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

**ROMANS-001**. **THE WITNESS OF THE RESURRECTION by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Declared to be the Son of God with power, ... by the resurrection of the dead."*

*Romans 1:4 (R.V.)*

It is a great mistake to treat Paul's writings, and especially this Epistle, as mere theology. They are the transcript of his life's experience. As has been well said, the gospel of Paul is an interpretation of the significance of the life and work of Jesus based upon the revelation to him of Jesus as the risen Christ. He believed that he had seen Jesus on the road to Damascus, and it was that appearance which revolutionised his life, turned him from a persecutor into a disciple, and united him with the Apostles as ordained to be a witness with them of the Resurrection. To them all the Resurrection of Jesus was first of all a historical fact appreciated chiefly in its bearing on Him. By degrees they discerned that so transcendent a fact bore in itself a revelation of what would become the experience of all His followers beyond the grave, and a symbol of the present life possible for them. All three of these aspects are plainly declared in Paul's writings. In our text it is chiefly the first which is made prominent. All that distinguishes Christianity; and makes it worth believing, or mighty, is inseparably connected with the Resurrection.

**I. The Resurrection of Christ declares His Sonship.**

Resurrection and Ascension are inseparably connected. Jesus does not rise to share again in the ills and weariness of humanity. Risen, He dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over Him. He died unto sin once; and His risen humanity had nothing in it on which physical death could lay hold. That He should from some secluded dimple on Olivet ascend before the gazing disciples until the bright cloud, which was the symbol of the Divine Presence, received Him out of their sight, was but the end of the process which began unseen in morning twilight. He laid aside the garments of the grave and passed out of the sepulchre which was made sure by the great stone rolled against its mouth. The grand avowal of faith in His Resurrection loses meaning, unless it is completed as Paul completed his yea rather that was raised from the dead, with the triumphant who is at the right hand of God. Both are supernatural, and the Virgin Birth corresponds at the beginning to the supernatural Resurrection and Ascension at the close. Both such an entrance into the world and such a departure from it, proclaim at once His true humanity, and that this is the Son of God.

Still further, the Resurrection is God's solemn Amen to the tremendous claims which Christ had made. The fact of His Resurrection, indeed, would not declare His divinity; but the Resurrection of One who had spoken such words does. If the Cross and a nameless grave had been the end, what a reductio ad absurdum that would have been to the claims of Jesus to have ever been with the Father and to be doing always the things that pleased Him. The Resurrection is God's last and loudest proclamation, This is My beloved Son: hear ye Him. The Psalmist of old had learned to trust that his sonship and consecration to the Father made it impossible that that Father should leave his soul in Sheol, or suffer one who was knit to Him by such sacred bonds to see corruption; and the unique Sonship and perfect self-consecration of Jesus went down into the grave in the assured confidence, as He Himself declared, that the third day He would rise again. The old alternative seems to retain all its sharp points: Either Christ rose again from the dead, or His claims are a series of blasphemous arrogances and His character irremediably stained.

But we may also remember that Scripture not only represents Christ's Resurrection as a divine act but also as the act of Christ's own power. In His earthly life He asserted that His relation both to physical death and to resurrection was an entirely unique one. I have power, said He, to lay down my life, and I have power to take it again; and yet, even in this tremendous instance of self-assertion, He remains the obedient Son, for He goes on to say, This commandment have I received of My Father. If these claims are just, then it is vain to stumble at the miracles which Jesus did in His earthly life. If He could strip it off and resume it, then obviously it was not a life like other men's. The whole phenomenon is supernatural, and we shall not be in the true position to understand and appreciate it and Him until, like the doubting Thomas, we fall at the feet of the risen Son, and breathe out loyalty and worship in that rapturous exclamation, My Lord and my God.

**II. The Resurrection interprets Christ's Death.**

There is no more striking contrast than that between the absolute non-receptivity of the disciples in regard to all Christ's plain teachings about His death and their clear perception after Pentecost of the mighty power that lay in it. The very fact that they continued disciples at all, and that there continued to be such a community as the Church, demands their belief in the Resurrection as the only cause which can account for it. If He did not rise from the dead, and if His followers did not know that He did so by the plainest teachings of common-sense, they ought to have scattered, and borne in isolated hearts the bitter memories of disappointed hopes; for if He lay in a nameless grave, and they were not sure that He was risen from the dead, His death would have been a conclusive showing up of the falsity of His claims. In it there would have been no atoning power, no triumph over sin. If the death of Christ were not followed by His Resurrection and Ascension, the whole fabric of Christianity falls to pieces. As the Apostle puts it in his great chapter on resurrection, Ye are yet in your sins. The forgiveness which the Gospel holds forth to men does not depend on the mercy of God or on the mere penitence of man, but upon the offering of the one sacrifice for sins in His death, which is justified by His Resurrection as being accepted by God. If we cannot triumphantly proclaim Christ is risen indeed, we have nothing worth preaching.

We are told now that the ethics of Christianity are its vital centre, which will stand out more plainly when purified from these mystical doctrines of a Death as the sin-offering for the world, and a Resurrection as the great token that that offering avails. Paul did not think so. To him the morality of the Gospel was all deduced from the life of Christ the Son of God as our Example, and from His death for us which touches men's hearts and makes obedience to Him our joyful answer to what He has done for us. Christianity is a new thing in the world, not as moral teaching, but as moral power to obey that teaching, and that depends on the Cross interpreted by the Resurrection. If we have only a dead Christ, we have not a living Christianity.

**III. Resurrection points onwards to Christ's coming again.**

Paul at Athens declared in the hearing of supercilious Greek philosophers, that the Jesus, whom he proclaimed to them, was the Man whom God had ordained to judge the world in righteousness, and that He had given assurance thereof unto all men, in that He raised Him from the dead. The Resurrection was the beginning of the process which, from the human point of view, culminated in the Ascension. Beyond the Ascension stretches the supernatural life of the glorified Son of God. Olivet cannot be the end, and the words of the two men in white apparel who stood amongst the little group of the upward gazing friends, remain as the hope of the Church: This same Jesus shall so come in like manner as ye have seen Him go into heaven. That great assurance implies a visible corporeal return locally defined, and having for its purpose to complete the work which Incarnation, Death, Resurrection, and Ascension, each advanced a stage. The Resurrection is the corner-stone of the whole Christian faith. It seals the truths that Jesus is the Son of God with power, that He died for us, that He has ascended on high to prepare a place for us, that He will come again and take us to Himself. If we, by faith in Him, take for ours the women's greeting on that Easter morning, The Lord hath risen indeed, He will come to us with His own greeting, Peace be unto you.