush the heavens up to the seventh and beyond, with the glories that stream from it. Hold fast by the Cross, and the more fully, believingly, joyously, unfalteringly, we recognise in it the foundation of our salvation, the more gladly, clearly, operatively, shall we cherish the hope that the headstone shall be brought forth with shoutings, and that the imperfect symbolical communion of earth will grow and greaten into complete and real union in eternal bliss.

Let me urge, then, this, that, as a matter of fact, a faith in eternal glory goes with and fluctuates in the same degree and manner as does the faith in the past sacrifice that Christ has made. He, and He alone, as I believe, turns nebulae into solidity, and makes of the more or less tremulous anticipation of a more or less dim and distant future, a calm, still certainty. We know that He will come because, and in proportion as, we believe that He has come. Keep these two things, then, always together, the memory and the hope. They stand like two great piers, one on either side of a narrow, dark glen, and suspended from them is stretched the bridge, along which the happy pilgrims may travel and enter into rest.

**II. And now, let us turn for a moment to the lovely vision of that future which is suggested by our text.**

The truest way, I was going to say the only way, by which we can have any conceptions of a condition of being of which we have no experience, is to fall back upon the experiences which we have, and use them as symbols and metaphors. The curtain is the picture. So our Lord here, in accordance with the necessary limitations of our human knowledge, contents Himself with using what lay at His hand, and taking it as giving faint shadows and metaphorical suggestions as to spiritual blessedness yonder.

There is one other way, as it seems to me, by which we can in any measure body forth to ourselves that unknown condition of things, and that is to fall back upon our present experiences in another fashion, and negative all of them which involve pain and limitation and incompleteness. There shall be no night--no sorrow--no tears--no sighing, and the like. These negatives of the strong and stinging griefs and limitations of the present are perhaps our second-best way of coming to some prophetic vision of that great future.

Remembering, then, that we are dealing with pure metaphor, and that the exact translation of the metaphor into reality is not yet possible for us, let us take one or two very plain thoughts out of this great saying--Until I drink it new with you in My Father's kingdom.

Then, we have to think of the completion of the Christian life beyond, which is also the completion of the results of Christ's death on the Cross, as being, according to the very frequent metaphor both of the Old and the New Testament, a prolonged festival. I do not need to speak of the details of the thoughts that thence emerge. Let me sum them up as briefly as may be. They include the satisfaction of every desire and the nourishment of all strength, and food for every faculty. When we think of the hungry hearts that all men carry, and how true it is that even the wisest and the holiest of us are spending our money for that which is not bread, and our labour for that which satisfieth not; when we think of how the choicest foods that life can provide, even for the noblest hunger of noble hearts, are too often to us but as a feeding on ashes that will leave grit between the teeth and a foul taste upon the palate, surely it is blessed to think that we may, after all life's disappointments, cherish the hope of a perfect fruition, and that yonder, if not here, it will be fully true that God never sends mouths but He sends meat to feed them. That is not so in this world, for we all carry hungers which impel us forward to nobler living, and which it would not be good for us to have satisfied here. But, unless the whole universe is a godless chaos, there must be somewhere a state in which a man shall have all that he wants, and shall want only what he ought.

The emblem of a feast suggests also society. The solitary travellers who have been toiling and moiling through the desert all the day long, snatching up a hasty mouthful as they march, and lonely many a time, come together at last, and sit together there joyous and united. Deep down in our hearts some of us have gashes that always bleed. We know losses and loneliness, and we can feel, I hope, how blessed is the thought that all the wanderers shall sit there together, and rejoice in each other's communion, and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

But besides satisfaction and society the figure suggests repose. That rest is not indolence, for we have to carry other metaphors with us in order to come to the full significance of this one, and the festal imagery is not all that we have to take into account; for we read, I grant unto you a kingdom, and ye shall sit on twelve thrones judging the twelve tribes of Israel, as well as ye shall eat and drink with Me at My table in My kingdom. So repose, which is consistent and coexistent with the intensest activity, is the great hope that comes out of these metaphors. But for many of us--I suppose for all of us elderly people--who are about weary of work and worry, there is no deeper hope than the hope of rest. I have had labour enough for one, says one of our poets. And I think there is something in most of our hearts that echoes that and rejoices to hear that, after the long march, ye shall sit with Me at My table.

But besides satisfaction, society, and rest, the figure suggests gladness. Wine is the emblem of the joyous side of a feast, just as bread is the emblem of the necessary nourishment. And it is new wine; joy raised to a higher power, transformed and glorified; and yet the old emotion in a new form. As for that gladness, eye hath not seen, neither hath it entered into the heart of man to conceive, the things that God hath prepared for them that love Him. Only all we weary, heavy-laden, saddened, anxious, disappointed, tormented people may hope for these festal joys, if we are Christ's. The feast will last when all the troubles and the cares which helped us to it are dead and buried and forgotten.

These four things, brethren--satisfaction, society, rest, new gladness--are proclaimed and prophesied to each of us, if we will, by this memorial rite.

Again, there comes from this aspect of the Communion the thought that the blessed condition of the Christian soul hereafter is a feast on a sacrifice. We must distinguish between the sense in which our Lord drinks with us, and the sense in which we alone partake of that feast of which He provides the viands. But just as in the symbolic ordinance of the Communion the very essence of it is that what was offered as sacrifice is now incorporated into the participant's spiritual being, and becomes part of himself, and the life of his life, so, in the future, all the blessedness of the clustered and constellated joys of that life, which is one eternal festival, shall arise from the reception into perfected spirits with ever-growing greatness and blessedness of the Christ that died and ever lives for them. That heavenly glory, to its highest pinnacle of aspiration, to its most rapt completeness of gladness, is all the consequence of Christ's death on the Cross. That death, which we commemorate, is the procuring cause of man's entrance into bliss, and that death is the subject of the continual, grateful remembrance of the saints in the seventh heaven of their glory. Life yonder, as all true life here, consists in taking into ourselves the life of Jesus Christ, and the law for heaven is the same as the law for earth, He that eateth Me, even he shall live by Me.

**III. Lastly, the conception of the future for Christian souls arising from this aspect of the Lord's Supper is that it is not only a feast, and a feast on a sacrifice, but that it is a feast with the King.**

With you I will drink it. Brethren, we pass beyond metaphor when we gather up and condense all the vague brightness and glories of that perfect future into this one rapturous, overwhelming, all-embracing thought: So shall we ever be with the Lord. I could almost wish that Christian people had no other thought of that future than this, for surely in its grand simplicity, in its ineffable depth, there lie the germs of every blessedness. How poor all the material emblems are of which sensuous imaginations make so much, when compared with that hope! As the good old hymn has it, which to me says more, in its bold simplicity, than all the sentimental enlargements of Scriptural metaphors which some people admire so much--

It is enough that Christ knows all,

And I shall be with Him.

Strange that He says, I will drink it with you. Does He need sustenance? Does He need any external things in order to make His feast? No! and Yes! I will sup with Himas well as He with me. And, surely, His meat and drink are the love, the loyalty, the obedience, the receptiveness, the society of His redeemed children. The joy of the Lordcomes from seeing of the travail of His soul, and His servants do enter into that joy in deep and wondrous fashion. We not only shall live on Christ, but He Himself puts to His own lips the chalice that He commends to ours, and in marvellous condescension to, and identity with, our glorified humanity drinks with us the new winein the Father's kingdom.