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

**PSALMS-016**. **SEEK YE - I WILL SEEK by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"8.* *When Thou saidst, Seek ye my face; My heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. 9. Hide not Thy face far from me."*

*Psalm 27:8-9*

We have here a report of a brief dialogue between God and a devout soul. The Psalmist tells us of God's invitation and of his acceptance, and on both he builds the prayer that the face which he had been bidden to seek, and had sought, may not be hid from him. The correspondence between what God said to him and what he said to God is even more emphatically expressed in the original than in our version. In the Hebrew the sentence is dislocated, at the risk of being obscure, for the sake of bringing together the two voices. It runs thus, My heart said to Thee, and then, instead of going on with his answer, the Psalmist interjects God's invitation Seek ye My face, and then, side by side with that, he lays his response, Thy face, Lord, will I seek. The completeness and swiftness of his answer could not be more vividly expressed. To hear was to obey: as soon as God's merciful call sounded, the Psalmist's heart responded, like a harp-string thrilled into music by the vibration of another tuned to the same note. Without hesitation, and in entire correspondence with the call, was his response. So swiftly, completely, resolutely should we respond to God's voice, and our ready I will should answer His commandment, as the man at the wheel repeats the captain's orders whilst he carries them out. Upon such acceptance of such an invitation we, too, may build the prayer, Hide not Thy face far from me.

Now, there are three things here that I desire to look at--God's merciful call to us all; the response of the devout soul to that call; and the prayer which is built upon both.

**I. We have God's merciful call to us all.**

Thou saidst, Seek ye My face. Now, that expression, the face of God, though highly metaphorical, is perfectly clear and defined in its meaning. It corresponds substantially to what the Apostle Paul calls, in speaking of the knowledge of God beyond the limits of revelation, that which may be known of God; or, in more modern language, the side of the divine nature which is turned to man; or, in plainer words still, God, in so far as He is revealed. It means substantially the same thing as the other Scriptural expression, the name of the Lord. Both phrases draw a broad distinction between what God is, in the infinite fulness of His incomprehensible being, and what He is as revealed to man; and both imply that what is revealed is knowledge, real and valid, though it may be imperfect.

This, then, being the meaning of the phrase, what is the meaning of the invitation: Seek ye My face? Have we to search for that, as if it were something hidden, far off, lost, and only to be recovered by our effort? No: a thousand times no! For the seeking, to which God mercifully invites us, is but the turning of the direction of our desires to Him, the recognition of the fact that His face is more than all else to men, the recognition that whilst there are many that say, Who will show us any good? and put the question impatiently, despairingly, vainly, they that turn the seeking into a prayer, and ask, Lord! lift Thou the light of Thy countenance upon us, will never ask in vain. To seek is to desire, to turn the direction of thought and will and affection to Him and to take heed that the ordering of our daily lives is such as that no mist rising from them shall come between us and that brightness of light, or hide from us the vision splendid. They who seek God by desire, by the direction of thought and will and love, and by the regulation of their daily lives in accordance with that desire, are they who obey this commandment.

Next we come to that great thought that God is ever sounding out to all mankind this invitation to seek His face. By the revelation of Himself He bids us all sun ourselves in the brightness of His countenance. One of the New Testament writers, in a passage which is mistranslated in our Authorised Version, says that God calls us by His own glory and virtue. That is to say, the very manifestation of the divine Being is such that there lies in it a summons to behold Him, and an attraction to Himself. So fair is He, that He but needs to withdraw the veil, and men's hearts rejoice in that countenance, which is as the sun shining in his strength; nor know we anything more fair than is the smile upon His face. If we see Him as He really is, we cannot choose but love. By all His works He calls us to seek Him, not only because the intellect demands that there shall be a personal Will behind all these phenomena, but because they in themselves proclaim His name, and the proclamation of His name is the summons to behold.

By the very make of our own spirits He calls us to Himself. Our restlessness, our yearnings, our movings about as aliens in the midst of things seen and visible, all these bid us turn to Him in whom alone our capacities can be satisfied, and the hunger of our souls appeased. You remember the old story of the Saracen woman who came to England seeking her lover, and passed through these foreign cities, with no word upon her tongue that could be understood of those that heard her except his name whom she sought. Ah! that is how men wander through the earth, strangers in the midst of it. They cannot translate the cry of their own hearts, but it means, God--my soul thirsteth for Thee; and the thirst bids us seek His face.

He summons us by all the providences and events of our changeful lives. Our sorrows by their poignancy, our joys by their incompleteness and their transiency, alike call us to Him in whom alone the sorrows can be soothed and the joys made full and remain. Our duties, by their heaviness, call us to turn ourselves to Him, in whom alone we can find the strength to fill the role that is laid upon us, and to discharge our daily tasks.

But, most of all, He summons us to Himself by Him who is the Angel of His Face, the effulgence of His glory, and the express image of His person. In the face of Jesus Christ, the light of the knowledge of the glory of God beams out upon us, as it never shone on this Psalmist of old. He saw but a portion of that countenance, through a thick veil which thinned as faith gazed, but was never wholly withdrawn. The voice that he heard calling him was less penetrating and less laden with love than the voice that calls us. He caught some tones of invitation sounding in providences and prophecies, in ceremonies and in law; we hear them more full and clear from the lips of a Brother. They sound to us from the cradle and the cross, and they are wafted down to us from the throne. God's merciful invitation to us poor men never has taken, nor will, nor can, take a sweeter and more attractive form than in Christ's version of it: Come unto Me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest. Friend! that summons comes to us; may we deal with it as the Psalmist did!

**II. That brings me to note, secondly, the devout soul's response to the loving call from God.**

I have already pointed out how beautifully and vividly the contrast between the two is expressed in our text: Seek ye My face--Thy face will I seek. The Psalmist takes the general invitation and converts it into an individual one, to which he responds. God's ye is met by his I. The Psalmist makes no hesitation or delay--When Thou saidst ... my heart said to Thee. The Psalmist gathers himself together in a concentrated resolve of a fixed determination--Thy face will I seek. That is how we ought to respond.

Make the general invitation thy very own. God summons all, because He summons each. He does not cast His invitations out at random over the heads of a crowd, as some rich man might fling coins to a mob, but He addresses every one of us singly and separately, as if there were not another soul in the universe to hear His voice but our very own selves. It is for us not to lose ourselves in the crowd, since He has not lost us in it; but to appropriate, to individualise, to make our very own, the universality of His call to the world. It matters nothing to you what other men may do; it matters not to you how many others may be invited, and whether they may accept or may refuse. When that Seek ye comes to my heart, life or death depends on my answering, Whatsoever others may do, as for me I will seek Thy face. We preachers that have to stand and address a multitude sound out the invitation, and it loses in power, the more there are to listen to us. If I could get you one by one, the poorest words would have more weight with you than the strongest have when spoken to a crowd. Brother! God individualises us, and God speaks to Thee, Wilt thou behold My face? Answer, As for me, I will.

Again, the Psalmist made haste, and delayed not, but made haste to respond to the merciful summons. Ah! how many of us, in how many different ways, fall into the snare by-and-by! not now; and all these days, that slip away whilst we hesitate, gather themselves together to be our accusers hereafter. Friend! why should you limit the blessedness that may come into your life to the fag end of it when you have got tired and satiated, or tired and disappointed with the world and its good? Seek ye the Lord while He may be found, call ye upon Him while He is near. It is poor courtesy to show to a merciful invitation from a bountiful host if I say; After I have looked to the oxen I have bought, and tested them, and measured the field that I have acquired; after I have drunk the sweetness of wedded life with the wife that I have married, then I will come. But, for the present, I pray thee, have me excused. And that is what many are doing, more or less.

The Psalmist gathered himself together in a fixed resolve, and said, I will. That is what we have to do. A languid seeker will not find; an earnest one will not fail to find. But if half-heartedly, now and then, when we are at leisure in the intervals of more important and pressing daily business, we spasmodically bethink ourselves, and for a little while seek for the light of God's felt presence to shine upon us, we shall not get it. But if we lay a masterful hand, as we ought to do, on these divergent desires that draw us asunder, and bind ourselves, as it were, together, by the strong cord of a resolved purpose carried out throughout our lives, then we shall certainly not seek in vain.

Alas! how strange and how sad is the reception which this merciful invitation receives from so many of us! Some of you never hear it at all. Standing in the very focus where the sounds converge, you are deaf, as if a man behind the veil of the falling water of Niagara, on that rocky shelf there, should hear nothing. From every corner of the universe that voice comes; from all the providences and events of our lives that voice comes; from the life and death of Jesus Christ that voice comes; and not a sound reaches your ears. Having ears, they hear not, and some of us might take the Psalmist's answer, with one sad word added, as ours--When Thou saidst, Seek ye My face, my heart said unto Thee, Thy face, Lord, will I not seek.

Brethren! it is heaven on earth to say, Thou dost call, and I answer. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Yet you shut yourselves up to, and with, misery and vanity, if you so deal with God's merciful summons as some of us are dealing with it, so that He has to say, I called, and ye refused; I stretched out My hand, and no man regarded.

**III. Lastly, we have here a prayer built upon both the invitation and the acceptance.**

Hide not Thy face far from me. That prayer implies that God will not contradict Himself. His promises are commandments. If He bids us seek He binds Himself to show. His veracity, His unchangeableness, are pledged to this, that no man who yields to His invitation will be balked of his desire. He does not hold out the gift in His hand, and then twitch it away when we put out encouraged and stimulated hands to grasp it. You have seen children flashing bright reflections from a mirror on to a wall, and delighting to direct them away to another spot, when a hand has been put out to touch them. That is not how God does. The light that He reveals is steady, and whosoever turns his face to it will be irradiated by its brightness.

The prayer builds itself on the assurance that, because God will not contradict Himself, therefore every heart seeking is sure to issue in a heart finding. There is only one region where that is true, brethren! there is only one tract of human experience in which the promise is always and absolutely fulfilled:--Ask, and ye shall receive; seek, and ye shall find. We hunt after all other good, and at the best we get it in part or for a time, and when possessed, it is not as bright as when it shone in the delusive colours of hope and desire. If you follow other good, and are drawn after the elusive lights that dance before you, and only show how great is the darkness, you will not reach them, but will be mired in the bog. If you follow after God's face, it will make a sunshine in the shadiest places of life here. You will be blessed because you walk all the day long in the light of His countenance, and when you pass hence it will irradiate the darkness of death, and thereafter, His servants shall serve Him, and shall see His face, and, seeing, shall be made like Him, for His name shall be in their foreheads.

Brethren! we have to make our choice whether we shall see His face here on earth, and so meet it hereafter as that of a long-separated and long-desired friend; or whether we shall see it first when He is on His throne, and we at His bar, and so shall have to call on the rocks and the hills to fall on us, and cover us from the face of Him who is our Judge.