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

**ROMANS-024**. **MORE THAN CONQUERORS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us."*

*Romans 8:37*

In order to understand and feel the full force of this triumphant saying of the Apostle, we must observe that it is a negative answer to the preceding questions, Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? A heterogeneous mass the Apostle here brigades together as an antagonistic army. They are alike in nothing except that they are all evils. There is no attempt at an exhaustive enumeration, or at classification. He clashes down, as it were, a miscellaneous mass of evil things, and then triumphs over them, and all the genus to which they belong, as being utterly impotent to drag men away from Jesus Christ. To ask the question is to answer it, but the form of the answer is worth notice. Instead of directly replying, No! no such powerless things as these can separate us from the love of Christ, he says, No! In all these things, whilst weltering amongst them, whilst ringed round about by them, as by encircling enemies, "we are more than conquerors." Thereby, he suggests that there is something needing to be done by us, in order that the foes may not exercise their natural effect. And so, taking the words of my text in connection with that to which they are an answer, we have three things--the impotent enemies of love; the abundant victory of love; We are more than conquerors; and the love that makes us victorious. Let us look then at these three things briefly.

**I. First of all, the impotent enemies of love.**

There is contempt in the careless massing together of the foes which the Apostle enumerates. He begins with the widest word that covers everything--affliction. Then he specifies various forms of it--distress, straitening, as the word might be rendered, then he comes to evils inflicted for Christ's sake by hostile men--persecution, then he names purely physical evils, hunger and nakedness, then he harks back again to man's antagonism, peril, and sword. And thus carelessly, and without an effort at logical order, he throws together, as specimens of their class, these salient points, as it were, and crests of the great sea, whose billows threaten to roll over us; and he laughs at them all, as impotent and nought, when compared with the love of Christ, which shields us from them all.

Now it must be noticed that here, in his triumphant question, the Apostle means not our love to Christ but His to us; and not even our sense of that love, but the fact itself. And his question is just this:--Is there any evil in the world that can make Christ stop loving a man that cleaves to Him? And, as I said, to ask the question is to answer it. The two things belong to two different regions. They have nothing in common. The one moves amongst the low levels of earth; the other dwells up amidst the abysses of eternity, and to suppose that anything that assails and afflicts us here has any effect in making that great heart cease to love us is to fancy that the mists can quench the sunlight, is to suppose that that which lies down low in the earth can rise to poison and to darken the heavens.

There is no need, in order to rise to the full height of the Christian contempt for calamity, to deny any of its terrible power. These things can separate us from much. They can separate us from joy, from hope, from almost all that makes life desirable. They can strip us to the very quick, but the quick they cannot touch. The frost comes and kills the flowers, browns the leaves, cuts off the stems, binds the sweet music of the flowing rivers in silent chains, casts mists and darkness over the face of the solitary grey world, but it does not touch the life that is in the root.

And so all these outward sorrows that have power over the whole of the outward life, and can slay joy and all but stifle hope, and can ban men into irrevocable darkness and unalleviated solitude, they do not touch in the smallest degree the secret bond that binds the heart to Jesus, nor in any measure affect the flow of His love to us. Therefore we may front them and smile at them and say:

Do as thou wilt, devouring time,

With this wide world, and all its fading sweets;

my flesh and my heart faileth, but God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever.

You need not be very much afraid of anything being taken from you as long as Christ is left you. You will not be altogether hopeless so long as Christ, who is our hope, still speaks His faithful promises to you, nor will the world be lonely and dark to them who feel that they are lapt in the sweet and all-pervading consciousness of the changeless love of the heart of Christ. Shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution?--in any of these things, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us. Brethren, that is the Christian way of looking at all externals, not only at the dark and the sorrowful, but at the bright and the gladsome. If the withdrawal of external blessings does not touch the central sanctities and sweetness of a life in communion with Jesus, the bestowal of external blessedness does not much brighten or gladden it. We can face the withdrawal of them all, we need not covet the possession of them all, for we have all in Christ; and the world without His love contributes less to our blessedness and our peace than the absence of all its joys with His love does. So let us feel that earth, in its givings and in its withholdings, is equally impotent to touch the one thing that we need, the conscious possession of the love of Christ.

All these foes, as I have said, have no power over the fact of Christ's love to us, but they have power, and a very terrible power, over our consciousness of that love; and we may so kick against the pricks as to lose, in the pain of our sorrows, the assurance of His presence, or be so fascinated by the false and vulgar sweetnesses and promises of the world as, in the eagerness of our chase after them, to lose our sense of the all-sufficing certitude of His love. Tribulation does not strip us of His love, but tribulation may so darken our perceptions that we cannot see the sun. Joys need not rob us of His heart, but joys may so fill ours, as that there shall be no longing for His presence within us. Therefore let us not exaggerate the impotence of these foes, but feel that there are real dangers, as in the sorrows so in the blessings of our outward life, and that the evil to be dreaded is that outward things, whether in their bright or in their dark aspects, may come between us and the home of our hearts, the love of the loving Christ.

**II. So then, note next, the abundant victory of love.**

Mark how the Apostle, in his lofty and enthusiastic way, is not content here with simply saying that he and his fellows conquer. It would be a poor thing, he seems to think, if the balance barely inclined to our side, if the victory were but just won by a hair's breadth and triumph were snatched, as it were, out of the very jaws of defeat. There must be something more than that to correspond to the power of the victorious Christ that is in us. And so, he says, we very abundantly conquer; we not only hinder these things which he has been enumerating from doing that which it is their aim apparently to do, but we actually convert them into helpers or allies. The more than conquerors seems to mean, if there is any definite idea to be attached to it, the conversion of the enemy conquered into a friend and a helper. The American Indians had a superstition that every foe tomahawked sent fresh strength into the warrior's arm. And so all afflictions and trials rightly borne, and therefore overcome, make a man stronger, and bring him nearer to Jesus Christ.

Note then, further, that not only is this victory more than bare victory, being the conversion of the enemy into allies, but that it is a victory which is won even whilst we are in the midst of the strife. It is not that we shall be conquerors in some far-off heaven, when the noise of battle has ceased and they hang the trumpet in the hall, but it is here now, in the hand-to-hand and foot-to-foot death-grapple that we do overcome. No ultimate victory, in some far-off and blessed heaven, will be ours unless moment by moment, here, to-day, we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

So, then, about this abundant victory there are these things to say:--You conquer the world only, then, when you make it contribute to your conscious possession of the love of Christ. That is the real victory, the only real victory in life. Men talk about overcoming here on earth, and they mean thereby the accomplishment of their designs. A man has victory, as it is phrased, in the world's strife, when he secures for himself the world's goods at which he has aimed, but that is not the Christian idea of the conquest of calamity. Everything that makes me feel more thrillingly in my inmost heart the verity and the sweetness of the love of Jesus Christ as my very own, is conquered by me and compelled to subserve my highest good, and everything which slips a film between me and Him, which obscures the light of His face to me, which makes me less desirous of, and less sure of, and less happy in, and less satisfied with, His love, is an enemy that has conquered me. And all these evils as the world calls them, and as our bleeding hearts have often felt them to be, are converted into allies and friends when they drive us to Christ, and keep us close to Him, in the conscious possession of His sweet and changeless love. That is the victory, and the only victory. Has the world helped me to lay hold of Christ? Then I have conquered it. Has the world loosened my grasp upon Him? Then it has conquered me.

Note then, further, that this abundant victory depends on how we deal with the changes of our outward lives, our sorrows or our joys. There is nothing, per se, salutary in affliction, there is nothing, per se, antagonistic to Christian faith in it either. No man is made better by his sorrows, no man need be made worse by them. That depends upon how we take the things which come storming against us. The set of your sails, and the firmness of your grasp upon the tiller, determine whether the wind shall carry you to the haven or shall blow you out, a wandering waif, upon a shoreless and melancholy sea. There are some of you that have been blown away from your moorings by sorrow. There are some professing Christians who have been hindered in their work, and had their peace and their faith shattered all but irrevocably, because they have not accepted, in the spirit in which they were sent, the trials that have come for their good. The worst of all afflictions is a wasted affliction, and they are all wasted unless they teach us more of the reality and the blessedness of the love of Jesus Christ.

**III. Lastly, notice the love which makes us conquerors.**

The Apostle, with a wonderful instinctive sense of fitness, names Christ here by a name congruous to the thoughts which occupy his mind, when he speaks of Him that loved us. His question has been, Can anything separate us from the love of Christ? And his answer is, So far from that being the case, that very love, by occasion of sorrows and afflictions, tightens its grasp upon us, and, by the communication of itself to us, makes us more than conquerors. This great love of Jesus Christ, from which nothing can separate us, will use the very things that seem to threaten our separation as a means of coming nearer to us in its depth and in its preciousness.

The Apostle says Him that loved us, and the words in the original distinctly point to some one fact as being the great instance of love. That is to say they point to His death. And so we may say Christ's love helps us to conquer because in His death He interprets for us all possible sorrows. If it be true that love to each of us nailed Him there, then nothing that can come to us but must be a love-token, and a fruit of that same love. The Cross is the key to all tribulation, and shows it to be a token and an instrument of an unchanging love.

Further, that great love of Christ helps us to conquer, because in His sufferings and death He becomes the Companion of all the weary. The rough, dark, lonely road changes its look when we see His footprints there, not without specks of blood in them, where the thorns tore His feet. We conquer our afflictions if we recognise that in all our afflictions He was afflicted, and that Himself has drunk to its bitterest dregs the cup which He commends to our lips. He has left a kiss upon its margin, and we need not shrink when He holds it out to us and says Drink ye all of it. That one thought of the companionship of the Christ in our sorrows makes us more than conquerors.

And lastly, this dying Lover of our souls communicates to us all, if we will, the strength whereby we may coerce all outward things into being helps to the fuller participation of His perfect love. Our sorrows and all the other distracting externals do seek to drag us away from Him. Is all that happens in counteraction to that pull of the world, that we tighten our grasp upon Him, and will not let Him go; as some poor wretch might the horns of the altar that did not respond to his grasp? Nay what we lay hold of is no dead thing, but a living hand, and it grasps us more tightly than we can ever grasp it. So because He holds us, and not because we hold Him, we shall not be dragged away, by anything outside of our own weak and wavering souls, and all these embattled foes may come against us, they may shear off everything else, they cannot sever Christ from us unless we ourselves throw Him away. In this thou shalt conquer. They overcame by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of His testimony.