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

**ROMANS-019**. **SUFFERING WITH CHRIST, A CONDITION OF GLORY WITH CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... Joint heirs with Christ: if so be that we suffer with Him, that we may be also glorified together."*

*Romans 8:17*

In the former part of this verse the Apostle tells us that in order to be heirs of God, we must become sons through and joint-heirs with Christ. He seems at first sight to add in these words of our text another condition to those already specified, namely, that of suffering with Christ.

Now, of course, whatever may be the operation of suffering in fitting for the possession of the Christian inheritance, either here or in another world, the sonship and the sorrows do not stand on the same level in regard to that possession. The one is the indispensable condition of all; the other is but the means for the operation of the condition. The one--being sons, joint-heirs with Christ,--is the root of the whole matter; the other--the suffering with Him,--is but the various process by which from the root there come the blade, and the ear, and the full corn in the ear. Given the sonship--if it is to be worked out into power and beauty, there must be suffering with Christ. But unless there be sonship, there is no possibility of inheriting God; discipline and suffering will be of no use at all.

The chief lesson which I wish to gather from this text now is that all God's sons must suffer with Christ; and in addition to this principle, we may complete our considerations by adding briefly, that the inheritance must be won by suffering, and that if we suffer with Him, we certainly shall receive the inheritance.

**I. First, then, sonship with Christ necessarily involves suffering with Him.**

I think that we entirely misapprehend the force of this passage before us, if we suppose it to refer principally or merely to the outward calamities, what you call trials and afflictions, which befall people, and see in it only the teaching, that the sorrows of daily life may have in them a sign of our being children of God, and some power to prepare us for the glory that is to come. There is a great deal more in the thought than that, brethren. This is not merely a text for people who are in affliction, but for all of us. It does not merely contain a law for a certain part of life, but it contains a law for the whole of life. It is not merely a promise that in all our afflictions Christ will be afflicted, but it is a solemn injunction that we seek to know the fellowship of His sufferings, and be made conformable to the likeness of His death, if we expect to be found in the likeness of His Resurrection, and to have any share in the community of His glory. In other words, the foundation of it is not that Christ shares in our sufferings; but that we, as Christians, in a deep and real sense do necessarily share and participate in Christ's. We suffer with Him; not He suffers with us.

Now, do not let us misunderstand each other, or the Apostle's teaching. Do not suppose that I am forgetting, or wishing you to account as of small importance, the awful sense in which Christ's suffering stands as a thing by itself and unapproachable, a solitary pillar rising up, above the waste of time, to which all men everywhere are to turn with the one thought, I can do nothing like that; I need to do nothing like it; it has been done once, and once for all; and what I have to do is, simply to lie down before Him, and let the power and the blessings of that death and those sufferings flow into my heart. The Divine Redeemer makes eternal redemption. The sufferings of Christ--the sufferings of His life, and the sufferings of His death--both because of the nature which bore them, and of the aspect which they wore in regard to us, are in their source, in their intensity, in their character, and consequences, unapproachable, incapable of repetition, and needing no repetition whilst the world shall stand. But then, do not let us forget that the very books and writers in the New Testament that preach most broadly Christ's sole, all-sufficient, eternal redemption for the world by His sufferings and death, turn round and say to us too, "Be planted together in the likeness of His death"; you are "crucified to the world" by the Cross of Christ; you are to "fill up that which is behind of the sufferings of Christ." He Himself speaks of our drinking of the cup that He drank of, and being baptized with the baptism that He was baptized with, if we desire to sit yonder on His throne, and share with Him in His glory.

Now what do the Apostles, and what does Christ Himself, in that passage that I have quoted, mean, by such solemn words as these? Some people shrink from them, and say that it is trenching upon the central doctrine of the Gospel, when we speak about drinking of the cup which Christ drank of. They ask, Can it be? Yes, it can be, if you will think thus:--If a Christian has the Spirit and life of Christ in him, his career will be moulded, imperfectly but really, by the same Spirit that dwelt in his Lord; and similar causes will produce corresponding effects. The life of Christ which--divine, pure, incapable of copy and repetition--in one aspect has ended for ever for men, remains to be lived, in another view of it, by every Christian, who in like manner has to fight with the world; who in like manner has to resist temptation; who in like manner has to stand, by God's help, pure and sinless, in so far as the new nature of him is concerned, in the midst of a world that is full of evil. For were the sufferings of the Lord only the sufferings that were wrought upon Calvary? Were the sufferings of the Lord only the sufferings which came from the contradiction of sinners against Himself? Were the sufferings of the Lord only the sufferings which were connected with His bodily afflictions and pain, precious and priceless as they were, and operative causes of our redemption as they were? Oh no. Conceive of that perfect, sinless, really human life, in the midst of a system of things that is all full of corruption and of sin; coming ever and anon against misery, and wrong-doing, and rebellion; and ask yourselves whether part of His sufferings did not spring from the contact of the sinless Son of man with a sinful world, and the apparently vain attempt to influence and leaven that sinful world with care for itself and love for the Father. If there had been nothing more than that, yet Christ's sufferings as the Son of God in the midst of sinful men would have been deep and real. O faithless generation, how long shall I be with you? how long shall I suffer you? was wrung from Him by the painful sense of want of sympathy between His aims and theirs. Oh that I had wings like a dove, for then I would fly away and be at rest, must often be the language of those who are like Him in spirit, and in consequent sufferings.

And then again, another branch of the sufferings of Christ is to be found in that deep and mysterious fact on which I durst not venture to speak beyond what the actual words of Scripture put into my lips--the fact that Christ wrought out His perfect obedience as a man, through temptation and by suffering. There was no sin within Him, no tendency to sin, no yielding to the evil that assailed. The Prince of this world cometh, and hath nothing in Me. But yet, when that dark Power stood by His side, and said, If thou be the Son of God, cast Thyself down, it was a real temptation and not a sham one. There was no wish to do it, no faltering for a moment, no hesitation. There was no rising up in that calm will of even a moment's impulse to do the thing that was presented;--but yet it was presented, and, when Christ triumphed, and the tempter departed for a season, there had been a temptation and there had been a conflict. And though obedience be a joy, and the doing of His Father's will was His delight, as it must needs be in pure and in purified hearts; yet obedience which is sustained in the face of temptation, and which never fails, though its path lead to bodily pains and the contradiction of sinners, may well be called suffering. We cannot speak of our Lord's obedience as the surrender of His own will to the Father's, with the implication that these two wills ever did or could move except in harmony. There was no place in Christ's obedience for that casting out of sinful self which makes our submission a surrender joined with suffering, but He knew temptation. Flesh, and sense, and the world, and the prince of this world, presented it to Him; and therefore His obedience too was suffering, even though to do the will of His Father was His meat and His drink, His sustenance and His refreshment.

But then, let me remind you still further, that not only does the life of Christ, as sinless in the midst of sinful men, and the life of Christ, as sinless whilst yet there was temptation presented to it--assume the aspect of being a life of suffering, and become, in that respect, the model for us; but that also the Death of Christ, besides its aspect as an atonement and sacrifice for sin, the power by which transgression is put away and God's love flows out upon our souls, has another power given to it in the teaching of the New Testament. The Death of Christ is a type of the Christian's life, which is to be one long, protracted, and daily dying to sin, to self, to the world. The crucifixion of the old manhood is to be the life's work of every Christian, through the power of faith in that Cross by which the world is crucified unto Me, and I unto the world. That thought comes over and over again in all forms of earnest presentation in the Apostle's teaching. Do not slur it over as if it were a mere fanciful metaphor. It carries in its type a most solemn reality. The truth is, that, if a Christian, you have a double life. There is Christ, with His power, with His Spirit, giving you a nature which is pure and sinless, incapable of transgression, like His own. The new man, that which is born of God, sinneth not, cannot sin. But side by side with it, working through it, working in it, leavening it, indistinguishable from it to your consciousness, by anything but this that the one works righteousness and the other works transgression, there is the old man, the flesh, the old Adam, your own godless, independent, selfish, proud being. And the one is to slay the other! Ah, let me tell you, these words--crucifying, casting out the old man, plucking out the right eye, maiming self of the right hand, mortifying the deeds of the body--they are something very much deeper and more awful than poetical symbols and metaphors. They teach us this, that there is no growth without sore sorrow. Conflict, not progress, is the word that defines man's path from darkness into light. No holiness is won by any other means than this, that wickedness should be slain day by day, and hour by hour. In long lingering agony often, with the blood of the heart pouring out at every quivering vein, you are to cut right through the life and being of that sinful self; to do what the Word does, pierce to the dividing asunder of the thoughts and intents of the heart, and get rid by crucifying and slaying--a long process, a painful process--of your own sinful self. And not until you can stand up and say, I live, yet not I, but Christ liveth in me, have you accomplished that to which you are consecrated and vowed by your sonship--being conformed unto the likeness of His death, and knowing the fellowship of His sufferings.

It is this process, the inward strife and conflict in getting rid of evil, which the Apostle designates here with the name of suffering with Christ, that we may be also glorified together. On this high level, and not upon the lower one of the consideration that Christ will help us to bear outward infirmities and afflictions, do we find the true meaning of all that Scripture teaching which says indeed, Yes, our sufferings are His; but lays the foundation of it in this, His sufferings are ours. It begins by telling us that Christ has done a work and borne a sorrow that no second can ever do. Then it tells us that Christ's life of obedience--which, because it was a life of obedience, was a life of suffering, and brought Him into a condition of hostility to the men around Him--is to be repeated in us. It sets before us the Cross of Calvary, and the sorrows and pains that were felt there;--and it says to us, Christian men and women, if you want the power for holy living, have fellowship in that atoning death; and if you want the pattern of holy living, look at that Cross and feel, I am crucified to the world by it; and the life that I live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God.

Such considerations as these, however, do not necessarily exclude the other one (which we may just mention and dwell on for a moment), namely, that where there is this spiritual participation in the sufferings of Christ, and where His death is reproduced and perpetuated, as it were, in our daily mortifying ourselves in the present evil world--there Christ is with us in our afflictions. God forbid that I should try to strike away any word of consolation that has come, as these words of my text have come, to so many sorrowing hearts in all generations, like music in the night and like cold waters to a thirsty soul. We need not hold that there is no reference here to that comforting thought, In all our affliction He is afflicted. Brethren, you and I have, each of us--one in one way, and one in another, all in some way, all in the right way, none in too severe a way, none in too slight a way--to tread the path of sorrow; and is it not a blessed thing, as we go along through that dark valley of the shadow of death down into which the sunniest paths go sometimes, to come, amidst the twilight and the gathering clouds, upon tokens that Jesus has been on the road before us? They tell us that in some trackless lands, when one friend passes through the pathless forests, he breaks a twig ever and anon as he goes, that those who come after may see the traces of his having been there, and may know that they are not out of the road. Oh, when we are journeying through the murky night, and the dark woods of affliction and sorrow, it is something to find here and there a spray broken, or a leafy stem bent down with the tread of His foot and the brush of His hand as He passed, and to remember that the path He trod He has hallowed, and thus to find lingering fragrances and hidden strengths in the remembrance of Him as in all points tempted like as we are, bearing grief for us, bearing grief with us, bearing grief like us.

Oh, do not, do not, my brethren, keep these sacred thoughts of Christ's companionship in sorrow, for the larger trials of life. If the mote in the eye be large enough to annoy you, it is large enough to bring out His sympathy; and if the grief be too small for Him to compassionate and share, it is too small for you to be troubled by it. If you are ashamed to apply that divine thought, Christ bears this grief with me, to those petty molehills that you sometimes magnify into mountains, think to yourselves that then it is a shame for you to be stumbling over them. But on the other hand, never fear to be irreverent or too familiar in the thought that Christ is willing to bear, and help you to bear, the pettiest, the minutest, and most insignificant of the daily annoyances that may come to ruffle you. Whether it be a poison from one serpent sting, or whether it be poison from a million of buzzing tiny mosquitoes, if there be a smart, go to Him, and He will help you to endure it. He will do more, He will bear it with you, for if so be that we suffer with Him, He suffers with us, and our oneness with Christ brings about a community of possessions whereby it becomes true of each trusting soul in its relations to Him, that all mine (joys and sorrows alike) are thine, and all thine are mine.

**II. There remain some other considerations which may be briefly stated, in order to complete the lessons of this text. In the second place, this community of suffering is a necessary preparation for the community of glory.**

I name this principally for the sake of putting in a caution. The Apostle does not mean to tell us, of course, that if there were such a case as that of a man becoming a son of God, and having no occasion or opportunity afterwards, by brevity of life or other causes, for passing through the discipline of sorrow, his inheritance would be forfeited. We must always take such passages as this--which seem to make the discipline of the world an essential part of the preparing of us for glory--in conjunction with the other undeniable truth which completes them, that when a man has the love of God in his heart, however feebly, however newly, there and then he is fit for the inheritance. I think that Christian people make vast mistakes sometimes in talking about being made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, about being ripe for glory, and the like. One thing at any rate is very certain, it is not the discipline that fits. That which fits goes before the discipline, and the discipline only develops the fitness. God hath made us meet for the inheritance of the saints in light, says the Apostle. That is a past act. The preparedness for heaven comes at the moment--if it be a momentary act--when a man turns to Christ. You may take the lowest and most abandoned form of human character, and in one moment (it is possible, and it is often the case) the entrance into that soul of the feeble germ of that new affection shall at once change the whole moral habitude of that man. Though it be true, then, that heaven is only open to those who are capable--by holy aspirations and divine desires--of entering into it, it is equally true that such aspirations and desires may be the work of an instant, and may be superinduced in a moment in a heart the most debased and the most degraded. This day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise,--fit for the inheritance!

And, therefore, let us not misunderstand such words as this text, and fancy that the necessary discipline, which we have to go through before we are ready for heaven, is necessary in anything like the same sense in which it is necessary that a man should have faith in Christ in order to be saved. The one may be dispensed with, the other cannot. A Christian at any period of his Christian experience, if it please God to take him, is fit for the kingdom. The life is life, whether it be the budding beauty and feebleness of childhood, or the strength of manhood, or the maturity and calm peace of old age. But add to your faith, that an entrance may be ministered unto you abundantly. Remember that though the root of the matter, the seed of the kingdom, may be in you; and that though, therefore, you have a right to feel that, at any period of your Christian experience, if it please God to take you out of this world, you are fit for heaven--yet in His mercy He is leaving you here, training you, disciplining you, cleansing you, making you to be polished shafts in His quiver; and that all the glowing furnaces of fiery trial and all the cold waters of affliction are but the preparation through which the rough iron is to be passed before it becomes tempered steel, a shaft in the Master's hand.

And so learn to look upon all trial as being at once the seal of your sonship, and the means by which God puts it within your power to win a higher place, a loftier throne, a nobler crown, a closer fellowship with Him who hath suffered, being tempted, and who will receive into His own blessedness and rest them that are tempted. The child, though he be an heir, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all; but is under tutors and governors. God puts us in the school of sorrow under that stern tutor and governor here, and gives us the opportunity of suffering with Christ, that by the daily crucifixion of our old nature, by the lessons and blessings of outward calamities and change, there may grow up in us a still nobler and purer, and perfecter divine life; and that we may so be made capable--more capable, and capable of more--of that inheritance for which the only necessary thing is the death of Christ, and the only fitness is faith in His name.

**III. Finally, that inheritance is the necessary result of the suffering that has gone before.**

The suffering results from our union with Christ. That union must needs culminate in glory. It is not only because the joy hereafter seems required in order to vindicate God's love to His children, who here reap sorrow from their sonship, that the discipline of life cannot but end in blessedness. That ground of mere compensation is a low one on which to rest the certainty of future bliss. But the inheritance is sure to all who here suffer with Christ, because the one cause--union with the Lord--produces both the present result of fellowship in His sorrows, and the future result of joy in His joy, of possession of His possessions. The inheritance is sure because Christ possesses it now. The inheritance is sure because earth's sorrows not merely require to be repaid by its peace, but because they have an evident design to fit us for it, and it would be destructive to all faith in God's wisdom, and God's knowledge of His own purposes, not to believe that what He has wrought us for will be given to us. Trials have no meaning, unless they are means to an end. The end is the inheritance, and sorrows here, as well as the Spirit's work here, are the earnest of the inheritance. Measure the greatness of the glory by what has preceded it. God takes all these years of life, and all the sore trials and afflictions that belong inevitably to an earthly career, and works them in, into the blessedness that shall come. If a fair measure of the greatness of any result of productive power be the length of time that was taken for getting it ready, we can dimly conceive what that joy must be for which seventy years of strife and pain and sorrow are but a momentary preparation; and what must be the weight of that glory which is the counterpoise and consequence to the afflictions of this lower world. The further the pendulum swings on the one side, the further it goes up on the other. The deeper God plunges the comet into the darkness out yonder, the closer does it come to the sun at its nearest distance, and the longer does it stand basking and glowing in the full blaze of the glory from the central orb. So in our revolution, the measure of the distance from the farthest point of our darkest earthly sorrow, to the throne, may help us to the measure of the closeness of the bright, perfect, perpetual glory above, when we are on the throne: for if so be that we are sons, we must suffer with Him; if so be that we suffer, we must be glorified together!