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

**JOHN-096**. **PEACE AND VICTORY by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"These things I have spoken unto you, that in Me ye might have peace. In the world ye shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world."*

*John 16:33*

So end these wonderful discourses, and so ends our Lord's teaching before His passion. He gathers up in one mighty word the total intention of these sweet and deep sayings which we have so long been pondering together. He sketches in broad outline the continual characteristics of the disciples life, and closes all with the strangest shout of victory, even at the moment when He seems most utterly defeated.

We shall, I think, best lay on our hearts and minds the spirit and purpose of these words if we simply follow their course, and look at the three things which Christ emphasises here: the inward peace which is His purpose for us; the outward tribulation which is our certain fate; and the courageous confidence which Christ's victory for us gives.

**I. Note, then, first, the inward peace.**

These things have I spoken unto you that in Me ye might have peace. Peace is not lethargy; and it is very remarkable to notice how, in immediate connection with this great promise, there occur words which suggest its opposite--tribulation and battle. In the world ye have tribulation. I have overcome--that means a fight. These are to go side by side with the peace that He promises. The two conditions belong to two different spheres. The Christian life bifurcates, as it were, into a double root, and moves in two realms--in Meand in the worldAnd the predicates and characteristics of these two lives are, in a large measure, diametrically opposite. So here, without any contradiction, our Lord brackets together these two opposite conditions as both pertaining to the life of a devout soul. He promises a peace which co-exists with tribulation and disturbance, a peace which is realised in and through conflict and struggle. The tree will stand, with its deep roots and its firm bole, unmoved, though wildest winds may toss its branches and scatter its leaves. In the fortress, beleaguered by the sternest foes, there may be, right in the very centre of the citadel, a quiet oratory through whose thick walls the noise of battle and the shout of victory or defeat can never penetrate. So we may live in a centre of rest, however wild may be the uproar in the circumference. In Me... peace, that is the innermost life. In the world... tribulation, that is only the surface.

But, then, note that this peace, which exists with, and is realised through, tribulation and strife, depends upon certain conditions. Our Lord does not say, Ye have peace, but These things I have spoken that you may have it. It is a possibility; and He lays down distinctly and plainly here the twofold set of conditions, in fulfilment of which a Christian disciple may dwell secure and still, in the midst of all confusion. Note, then, these two.

It is peace, if we have it at all, in Him. Now you remember how emphatically and loftily, as one of the very key-notes of these discourses, our Lord has spoken to us, in them, of dwelling in Himas the prerogative and the duty of every Christian. We are in Him as in an atmosphere. In Him our true lives are rooted as a tree in the soil. We are in Him as a branch in the vine, in Him as the members in a body, in Him as the residents in a house. We are in Him by simple faith, by the trust that rests all upon Him, by the love that finds all in Him, by the obedience that does all for Him. And it is only when we are in Christthat we rest, and realise peace. All else brings distraction. Even delights trouble. The world may give excitement, the world may give vulgar and fleeting joys, the world may give stimulus to much that is good and true in us, but there is only one thing that gives peace, and that is that our hearts should dwell in the Fortress, and should ever be surrounded by Jesus Christ. Brother! let nothing tempt us down from the heights, and out from the citadel where alone we are at rest; but in the midst of all the pressing duties, the absorbing cares, the carking anxieties, the seducing temptations of the world, and in the presence of all the necessity for noble conflict which the world brings to every man that is not its slave, let us try to keep the roots of our lives in contact with that soil from which they draw all their nourishment, and to wrap ourselves round with the life of Jesus Christ, which shall make an impenetrable shield between us and the fiery darts of the wicked. Keep on the lee side of the breakwater and your little cock-boat will ride out the gale. Keep Christ between you and the hurtling storm, and there will be a quiet place below the wall where you may rest, hearing not the loud winds when they call. These things have I spoken that in Me ye might have peace.

But there is another condition. Christ speaks the great words which have been occupying us so long, that they may bring to us peace. I need not do more than remind you, in a sentence, of the contents of these wonderful discourses. Think of how they have spoken to us of our Brother's ascension to Heaven to prepare a place for us; of His coming again to receive us to Himself; of His presence with us in His absence; of His indwelling in us and ours in Him; of His gift to us of a divine Spirit. If we believed all these things; if we realised them and lived in the faith of them; if we meditated upon them in the midst of our daily duties; and if they were real to us, and not mere words written down in a Book, how should anything be able to disturb us, or to shake our settled confidence? Cleave to the words of the Master, and let them pour into your hearts the quietness and confidence which nothing else can give. And then, whatsoever storms may be around, the heart will be at rest. We find peace nowhere else but where Mary found her repose, and could shake off care and trouble about many things, sitting at the feet of Jesus, wrapt in His love and listening to His word.

**II. Then note, secondly, the outward tribulation which is the certain fate of His followers.**

Of course there is a very sad and true sense in which the warning, In the world ye shall have tribulation, applies to all men. Pain and sickness, loss and death, the monotony of hard, continuous, unwelcome toil, hopes blighted or disappointed even in their fruition, and all the other ills that flesh is heir to, afflict us all. But our Lord is not speaking here about the troubles that befall men as men, nor about the chastisement that befalls them as sinners, nor about the evils which dog them because they are mortal or because they are bad, but of the yet more mysterious sorrows which fall upon them because they are good, In the world ye have tribulation, is the proper rendering and reading. It had already begun, and it was to be the standing condition and certain fate of all that followed Him.

I have already said that the Christian life moves in two spheres, and hence there must necessarily be antagonism and conflict. Whoever realises the inward life in Christ will more or less, and sooner or later, find himself coming into hostile collision with lives which only move on the surface and belong to the world. If you and I are Christians after the pattern of Jesus Christ, then we dwell in the midst of an order of things which is not constituted on or for the principles that regulate our lives and the objects at which we aim. And hence, in that fundamental discordance between the Christian life and society as it is constituted, there must always be, if there be honesty and consistency on the side of the Christian man, more or less of collision between him and it. All that you regard as axiomatic the world regards as folly, if you take Christ for your Teacher. All that you labour to secure the world does not care to possess, if you have Him for your aim. All that you live to seek it has abandoned; all that you desire to obey it will not even consult, if you are taking Christ and His law for your rule. And therefore there must come, sooner or later, and more or less intensely in all Christian lives, opposition and tribulation. You cannot get away from the necessity, so it is as well to face it.

No doubt the form of antagonism varies. No doubt the more the world is penetrated by Christian principles divorced from their root and source, the less vehement and painful will the collision be. But there is the gulf, and there it will remain, until the world is a Church. No doubt some portion of the battlements of organised Christianity has tumbled into the ditch, and made it a little less deep. Christians have dropped their standard far too much, and so the antagonism is not so plain as it ought to be, and as it used to be, and as, some day, it will be. But there it is, and if you are going to live out and out like a Christian man, you will get the old sneers flung at you. You will be crotchety, impracticable, spoiling sport, not to be dealt with, a wet blanket, pharisaical, bigoted, and all the rest of the pretty words which have been so frequently used about the men that try to live like Jesus Christ. Never mind! In the world ye have tribulation. I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus, the branding-iron which tells to whom the slave belongs. And if it is His initials that I carry I may be proud of the marks.

But at any rate there will be antagonism. You young men in your warehouses, you men that go on Change', we people that live by our pens or our tongues, and find ourselves in opposition to much of the tendencies of the present day--we have all, in our several ways, to bear the cross. Do not let us be ashamed of it, and, above all, do not let us, for the sake of easing our shoulders, be unfaithful to our Master. In the world ye have tribulation; and the Christian man's peace has to be like the rainbow that lives above the cataract--still and radiant, whilst it shines above the hell of white waters that are tortured below.

**III. Lastly, notice the courageous confidence which comes from the Lord's victory.**

Be of good cheer! It is the old commandment that rang out to Joshua when, on the departure of Moses, the conduct of the war fell into his less experienced hands: Be strong, and of a good courage; only be thou strong and very courageous. So says the Captain of salvation, leaving His soldiers to face the current of the heady fight in the field. Like some leader who has climbed the ramparts, or hewed his way through the broken ranks of the enemies, and rings out the voice of encouragement and call to his followers, our Captain sets before us His own example: I have overcome the world, He said that the day before Calvary. If that was victory, what would defeat have been?

Notice, then, how our Lord's life was a true battle. The world tried to draw Him away from God by appealing to things desirable to sense, as in the wilderness; or to things dreadful to sense, as on the cross; and both the one and the other form of temptation He faced and conquered. It was no shadow fight which evoked this paean of victory from His lips. The reality of His conflict is somewhat concealed from us by reason of its calm and the completeness of His conquest. We do not appreciate the force that drives a planet upon its path because it is calm and continuous and silent, but the power that kept Jesus Christ continually faithful to His Father, continually sure of that Father's presence, continually averse to all self-will and selfish living, was a power mightier then all others that have been manifested in the history of humanity. The Captain of our salvation has really fought the fight before us.

But mark, again, that our Lord's life is the type of all victorious life. The world conquers me when it draws me away from God, when it makes me its slave, when it coaxes me to trust it, and urges to despair if I lose it. The world conquers me when it comes between me and God, when it fills my desires, when it absorbs my energies, when it blinds my eyes to the things unseen and eternal. I conquer the world when I put my foot upon its temptations, when I crush it down, when I shake off its bonds, and when nothing that time and sense, with their delights or their dreadfulnesses, can bring, prevents me from cleaving to my Father with all my heart, and from living as His child here. Whoso thus coerces Time and Sense to be the servants of his filial love has conquered them both, and whoso lets them draw him away from God is beaten, however successful he may dream himself to be and men may call him.

My friends! there is a lesson for Manchester people. Jesus Christ was not a very successful man according to the standard of Market Street and the Exchange. He made but a poor thing of the world, and He was going to be martyred on the cross the day after He said these words. And yet that was victory. Ay! Many a man beaten down in the struggle of daily life, and making very little of it, according to our vulgar estimate, is the true conqueror. Success means making the world a stepping-stone to God.

Still further, note our share in the Master's victory--I have overcome the world. Be ye of good cheer. That seems an irrelevant way of arguing. What does it matter to me though He has overcome? So much the better for Him; but what good is it to me?

 It may aid us somewhat to more strenuous fighting, if we know that a brother has fought and conquered, and I do not under-estimate the blessing and the benefit of the life of Jesus Christ, as recorded in these Scriptures, even from that, as I conceive it, miserably inadequate and imperfect point of view. But the victory of Jesus Christ is of extremely little practical use to me, if all the use of it is to show me how to fight. Ah! you must go a deal deeper than that. I have overcome the world, and I will come and put My overcoming Spirit into your weakness, and fill you with My own victorious life, and make your hands strong to war and your fingers to fight; and be in you the conquering and omnipotent Power.

My friends! Jesus Christ's victory is ours, and we are victors in it, because He is more than the pattern of brave warfare, He is even the Son of God, who gave Himself for us, and gives Himself to us, and dwells in us our Strength and our Righteousness.

Lastly, remember that the condition of that victory's being ours is the simple act of reliance upon Him and upon it. The man who goes into the battle as that little army of the Hebrews did against the wide-stretching hosts of the enemy, saying, O Lord! we know not what to do, but our eyes are up unto Thee, will come out more than conqueror through Him that loved him. For this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.