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

**MICAH-004. A DEW FROM THE LORD by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord, that tarrieth not for man, nor waiteth for the sons of men."*

*Micah 5:7*

The simple natural science of the Hebrews saw a mystery in the production of the dew on a clear night, and their poetic imagination found in it a fit symbol for all silent and gentle influences from heaven that refreshed and quickened parched and dusty souls. Created by an inscrutable process in silence and darkness, the dewdrops lay innumerable on the dry plains and hung from every leaf and thorn, each little globule a perfect sphere that reflected the sun, and twinkled back the beams in its own little rainbow. Where they fell the scorched vegetation lifted its drooping head. That is what Israel is to be in the world, says Micah. He saw very deep into God's mind and into the function of the nation.

It may be a question as to whether the text refers more especially to the place and office of Israel when planted in its own land, or when dispersed among the nations. For, as you see, he speaks of the remnant of Jacob as if he was thinking of the survivors of some great calamity which had swept away the greater portion of the nation. Both things are true. When settled in its own land, Israel's office was to teach the nations God; when dispersed among the Gentiles, its office ought to have been the same. But be that as it may, the conception here set forth is as true to-day as ever it was. For the prophetic teachings, rooted though they may be in the transitory circumstances of a tiny nation, are not for an age, but for all time, and we get a great deal nearer the heart of them when we grasp the permanent truths that underlie them, than when we learnedly exhume the dead history which was their occasion.

Micah's message comes to all Christians, and very eminently to English Christians. The subject of Christian missions is before us to-day, and some thoughts in the line of this great text may not be inappropriate.

We have here, then,

**I. The function of each Christian in his place.**

The remnant of Jacob shall be as a dew from the Lord in the midst of many nations. What made Israel as a dew? One thing only; its religion, its knowledge of God, and its consequent purer morality. It could teach Greece no philosophy, no art, no refinement, no sensitiveness to the beautiful. It could teach Rome no lessons of policy or government. It could bring no wisdom to Egypt, no power or wealth to Assyria. But God lit His candle and set it on a candlestick, that it might give light to all that were in the house. The same thing is true about Christian people. We cannot teach the world science, we cannot teach it philosophy or art, but we can teach it God. Now the possibility brings with it the obligation. The personal experience of Jesus Christ in our hearts, as the dew that brings to us life and fertility, carries with it a commission as distinct and imperative as if it had been pealed into each single ear by a voice from heaven. That which made Israel the dew amidst many nations, parched for want of it, makes Christian men and women fit to fill the analogous office, and calls upon them to discharge the same functions. For--in regard to all our possessions, and therefore most eminently and imperatively in regard to the best--that which we have, we have as stewards, and the Gospel, as the Apostle found, was not only given to him for his own individual enjoyment, elevation, ennobling, emancipation, salvation, but was committed to his charge, and he was entrusted with it, as he says, as a sacred deposit.

Remember, too, that, strange as it may seem, the only way by which that knowledge of God which was bestowed upon Israel could become the possession of the world was by its first of all being made the possession of a few. People talk about the unfairness, the harshness, of the providential arrangement by which the whole world was not made participant of the revelation which was granted to Israel. The fire is gathered on to a hearth. Does that mean that the corners of the room are left uncared for? No! the brazier is in the middle--as Palestine was, even geographically in the centre of the then civilised world--that from the centre the beneficent warmth might radiate and give heat as well as light to all them that are in the house.

So it is in regard to all the great possessions of the race. Art, literature, science, political wisdom, they are all intrusted to a few who are made their apostles; and the purpose is their universal diffusion from these human centres. It is in the line of the analogy of all the other gifts of God to humanity, that chosen men should be raised up in whom the life is lodged, that it may be diffused.

So to us the message comes: The Lord hath need of thee. Christ has died; the Cross is the world's redemption. Christ lives that He may apply the power and the benefits of His death and of His risen life to all humanity. But the missing link between the all sufficient redemption that is in Christ Jesus, and the actual redemption of the world, is the remnant of Jacob, the Christian Church which is to be in the midst of many people, as a dew from the Lord.

Now, that diffusion from individual centres of the life that is in Jesus Christ is the chiefest reason--or at all events, is one chief reason--for the strange and inextricable intertwining in modern society, of saint and sinner, of Christian and non-Christian. The seed is sown among the thorns; the wheat springs up amongst the tares. Their roots are so matted together that no hand can separate them. In families, in professions, in business relations, in civil life, in national life, both grow together. God sows His seed thin that all the field may smile in harvest. The salt is broken up into many minute particles and rubbed into that which it is to preserve from corruption. The remnant of Jacob is in the midst of many peoples; and you and I are encompassed by those who need our Christ, and who do not know Him or love Him; and one great reason for the close intertwining is that, scattered, we may diffuse, and that at all points the world may be in contact with those who ought to be working to preserve it from putrefaction and decay.

Now there are two ways by which this function may be discharged, and in which it is incumbent upon every Christian man to make his contribution, be it greater or smaller, to the discharge of it. The one is by direct efforts to impart to others the knowledge of God in Jesus Christ which we have, and which we profess to be the very root of our lives. We can all do that if we will, and we are here to do it. Every one of us has somebody or other close to us, bound to us, perhaps, by the tie of kindred and love, who will listen to us more readily than to anybody else. Christian men and women, have you utilised these channels which God Himself, by the arrangements of society, has dug for you, that through them you may pour upon some thirsty ground the water of life? We could also help, and help far more than any of us do, in associated efforts for the same purpose. The direct obligation to direct efforts to impart the Gospel cannot be shirked, though, alas! it is far too often ignored by us professing Christians.

But there is another way by which the remnant of Jacob is to be a dew from the Lord, and that is by trying to bring to bear Christian thoughts and Christian principles upon all the relations of life in which we stand, and upon all the societies, be they greater or smaller--the family, the city, or the nation--of which we form parts. We have heard a great deal lately about what people that know very little about it, are pleased to call the Nonconformist conscience, I take the compliment, which is not intended, but is conveyed by the word. But I venture to say that what is meant, is not the Nonconformist conscience, it is the Christian conscience. We Nonconformists have no monopoly, thank God, of that. Nay, rather, in some respects, our friends in the Anglican churches are teaching some of us a lesson as to the application of Christian principles to civic duty and to national life. I beseech you, although I do not mean to dwell upon that point at all at this time, to ask yourselves whether, as citizens, the vices, the godlessness, the miseries--the removable miseries--of our great town populations, lie upon your hearts. Have you ever lifted a finger to abate drunkenness? Have you ever done anything to help to make it possible that the masses of our town communities should live in places better than the pigsties in which many of them have to wallow? Have you any care for the dignity, the purity, the Christianity of our civic rulers; and do you, to the extent of your ability, try to ensure that Christ's teaching shall govern the life of our cities? And the same question may be put yet more emphatically with regard to wider subjects, namely, the national life and the national action, whether in regard to war or in regard to other pressing subjects for national consideration. I do not touch upon these; I only ask you to remember the grand ideal of my text, which applies to the narrowest circle--the family; and to the wider circles--the city and the nation, as well as to the world. Time was when a bastard piety shrank back from intermeddling with these affairs and gathered up its skirts about it in an ecstasy of unwholesome unworldliness. There is not much danger of that now, when Christian men are in the full swim of the currents of civic, professional, literary, national life. But I will tell you of what there is a danger--Christian men and women moving in their families, going into town councils, going into Parliament, going to the polling booths, and leaving their Christianity behind them. The remnant of Jacob shall be as a dew from the Lord.

Now let me turn for a moment to a second point, and that is

**II. The function of English Christians in the world.**

I have suggested in an earlier part of this sermon that possibly the application of this text originally was to the scattered remnant. Be that as it may, wherever you go, you find the Jew and the Englishman. I need not dwell upon the ubiquity of our race. I need not point you to the fact that, in all probability, our language is destined to be the world's language some day. I need do nothing more than recall the fact that a man may go on board ship, in Liverpool or London, and go round the world; everywhere he sees the Union Jack, and everywhere he lands upon British soil. The ubiquity of the scattered Englishman needs no illustration.

But I do wish to remind you that that ubiquity has its obligation. We hear a great deal to-day about Imperialism, about the Greater Britain, about the expansion of England. And on one side all that new atmosphere of feeling is good, for it speaks of a vivid consciousness which is all to the good in the pulsations of the national life. But there is another side to it that is not so good. What is the expansion sought for? Trade? Yes! necessarily; and no man who lives in Lancashire will speak lightly of that necessity. Vulgar greed, and earth-hunger? that is evil. Glory? that is cruel, blood-stained, empty. My text tells us why expansion should be sought, and what are the obligations it brings with it. The remnant of Jacob shall be in the midst of many people as a dew from the Lord There are two kinds of Imperialism: one which regards the Empire as a thing for the advantage of us here, in this little land, and another which regards it as a burden that God has laid on the shoulders of the men whom John Milton, two centuries ago, was not afraid to call His Englishmen.

Let me remind you of two contrasted pictures which will give far more forcibly than anything I can say, the two points of view from which our world-wide dominion may be regarded. Here is one of them: By the strength of my hand I have done it, and by my wisdom, for I am prudent. And I have removed the bounds of the people, and have robbed their treasures, and my hand hath found as a nest the riches of the people; and as one gathereth eggs that are left, have I gathered all the earth; and there was none that moved a wing, or opened a mouth, or peeped. That is the voice of the lust for Empire for selfish advantages. And here is the other one: The kings of Tarshish and of the isles shall bring presents; yea, all kings shall fall down before Him; all nations shall serve Him, for He shall deliver the needy when he crieth, the poor also, and him that hath no helper. He shall redeem their soul from deceit and violence, and precious shall their blood be in His sight. That is the voice that has learned: He that is greatest among you, let him be your servant; and that the dominion founded on unselfish surrender for others is the only dominion that will last. Brethren! that is the spirit in which alone England will keep its Empire over the world.

I need not remind you that the gift which we have to carry to the heathen nations, the subject peoples who are under the æ§©s of our laws, is not merely our literature, our science, our Western civilisation, still less the products of our commerce, for all of which some of them are asking; but it is the gift that they do not ask for. The dew waiteth not for man, nor tarrieth for the sons of men. We have to create the demand by bringing the supply. We have to carry Christ's Gospel as the greatest gift that we have in our hands.

And now, I was going to have said a word, lastly, but I see it can only be a word, about--

**III. The failure to fulfil the function.**

Israel failed. Pharisaism was the end of it--a hugging itself in the possession of the gift which it did not appreciate, and a bitter contempt of the nations, and so destruction came, and the fire on the hearth was scattered and died out, and the vineyard was taken from them and given to a nation bringing forth the fruits thereof. Change the name, as the Latin poet says, and the story is told about us. England largely fails in this function; as witness in India godless civilians; as witness on every palm-shaded coral beach in the South Seas, profligate beach-combers, drunken sailors, unscrupulous traders; as witness the dying out of races by diseases imported with profligacy and gin from this land. A dew from the Lord!; say rather a malaria from the devil! By you, said the Prophet, is the name of God blasphemed among the Gentiles. By Englishmen the missionary's efforts are, in a hundred cases, neutralised, or hampered if not neutralised.

We have failed because, as Christian people, we have not been adequately in earnest. No man can say with truth that the churches of England are awake to the imperative obligation of this missionary enterprise. If God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest He spare not thee. Israel's religion was not diffusive, therefore it corrupted; Israel's religion did not reach out a hand to the nations, therefore its heart was paralysed and stricken. They who bring the Gospel to others increase their own hold upon it. There is a joy of activity, there is a firmer faith, as new evidences of its power are presented before them. There is the blessing that comes down upon all faithful discharge of duty; If the house be not worthy, your peace shall return to you. After all, our Empire rests on moral foundations, and if it is administered by us--and we each have part of the responsibility for all that is done--on the selfish ground of only seeking the advantage of the predominant partner, then our hold will be loosened. There is no such cement of empire as a common religion. If we desire to make these subject peoples loyal fellow-subjects, we must make them true fellow-worshippers. The missionary holds India for England far more strongly than the soldier does. If we apply Christian principles to our administration of our Empire, then instead of its being knit together by iron bands, it will be laced together by the intertwining tendrils of the hearts of those who are possessors of like precious faith. Brethren, there is another saying in the Old Testament, about the dew. I will be as the dew unto Israel, says God through the Prophet. We must have Him as the dew for our own souls first. Then only shall we be able to discharge the office laid upon us, to be in the midst of many peoples as dew from the Lord. If our fleece is wet and we leave the ground dry, our fleece will soon be dry, though the ground may be bedewed.