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

**MATTHEW-139**. **ON THE MOUNTAIN by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"16.* *Then the eleven disciples went away into Galilee, into a mountain where Jesus had appointed them. 17. And when they saw Him, they worshipped Him: but some doubted."*

*Matthew 28:16-17*

*"After that, He was seen of above five hundred brethren at once."*

*1 Corinthians 15:4*

To infer an historian's ignorance from his silence is a short and easy, but a rash, method. Matthew has nothing to say of our Lord's appearances in Jerusalem, except in regard to that of the women in the early morning of Easter Day. But it does not follow that he was ignorant of these appearances. Imperfect knowledge may be the explanation; but the scope and design of his Gospel is much more likely to be so. It is emphatically the Gospel of the King of Israel, and it moves, with the exception of the story of the Passion, wholly within the limits of the Galilean ministry. What more probable than that the same motive which induced Jesus to select the mountain which He had appointed as the scene of this meeting should have induced the Evangelist to pass by all the other manifestations in order to fix upon this one? It was fitting that in Galilee, where He had walked in lowly gentleness, kindly with His kind, He should assume His sovereign authority. It was fitting that in Galilee of the Gentiles, that outlying and despised province, half heathen in the eyes of the narrow-minded Pharisaic Jerusalem, He should proclaim the widening of His kingdom from Israel to all nations.

If we had Matthew's words only, we should suppose that none but the eleven were present on this occasion. But it is obviously the same incident to which Paul refers when he speaks of the appearance to five hundred brethren at once. These were the Galilean disciples who had been faithful in the days of His lowliness, and were thus now assembled to hear His proclamation of exaltation. Apparently the meeting had been arranged beforehand. They came without Him to the mountain where Jesus had appointed. Probably it was the same spot on which the so-called Sermon on the Mount, the first proclamation of the King, had been delivered, and it was naturally chosen to be the scene of a yet more exalted proclamation. A thousand tender memories and associations clustered round the spot. So we have to think of the five hundred gathered in eager expectancy; and we notice how unlike the manner of His coming is to that of the former manifestations. Then, suddenly, He became visibly present where a moment before He had been unseen. But now He gradually approaches, for the doubting and the worshipping took place when they saw Him, and before He came to them. I suppose we may conceive of Him as coming down the hill and drawing near to them, and then, when He stands above them, and yet close to them--else the five hundred could not have seen Him at once--doubts vanish; and they listen with silent awe and love. The words are majestic; all is regal. There is no veiled personality now, as there had been to Mary, and to the two on the road to Emmaus. There is no greeting now, as there had been in the upper chamber; no affording of a demonstration of the reality of His appearance, as there had been to Thomas and to the others. He stands amongst them as the King, and the music of His words, deep as the roll of thunder, and sweet as harpers harping with their harps, makes all comment or paraphrase sound thin and poor. But yet so many great and precious lessons are hived in the words that we must reverently ponder them. The material is so abundant that I can but touch it in the slightest possible fashion. This great utterance of our Lord's falls into three parts: a great claim, a great commission, a great promise.

**I. There is a Great Claim.**

All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earth. No words can more absolutely express unconditional, unlimited authority and sovereignty. Mark the variety of the gift--all power; every kind of force, every kind of dominion is in His hands. Mark the sphere of sovereignty--in heaven and in earth. Now, brethren, if we know anything about Jesus Christ, we know that He made this claim. There is no reason, except the unwillingness of some people to admit that claim, for casting any sort of doubt upon these words, or making any distinction in authority between them and the rest of the words of graciousness which the whole world has taken to its heart. But if He said this, what becomes of His right to the veneration of mankind, as the Perfect Example of the self-sacrificing, self-oblivious religious life? It is a mystery that I cannot solve, how any man can keep his reverence for Jesus, and refuse to believe that beneath these tremendous words there lies a solemn and solid reality.

Notice, too, that there is implied a definite point of time at which this all-embracing authority was given. You will find in the Revised Version a small alteration in the reading, which makes a great difference in the sense. It reads, All power has been given; and that points, as I say, to a definite period. When was it given? Let another portion of Scripture answer the question--Declared to be the Son of God with power, by the resurrection from the dead. Then to the Man Jesus was given authority over heaven and earth. All the early Christian documents concur in this view of the connection between the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ, and His investiture with this sovereign power. Hearken to Paul, Became obedient unto death, even the death of the Cross; wherefore God also hath highly exalted Him, and given Him a name that is above every name. Hearken to Peter, Who raised Him from the dead and gave Him glory. Hearken to the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews, We see Jesus crowned with glory and honour for the suffering of death. Hearken to John, To Him that is the Faithful Witness, and the First-born from the dead, and the Prince of the kings of the earth. Look with his eyes to the vision of the Lamb as it had been slain, enthroned in the midst of the throne, and say whether this unanimous consent of the earliest Christian teachers is explicable on any reasonable grounds, unless there had been underlying it just the words of our text, and the Master Himself had taught them that all power was given to Him in heaven and in earth. As it seems to me impossible to account for the existence of the Church if we deny the Resurrection, so it seems to me impossible to account for the faith of the earliest stratum of the Christian Church without the acceptance of some such declaration as this, as having come from the Lord Himself. And so the hands that were pierced with the nails wield the sceptre of the Universe, and on the brows that were wounded and bleeding with the crown of thorns are wreathed the many crowns of universal Kinghood.

But we have further to notice that in this investiture, with all power in heaven and on earth, we have not merely the attestation of the perfection of His obedience, the completeness of His work, and the power of His sacrifice, but that we have also the elevation of Manhood to enthronement with Divinity. For the new thing that came to Jesus after His resurrection was that His humanity was taken into, and became participant of, the glory which I had with Thee, before the world was. Then our nature, when perfect and sinless, is so cognate and kindred with the Divine that humanity is capable of being invested with, and bearing, that exceeding and eternal weight of glory. In that elevation of the Man Christ Jesus, we may read a prophecy, that shall not be unfulfilled, of the destiny of all those who conform to Him through faith, love, and obedience, finally to sit down with Him on His throne, even as He is set down with the Father on His throne.

Ah! brethren, Christianity has dark and low views of human nature, and men say they are too low and too dark. It is Nature's sternest painter, and, therefore, its best. But if on its palette the blacks are blacker than anywhere else, its range of colour is greater, and its white is more lustrous. No system thinks so condemnatorily of human nature as it is; none thinks so glowingly of human nature as it may become. There are bass notes far down beyond the limits of the scale to which ears dulled by the world and sin and sorrow are sensitive; and there are clear, high tones, thrilling and shrilling far above the range of perception of such ears. The man that is in the lowest depths may rise with Jesus to the highest, but it must be by the same road by which the Master went. If we suffer with Him, we shall also reign with Him, and only if. There is no other path to the Throne but the Cross. Via crucis, via lucis--the way of the Cross is the way of light. It is to those who have accepted their Gethsemanes and their Calvarys that He appoints a kingdom, as His Father has appointed unto Him.

So much, then, for the first point here in these words; turn now to the second.

**II. The Great Commission.**

One might have expected that the immediate inference to be drawn from All power is given unto Me in heaven and in earthwould have been some word of encouragement and strengthening to those who were so soon to be left, and who were beginning to be conscious of their feebleness. But there is nothing more striking in the whole of the incidents of those forty days than the prominence which is given in them to the work of the Church when the Master had left it, and to the imperative obligations devolving upon it. And so here, not encouragement, but obligation is the inference that is drawn from that tremendous claim. Because I have all power, therefore you are charged with the duty of winning the world for its King. The all-ruling Christ calls for the universal proclamation of His sovereignty by His disciples. These five hundred little understood the sweep of the commandment, and, as history shows, terribly failed to apprehend the emancipating power of it. But He says to us, as to them, I am not content with the authority given to Me by God, unless I have the authority that each man for himself can give Me, by willing surrender of his heart and will to Me. Jesus Christ craves no empty rule, no mere elevation by virtue of Divine supremacy, over men. He regards that elevation as incomplete without the voluntary surrender of men to become His subjects and champions. Without its own consent He does not count that His universal power is established in a human heart. Though that dominion be all-embracing like the ocean, and stretching into all corners of the universe, and dominating over all ages, yet in that ocean there may stand up black and dry rocks, barren as they are dry, and blasted as they are black, because, with the awful power of a human will, men have said, We will not have this Man to reign over us. It is willing subjects whom Christ seeks, in order to make the Divine grant of authority a reality.

In that work He needs His servants. The gift of God notwithstanding, the power of His Cross notwithstanding, the perfection and completeness of His great reconciling and redeeming work notwithstanding, all these are vain unless we, His servants, will take them in our hands as our weapons, and go forth on the warfare to which He has summoned us. This is the command laid upon us all, Make disciples of all nations. Only so will the reality correspond to the initial and all-embracing grant.

It would take us too far to deal at all adequately, or in anything but the most superficial fashion, with the remaining parts of this great commission. Make disciples of all nations--that is the first thing. Then comes the second step: Baptizing them into the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Who are to be baptized? Now, notice, if I may venture upon being slightly technical for a moment, that the word nationsin the preceding clause is a neuter one, and that the word for themin this clause is a masculine, which seems to me fairly to imply that the command baptizing themdoes not refer to all nations, but to the disciples latent among them, and to be drawn from them. Surely, surely the great claim of absolute and unbounded power has for its consequence something better than the lame and impotent conclusion of appointing an indiscriminate rite, as the means of making disciples! Surely that is not in accordance with the spirituality of the Christian faith!

Baptizing them into the Name--the name is one, that of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Spirit. Does that mean the name of God, and of a man, and of an influence, all jumbled up together in blasphemous and irrational union? Surely, if Father, Son, and Holy Spirit have one name, the name of Divinity, then it is but a step to say that three Persons are one God! But there is a great deal more here than a baptismal formula, for to be baptized into the Name is but the symbol of being plunged into communion with this one threefold God of our salvation. The ideal state of the Christian disciple is that he shall be as a vase dropped into the Atlantic, encompassed about with God, and filled with Him. We all live, and move, and have our beingin Him, but some of us have so wrapped ourselves, if I may venture to use such a figure, in waterproof covering, that, though we are floating in an ocean of Divinity, not a drop finds its way in. Cast the covering aside, and you will be saturated with God, and only in the measure in which you live and move and have your being in the Name are you disciples.

There is another step still. Making disciples and bringing into communion with the Godhead is not all that is to flow from, and correspond to, and realise in the individual, the absolute authority of Jesus Christ--Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. We hear a great deal in these days about the worthlessness of mere dogmatic Christianity. Jesus Christ anticipated all that talk, and guarded it from exaggeration. For what He tells us here that we are to train ourselves and others in, is not creed but conduct; not things to be believed or credenda but things to be done or agenda--teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you. A creed that is not wrought out in actions is empty; conduct that is not informed, penetrated, regulated by creed, is unworthy of a man, not to say of a Christian. What we are to know we are to know in order that we may do, and so inherit the benediction, which is never bestowed upon them that know, but upon them that, knowing these things, are blessed in, as well as for, the doing of them.

That training is to be continuous, educating to new views of duty; new applications of old truths, new sensitiveness of conscience, unveiling to us, ever as we climb, new heights to which we aspire. The Christian Church has not yet learnt--thank God it is learning, though by slow degrees--all the moral and practical implications and applications of the truth as it is in Jesus. And so these are the three things by which the Church recognises and corresponds to the universal dominion of Christ, the making disciples universally; the bringing them into the communion of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit; and the training of them to conduct ever approximating more and more to the Divine ideal of humanity in the glorified Christ.

And now I must gather just into a sentence or two what is to be said about the last point. There is--

**III. The Great Promise.**

I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world, or, as it might be read, with you all the days, even to the accomplishment of the age. Note that emphatic I am, which does not only denote certainty, but is the speech of Him who is lifted above the lower regions where Time rolls and the succession of events occurs. That I amcovers all the varieties of was, is, will be. Notice the long vista of variously tinted days which opens here. Howsoever many they be, howsoever different their complexion, days of summer and days of winter, days of sunshine and days of storm, days of buoyant youth and days of stagnant, stereotyped old age, days of apparent failure and days of apparent prosperity, He is with us in them all. They change, He is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. Notice the illimitable extent of the promise--even unto the end. We are always tempted to think that long ago the earth was more full of God than it is to-day, and that away forward in the future it will again be fuller, but that this moment is comparatively empty. The heavens touch the earth on the horizon in front and behind, and they are highest and remotest above us just where we stand. But no past day had more of Christ in it than to-day has, and that He has gone away is the condition of His coming. He therefore departed for a season, that we might receive Him for ever.

But mark that the promise comes after a command, and is contingent, for all its blessedness and power, upon our obedience to the prescribed duty. That duty is primarily to make disciples of all nations, and the discharge of it is so closely connected with the realisation of the promise that a non-missionary Church never has much of Christ's presence. But obedience to all the King's commands is required if we stand before Him, and are to enjoy His smile. If you wish to keep Christ very near you, and to feel Him with you, the way to do so is no mere cultivation of religious emotion, or saturating your mind with religious books and thoughts, though these have their place; but on the dusty road of life doing His will and keeping His commandments. If a man love Me he will keep My words, and My Father will love Him. We will come to Him, and make our abode with Him.