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

**ROMANS-021**. **THE REDEMPTION OF THE BODY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"The adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body."*

*Romans 8:23*

In a previous verse Paul has said that all true Christians have received the Spirit of adoption. They become sons of God through Christ the Son. They receive a new spiritual and divine life from God through Christ, and that life is like its source. In so far as that new life vitalises and dominates their nature, believers have received the Spirit of adoption, and by it they cry Abba, Father. But the body still remains a source of weakness, the seat of sin. It is sluggish and inapt for high purposes; it still remains subject to the law of sin and death; and so is not like the Father who breathed into it the breath of life. It remains in bondage, and has not yet received the adoption. This text, in harmony with the Apostle's whole teaching, looks forward to a change in the body and in its relations to the renewed spirit, as the crown and climax of the work of redemption, and declares that till that change is effected, the condition of Christian men is imperfect, and is a waiting, and often a groaning.

In dealing with some of the thoughts that arise from this text, we note--

**I. That a future bodily life is needed in order to give definiteness and solidity to the conception of immortality.**

Before the Gospel came men's belief in a future life was vague and powerless, mainly because it had no Gospel of the Resurrection, and so nothing tangible to lay hold on. The Gospel has made the belief in a future state infinitely easier and more powerful, mainly because of the emphasis with which it has proclaimed an actual resurrection and a future bodily life. Its great proof of immortality is drawn, not merely from ethical considerations of the manifest futility of earthly life which has no sequel beyond the grave, nor from the intuitions and longings of men's souls, but from the historical fact of the Resurrection of Jesus Christ, and of His Ascension in bodily form into heaven. It proclaims these two facts as parts of His experience, and asserts that when He rose from the dead and ascended up on high, He did so as the first-born among many brethren, their forerunner and their pattern. It is this which gives the Gospel its power, and thus transforms a vague and shadowy conception of immortality into a solid faith, for which we have already an historical guarantee. Stupendous mysteries still veil the nature of the resurrection process, though these are exaggerated into inconceivabilities by false notions of what constitutes personal identity; but if the choice lies between accepting the Christian doctrine of a resurrection and the conception of a finite spirit disembodied and yet active, there can be no doubt as to which of these two is the more reasonable and thinkable. Body, soul, and spirit make the complete triune man.

The thought of the future life as a bodily life satisfies the longings of the heart. Much natural shrinking from death comes from unwillingness to part company with an old companion and friend. As Paul puts it in 2nd Corinthians, Not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon. All thoughts of the future which do not give prominence to the idea of a bodily life open up but a ghastly and uninviting mode of existence, which cannot but repel those who are accustomed to the fellowship of their bodies, and they feel that they cannot think of themselves as deprived of that which was their servant and instrument, through all the years of their earthly consciousness.

**II. The body that shall be is an emancipated body.**

The varied gifts of the Spirit bestowed upon the Christian Church served to quicken the hope of the yet greater gifts of that indwelling Spirit which were yet to come. Chief amongst these our text considers the transformation of the earthly into a spiritual body. This transformation our text regards as being the participation by the body in the redemption by which Christ has bought us with the great price of His blood. We have to interpret the language here in the light of the further teaching of Paul in the great Resurrection chapter of 1st Corinthians, which distinctly lays stress, not on the identity of the corporeal frame which is laid in the grave with the body of glory, but upon the entire contrast between the natural body, which is fit organ for the lower nature, and is informed by it, and the spiritual body, which is fit organ for the spirit. We have to interpret the resurrection of the body by the definite apostolic declaration, Thou sowest not that body that shall be... but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased Him; and we have to give full weight to the contrasts which the Apostle draws between the characteristics of that which is sown and of that which is raised. The one is sown in corruption and raised in incorruption. Natural decay is contrasted with immortal youth. The one is sown in dishonour, the other is raised in glory. That contrast is ethical, and refers either to the subordinate position of the body here in relation to the spirit, or to the natural sense of shame, or to the ideas of degradation which are attached to the indulgence of the appetites. The one is sown in weakness, the other is raised in power; the one is sown a natural body, the other is raised a spiritual body. Is not Paul in this whole series of contrasts thinking primarily of the vision which he saw on the road to Damascus when the risen Christ appeared before him? And had not the years which had passed since then taught him to see in the ascended Christ the prophecy and the pattern of what His servants should become? We have further to keep in view Paul's other representation in 2nd Corinthians v., where he strongly puts the contrast between the corporeal environment of earth and the body of glory, which belongs to the future life, in his two images: the earthly house of this tabernacle--a clay hut which lasts but for a time,--and the building of God, the house not made with hands and eternal. The body is an occasion of separation from the Lord.

These considerations may well lead us to, at least, general outlines on which a confident and peaceful hope may fix. For example, they lead us to the thought that that redeemed body is no more subject to decay and death, is no more weighed upon by weakness and weariness, has no work beyond its strength, needs no sustenance by food, and no refreshment of sleep. The Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, suggests strength constantly communicated by a direct divine gift. And from all these negative characteristics there follows that there will be in that future bodily life no epochs of age marked by bodily changes. The two young men who were seen sitting in the sepulchre of Jesus had lived before Adam, and would seem as young if we saw them to-day.

Similarly the redeemed body will be a more perfect instrument for communication with the external universe. We know that the present body conditions our knowledge, and that our senses do not take cognisance of all the qualities of material things. Microscopes and telescopes have enlarged our field of vision, and have brought the infinitely small and the infinitely distant within our range. Our ear hears vibrations at a certain rate per second, and no doubt if it were more delicately organised we could hear sounds where now is silence. Sometimes the creatures whom we call inferior seem to have senses that apprehend much of which we are not aware. Balaam's ass saw the obstructing angel before Balaam did. Nor is there any reason to suppose that all the powers of the mind find tools to work with in the body. It is possible that that body which is the fit instrument of the spirit may become its means of knowing more deeply, thinking more wisely, understanding more swiftly, comprehending more widely, remembering more firmly and judging more soundly. It is possible that the contrast between then and now may be like the contrast between telegraph and slow messenger in regard to the rapidity, between photograph and poor daub in regard to the truthfulness, between a full-orbed circle and a fragmentary arc in regard to the completeness of the messages which the body brings to the indwelling self.

But, once more, the body unredeemed has appetites and desires which may lead to their own satisfaction, which do lead to sordid cares and weary toil. The flesh lusts against the spirit and the spirit against the flesh. The redeemed body will have in it nothing to tempt and nothing to clog, but will be a helper to the spirit and a source of strength. Glorious work of God as the body is, it has its weaknesses, its limitations, and its tendencies to evil. We must not be tempted into brooding over unanswered questions as to How do the dead rise, and with what body do they come? But we can lift our eyes to the mountain-top where Jesus went up to pray. And as He prayed the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His raiment became white and dazzling; and He was capable of entering into the Shekinah cloud and holding fellowship therein with the Father, who attested His Sonship and bade us listen to His voice. And we can look to Olivet and follow the ascending Jesus as He lets His benediction drop on the upturned faces of His friends, until He again passes into the Shekinah cloud, and leaving the world, goes to the Father. And from both His momentary transfiguration and His permanent Ascension we can draw the certain assurance that He 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 subdue all things unto Himself.

**III. The redeemed body is a consequence of Christ's indwelling Spirit.**

It is no natural result of death or resurrection, but is the outcome of the process begun on earth, by which, through faith and the righteousness of faith, the spirit is life. The context distinctly enforces this view by its double use of adoption, which in one aspect has already been received, and is manifested by the fact that now are we the sons of God, and in another aspect is still waited for. The Christian man in his regenerated spirit has been born again; the Christian man still waits for the completion of that sonship in a time when the regenerated spirit will no longer dwell in the clay cottage of this tabernacle, but will inhabit a congruous dwelling in the building of God not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Scripture is too healthy and comprehensive to be contented with a merely spiritual regeneration, and is withal too spiritual to be satisfied with a merely material heaven. It gives full place to both elements, and yet decisively puts all belonging to the latter second. It lays down the laws that for a complete humanity there must be body as well as spirit; that there must be a correspondence between the two, and as is the spirit so must the body be, and further, that the process must begin at the centre and work outwards, so that the spirit must first be transformed, and then the body must be participant of the transformation.

All that Scripture says about rising in glory is said about believers. It is represented as a spiritual process. They who have the Spirit of God in their spirits because they have it receive the glorified body which is like their Saviour's. It is not enough to die in order to rise glorious. If the Spirit of Him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, He that raised up Christ from the dead shall also quicken your mortal bodies by His Spirit that dwelleth in you. The resurrection is promised for all mankind, but it may be a resurrection in which there shall be endless living and no glory, nor any beauty and no blessedness. But the body may be sown in weakness, and in weakness raised; it may be sown in dishonour and in dishonour raised; it may be sown dead, and raised a living death. Many of them that sleep in the dust of the earth shall awake, some to everlasting life, and some to shame and everlasting contempt. Does that mean nothing? They that have done evil to the resurrection of condemnation. Does that mean nothing? There are dark mysteries in these and similar words of Scripture which should make us all pause and solemnly reflect. The sole way which leads to the resurrection of glory is the way of faith in Jesus Christ. If we yield ourselves to Him, He will plant His Spirit in our spirits, will guide and growingly sanctify us through life, will deliver us by the indwelling of the Spirit of life in Him from the law of sin and death. Nor will His transforming power cease till it has pervaded our whole being with its fiery energy, and we stand at the last men like Christ, redeemed in body, soul, and spirit, according to the mighty working whereby He is able to subdue all things unto Himself.