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

**2 CORINTHIANS-007**. **TENT AND BUILDING by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"For we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens."*

*2 Corinthians 5:1*

Knowledge and ignorance, doubt and certitude, are remarkably blended in these words. The Apostle knows what many men are not certain of; the Apostle doubts as to what all men now are certain of. If our earthly house of this tabernacle be dissolved--there is surely no if about that. But we must remember that the first Christians, and the Apostles with them, did not know whether they might not survive till the coming of Christ; and so not die, but be changed. And this possibility, as appears from the context, is clearly before the Apostle's mind. Such a limitation of his knowledge is in entire accordance with our Lord's own words, It is not for you to know the times and the seasons, and does not in the smallest degree derogate from his authority as an inspired teacher. But his certitude is as remarkable as his hesitation. He knows--and he modestly and calmly affirms the confidence, as possessed by all believers--that, in the event of death coming to him or them, he and they have a mansion waiting for their entrance; a body of glory like to that which Jesus already wears.

**I. So my text mainly sets before us very strikingly the Christian certitude as to the final future.**

I need not dwell, I suppose, upon that familiar metaphor by which the relation of man to his bodily environment is described as that of a man to his dwelling-place. Only I would desire, in a word, to emphasise this as being the first of the elements of the blessed certitude in which Christian people may expatiate--the clear, broad distinction between me and my physical frame. There is no more connection, says Paul, between us and the organisation in which we at present dwell than there is between a man and the house that he inhabits. The foolish senses crown Death and call him lord; but the Christian's certitude firmly draws the line, and declares that the man, the whole personality, is undisturbed by anything that befalls his residence; and that he may pass unimpaired from one house to another, being in both the self-same person. And that is something to keep firm hold of in these days when we are being told that life and consciousness are but a function of organisation, and that if the one be annihilated the other cannot persist. No; though all illustrations and metaphors must necessarily fail, the two which lie side by side here in my text and its context are far truer than that pseudo-science--which is not science at all, but only inference from science--which denies that the man is one thing and his house altogether another.

Then again, note, as part of the elements of this Christian certitude, the blessed thought that a body is part of the perfection of manhood. No mere dim, ghostly future, where consciousness somehow persists, without environment or tools to act upon an outer world, completes the idea of God in reference to man. But the old trinity is the eternal trinity for humanity, body, soul, and spirit. Corporeity, with all that it means of definiteness, with all that it means of relation to an external universe, is the perfection of manhood. To dwell naked, as the Apostle says in the context, is a thing from which man shudderingly recoils; and it is not to be his final fate. Let us take this as no small gain in reference to our conceptions of a future--the emphatic drawing into light of that thought that for his perfection man requires body, soul, and spirit.

And now, if we turn for a moment to the characteristics of the two conditions with which my text deals, we get some familiar enough but yet great and strengthening thoughts. The earthly house of this tabernacle is dissolved, or, more correctly, retaining the metaphor of the house, is to be pulled down--and in its place there comes a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Now the contrast that is drawn here, whilst it would run out into a great many other particulars, about which we know nothing, and therefore had better say nothing, revolves in the Apostle's mind mainly round these two earthly as contrasted with in the heavens; and tabernacle, or tent, as contrasted, first of all with a building, and then with the predicate eternal.

That is to say, the first outstanding difference which arises before the Apostle as blessed and glorious, is the contrast between the fragile dwelling-place, with its thin canvas, its bending poles, its certain removal some day, and the permanence of that which is not a tent, but a building which is eternal. Involved in that is the thought that all the limitations and weaknesses which are necessarily associated with the perishableness of the present abode are at an end for ever. No more fatigue, no more working beyond the measure of power, no more need for recuperation and repose; no more dread of sickness and weakness; no more possibility of decay, It is sown in corruption; it is raised in incorruption--neither can they die any more. Whether that be by reason of any inherent immortality, or by reason of the uninterrupted flow into the creature of the immortal life of Christ, to whom he is joined, is a question that need not trouble us now. Enough for us that the contrast between the Bedouin tent--which is folded up and carried away, and nothing left but the black circle where the cheerful hearth once glinted amidst the sands of the desert--and the stately mansion reared for eternity, is the contrast between the organ of the spirit in which we now dwell and that which shall be ours.

And the other contrast is no less glorious and wonderful. The earthly house of this tent does not merely define the composition, but also the whole relations and capacities of that to which it refers. The tent is earthly , not merely because, to use a kindred metaphor, it is a building of clay, but because, by all its capacities, it belongs to, corresponds with, and is fitted only for, this lower order of things, the seen and the perishable. And, on the other hand, the mansion is in the heavens, even whilst the future tenant is a nomad in his tent. That is so, because the power which can create that future abode is in the heavens. It is so called in order to express the security in which it is kept for those who shall one day enter upon it. And it is so, further, to express the order of things with which it brings its dwellers into contact. Flesh and blood cannot inherit the Kingdom of God; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption. That future home of the spirit will be congruous with the region in which it dwells; fitted for the heavens in which it is now preserved. And thus the two contrasts--adapted to the perishable, and itself perishable, belonging to the eternal and itself incorruptible--are the two which loom largest before the Apostle's mind.

Let no man say that such ideas of a possible future bodily frame are altogether inconsistent with all that we know of the limitations and characteristics of what we call matter. There is one flesh of beasts and another of birds, says Paul; there is one glory of the sun and another of the moon. And his old-fashioned argument is perfectly sound to-day.

Do you know so fully all the possibilities of creation as that you are warranted in asserting that such a thing as a body which is the fit organ of the spirit, and is incorruptible like the heavens in which it dwells, is an impossibility? Surely the forms of matter are sufficiently varied to make us chary in asserting that other forms are impossible, to which there may belong, as characteristics, even these glorious ones of my text. The old story of the king in the tropics, who laughed to scorn some one who told him that water could be turned into a solid, may well be quoted in this connection. Let us be less confident that we know all that is to be known in regard to the sweep of God's creative power; and let us thankfully accept the teaching by which we, too, in all our ignorance, may be able to say, We know that ... we have a building of God ... eternal in the heavens.

Now there is only one more remark that I wish to make about this part of my subject; and it is this, that the teaching of my text and its context casts great light--and I think by many people much-needed light--on what the resurrection of the dead means. That doctrine has been weighted with a great many incredibilities and I venture to say absurdities, by well-meaning misconceptions and exaggerations. We have heard grand platitudes about the scattered dust being gathered from the four winds of heaven, and so on, but the teaching of my text is that the contrast between the present physical frame and the future bodily environment is utter and complete; and that resurrection does not mean the assuming again of the body that is left behind and done with, but the reinvestiture of the man with another body. And so the Scriptural phrase is, not the resurrection of the body, but the resurrection of the dead. It is a house in the heavens. It comes from heaven.

We leave the tent. Life and thought

have gone away, side by side,

Leaving doors and windows wide;

Careless tenants they!

And they may well be careless, because in the heavens they have another mansion, incorruptible and glorious.

We leave the tent; we enter the building. There is nothing here of some germ of immortality being somehow extricated from the ruins, and fostered into glorious growth. Or, to take another metaphor of the context, we strip off the garment and are naked; and then we are clothed with another garment and are not found naked. The resurrection of the dead is the clothing of the spirit with the house which is from heaven. And there is as much difference between the two habitations as there is between the grim, solid architecture of northern peoples, amidst snow and ice, needed to resist the blasts, and to keep the life within in an ungenial climate, and the light, graceful dwellings of those who walk in an atmosphere of perpetual sunshine in the tropics, as there is between the close-knit and narrow-windowed and narrow-doored abode in which we now have to pass our days, and that large house, with broad windows that take in a mightier sweep and new senses that have relation with new qualities in the world then around us. Therefore let us, whilst we grope in the dark here, and live in a narrow hovel in a back street, look forward to the time when we shall dwell on the sunny heights in the great pavilion which God prepares for them that love Him.

**II. And now note, again, how we come to this certitude.**

My text is very significantly followed by a for, which gives the reason of the knowledge in a very remarkable manner. We know, ... for in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house, which is from heaven. Now that singular collocation of ideas may be set forth thus--whatever longing there is in a Christian, God-inspired soul, that longing is a prophecy of its own fulfilment. We know that there is a house, because of the yearning, which is deepest and strongest when we are nearest God, and likest what He would have us to be--the yearning to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven. That is a truth that goes a long way; though to enlarge on it is irrelevant to our present purpose. It has its limitations, as is obvious from the context, in which are human elements which are not destined to be gratified, mingled with the yearning, which is of God, and which is destined to be satisfied. But this at least we may firmly hold by, that just because God will not put men to confusion intellectually, and does not let them entertain uncherished--still less Himself foster and excite--longings which He does not mean to gratify, a Christian yearning for immortality is, to the man who feels it, a declaration that immortality is sure for him. Delight thyself in the Lord, and He shall give thee the desires of thine heart. Whatsoever, in touching Him, we do deeply long for may have blended with it human elements, which will be dispersed unsatisfied, but the substance of it is a prophecy of its own fulfilment. And as surely as the stork in the heavens, flying southward, will reach the sunny lands which draw it from the grim northern winter, so surely may a man say, I know that I have a house in heaven, because I long for it, and shrink from being found naked.

Of course such longing, such aspiration and revulsion are no proofs of a fact except there be some fact which changes them, from mere vague desires, and makes these solid certainties. And such a fact we have in that which is the only proof that the world has received, of the persistence of life through death and the continuance of personal identity unchanged by the grave, and that is the Resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead. Our faith in immortality does not depend merely on our own subjective desires and longings, but these desires and longings are quickened, confirmed, and certified by this great fact that Jesus Christ has risen from the dead; and therefore we know that the yearnings in us are not in vain. So we come to this certitude, first, by reason of his experience; and, second, by reason of the longings which that experience fosters if it does not kindle, within our hearts.

And let no man take exception to the Apostle's word here, we know, or tell us that Knowledge is of the things we see. That is true, and not true. It is true in regard to what arrogates to itself the name of science. And we are willing to admit the limitation if the men who insist upon it will, on their sides, admit that there are other sources of certitude than so-called facts, by which they mean merely material facts. If it is meant to assert that we are less sure of the love of God, of immortality, than we are of the existence of this piece of wood, or that flame of gas; then I humbly venture to say that there is another region of facts than those which are appreciable by sense; that the evidence upon which we rest our certitude of immortal blessedness is quite as valid, quite as true, quite as able to bear the weight of a leaning heart as anything that can be produced, in the nature of evidence, for the things round us. It is not, We fancy, we believe, we hope, we are pretty nearly sure, but it is We know ... that we have a building of God.

**III. Lastly, note what this certitude does.**

The Apostle tells us by the for which lies at the beginning of my text, and makes it a reason for something that has preceded, and what has preceded is this, We look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen.

That is to say, such a joyous, calm certitude draws men's thoughts away from this shabby and transitory present, and fixes them on the solemn majesties of that eternal future. Yes! and nothing else will. Take away the idea of resurrection, and the remaining idea of immortality is a poor, shadowy, impotent thing. There is no force in it; there is no blessedness in it; there is nothing in it for a man to lay hold of. And, as a matter of fact, there is no vivid faith in a future life without belief in the resurrection and bodily existence of the perfected dead.

And we shall not let our thoughts willingly go out thither unless our own personal wellbeing there is very sure to us. When we know that for us individually there is that house waiting for us to enter into it, when the Lord comes, then we shall not be unwilling to turn our hearts and our desires thither. We look at the things which are not seen, for we know that we have a house eternal.

And such a certitude will also make a man willing to accept the else unwelcome necessity of leaving the tent, and for a while doing without the mansion. It is that which the Apostle is speaking of in subsequent verses, on which I cannot enter now. He says--and therein speaks a universal experience--that men recoil from the idea of having to lay aside this earthly body and be naked. But we know that we have that glorious mansion waiting for us, and that till the day comes when we enter upon it we may be lapt in Christ instead, and, in that so-called intermediate state, may have Him to surround us, Him to be to us the medium by which we come into connection with anything external, and so can contentedly go away from our home in the body; and go to our home in Christ. Wherefore, we are always confident, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be at home with the Lord.

Oh, brethren! do we think of our future thus? If we do, then let us lay to heart the final words of our teacher in this part of his letter: Wherefore we make it our aim, whether at home or absent, to be well-pleasing unto Him.