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

**JOHN-059**. **SEEKING JESUS by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"... Ye shall seek Me."*

*John 13:33*

In the former sermon on this verse I pointed out that it, in its fullness, applies only to the brief period between the crucifixion and the resurrection, but that, partly by contrast and partly by analogy, it suggests permanent relations between Christ and His disciples. These relations were mainly--as I pointed out then--two: there was that one expressed by the subsequent words of the verse, Whither I go, ye cannot come--a brief cannot, soon to be changed into a permanent can; and there was a second, a brief, sad, and vain seeking, soon to be changed into a seeking which finds. It is to the latter that I wish to turn now.

Ye shall seek Mefell, like the clods on a coffin-lid, with a hollow sound on the hearts of the Apostles. It comes to us as a permission and a command and a promise. I do not dwell on that sad seeking, which was so brief but so bitter. We all know what it is to put out an empty hand into the darkness and the void, and to grope for a touch which we know, whilst we grope, that we shall not find. And these poor, helpless disciples, by their forlorn sense of separation, by their yearning that brought no satisfaction, by their very listless despair, were saying, during these hours of agony into which an eternity of pain was condensed, Oh! that He were beside us again!

That sad seeking ended when He came to them, and then were the disciples glad when they saw the Lord. But another kind of seeking began, when the cloud received Him out of their sight; as joyful as the other was laden with sorrow, as sure to find the object of its quest as the other was certain to be disappointed. What He said in the darkness to them, He says in the light to us: What I say unto you I say unto all, Seek! So now we have to deal with that joyful search which is sure of finding its object, and is only a little, if at all, less blessed than the finding itself.

**I. Every Christian is, by his very name, a seeker after Christ.**

There are two kinds of seeking, one like that of a bird whose young have been stolen away, which flutters here and there, because it knows not where that is which it seeks; another, like the flight of the same bird, when the migrating instinct rises in its little breast, and straight as an arrow it goes, not because it knows not its goal, but because it knows it, yonder where the sun is warm and the sky is blue, and winter is left behind in the cold north. Ye shall seek Meis the word of promise, which changes the vain search that is ignorant of where the object of its quest is, into a blessed going out of the heart towards that which it knows to be the home of its homelessness. Thus the text brings out the very central blessedness and peculiarity of the Christian life, that it has no uncertainty in its aims, and that, instead of seeking for things which may or may not be found, or if found may or may not prove to be what we dreamt them to be. It seeks for a Person whom it knows where to find, and of whom it knows that all its desires will be met in Him. We have, then, on the one side the multifarious, divergent searchings of man; and on the other side the one quest in which all these others are gathered up, and translated into blessedness--the seeking after Jesus Christ.

Men know that they need, if I may so put it, four things: truth for the understanding, love round which the heart may coil, authority for the will which may direct and restrain, and energy for the practical life. But, apart from the quest after Christ, men for the most part seek these necessary goods in divers objects, and fragmentarily look for the completion of their desires. But fragments will never satisfy a man's soul, and they who have to go to one place for truth, and to another for love, and to another for authority, and to another for energy, are wofully likely never to find what they search for. They are seeking in the manifold what can be found only in the One. It is as if some vessel, full of precious stones, were thrown down before men, and whilst they are racing after the diamonds, they lose the emeralds and the sapphires. But the wise concentrate their seekings on the one Pearl of great price, in whom is truth for the brain, love for the heart, authority for the will, power for the life, and all summed in that which is more blessed than all, the Person of the Brother who died for us, the Christ who lives to fill our hearts for ever. One sun dims all the stars; and the one entire and perfect Chrysolitebeggars and reduces to fragments all the precious things that thou canst desire.

To seek Him is the very hall-mark of a Christian, and that seeking comes to be an earnest desire and effort after more conscious communion with Him, and a more entire possession of His imparted life which is righteousness and peace and joy and power. According to the Rabbis, the manna tasted to each man what each man most desired. The manifoldness of the one Christ is far more manifold than the manifoldness of the multiplicity of fragmentary and partial aims which foolish men perceive.

The ways of seeking are very plain. First of all, we seek if, and in proportion as, we make the effort to occupy our thoughts and minds, not with theological dogmas, but with the living Christ Himself. Ah! brethren, it is hard to do, and I daresay a great many of you are thinking that it is far harder for you, in the distractions and rush and conflict of business and daily life, than it is for people like me, whom you imagine as sitting in a study, with nothing to distract us. I do not know about that; I fancy it is about equally hard for us all; but it is possible. I have been in Alpine villages where, at the end of every squalid alley, there towered up a great, pure, silent, white peak. That is what our lives may be; however noisome, crowded, petty the little lane in which we live, the Alp is at the end of it there, if we only choose to lift our eyes and look. It is possible that not only into the sessions of sweet silent thought, but into the rush and bustle of the workshop or the exchange, there may come, like some sweet, beguiling melody, so sweet we know not we are listening to it, the thought that changes pettiness into greatness, that makes all things go smoothly and easily, that is a test and a charm to discover and to destroy temptation, the thought of a present Christ, the Lover of my soul, and the Helper of my life.

Again, we seek Him when, by aspiration and desire, we bring Him--as He is always brought thereby--into our hearts and into our lives. The measure of our desire is the measure of our possession. Wishing is the opening of our hearts, but, alas, often we wish and desire, and the heart opens and nothing enters. Wishes are like the tentacles of some marine organism waving about in a waste ocean, feeling for the food that they do not find. But if we open our hearts for Him, that is simultaneous with the coming of Him to us. Ye have not, because ye ask not. Do not forget, dear friends, that desire, if it is genuine, will take a very concrete form and will be prayer. And it is prayer--by which I do not mean the utterance of words without desire, any more than I mean desire without the direct casting of it into the form of supplication--it is prayer that brings Christ into any, and it is prayer that will bring Him into every, life.

Nor let us forget that there is another way of seeking besides these two, of looking up to Him through, and in the midst of, all the shows and trifles of this low life, and the reaching out of our desires towards Him, as the roots of a tree beneath the soil go straight for the river. That other way is imitation and obedience. It is vain to think of Him, and it is unreal to pretend to desire Him, if we are not seeking Him by treading in the path that He has trod, and which leads to Him. Imitation and obedience--these are the steps by which we go straight through all the trivialities of life into the presence of the Lord Himself. The smallest deflection from the path that leads to Him will carry us away into doleful wastes. The least invisible cloud that steals across the sky will blot out half a hemisphere of stars; and we seek not Christ unless, thinking of Him, and desiring Him, we also walk in the path in which He has walked, and so come where He is. He Himself has said that if His servant follows Him, where He is there shall also His servant be. These things make up the seeking which ought to mark us all.

I note that--

**II. The Christian seeker always finds.**

I pointed out in my last sermon the strange identity of our Lord's words to His humble friends, with those which on another occasion He used to His bitter enemies. He reminds the disciples of that identity in the verse from which my text comes: As I said to the Jews ... so now I say to you. But there was one thing that He said to the Jews that He did not say to them. To the former He said, Ye shall seek Me, and shall not find Me; and He did not say that--even for the sad hours it was not quite true--He did not say that to His followers, and He does not say it to us.

If we seek we shall find. There is no disappointment in the Christian life. Anything is possible rather than that a man should desire Christ and not have Him. That has never been the experience of any seeking soul. And so I urge upon you what has already been suggested, that inasmuch as, by reason of His infinite longing to give truth and love and guidance and energy and His whole Self, to all of us, the amount of our possession of the power and life of Jesus Christ depends on ourselves. If you take to the fountain a tiny cup, you will only bring away a tiny cupful. If you take a great vessel you will bring it away full. As long as the woman in the old story held out her vessels to the miraculous flow of the oil, the flow continued. When she had no more vessels to take, the flow stopped. If a man holds a flagon beneath a spigot with an unsteady hand, half of the precious liquor will be spilt on the ground. Those who fulfil the conditions, of which I have already been speaking, may make quite sure that according to their faith will it be unto them. And if you, dear friend, have not in your experience the conscious presence of a Christ who is all that you need, there is no one in heaven or earth or hell to blame for it but only your own self. I have never said to any of the seed of Jacob, Seek ye My face in vain; and when the Lord said, Ye shall seek Me, He was implicitly binding Himself to meet the seeking soul, and give Himself to the desiring heart.

Remember, too, that this seeking, which is always crowned with finding, is the only search in which failure is impossible. There is only one course of life that has no disappointments. We all know how frequently we are foiled in our quests; we all know how often a prize won is a bitterer disappointment than a prize unattained. Like a jelly-fish in the water, as long as it is there its tenuous substance is lovely, expanded, tinged with delicate violets and blues, and its long filaments float in lines of beauty. Lay it on the beach, and it is a shapeless lump, and it poisons and stings. You fish your prize out of the great ocean, and when you have it, does it disappoint, or does it fulfil, the raised expectations of the quest? There is One who does not disappoint. There is one gold mine that comes up to the prospectus. There is one spring that never runs dry. The more deep our Christian experience is, the more we shall take the rapturous exclamation of the Arabian queen to ourselves: The half was not told us!

And so, lastly, I suggest that--

**III. The finding impels to fresh seeking.**

The object of the Christian man's quest is Jesus Christ. He is Incarnate Infinitude; and that cannot be exhausted. The seeker after Jesus Christ is the Christian soul. That soul is the incarnate possibility of indefinite expansion and approximation and assimilation; and that cannot be exhausted. And so, with a Christ who is infinite, and a seeker whose capacities may be indefinitely expanded, there can be no satiety, there can be no limit, there can be no end to the process. This wine-skin will not burst when the new wine is put into it. Rather like some elastic vessel, as you pour it will fill out and expand. Possession enlarges, and the more of Christ's fullness is poured into a human heart, the more is that heart widened out to receive a greater blessing.

Dear brethren, there is one course of life, and I believe but one, on which we may all enter with the sure confidence that in the nature of things, in the nature of Christ, and in the nature of ourselves, there is no end to growth and progress. Think of the freshness and blessedness and energy that puts into a life. To have an unattained and unattainable object, a goal to which we can never come, but to which we may ever be approximating, seems to me to be the secret of perpetual joy and of perpetual youthfulness. To say, forgetting the things that are behind, I reach forward unto the things that are before, is a charm and an amulet that repels monotony and weariness, and goes with a man to the very end, and when all other aims and objects have died down into grey ashes, that flame, like the fabled lamp in Virgil's tomb, burns clear in the grave, and lights us to the eternity beyond.

For certainly, if there be neither satiety nor limit to Christian progress here, there can be no better and stronger evidence that Christian progress here is but the first lapof the race, the first stadium of the course, and that beyond that narrow, dark line which lies across the path, it runs on, rising higher, and will run on for ever.

On earth the broken arc; in heaven the perfect round.

Seek for what you are sure to find; seek for what will never disappoint you; seek for what will abide with you for ever. The very first word of Christ's recorded in Scripture is a question which He puts to us all: What seek ye?Well for us, if like the two to whom it was originally addressed, we answer, We are not seeking a What; we are seeking a Whom.--Master, where dwellest Thou?And if we have that answer in our hearts, we shall receive the invitation which they received, Come and see,--come and seek. Ye shall seek Meis a gracious invitation, an imperative command, and a faithful promise that if we seek we shall find. Whoso findeth Him findeth life; whoso misseth Him--whatever else he has sought and found--wrongeth his own soul.