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

**MARK-080**. **THE ETHRONED CHRIST by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"So then after the Lord had spoken unto them, He was received up into heaven, and sat on the right hand of God."*

*Mark 16:19*

How strangely calm and brief is this record of so stupendous an event! Do these sparing and reverent words sound to you like the product of devout imagination, embellishing with legend the facts of history? To me their very restrainedness, calmness, matter-of-factness, if I may so call it, are a strong guarantee that they are the utterance of an eyewitness, who verily saw what he tells so simply. There is something sublime in the contrast between the magnificence and almost inconceivable grandeur of the thing communicated, and the quiet words, so few, so sober, so wanting in all detail, in which it is told.

That stupendous fact of Christ sitting at the right hand of God is the one that should fill the present for us all, even as the Cross should fill the past, and the coming for Judgment should fill the future. So for us the one central thought about the present, in its loftiest relations, should be the throned Christ at God's right hand. It is to that thought of the session of Jesus by the side of the Majesty of the Heavens that I wish to turn now, to try to bring out the profound teaching that is in it, and the practical lessons which it suggests. I desire to emphasise very briefly four points, and to see, in Christ's sitting at the right hand, the revelation of these things:--The exalted Man, the resting Saviour, the interceding Priest, and the ever-active Helper.

**I. First, then, in that solemn and wondrous fact of Christ's sitting at the right hand of God, we have the exalted Man.**

We are taught to believe, according to His own words, that in His ascension Christ was but returning whence He came, and entering into the glory which He had with the Father before the world was. And that impression of a return to His native and proper abode is strongly conveyed to us by the narrative of His ascension. Contrast it, for instance, with the narrative of Elijah's rapture, or with the brief reference to Enoch's translation. The one was taken by God up into a region and a state which he had not formerly traversed; the other was borne by a fiery chariot to the heavens; but Christ slowly sailed upwards, as it were, by His own inherent power, returning to His abode, and ascending up where He was before.

But whilst this is one side of the profound fact, there is another side. What was new in Christ's return to His Father's bosom? This, that He took His Manhood with Him. It was the Everlasting Son of the Father, the Eternal Word, which from the beginning was with God and was God, that came down from heaven to earth, to declare the Father; but it was the Incarnate Word, the Man Christ Jesus, that went back again. This most blessed and wonderful truth is taught with emphasis in His own words before the Council, Ye shall see the Son of Man sitting on the right hand of power. Christ, then, to-day, bears a human body, not, indeed, the body of His humiliation, but the body of His glory, which is none the less a true corporeal frame, and necessarily requires a locality. His ascension, whithersoever He may have gone, was the true carrying of a real humanity, complete in all its parts, Body, Soul, and Spirit, up to the very throne of God.

Where that locality is it is bootless to speculate. Scripture says that He ascended up far above all heavens; or, as the Epistle to the Hebrews has it, in the proper translation, the High Priest is passed through the heavens, as if all this visible material creation was rent asunder in order that He might soar yet higher beyond its limits wherein reign mutation and decay. But wheresoever that place may be, there is a place in which now, with a human body as well as a human spirit, Jesus is sitting at the right hand of God.

Let us thankfully think how, in the profound language of Scripture, the Forerunner is for us entered; how, in some mysterious manner, of which we can but dimly conceive, that entrance of Jesus in His complete humanity into the highest heavens is the preparation of a place for us. It seems as if, without His presence there, there were no entrance for human nature within that state, and no power in a human foot to tread upon the crystal pavements of the celestial City, but where He is, there the path is permeable, and the place native, to all who love and trust Him.

We may stand, therefore, with these disciples, and looking upwards as the cloud receives Him out of our sight, our faith follows Him, still our Brother, still clothed with humanity, still wearing a bodily frame; and we say, as we lose Him from our vision, What is man? Capable of being lifted to the most intimate participation in the glories of divinity, and though he be poor and weak and sinful here, yet capable of union and assimilation with the Majesty that is on high. For what Christ's Body is, the bodies of them that love and serve Him shall surely be, and He, the Forerunner, is entered there for us; that we too, in our turn, may pass into the light, and walk in the full blaze of the divine glory; as of old the children in the furnace were, unconsumed, because companioned by One like unto the Son of Man.

The exalted Christ, sitting at the right hand of God, is the Pattern of what is possible for humanity, and the prophecy and pledge of what will be actual for all that love Him and bear the image of Him upon earth, that they may be conformed to the image of His glory, and be with Him where He is. What firmness, what reality, what solidity this thought of the exalted bodily Christ gives to the else dim and vague conceptions of a Heaven beyond the stars and beyond our present experience! I believe that no doctrine of a future life has strength and substance enough to survive the agonies of our hearts when we part from our dear ones, the fears of our spirits when we look into the unknown, inane future for ourselves; except only this which says Heaven is Christ and Christ is Heaven, and points to Him and says, Where He is, there and that also shall His servants be.

**II. Now, secondly, look at Christ's sitting at the right hand of God as presenting to our view the Resting Saviour.**

That session expresses the idea of absolute repose after sore conflict. It is the same thought which is expressed in those solemn Egyptian colossal statues of deified conquerors, elevated to mysterious union with their gods, and yet men still, sitting before their temples in perfect stillness, with their mighty hands lying quiet on their restful limbs; with calm faces out of which toil and passion and change seem to have melted, gazing out with open eyes as over a silent, prostrate world. So, with the Cross behind, with all the agony and weariness of the arena, the dust and the blood of the struggle, left beneath, He sitteth at the right hand of God the Father Almighty.

The rest of the Christ after His Cross is parallel with and carries the same meaning as the rest of God after the Creation. Why do we read He rested on the seventh day from all His works? Did the Creative Arm grow weary? Was there toil for the divine nature in the making of a universe? Doth He not speak and it is done? Is not the calm, effortless forth-putting of His will the cause and the means of Creation? Does any shadow of weariness steal over that life which lives and is not exhausted? Does the bush consume in burning? Surely not. He rested from His works, not because He needed to recuperate strength after action by repose, but because the works were perfect, and in sign and token that His ideal was accomplished, and that no more was needed to be done.

And, in like manner, the Christ rests after His Cross, not because He needed repose even after that terrible effort, or was panting after His race, and so had to sit there to recover, but in token that His work was finished and perfected, that all which He had come to do was done; and in token, likewise, that the Father, too, beheld and accepted the finished work. Therefore, the session of Christ at the right hand of God is the proclamation from Heaven of what He cried with His last dying breath upon the Cross: It is finished!It is the declaration that the world has had all done for it that Heaven can do for it. It is the declaration that all which is needed for the regeneration of humanity has been lodged in the very heart of the race, and that henceforward all that is required is the evolving and the development of the consequences of that perfect work which Christ offered upon the Cross. So the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews contrasts the priests who stood daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrificeswhich can never take away sin, with this Man who, after He had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down at the right hand of God; testifying thereby that His Cross is the complete, sufficient, perpetual atonement and satisfaction for the sins of the whole world. So we have to look back to that past as interpreted by this present, to that Cross as commented upon by this Throne, and to see in it the perfect work which any human soul may grasp, and which all human souls need, for their acceptance and forgiveness. The Son of Man set at the right hand of God is Christ's declaration, I have finished the work which Thou gavest Me to do, and is also God's declaration, This is My beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.

**III. Once more, we see here, in this great fact of Christ sitting at the right hand of God, the interceding Priest.**

So the Scripture declares. The Epistle to the Hebrews over and over again reiterates that thought that we have a Priest who has passed into the heavens, there to appear in the presence of God for us. And the Apostle Paul, in that great linked climax in the eighth chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, has it, Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. There are deep mysteries connected with that thought of the intercession of Christ. It does not mean that the divine heart needs to be won to love and pity. It does not mean that in any mere outward and formal fashion Christ pleads with God, and softens and placates the Infinite and Eternal love of the Father in the heavens. It, at least, plainly means this, that He, our Saviour and Sacrifice, is for ever in the presence of God; presenting His own blood as an element in the divine dealing with us, modifying the incidence of the divine law, and securing through His own merits and intercession the outflow of blessings upon our heads and hearts. It is not a complete statement of Christ's work for us that He died for us. He died that He might have somewhat to offer. He lives that He may be our Advocate as well as our propitiation with the Father. And just as the High Priest once a year passed within the curtain, and there in the solemn silence and solitude of the holy place sprinkled the blood that he bore thither, not without trembling, and but for a moment permitted to stay in the awful Presence, thus, but in reality and for ever, with the joyful gladness of a Son in His own calm home, His habitation from eternity, Christ abides in the Holy Place; and, at the right hand of the Majesty of the Heavens, lifts up that prayer, so strangely compact of authority and submission; Father, I will that these whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am. The Son of Man at the right hand of God is our Intercessor with the Father. Seeing, then, that we have a great High Priest that is passed through the heavens, let us come boldly to the Throne of Grace.

**IV. Lastly, this great fact sets before us the ever-active Helper.**

The right hand of Godis the Omnipotent energy of God, and howsoever certainly the language of Scripture requires for its full interpretation that we should firmly hold that Christ's glorified body dwells in a place, we are not to omit the other thought that to sit at the right hand also means to wield the immortal energy of that divine nature, over all the field of the Creation, and in every province of His dominion. So that the ascended Christ is the ubiquitous Christ; and He who is at the right hand of Godis wherever the power of God reaches throughout His whole Universe.

Remember, too, that it was once given to a man to look through the opened heavens (through which Christ had passed) and to see the Son of Man standing--not sitting--at the right hand of God. Why to the dying protomartyr was there granted that vision thus varied? Wherefore was the attitude changed but to express the swiftness, the certainty of His help, and the eager readiness of the Lord, who starts to His feet, as it were, to succour and to sustain His dying servant? And so, dear friends, we may take that great joyful truth that both as receiving gifts for menand bestowing gifts upon them, and as working by His providence in the world, and on the wider scale for the well-being of His children and of the Church, the Christ who sits at the right hand of God wields, ever with eager cheerfulness, all the powers of omnipotence for our well-being, if we love and trust Him. We may look quietly upon all perplexities and complications, because the hands that were pierced for us hold the helm and the reins, because the Christ who is our Brother is the King, and sits supreme at the centre of the Universe. Joseph's brethren, that came up in their hunger and their rags to Egypt, and found their brother next the throne, were startled with a great joy of surprise, and fears were calmed, and confidence sprang in their hearts. Shall not we be restful and confident when our Brother, the Son of Man, sits ruling all things? We see not yet all things put underus, but we see Jesus, and that is enough.

So the ascended Man, the resting Saviour and His completed work, the interceding Priest, and the ever-active Helper, are all brought before us in this great and blessed thought, Christ sitteth at the right hand of God. Therefore, dear friends, set your affection on things above. Our hearts travel where our dear ones are. Oh how strange and sad it is that professing Christians whose lives, if they are Christians at all, have their roots and are hid with Christ in God, should turn so few, so cold thoughts and loves thither! Surely where your treasure is there will your heart be also. Surely if Christ is your Treasure you will feel that with Him is home, and that this is a foreign land. Set your affection, then, on things above, while life lasts, and when it is ebbing away, perhaps to our eyes too Heaven may be opened, and the vision of the Son of Man standing to receive and to welcome us may be granted. And when it has ebbed away, His will be the first voice to welcome us, and He will lift us to share in His glorious rest, according to His own wondrous promise, To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with Me in My Throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with My Father in His Throne.