

MacLaren Expositions Of Holy Scripture

Titus 2:11

For the grace of God that bringeth salvation, hath appeared to all men,
Titus

THE SCHOOL OF GRACE

THE Apostle has been giving fatherly admonitions as to very elementary pieces of morality, addressed to both sexes, and to all ages. He winds up with inculcating on Christian slaves some obvious duties, such as obedience and honesty. In my text he bases all these on what was to him the motive and the power for all sorts of righteous living - viz., the fact of Christ's mission. The 'for' with which my text begins carries with it the whole relation between Christian thinking and Christian action, and shows us that the loftiest truths are then most honoured when they are brought to bear on the lowliest duties. Slaves are not to pilfer nor wrangle, 'for the grace that brings salvation hath appeared to all men, teaching.'

Now there are two remarks that I must make of an expository kind in order to come to the understanding of the words before us. One is that the collocation in our Authorised Version, 'hath appeared to all men,' is not what Paul means, but these last words, 'to all men,' should be connected with the previous ones, 'that bringeth salvation.' It is not part of his purpose to declare, what was not in fact true then, and is not true now, that the grace of God has appeared to all men, but it was part of his purpose to declare that that grace brings salvation to all men, howsoever the present range of its manifestation may historically be contracted. The other remark that I would make is that 'teaching' is by no means a sufficiently comprehensive expression to cover the Apostle's thought, for the word which he employs, whilst it does mean the communication of instruction, carries with it inseparably the other ideas of correcting faults and of chastisement. It is the same which is used in the well-known words, 'Whom the Lord loveth He chasteneth.' So that what the Apostle says here is that the grace of God has appeared, bringing salvation to all men, schooling, or training, or disciplining.

I. Let us, then, first look at the appearance of the grace.

Now that word 'grace' played a much larger part in the thoughts of our fathers than it does in ours; and I am not sure that many things are more needed by the ordinary Christian of this generation than that he should rediscover the amplitude and the majesty of that old-fashioned and unfashionable word. For what does 'grace' mean? It

means a self- originated love. Grace is love that has no motive but itself. Grace is a self-motivated love that is in full energetic exercise. Grace is a self-motivated, ever-acting love that delights to impart. Grace is a self-motivated, ever-acting, communicating love which bends in tenderness over and floods with gifts those that stand far beneath itself. Grace is a self-motivated, ever-acting, communicating, and stooping love which brings in its hands the gift of forgiveness, and deals with those on whom it lavishes this tenderness, not according to their merits, but according to the pulsations of its own heart. And thus grace is the shorthand word for the self-motivated, ever-acting, communicating, stooping, and pardoning mercy which has its very home and throne in the heart of God Himself. It is this galaxy of stars blended into one diffused light, and yet capable of being resolved into so many suns, which the Apostle here says 'hath appeared.' He uses a most significant and picturesque word, for it is the expression which is proper to describe the raying out in the heavens of its great lights, and in the only place in Scripture in which it is applied to physical things is in reference to the sun and stars which, clouded by tempest, for many days did not 'appear,' nor could beam their sweet light on the darkened earth. In all other cases where the word is employed it has a definite and plain meaning. It always refers to the coming of Jesus Christ, either his first coming in the Incarnation, or his second coming to Judgment. That manifestation is the raying out, as it were, of a sun, which has been obscured by the mists of sin, rising from the undrained swamps of our own hearts, and it pours itself down upon the mists; and thins them away until its radiant light is spread over all the glittering and rejoicing earth.

So the Apostle has a definite meaning, and points to a definite historical fact, when he declares that, in the Person and life of Jesus Christ, the Incarnate Son of God, all this self-originated, active, communicating stooping, pardoning love finds its highest manifestation. The fire-mist, if I might so say, which was diffused through a chaotic universe, is gathered together into a sun, and it blazes down upon the world.

Now, of course, that conception of the life of Jesus Christ as the appearance of the grace of God rests upon the other belief that Jesus Christ has a special and unique relation to the God whose love He manifests. And this is the point of view from which the approaching Christmas festival has to be regarded by Christian people. Unless we can say, 'the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us,' we cannot go on to say, 'We beheld his glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.' Christmas celebrates not merely the birth of a man: but the Incarnation of a God. The 'grace that bringeth salvation to all men hath appeared.' Ay, there is the great peculiarity, there are the power and the blessedness of Christianity in its teaching, that now we no longer need to grope after God, searching painfully for traces of His footsteps in the maze of the world's history, or consulting the ambiguous oracles of nature, or looking for Him in the intuitions of our own hearts, our hopes and fears, but that we can turn to historical facts and say, 'Lo! this is our God. We have waited for Him, and He will save us.' The day

of peradventures is past, when we listen to his 'Verily! verily! I say unto you... he that hath seen Me hath seen the Father.'

And so the Word was flesh, and wrought With ,human hands the creed of creeds In loveliness of perfect deeds, Higher than all poetic thought.'

'The grace of God hath appeared.'

II. Note the gift of the grace.

It 'bringeth salvation to all men.' Now I suppose one reason which recommended what I have already designated as an erroneous connection of words in our Authorised Version is the difficulty of believing in the face of facts that Christ, in His character of the embodied grace of God, did bring salvation to all men. But the explanation of the seeming difficulty is not to be found in twisting the words out of their proper order, but in understanding the words in the order in which they occur. For when the Apostle says that this grace brings salvation unto all, he does not say that all receive the salvation which is brought to them. There is a whole world of difference between the two expressions. And the word that he employs - for it is one word in the original which is rendered in our Version by the three 'that bringeth salvation' - does not describe an actuality, but a potentiality and a possibility. The aim and purpose, not the realised effect, is what is pointed out in this great word of our text.

For there is a condition necessary from the very nature of the case. If God could save all men, be sure that He would do it; the love that thus takes its rise in the councils of Eternity, and flows on for ever through the waste and barren ages of human history, and is ever waiting to bestow itself, in its tenderness and in its liberality upon all men, is not made less universal, but it is conditioned by the nature of the gift that it brings. Salvation cannot be flung broadcast and indiscriminately upon all men of all sorts, whatever their relation to God. If it could, be sure that it would be. But just because it is a deep and inward thing, affecting men's moral and religious state, and not only their position in regard to some future hell, it cannot be given thus broadcast, it must be sown in the fitting places. The one thing that is requisite, and it is indispensably requisite, is that I shall trust Him who brings salvation, and, trusting Him, shall take it out of His hand. If the medicine stands on the shelf, in the bottle with the stopper in, the sick man will not be cured. That is not the fault of the medicine; it is a panacea, but no remedy can work where it is not applied. This great ocean of the divine love goes, as it were, feeling along the black cliffs that front it, for some cranny into which it may pour itself, but the obstinate rock can fling it all back in impotent spray. Though the whole Atlantic surges against the cliff, it is dry an inch inwards. Thus the universality of the gift, the universal potency of the gift, is not in the slightest degree affected by the fact

that, where it is not taken, its benefits are not realised. Have you shut your hearts to it, or have you opened them?

Paul recognised that this grace of God came with a gift that was meant for everybody, mainly because he knew that it had come with a gift that had done what it aimed at for him. Like every true Christian man, he felt, as you and I ought to feel, that if it were able to save me it is able to save anybody, and that if it can cast out my faults and sins, though I may not have fallen into gross sins, or what the world calls crimes, there is no man whose iniquities will foil it. 'Of whom I am chief' is not an exaggeration, but it is the verdict of an honest conscience that knows the inside of one man, at all events, and knows how much of his surface innocence is deceptive, and how much of it is due not to himself, but to circumstances.

'The arms of love that compassed me

Would all mankind embrace.'

You know, some of you, that He has cleansed you. You know that He would have cleansed you more completely if you had let Him; and, knowing that, can you doubt that He would cleanse everybody?

The universality of the gift is manifest in the fact that it addresses itself only to needs which belong to every man, for the deepest of all needs is the need that our relations to God shall be set right, and that we shall be delivered from the bondage and the tyranny of our sins.

And that universal potentiality and universal aim are still further written in unmistakable characters upon the mission and work of Jesus Christ, inasmuch as it requires only, as its condition, that which all men can render. For if it had been meant for sections it would have called for qualifications which only classes can possess. If our understanding had been the organ for receiving the truth, it would have been a gospel for the wise men of the world, and the wayfaring man, the fool, would have been shut out. But now there is but the one condition of trust in the one omnipotent grace, and since all men, if they would, could put forth a believing hand, the very condition, instead of being a limitation, is a demonstration of the universality of the gift.

We have to look out over all the world, the outcasts, the slum-dwellers, the barbarian races, and as the main thought about them, to cherish the undying assurance that not one of them but is capable of being lifted by the grace of God from the depths into which they have fallen. That is not the way in which people look at 'the dangerous classes' of civilisation and at the savage races outside its pale. Some of us are looking

now at the latter mainly as beasts of burden, and hoping to exploit their muscles in the search after wealth and glory. Jesus Christ looks at them, and you and I ought to look at them, as possible candidates for the elevating influences of His grace. There is no metal so hard but, cast into that furnace of love, it will melt and flow. There is no reed so broken and trampled into the mud but that His gracious hands, with His deft and loving gentleness of touch, can bind it up and make it whole, and make it blossom. And there is no foulness so black but that this detergent can wash it white. There is no man on the face of the earth, nor ever has been, so brutalised but that, by the grace of God, he may be deified, made 'partaker of a divine nature.' Grace 'brings salvation to all men.'

III. Lastly, let me point you to the discipline of the Grace.

As I have already said, 'teaching' here implies not only the communication of instruction, either outwardly or inwardly, but also a disciplinary process of correction that includes necessarily chastisement. Jesus Christ comes to us, and brings the external means of communicating instruction in the record of His life in this book. And He comes to us, also doing what no other teacher can do, for He passes into our spirits, and communicates not only instruction but the Spirit which teaches them in whom it abides, and guides them with gentle illumination into 'all truth! concerning God, Christ, and themselves, which it is needful for them to know.

Nor does His work stop there, for He corrects and rebukes.

Nor does His work stop there, for as He Himself has said, 'As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten' He comes 'with a rod' sometimes, but always 'in the spirit of meekness.' He uses not only inward but also outward chastisements. The knife mercilessly cuts away the tender, pliant tendrils of the vine, and the sap bleeds out at the wound, but the life does not; and the result of the pruning is larger and mellower clusters, ruddy in the sunlight and full of generous juice. So be sure of two things, dear friends, that it is grace which chastens, that the knife is held by a loving hand, and that the purpose of our outward sorrows, as well as of our inward discipline, is 'that we may be partakers of His holiness.' That grace is not like some unskilful surgeon, who cuts so deep that, in the effort to remove the tumour, he kills the sufferer; but His surgery knows to a hairsbreadth where to stop, and when the incision has Served its purpose.

'The grace of God hath appeared disciplining.' Disciplining? What for? Is the discipline to be sedulously carried on for threescore years and ten, and there an end? If we will only think of life as Christ's school, we shall understand it better than from any other point of view; and be certain that all these capacities, which are imparted and unfolded and trained by us, exercised here, will find a better field beyond. Jesus Christ, the embodied Grace, has appeared to us. He prays us with much entreaty to receive His gift. If we will

enroll ourselves in His school, and learn His lessons, and accept His corrections, and submit to His chastisements as tokens of His love and of His desire that we shall bear better fruit, then, as schoolboys say, we shall 'get our remove' when we are ready for it, and go up into the top form. And there not only Grace but Glory will be our teacher, and we shall learn from the Glory more than ever on earth we learned from the Grace.