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

**PHILIPPIANS-022**. **WARNINGS AND HOPES by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Brethren, be ye imitators together of me, and mark them which so walk even as ye have us for an ensample. For many walk, of whom I told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ: whose end is perdition, whose God is the belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things. For our citizenship is in heaven; from whence also we wait for a Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ: who shall fashion anew the body of our humiliation, that it may be conformed to the body of His glory, according to the working whereby he is able even to subject all things unto Himself."*

*Philippians 3:17-21 (R.V.)*

There is a remarkable contrast in tone between the sad warnings which begin this section and the glowing hopes with which it closes, and that contrast is made the more striking when we notice that the Apostle binds the gloom of the one and the radiance of the other by For, which makes the latter the cause of the former.

The exhortation in which the Apostle begins by proposing himself as an example sounds strange on any lips, and, most of all, on his, but we have to note that the points in which he sets himself up as a pattern are obviously those on which he touched in the preceding outpouring of his heart, and which he has already commended to the Philippians in pleading with them to be thus minded. What he desires them to copy is his self-distrust, his willingness to sacrifice all things to win Christ, his clear sense of his own shortcomings, and his eager straining towards as yet unreached perfection. His humility is not disproved by such words, but what is remarkable in them is the clear consciousness of the main direction and set of his life. We may well hesitate to take them for ours, but every Christian man and woman ought to be able to say this much. If we cannot in some degree declare that we are so walking, we have need to look to our foundations. Such words are really in sharp contrast to those in which Jesus is held forth as an example. Notice, too, how quickly he passes to associate others with him, and to merge the Me into Us. We need not ask who his companions were, since Timothy is associated with him at the beginning of the letter.

The exhortation is enforced by pointing to others who had gone far astray, and of whom he had warned the Philippians often, possibly by letter. Who these unworthy disciples were remains obscure. They were clearly not the Judaisers branded in verse 2, who were teachers seeking to draw away the Philippians, while these others seem to have been enemies of the Cross of Christ, not by open hostility nor by theoretical errors, but by practical worldliness, and that in these ways; they make sense their God, they are proud of what is really their disgrace, namely, they are shaking off the restraints of morality; and, most black though it may seem least so, they mind earthly things on which thought, feeling, and interest are concentrated. Let us lay to heart the lesson that such direction of the current of a life to the things of earth makes men enemies of the Cross of Christ, whatever their professions, and will surely make their end perdition, whatever their apparent prosperity. Paul's life seemed loss and was gain; these men's lives seemed gain and was loss.

From this dark picture charged with gloom, and in one corner showing white waves breaking far out against an inky sky, and a vessel with torn sails driving on the rocks, the Apostle turns with relief to the brighter words in which he sets forth the true affinities and hopes of a Christian. They all stand or fall with the belief in the Resurrection of Christ and His present life in His glorified corporeal manhood.

**I. Our true metropolis.**

The Revised Version puts in the margin as an alternative rendering for citizenship commonwealth, and there appears to be a renewed allusion here to the fact already noted that Philippi was a colony, and that its inhabitants were Roman citizens. Paul uses a very emphatic word for is here which it is difficult to reproduce in English, but which suggests essential reality.

The reason why that heavenly citizenship is ours in no mere play of the imagination but in most solid substance, is because He is there for whom we look. Where Christ is, is our Mother-country, our Fatherland, according to His own promise, I go to prepare a place for you. His being there draws our thoughts and sets our affections on Heaven.

**II. The colonists looking for the King.**

The Emperors sometimes made a tour of the provinces. Paul here thinks of Christians as waiting for their Emperor to come across the seas to this outlying corner of His dominions. The whole grand name is given here, all the royal titles to express solemnity and dignity, and the character in which we look for Him is that of Saviour. We still need salvation, and though in one sense it is past, in another it will not be ours until He comes the second time without sin unto salvation. The eagerness of the waiting which should characterise the expectant citizens is wonderfully described by the Apostle's expression for it, which literally means to look away out--with emphasis on both prepositions--like a sentry on the walls of a besieged city whose eyes are ever fixed on the pass amongst the hills through which the relieving forces are to come.

It may be said that Paul is here expressing an expectation which was disappointed. No doubt the early Church looked for the speedy return of our Lord and were mistaken. We are distinctly told that in that point there was no revelation of the future, and no doubt they, like the prophets of old, searched what manner of time the spirit of Christ which was in them did signify. In this very letter Paul speaks of death as very probable for himself, so that he had precisely the same double attitude which has been the Church's ever since, in that he looked for Christ's coming as possible in his own time, and yet anticipated the other alternative. It is difficult, no doubt, to cherish the vivid anticipation of any future event, and not to have any certainty as to its date. But if we are sure that a given event will come sometime and do not know when it may come, surely the wise man is he who thinks to himself it may come any time, and not he who treats it as if it would come at no time. The two possible alternatives which Paul had before him have in common the same certainty as to the fact and uncertainty as to the date, and Paul had them both before his mind with the same vivid anticipation.

The practical effect of this hope of the returning Lord on our walk will be all to bring it nearer Paul's. It will not suffer us to make sense our God, nor to fix our affections on things above; it will stimulate all energies in pressing towards the goal, and will turn away our eyes from the trivialities and transiencies that press upon us, away out toward the distance where far off His coming shone.

**III. The Christian sharing in Christ's glory.**

The same precise distinction between fashion and form, which we have had occasion to notice in Chapter ii., recurs here. The fashion of the body of our humiliation is external and transient; the form of the body of His glory to which we are to be assimilated consists of essential characteristics or properties, and may be regarded as being almost synonymous with Nature. Observing the distinction which the Apostle draws by the use of these two words, and remembering their force in the former instance of their occurrence, we shall not fail to give force to the representation that in the Resurrection the fleeting fashion of the bodily frame will be altered, and the glorified bodies of the saints made participant of the essential qualities of His.

We further note that there is no trace of false asceticism or of gnostic contempt for the body in its designation as of our humiliation. Its weaknesses, its limitations, its necessities, its corruption and its death, sufficiently manifest our lowliness, while, on the other hand, the body in which Christ's glory is manifested, and which is the instrument for His glory, is presented in fullest contrast to it.

The great truth of Christ's continual glorified manhood is the first which we draw from these words. The story of our Lord's Resurrection suggests indeed that He brought the same body from the tomb as loving hands had laid there. The invitation to Thomas to thrust his hands into the prints of the nails, the similar invitation to the assembled disciples, and His partaking of food in their presence, seemed to forbid the idea of His rising changed. Nor can we suppose that the body of His glory would be congruous with His presence on earth. But we have to think of His ascension as gradual, and of Himself as changed by still degrees as He ascended, and so as returned to where the glory which He had with the Father before the world was, as the Shechinah cloud received Him out of the sight of the gazers below. If this be the true reading of His last moments on earth, He united in His own experience both the ways of leaving it which His followers experience--the way of sleep which is death, and the way of being changed.

But at whatever point the change came, He now wears, and for ever will wear, the body of a man. That is the dominant fact on which is built the Christian belief in a future life, and which gives to that belief all its solidity and force, and separates it from vague dreams of immortality which are but a wish tremblingly turned into a hope, or a dread shudderingly turned into an expectation. The man Christ Jesus is the pattern and realised ideal of human life on earth, the revelation of the divine life through a human life, and in His glorified humanity is no less the pattern and realised ideal of what human nature may become. The present state of the departed is incomplete in that they have not a body by which they can act on, and be acted on by, an external universe. We cannot indeed suppose them lapped in age-long unconsciousness, and it may be that the dead in Christ are through Him brought into some knowledge of externals, but for the full-summed perfection of their being, the souls under the altar have to wait for the resurrection of the body. If resurrection is needful for completion of manhood, then completed manhood must necessarily be set in a locality, and the glorified manhood of Jesus must also now be in a place. To think thus of it and of Him is not to vulgarise the Christian conception of Heaven, but to give it a definiteness and force which it sorely lacks in popular thinking. Nor is the continual manhood of our Lord less precious in its influence in helping our familiar approach to Him. It tells us that He is still and for ever the same as when on earth, glad to welcome all who came and to help and heal all who need Him. It is one of ourselves who sitteth at the right hand of God. His manhood brings Him memories which bind Him to us sorrowing and struggling, and His glory clothes Him with power to meet all our needs, to stanch all our wounds, to satisfy all our desires.

Our text leads us to think of the wondrous transformation into Christ's likeness. We know not what are the differences between the body of our humiliation and the body of His glory, but we must not be led away by the word Resurrection to fall into the mistake of supposing that in death we sow that body which shall be. Paul's great chapter in I. Corinthians should have destroyed that error for ever, and it is a singular instance of the persistency of the most unsupported mistakes that there are still thousands of people who in spite of all that they know of what befalls our mortal bodies, and of how their parts pass into other forms, still hold by that crude idea. We have no material by which to construct any, even the vaguest, outline of that body that shall be. We can only run out the contrasts as suggested by Paul in 1st Corinthians, and let the dazzling greatness of the positive thought which he gives in the text lift our expectations. Weakness will become power, corruption incorruption, liability to death immortality, dishonour glory, and the frame which belonged and corresponded to that which was natural, shall be transformed into a body which is the organ of that which is spiritual. These things tell us little, but they may be all fused into the great light of likeness to the body of His glory; and though that tells us even less, it feeds hope more and satisfies our hearts even whilst it does not feed our curiosity. We may well be contented to acknowledge that it doth not yet appear what we shall be, when we can go on to say, We know that when He shall appear we shall be like Him. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his Master.

But we must not forget that the Apostle regards even this overwhelming change as but part of a mightier process, even the universal subjection of all things unto Christ Himself. The Emperor reduces the whole world to subjection, and the glorifying of the body as the climax of the universal subjugation represents it as the end of the process of assimilation begun in this mortal life. There is no possibility of a resurrection unto life unless that life has been begun before death. That ultimate glorious body is needed to bring men into correspondence with the external universe. As is the locality so is the body. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God. This whole series of thoughts makes our glorious resurrection the result not of death, but of Christ's living power on His people. It is only in the measure in which He lives in us and we in Him, and are partaking by daily participation in the power of His Resurrection, that we shall be made subjects of the working whereby He is able even to subject all things unto Himself, and finally be conformed to the body of His glory.