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

**NUMBERS-008. MOSES AND THE INTERCESSOR by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Pardon, I beseech Thee, the iniquity of this people according unto the greatness of Thy mercy, and as Thou hast forgiven this people, from Egypt even until now."*

*Numbers 14:19*

See how in this story a divine threat is averted and a divine promise is broken, thus revealing a standing law that these in Scripture are conditional.

This striking incident of Moses intercession suggests to us some thoughts as to

**I. The ground of the divine forgiveness.**

The appeal is not based on anything in the people. God is not asked to forgive because of their repentance or their faith. True, these are the conditions on which His pardon is received by us, but they are not the reasons why it is given by Him. Nor does Moses appeal to any sacrifices that had been offered and were conceived to placate God. But he goes deeper than all such pleas, and lays hold, with sublime confidence, on God's own nature as his all-powerful plea. The greatness of Thy mercy is the ground of the divine forgiveness, and the mightiest plea that human lips can urge. It suggests that His very nature is pardoning love; that mercy is proper to Him, that it is the motive and impulse of His acts. He forgives because He is mercy. That is the foundation truth. It is the deep spring from which by inherent impulse all the streams of forgiveness well up.

What was true when Moses prayed for the rebels is true to-day. Christ's work is the consequence, not the cause, of God's pardoning love. It is the channel through which the waters reach us, but the waters made the channel for themselves.

**II. The persistency of the divine pardon.**

As thou hast forgiven ...even until now.

His past is the guarantee of His future. This is true of every one of His attributes. There is no limitation to the divine forgiveness; you cannot exhaust it.

Sometimes there may be long tracts of almost utter godlessness, or times of apathy. Sometimes there may be bursts of great and unsanctified evil after many professions of fidelity, as in David's case. Sometimes there may be but a daily experience in which there is little apparent progress, little consciousness of growing mastery over sin, little of deepening holiness and spiritual power. Be it so! To all such, and to every other form of Christian unfaithfulness, this blessed thought applies.

We are apt to think as if our many pardons in the past made future pardons less likely, whereas the truth is that we have received forgiveness so often in the past that we may be quite sure that it will never fail us in the future. God has established a precedent in His dealings with us. He binds Himself by His past.

As in His creative energy, the forces that flung the whole universe forth were not exhausted by the act, but subsist continually to sustain it, as He fainteth not, neither is weary, so in the works of His providence, and more especially of His grace, there is nothing in the exercise of any of His attributes to exhaust that attribute, nothing in the constant appeal which we make to His forgiving grace to weary out that grace. And thus we may learn, even from the unfading glories of the heavens and the undimmed splendours of His creative works, the lesson that, in the holier region of His love, and His pardoning mercy, there is no exhaustion, and that all the past instances of His pardoning grace only make the broader, firmer ground of certainty as to His continuous present and future forgiveness for all our iniquity. He who has proposed to us the seventy times seven as the number of our forgivenesses will not let His own fall short of that tale. Our iniquities may be more than the hairs of our heads, but as the psalmist who found his to be so comforted himself with thinking, God's thoughts which are to usward were more than can be numbered. There would be a pardoning thought for every sin, and after all sins had been forgiven, there would be multitudes of redemptions still available for penitent souls.

There is but one thing that limits the divine pardon, and that is continuous rejection of it.

Whoever seeks to be pardoned is pardoned.

**III. The manner of the divine forgiveness.**

He pardoned, but He also inflicted punishment, and in both He loves equally. The worst, that is the spiritual, consequences (which are the punishments) of sin, namely separation and alienation from God, He removes in the very act of forgiveness, but His pardon does not affect the natural consequences. Thou wast a God that forgavest them and tookest vengeance of their inventions, says a psalmist in reference to this very incident. Thank God that He loves us too wisely and well not to let us by experience know that it is a bitter thing to forsake the Lord.

It is a blessing that He does so, and a sign that we are pardoned, if we rightly use it.

**IV. The vehicle of the divine forgiveness.**

The Mediator. Moses here may be taken as a dim shadow of Christ.

Moses was faithful in all his house but Jesus is the true Mediator, whose intercession consists in presenting the constant efficacy of His sacrifice, and to whom God ever says, I have pardoned according to Thy word.

Trust utterly to Him. You cannot weary out the forgiving love of God. Christ ever liveth to make intercession; with God is plenteous redemption. He shall redeem Israel out of all his iniquities.