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

**ROMANS-010**. **THE SOURCES OF HOPE by ALEXANDER MACLAREN**

*"2.* … W*e rejoice in hope of the glory of God. 3. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4. And patience, experience; and experience, hope."*

*Romans 5:2-4*

We have seen in a previous sermon that the Apostle in the foregoing context is sketching a grand outline of the ideal Christian life, as all rooted in being justified by faith, and flowering into peace with God, access into grace, and a firm stand against all antagonists and would-be masters. In our text he advances to complete the outline by sketching the true Christian attitude towards the future. I have ventured to take so pregnant and large a text, because there is a very striking and close connection throughout the verses, which is lost unless we take them together. Note, then, we rejoice in hope, we glory in tribulation. Now, it is one word in the original which is diversely rendered in these two clauses by rejoice and glory. The latter is a better rendering than the former, because the original expression designates not only the emotion of joy, but the expression of it, especially in words. So it is frequently rendered in the New Testament by the word boast, which, of course, has unpleasant associations, which scarcely fit it for use here. So then you see Paul regards it as possible for, and more than possibly characteristic of, a Christian, that the very same emotion should he excited by that great bright future hope, and by the blackness of present sorrow. That is strong meat; and so he goes on to explain how he thinks it can and must be so, and points out that trouble, through a series of results, arrives at last at this, that if it is rightly borne, it flashes up into greater brightness the hope which has grasped the glory of God. So then we have here, not only a wonderful designation of the object around which Christian hope twines its tendrils, but of the double source from which that hope may come, and of the one emotion with which Christian people should front the darkness of the present and the brightness of the future. Ah! how different our lives would be if that ideal of a steadfast hope and an untroubled joy were realised by each of us. It may be. It should be. So I ask you to look at these three points which I have suggested.

**I. That wonderful designation of the one object of Christian hope which should fill, with an uncoruscating and unflickering light, all that dark future.**

We rejoice in hope of the glory of God. Now, I suppose I need not remind you that that phrase the glory of God is, in the Old Testament, used especially to mean the light that dwelt between the cherubim above the mercy-seat; the symbol of the divine perfections and the token of the Divine Presence. The reality of which it was a symbol is the total splendour, so to speak, of that divine nature, as it rays itself out into all the universe. And, says Paul, the true hope of the Christian man is nothing less than that of that glory he shall be, in some true sense, and in an eternally growing degree, the real possessor. It is a tremendous claim, and one which leads us into deep places that I dare not venture into now, as to the resemblance between the human person and the Divine Person, notwithstanding all the differences which of course exist, and which only a presumptuous form of religion has ventured to treat as transitory or insignificant. Let me use a technical word, and say that it is no pantheistic absorption in an impersonal Light, no Nirvana of union with a vague whole, which the Apostle holds out here, but it is the closest possible union, personality being saved and individual consciousness being intensified. It is the clothing of humanity with so much of that glory as can be imparted to a finite creature. That means perfect knowledge, perfect purity, perfect love, and that means the dropping away of all weaknesses and the access of strange new powers, and that means the end of the schism between will and ought, and of the other schism between will and can. It means what this Apostle says: Whom He justified them He also glorified, and what He says again, We all, beholding as in a glass--or rather, perhaps, mirroring as a glass does--the glory, are changed into the same image.

The very heart of Christianity is that the Divine Light of which that Shekinah was but a poor and transitory symbol has tabernacled amongst men in the Christ, and has from Him been communicated, and is being communicated in such measure as earthly limitations and conditions permit, and that these do point on assuredly to perfect impartation hereafter, when we shall be like Him, for we shall see Him as He is. The Three could walk in the furnace of fire, because there was One with them, like unto the Son of God. Who among us shall dwell with the everlasting fire, the fire of that divine perfection? They who have had introduction by Christ into the grace, and who will be led by Him into the glory.

Now, brethren, it seems to me to be of great importance that this, the loftiest of conceptions of that future life, should be the main aspect under which we think of it. It is well to speak of rest from toil; it is well to speak of all the negations of present unfavourable, afflictive conditions which that future presents to us. And perhaps there is none of the aspects of it which appeals to deeper feelings in ourselves, than those which say there shall be no night there, there shall be no tears there, neither sorrow nor sighing; there shall be no toil there. But we must rise above all that, for our heaven is to live in God, and to be possessors of His glory. Do not let us dwell upon the symbols instead of the realities. Do not let us dwell only on the oppositions and contradictions to earth. Let us rather rise high above symbols, high above negations, to the positive truth, and not contented with saying We shall be full of blessedness; we shall be full of purity; we shall be full of knowledge, let us rather think of that which embraces them all--we shall be full of God.

So much, then, for the one object of Christian hope. We have here--

**II. The double source of that hope.**

Observe that the first clause of my text comes as the last term in a sequence. It began with being justified by faith. The second round of the ladder was, we have peace with God. The third, we have access into this grace. The fourth, we stand, and then comes, we rejoice in hope of the glory of God. That is to say, to put it into general words, and, of course, presupposing the revelation in Jesus Christ as the basis of all, without which there is no assured hope of a future beyond the grave, then the facts of a Christian man's life are for him the best brighteners of the hope beyond. Of course, that is so. Justified by faith--peace with God--access into grace; what, in the name of common-sense, can death do with these things? How can its blunted sword cut the bond that unites a soul that has had such experiences as these with the source of them all? Nothing can be more grotesque, nothing more incongruous, than to think that that subordinate and accidental fact, whose region is the physical, has anything whatever to do with this higher region of consciousness.

And, further than that, it is absolutely unthinkable to a man in the possession of these spiritual gifts, that they should ever come to a close; and the fact that in the precise degree in which we realise as our very own possession, here and now, these Christian emotions and blessings, we instinctively rise to the belief that they are not for an age, but for all time, and not for all time, but for eternity, is itself, if not a proof, yet a very strong presumption, if you believe in God, that a man who thus feels he was not made to die because he has grasped the Eternal, is right in so feeling. If, too, we look at the experiences themselves, they all have the stamp of incompleteness, and suggest completeness by their own incompleteness. The new moon with its ragged edge not more surely prophesies its completed silver round, than do the experiences of the Christian life here, in their greatness and in their smallness, declare that there come a time and an order of things in which what was thwarted tendency shall be accomplished result. The tender green spikelet, pushing up through the brown clods, does not more surely prophesy the waving yellow ear, nor the broad highway on which a man comes in the wilderness more surely declare that there is a village at the end of it, than do the facts of the Christian life, here and now, attest the validity of the hope of the glory of God.

And so, brethren, if you wish to brighten that great light that fills the future, see to it that your present Christianity is fuller of peace with God, access into grace, and the firm, erect standing which flows from these. When the springs in the mountains dry up, the river in the valley shrinks; and when they are full, it glides along level with the top of its banks. So when our Christian life in the present is richest, our Christian hope of the future will be the brighter. Look into yourselves. Is there anything there that witnesses to that great future; anything there that is obviously incipient, and destined to greater power; anything there which is like a tropical plant up here in 45 degrees of north latitude, managing to grow, but with dwarfed leaves and scanty flowers and half shrivelled and sourish fruit, and that in the cold dreams of the warm native land? Reflecting telescopes show the stars in a mirror, and the observer looks down to see the heavens. Look into yourselves, and see whether, on the polished plate within, there are any images of the stars that move around the Throne of God.

But let us turn for a moment to the second source to which the Apostle traces the Christian hope here. I must not be tempted to more than just a word of explanation, but perhaps you will tolerate that. Paul says that trouble works patience, that is to say, not only passive endurance, but brave persistence in a course, in spite of antagonisms. That is what trouble does to a man when it is rightly borne. Of course the Apostle is speaking here of its ideal operation, and not of the reality which alas! often is seen when our tribulations lash us into impatience, or paralyse our efforts. Tribulation worketh patience, and patience experience. That is a difficult word to put into English. There underlies it the frequent thought which is familiar in Scripture, of trouble of all kinds as testing a man, whether as the refiner's fire or the winnower's fan. It tests a man, and if he bears the trouble with patient persistence, then he has passed the test and is approved. Patient perseverance thus works approval, or proof of the man's Christianity, and, still more, proof of the reality and power of the Christ whom his Christianity grasps. And so from out of that approval or proof which comes, through perseverance, from tribulation, there rises, of course, in that heart that has been tested and has stood, a calm hope that the future will be as the past, and that, having fought through six troubles, by God's help the seventh will be vanquished also, till at last troubles will end, and heaven be won.

Brethren, there is the true point of view from which to look, not only at tribulations, but at all the trials, for they too bring trials, that lie in duty and in enjoyment, and in earthly things. They are meant to work in us a conviction, by our experience of having been able to meet them aright, of the reality of our grasp of God, and of the reality and power of the God whom we grasp. If we took that point of view in regard to all the changes of this changeful life, we should not so often be bewildered and upset by the darkest of our sorrows. The shining lancets and cruel cutting instruments that the surgeon lays out on his table before he begins the operation are very dreadful. But the way to think of them is that they are there in order to remove from a man what it does him harm to keep, and what, if it is not taken away, will kill him. So life, with its troubles, great and small, is all meant for this, to make us surer of, and bring us closer to, our God, and to brace and strengthen us in our own personal character. And if it does that, then blessed be everything that produces these results, and leads us thereby to glorying in the troubles by which shines out on us a brighter hope.

So there are the two sources, you see: the one is the blessedness of the Christian life, the other the sorrows of the outward life, and both may converge upon the brightening of our Christian hope. Our rainbow is the child of the marriage of the sun and the rain. The Christian hope comes from being justified by faith, having peace with God ... and access into grace, and it comes from tribulation, which worketh patience, and patience which worketh approval. The one spark is struck from the hard flint by the cold steel, and the other is kindled by the sun itself, but they are both fire.

And so, lastly, we have here--

**III. The one emotion with which the Christian should front all the facts, inward and outward, of his earthly life.**

We glory in the hope, we glory in tribulation, I need not dwell upon the lesson which is taught us here by the fact that the Apostle puts as one in a series of Christian characteristics this of a steadfast and all-embracing joy. I do not believe that we Christian people half enough realise how imperative a Christian duty, as well as how great a Christian privilege, it is to be glad always. You have no right to be anxious; you are wrong to be hypochondriac and depressed, and weary and melancholy. True; there are a great many occasions in our Christian life which minister sadness. True; the Christian joy looks very gloomy to a worldly eye. But there are far more occasions which, if we were right, would make joy instinctive, and which, whether we are right or not, make it obligatory upon us. I need not speak of how, if that hope were brighter than it commonly is with us, and if it were more constantly present to our minds and hearts, we should sing with gladness. I need not dwell upon that great and wonderful paradox by which the co-existence of sorrow and of joy is possible. The sorrows are on the surface; beneath there may be rest. All the winds of heaven may rave across the breast of ocean, and fret it into clouds of spume against a storm-swept sky. But deep down there is stillness, and yet not stagnation, because there is the great motion that brings life and freshness; and so, though there will be wind-vexed surfaces on our too-often agitated spirits, there ought to be deeper than these the calm setting of the whole ocean of our nature towards God Himself. It is possible, as this Apostle has it, to be sorrowful, yet always rejoicing. It is possible, as his brother Apostle has it, to rejoice greatly, though now for a season we are in sorrow through manifold temptations. Look back upon your lives from the point of view that your tribulation is an instrument to produce hope, and you will be able to thank God for all the way by which He has led you.

Now, brethren, the plain lesson of all this is just that we have here, in these texts, a linked chain, one end of which is wrapped around our sinful hearts, and the other is fastened to the Throne of God. You cannot drop any of the links, and you must begin at the beginning, if you are to be carried on to the end. If we are to have a joy immovable, we must have a steadfast hope. If we are to have a steadfast hope, we must have a present grace. If we are to have a present grace, and access to the fullness of God, we must have peace with God. If we are to have peace with God, we must have the condemnation and the guilt taken away. If we are to have the condemnation and the guilt taken away, Jesus Christ must take them. If Jesus Christ is to take them away, we must have faith in Him. Then you can work it backward, and begin at your own end, and say, If I have faith in Jesus Christ, then every link of the chain in due succession will pass through my hand, and I shall have justifying, peace, access, the grace, erectness, hope, and exultation, and at last He will lead me by the hand into the glory for which I dare to hope, the glory which the Father gave to Him before the foundation of the world, and which He will give to me when the world has passed away in fervent heat.