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

**PSALMS-020**. **GOODNESS WROUGHT AND GOODNESS LAID UPON by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"Oh how great is Thy goodness, which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee; which Thou hast wrought for them that trust in Thee before the sons of men!"*

*Psalm 31:19*

The Psalmist has been describing, with the eloquence of misery, his own desperate condition, in all manner of metaphors which he heaps together--sickness, captivity, like a broken vessel, as a dead man out of mind. But in the depth of desolation he grasps at God's hand, and that lifts him up out of the pit. I trusted in Thee, O Lord! Thou art my God. So he struggles up on to the green earth again, and he feels the sunshine; and then he breaks out--Oh! how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast laid up for them that fear Thee. So the psalm that began with such grief, ends with the ringing call, Be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart, all ye that hope in the Lord.

Now these great words which I have read for my text, and which derive even additional lustre from their setting, do not convey to the hasty English reader the precise force of the antithesis which lies in them. The contrast in the two clauses is between goodness laid up and goodness wrought; and that would come out a little more clearly if we transposed the last words of the text, and instead of reading, as our Authorised Version does, which Thou hast wrought for them that trusted in Thee before the sons of men, read which Thou hast wrought before the sons of men for them that trusted in Thee.

So I think there are, as it were, two great masses of what the Psalmist calls goodness; one of them which has been plainly manifested before the sons of men, the other which is laid up in store. There are a great many notes in circulation, but there is far more bullion in the strong-room. Much goodness has been exhibited; far more lies concealed.

If we take that antithesis, then, I think we may turn it in two or three directions, like a light in a man's hand; and look at it as suggesting--

**I. First, the goodness already disposed--wrought before the sons of men; and that laid up, yet to be manifested.**

Now, that distinction just points to the old familiar but yet never-to-be-exhausted thought of the inexhaustibleness of the divine nature. That inexhaustibleness comes out most wondrously and beautifully in the fundamental manifestation of God on which the Old Testament revelation is built--I mean the vision given to Moses prior to his call, and as the basis of his message, of the bush that burned and was not consumed. That lowly shrub flaming and not burning out was not, as has often been supposed, the symbol of Israel which in the furnace of affliction was not destroyed. It meant the same as the divine name, then proclaimed; I AM THAT I AM, which is but a way of saying that God's Being is absolute, dependent upon none, determined by Himself, infinite, and eternal, burns and is not burned up, lives and has no proclivity towards death, works and is unwearied, operates unspent, is revealed and yet hidden, gives and is none the poorer.

And as we look upon our daily lives, and travel back in thought, some of us over the many years which have all been crowded with instances and illustrations of divine faithfulness and favouring care, we have to grasp both these exclamations of our text, Oh! how great is Thy goodness which Thou hast wrought, how much greater is Thy goodness which is laid up! The table has been spread in the wilderness, and the verities of Christian experience more than surpass the legends of hungry knights finding banquets prepared by unseen hands in desert places. It is as when Jesus made the multitude sit down on the green grass and feast to the full, and yet abundance remained undiminished after satisfying all the hungry applicants. The bread that was broken yielded more basketfuls for to-morrow than the original quantity in the lad's hands. The fountain rises, and the whole camp, themselves and their children and their cattle, slake their thirst at it, and yet it is full as ever. The goodness wrought is but the fringe and first beginnings of the mass that is laid up. All the gold that has been coined and put into circulation is as nothing compared with the wedges and ingots of massive bullion that lie in the strong room. God's riches are not like the world's wealth. You very soon get to the bottom of its purse. Its goodness, is very soon run dry; and nothing will yield an unintermittent stream of satisfaction and blessing to a poor soul except the river of the water of life that proceedeth out of the Throne of God and of the Lamb.

So, dear brethren! that contrast may suggest to us how quietly and peacefully we may look forward to all the unknown future; and hold up to it so as to enable us to scan its general outlines, the light of the known and experienced past. Let our trustful prayer be; Thou hast been my help: leave me not, neither forsake me, O God of my salvation! and the answer will certainly be: I will not leave thee, till I have done unto thee that which I have spoken to thee of. Our Memory ought to be the mother of our Hope; and we should paint the future in the hues of the past. Thou hast goodness laid up, more than enough to match the goodness Thou hast wrought. God's past is the prophecy of God's future; and my past, if I understand it aright, ought to rebuke every fear and calm every anxiety. We, and only we, have the right to say, To-morrow shall be as this day, and much more abundant. That is delusion if said by any but by those that fear and trust in the Inexhaustible God.

**II. Now let us turn our light in a somewhat different direction. The contrast here suggests the goodness that is publicly given and that which is experienced in secret.**

If you will notice, in the immediate neighbourhood of my text there come other words which evidently link themselves with the thought of the goodness laid up: Thou shalt hide them in the secret of Thy presence. That is where also the goodness is. Thou shalt keep them secretly in a pavilion ... blessed be the Lord! for He hath shewed me His marvellous kindness in a strong city. So, then, the goodness which is wrought, and which can be seen by the sons of men, dwindles in comparison with the goodness which lies in that secret place, and can only be enjoyed and possessed by those who dwell there, and whose feet are familiar with the way that leads to it. That is to say, if you wish the Psalmist's thought in plain prose, all these visible blessings of ours are but pale shadows and suggestions of the real wealth that we can have only if we live in continual communion with God. The spiritual blessings of quiet minds and strength for work, the joys of communion with God, the sweetness of the hopes that are full of immortality, and all these delights and manifestations of God's inmost love and sweetness which are granted only to waiting hearts that shut themselves off from the tumultuous delights of earth as the bases of their trust or the sources of their gladness--these are fuller, better than the selectest and richest of the joys that God's world can give. God does not put His best gifts, so to speak, in the shop-windows; He keeps these in the inner chambers. He does not arrange His gifts as dishonest traders do their wares, putting the finest outside or on the top, and the less good beneath. Thou hast kept the good wine until now. It is they who inhabit the secret place of the Most High, and whose lives are filled with communion with Him, realising His presence, seeking to know His will, reaching out the tendrils of their hearts to twine round Him, and diligently, for His dear sake, doing the tasks of life; who taste the selected dainties from God's gracious hands.

How foolish, then, to order life on the principle upon which we are all tempted to do it, and to yield to the temptation to which some of us have yielded far too much, of fancying that the best good is the good that we can touch and taste and handle and that men can see! No! no! Deep down in our hearts a joy that strangers never intermeddle with nor know, a peace that passes understanding, a present Christ and a Heaven all but present, because Christ is present--these are the good things for men, and these are the things which God does not, because He cannot, fling broadcast into the world, but which He keeps, because He must, for those that desire them, and are fit for them. He causeth His sun to shine, and His rain to fall on the unthankful and on the disobedient, but the goodness laid up is better than the sunshine, and more refreshing and fertilising and cleansing than the rain, and it comes, and comes only, to them that trust Him, and live near Him.

**III. And so, lastly, we may turn our light in yet another direction, and take this contrast as suggesting the goodness wrought on earth, and the goodness laid up in heaven.**

Here we see, sometimes, the messengers coming with the one cluster of grapes on the pole. There we shall live in the vineyard. Here we drink from the river as it flows; there we shall be at the fountain-head. Here we are in the vestibule of the King's house, there we shall be in the throne room, and each chamber as we pass through it is richer and fairer than the one preceding. Heaven's least goodness is more than earth's greatest blessedness. All that life to come, all its conditions and everything about it, are so strange to us, so incapable of being bodied forth or conceived by us, and the thought of Eternity is, it seems to me, so overwhelmingly awful that I do not wonder at even good people finding little stimulus, or much that cheers, in the thought of passing thither. But if we do not know anything more--and we know very little more--let us be sure of this, that when God begins to compare His adjectives He does not stop till He gets to the superlative degree and that good begets better, and the better of earth ensures the best of Heaven. And so out of our poor little experience here, we may gather grounds of confidence that will carry our thoughts peacefully even into the great darkness, and may say, What Thou didst work is much, what Thou hast laid up is more. And the contrast will continue for ever and ever; for all through that strange Eternity that which is wrought will be less than that which is laid up, and we shall never get to the end of God, nor to the end of His goodness.

Only let us take heed to the conditions--them that fear Him, them that trust in Him. If we will do these things through each moment of the experiences of a growing Christian life, and at the moment of the experience of a Christian death, and through the eternities of the experience of a Christian heaven, Jesus Christ will whisper to us, Thou shalt see greater things than these.